

Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners Principles informing the Project

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The Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners Project has been developed in response to the recommendations from the *Review of Education and Employment programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Education Queensland* (Hobbs, M. & Murphy, L.,1999). As such, many of the principles upon which the Project is grounded are based on both those that underpin the conduct and recommendations of the *Review*. These align with those formed out of wide consultation with practitioners in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in Queensland.

Standard Australian English

Standard Australian English is the national language of Australia. Proficiency in Standard Australian English is necessary for an individual to participate as fully as possible in Australian society.

Standard Australian English is the national language of Australia as well as "the language of powerful institutions: education, mainstream media, the courts and the bureaucracy." (Shnukal, 1996:4) Proficiency in Standard Australian English (SAE) is necessary for an individual to participate as fully as possible in Australian society. As Nakata (1995:21) states:

To communicate with the rest of the world we [Islanders] need to use the language they have formed for us, and thus their perspectives. Without their language and perspectives we risk not making ourselves understood in their context. Inadequate use of them, which is often the case, can mean that we lay our views open to the logics of their world view, and in turn lay ourselves open to misinterpretation, ridicule and setbacks.

Bilingualism

Acknowledgement and acceptance of the role of the first language to lead to effective bilingualism.

It should be recognised however, that whilst proficiency in SAE is essential to empowerment, this is not to be at the expense of the first language or dialect. The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to maintain their first language and develop competence in SAE underpins one of the priorities of *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002* by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. (1995:51). In fact the development of the first language has direct influence on the development of a second language. Without linguistic and conceptual development in the first language, second language development may be impaired or delayed.

Education Queensland supports the recognition and valuing of the cultural and language diversity of every school and community as stated in the Cultural and Language Diversity in Education Policy (1998:1) "To acknowledge cultural and language diversity in society, the department is committed to: the achievement of a socially just curriculum that ...acknowledges the role first language plays in learning across the curriculum and in learning English". Within our current society, social and political mobility is only possible if students become bicultural and bilingual. As Mandaway Yunupingu states, "...if you have control over both languages, you have double power." (1990:5)

Every teacher in Queensland is expected to teach Standard Australian English in order to "develop and refine students' ability to compose and comprehend spoken and written English – fluently, appropriately, effectively and critically for a wide range of personal and social purposes."(Department of Education, 1994:26). For students in many remote indigenous communities, SAE is not spoken outside the classroom and active engagement in SAE may only occur during school hours. For many students in the Torres Strait, exposure to multilingualism is a common experience, with children being able to communicate in a variety of languages prior to English acquisition in school. In Queensland Aboriginal communities, students may engage in traditional indigenous languages (such as Wik Mungkan or Lardil), a Creole (such as Torres Strait Creole or Cape York Creole) or a dialect of English (i.e. Aboriginal English).

Accountability

Evaluation of literacy programs involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and appropriate reporting on the effectiveness and cost effectiveness to both Education Queensland and the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Given this, aspects of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting as used with mainstream students who have had 5 years immersed in SAE are inappropriate for students in community schools. These students are learning English as a Foreign Language, with active engagement in Standard Australian English only occurring in classroom contexts, not outside the school. These students may not interact in spoken English until they enter Year One. Students are learning Standard Australian English in the similar way to that of mainstream students learning a Language Other Than English in an urban classroom.

Continuous improvement in English and literacy development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is only possible if evaluation of current literacy programs occurs and improvements are made. Since 1995, Education Queensland has conducted the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, designed to identify students who need specialist intervention in Literacy and Numeracy. Teachers of Years 1-3 monitor their students' literacy development using the First Steps Continua.

Discussions with principals, teachers and advisory teachers in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf regarding the appropriateness of the continua for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students revealed the following.:

The inadequacy of the continua to:

- Recognise the EFL context that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students live in;

- Assume that all students come from a print-rich environment;
- Acknowledge students' Home Languages which have rich oral language traditions rather than literate traditions;
- Recognise that Home Languages such as Torres Strait Creole and Aboriginal English have English as a lexifying language and may appear superficially similar to English. Students speaking these home languages may believe that they are speaking SAE when in fact they are speaking a Creole or dialect. This transparency may then impact on their reading comprehension and/or writing development in SAE;
- Recognise that students often plateau on the continua and are unable to progress because of assumed English oral language ability.

To address the issue of SAE oral language development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, a working party from the State, Catholic and Independent schools in the Peninsula Region was formed in early 1997. This working party produced the Oral Language Bandscales and Listening Bandscales for Junior Primary Students, designed specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who spoke a traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language, a Creole or Aboriginal English. The Oral Language Bandscales are currently being used to monitor students' development for Indigenous Language Speaking Students funding in Queensland. Recommendations from this original working party led to the current adaptation of the Bandscales for Reading and Writing, that is, the Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners Project.

Improved educational outcomes

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- focus on Second Language Acquisition theory research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and literacy acquisition sequences;
- focus on transparency issues which influence acquisition of English language and literacy; and
- focus on socio-cultural factors which may influence acquisition of English language and literacy.

Second Language Acquisition theory research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose Home Language is a Creole or English dialect is still in its embryonic stage and few published documents are available, especially for Torres Strait Islander students. As such, much field work and advice from a wide range of teachers and academics in the field was essential.

