



# Australian occupational therapy students' perceptions of their capabilities for practising Cultural Safety when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

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# Acknowledgement of Country



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# Background & Rationale

- Persistent health & wellbeing inequities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Tillot et al., 2025)
- Culturally safe practise → improved health outcomes (Mills et al., 2018; West et al., 2019)
- A professional requirement, embedded in Australian competency and accreditation standards (AHPRA, 2022; OBTA, 2018)
- Developing cultural capabilities through tertiary education essential (DoH, 2014)



Gap → Limited research on occupational therapy students' preparedness to practise Cultural Safety in Australia

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework



Image: Graduate Cultural Capability Model from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework (DoH, 2014)

# Aim & Methods

## Research Questions

1. What are occupational therapy students' perceptions about their capabilities to practise Cultural Safety when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples?
2. How have occupational therapy students' perceptions about their capability in delivering culturally safe care changed following their participation in the HLT242 Indigenous Wellbeing Practice course?



Pre intervention online survey



Post intervention online survey



Semi-structured interview

# Survey: Cultural Capability Measurement Tool (CCMT)



22-item validated tool



Developed through a First Peoples-led, decolonising process



Directly mapped to the five Graduate Cultural Capability domains

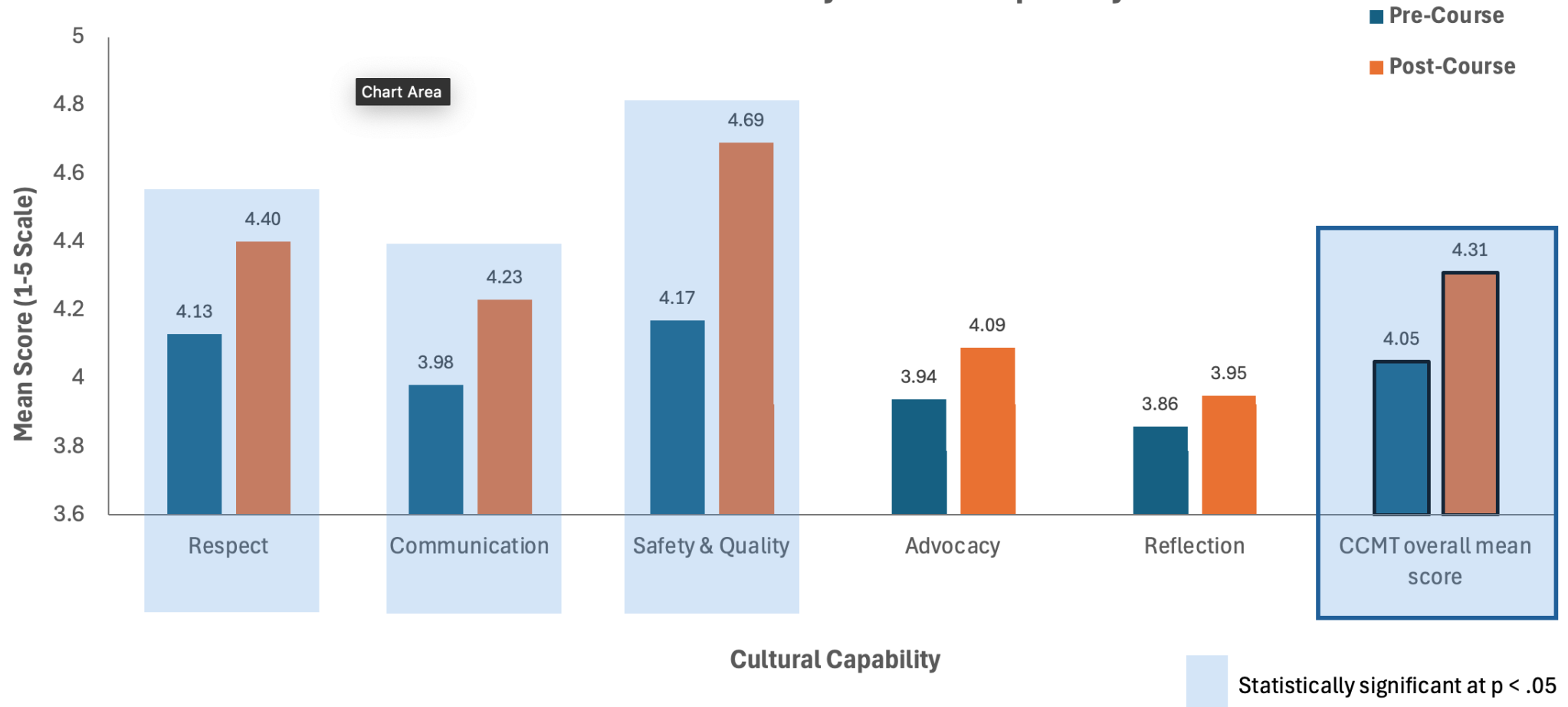


Good reliability: Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89-.91$

(West et al., 2018; West et al., 2017).

# Quantitative Results I: Domains & Total

## Pre vs Post Mean Scores by Cultural Capability



n = 21 matched participants

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# Quantitative Results II: Reverse-coded Items

- “History does not impact on First Peoples’ health” ( $p = .02$ )
- “Understanding First Peoples’ social practices will not apply to my practice” ( $p = .002$ )
- “First Peoples are all the same” ( $p = .005$ )
- “My relationship with First Peoples will not impact clinical outcomes” ( $p = .008$ )
- “First Peoples receive special treatment from government” ( $p = .013$ )

# Qualitative Results: Five Themes



Shifting Worldviews and Self-Awareness



Recognising Cultural Safety as a Lifelong Journey



Navigating Emotions and Uncertainty



Valuing Advocacy and Allyship



Identifying Opportunities for Curriculum Development

*“You know, there's nothing like embarrassment for some internal motivation to do something.”*

*“And I guess it's in that way that I would say my world view has, you could almost say, been flipped on its head.... HLT242 gave me moments of deep reflection.”*

# Key messages

- **CCMT score increases** post Indigenous wellbeing course → consistent with previous research (West et al., 2019)
- Cultural Safety as an **ongoing learning journey** → echoes the Framework and other educational research (DOH, 2014; Withall et al., 2021)
- **Education can help develop students' capabilities** for culturally safe practice
- Need for **longitudinal follow-up** into clinical practice

# My journey into practice



Stefan Dellinger

Occupational Therapist



WAKAI WAIAN  
HEALING

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Thank you

Questions?

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