

Purdie, N., Dudgeon, P., & Walker, R. (Eds.) (2010). *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*. Barton, Australian Capital Territory, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia, 299 pages.

Reviewed by
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Working Together is a book I not only recommend all community psychologists to read (and psychologists generally for that matter), but also one I'd recommend them to keep in that accessible part of their bookshelf next to the other equally important Community Psychology Bibles. The topic (or rather the range of subjects) covered in this book are so fundamental to our professional identities, so relevant to the work most of us are involved in, and so intertwined with the knowledge areas we as a profession are aligned to, that I feel embarrassed that so much of what I read in this book was still so new to me. Most importantly I think we need to become more culturally safe, competent and aware of the topics covered in this book because whether we are Aboriginal or not; the history, policies, social and political contexts that have led to the mental health issues as they are today in Aboriginal communities are the histories and political contexts of all of us.

The richness of detail, topics and references which *Working Together* draws on and includes make this the kind of book I struggle to sit down and read in one sitting. Instead I need to focus in on one of its areas, reflect on that, and spend time talking to other colleagues, psychologists or Aboriginal mentors to make sense of it within the work I do. The contributors to the book number 39

and their expertise is equally broad with both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal, current and historical writing, as well as outlining programs and ideas for future work. It also crosses topics about social and emotional and mental illness perspectives, including relevant information for treatment, counselling and other ameliorative aspects of mental health services, as well as topics relevant to population level interventions, health promotion and wellness perspectives. A chapter that I loved reading was all about the social determinants of mental health. The book also encompasses broader academic perspectives that might interest those in research or policy settings, as well as a more specific focus on case studies of culturally competent programs and services.

As a non-aboriginal community psychologist myself, I found it useful to read the chapter by Heather Gridley, Debra Rickwood and Pat Dudgeon which provided the history of psychology as this maps onto Australian history relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. It reminded me of how culturally specific the tools are that we often have been uncritically taught to use, including psychological tests and counselling models. Just as importantly, the chapter reminds me that the psychology profession has been shaped by many political and social forces including those that make up the colonial history of Australia. As so many of the other chapters further reinforce, this reflection leads me once again to the need for us as a profession and practitioners to remain critical, and seek ways to be collaborative, empowering and potentially decolonising of our own perspectives, whatever our area of work.

Later in the book, I found the two chapters focusing on culturally competent mental health practice enormously useful and practical. The first, on working as a culturally competent mental health practitioner (Roz Walker and Christopher Sonn) and the next

one on communication and engagement: urban diversity (Pat Dudgeon and Karen Ugle) were chapters we gave out to health workers who attended a training I helped to facilitate on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence for health workers. These chapters were very practical and easy to understand, with tools for being critically reflective in practice, information on culture, language, community obligations, and other things that people often ask for at training sessions. Further chapters follow in this practice section of the book to cover diagnosis and assessment, perinatal mental health, and dealing with grief, loss and trauma.

In general it has been a book I have loved to read. While much information is there for me to glean it isn't hard to notice the same themes that community psychologists grapple with in many areas of our work: empowerment, collaboration, respect for the expertise of the people and communities themselves along with recognition of how colonisation (and history) has played out in a real way within the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.