Given the social context, teachers of students in community schools are in a unique language-teaching situation in Queensland. Immersion models of language learning, as used with immigrant students entering an English-speaking majority in the classroom are inappropriate, because the

language of the majority in community classrooms is not English. Likewise, the majority of students have their own indigenous cultural identity. Therefore alternative pedagogical approaches to teaching English need to be used to reflect and support this differentiation.

Two way strong

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As such, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bandscales Project needed to:

- recognise and acknowledge the importance of Home Language;
- recognise the social context of the learner groups;
- recognise and include EFL learner groups;
- recognise what learners can do (eg. Rich Linguistic experiences –e.g. multi-lingual students, exposure to multi-lingualism);
- stress the key role of the Home Language in the learning of English; and
- recognise that students bring with them a culture which is to be respected and valued, whilst at the same time, introduce students to SAE culture to develop biculturalism.

School community relationships

All students are enriched by an awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Education Queensland works in partnership with local communities to support indigenous cultures and languages which remain within the custodianships of the Elders / leaders of communities /clans.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the right to an education that caters for their individual needs and cultural diversity of their communities. Although there are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that have an EFL context, it needs to be acknowledged that individuals within these communities enter school with a variety of experiences and understandings. Because of this, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bandscales Project addressed:

- The cultural differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups;
- Individual differences within these cultural groups;
- The need to stress individual differences as commonalities are explored; and
- The need to avoid stereo-typing in terms of learning styles by recognising individual differences amongst students.

Individual

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Rather than write indicators which had to be “ticked off” before a child could “move on” as occurs with the First Steps continua, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bandscales Project focused on global descriptions of development. In this way, a teacher could spend time more effectively in child-watching to gain a global view rather than attempting to record development which may or may not occur.

Joint responsibilities

Student participation in education is the responsibility of the child, parents, community and the whole school and is best accomplished through effective partnerships between these stakeholders.

Student participation in education is the responsibility of parents, community and the whole school and is best accomplished through effective partnerships between these stakeholders. Teacher consultation revealed that the Year 2 Net device used for reporting to parents did not illustrate the linguistic or literacy gains that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students learning EFL were making. Using this reporting format, parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander students who are learning EFL are provided with results which imply that very young children are failing, due to their lack of fit on assessment instruments which do not recognise HL and varying cultural backgrounds.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bandscales Project needed to :

- provide teachers with data to report upon student progress in a positive manner at parent-teacher discussions and in report cards;
- strengthen the compact rather than weaken it as may happen when parents, communities, schools and teachers are provided with results from inappropriate assessment instruments which do not recognise HL and varying cultural backgrounds, as is the case with the Continua; and
- include strategies which support the development of the relationships amongst parents and community members, teachers and students to lead to improved classroom pedagogy.

School based management

School / community-based decision-making functions within a common state-wide policy framework which caters for culturally diverse contexts and learning needs.

School or community-based decision-making functions within a common state-wide policy framework which caters for culturally diverse contexts and learning needs. In recognition of this, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bandscales Project needed to:

- recognise and cater for the integrated nature of EFL teaching and learning in the school context in a positive manner;
- aim the materials towards both ESL specialists and mainstream teachers in a user-friendly format, including a glossary of EFL specific language;
- provide rich, formative and summative assessment to inform teaching to lead to improved outcomes for students; and
- provide accessibility of appropriate assessment tools.

Given the varying social contexts (Aboriginal communities, Torres Strait Islander communities, urban indigenous students), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bandscales Project had to include:

- a glossary to assist ESL/EFL understanding;
- strengthening of the compact between school and parents. Involve parents in the success of the child;
- accept the changing nature of schools;
- recognise the development of multiple literacies;
- recognise the need to growth of information technology; and
- emphasise the need for professional development activities around the Project materials.

Overview of Principles underpinning the Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners Project

- Standard Australian English**
 - Standard Australian English is the national language of Australia. Proficiency in Standard Australian English is necessary for an individual to participate as fully as possible in Australian society.
- Improved educational outcomes**
 - Education Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are committed to achieving improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Bilingualism**
 - Acknowledgement and acceptance of role of the first language to lead to effective bilingualism.
- Two way strong**
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the right to an education which enables them to contribute to and benefit from both their own and mainstream cultures.
- Joint responsibilities**
 - Student participation in education is the responsibility of parents, community and the whole school and is best accomplished through effective partnerships between these stakeholders.
- Individual differences**
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the right to an education that caters their individual needs and cultural diversity of their communities.
- Accountability**
 - Evaluation of literacy programs involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and appropriate reporting on the effectiveness and cost effectiveness to both Education Queensland and the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Contribution of indigenous cultures**
 - Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures contribute to the quality of the Australian Community. Individuals have the right to have their identity and culture respected within the tenets of Australian Law.
- Discrimination free environment**
 - School community partnerships require relationships to be conducted in an atmosphere of open communication and mutual respect for individuals and their cultures.
- School community relationships**
 - All students are enriched by an awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Education Queensland works in partnership with local communities to support indigenous cultures and languages which remain within the custodianships of the Elders / leaders of communities /clans.
- School based management**
 - School/community-based decision-making functions within a common state-wide policy framework which caters for culturally diverse contexts and learning needs.
 - Based on "Principles underpinning Literacy Development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose home language is not Standard Australian English" Hobbs, M. & Murphy, L.(1999)

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