ACTA
AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF TESOL ASSOCIATIONS

Ms Claire Gorman
Principal Policy Officer
Manager – EAL/D Projects
Indigenous Education Policy
Division of Indigenous Education and Training Futures
Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment
Level 21 Education House 30 Mary Street Brisbane

10 October 2012

Dear Ms Gorman

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) is pleased to provide
feedback on the draft Capability Framework for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander EAL/D learners.

ACTA is the national coordinating body of state and territory professional
associations for the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).
ACTA represents and advocates on behalf of teachers, parents and guardians, and
English-language learners, including migrants, refugees, international students, and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak traditional/heritage
languages, creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English, in all education sectors and
contexts across Australia.

Our organisation strongly endorses the development and implementation of the
Capability Framework. We believe that the focus and detail of the document overall
are sound. We provide the following comments and recommendations for your
information.

1   **The status and categorisation of Aboriginal English; terminology**
    We recognise that there are differences of opinion around the country
    regarding the status and categorisation of Aboriginal English as a dialect, and

whether it is more appropriate to refer to "Aboriginal English" or "Aboriginal Englishes".

ACTA's position on the issue is that Standard Australian English (SAE) is a dialect of 'English', and that there are different varieties of SAE spoken or in use across the country and elsewhere at any given time, bound by such things as regional variation, class, cultural factors, and, perhaps most importantly, context of situation. The same applies for Aboriginal English, also a dialect of 'English'.

ACTA's approach in its submissions over the past two years has been to refer to 'varieties of Aboriginal English' rather than 'Aboriginal Englishes', and in addition to 'traditional/heritage languages' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creoles'. However, we believe that making teachers and educational staff aware of the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students might have different languages/creoles/dialects/varieties as their home language/s when they attend school, and providing appropriate language-based educational support in response to students' particular learning needs, are the essential priorities. We applaud the current document for engaging a similar emphasis.

While we support the use of the term 'vernaculars' in the document, the term 'home language/s' should also be used to indicate the language/s, creole/s, dialect/s or variety/ies which students bring with them to school. The important point for teachers to be aware of is that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D students may (or may not) speak a particular 'vernacular' which is in use in their home or community, they will speak one or more particular language/s, dialect/s, creole/s or variety/ies at home that are markedly different from the language of the classroom.

Suggested rewording ('Context', page 2, column 2, paragraph 2)
The framework uses the term 'vernaculars' to refer to the languages or dialects which are used as the primary means of communication, or 'home languages', of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These may include traditional languages (sometimes referred to as language), dialects of English (including all varieties of SAE and Aboriginal English) and creoles which have emerged since colonisation as a result of language contact.

The term 'home language' is preferred to the term 'first language' used elsewhere in the document. (The 'first language' learnt may no longer be the primary means of communication when students begin school, e.g., if they have moved to a new linguistic environment.)

2 The Australian Curriculum and the ACARA EAL/D Teacher Resource

Explicit reference in the document to the Australian Curriculum F-12 as providing the target educational outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students, including those learning Standard Australian English as a second or additional language or dialect, is commended. To exclude the cohort from the opportunity to achieve a standard of competency in the corpus of knowledge, skills and understandings prescribed by the country's national curriculum, whether by omission or otherwise, is to prolong the decades of educational and social disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Australia.

ACTA recommends additionally that the Capability Framework should direct teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as a second or additional language or dialect to the ACARA EAL/D Teacher Resource. This document was reviewed and endorsed by representatives from all states and territories and specifically includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners within the broader cohort of EAL/D students in Australia. The resource and accompanying materials provide a wealth of information and resources for teachers of EAL/D learners. Upon the initial release of the document online, an invitation was extended through professional networks and state and territory jurisdictions to teachers, consultants and other interested parties in all states and territories to provide feedback and suggest revisions to this resource. Subsequent iterations of the resource have incorporated these revisions, along with EAL/D Learning Area Annotations for F-10 English, Maths, Science and History and annotated EAL/D student work samples. The resource and additional materials are available on the ACARA website at http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/student_diversity/eald_teacher_resource.html and are an excellent national resource for teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners. ACTA recommends referring to this resource within Essential Element 3.2, as indicated in the attached

Recommended Additions document. The ACARA EAL/D Teacher Resource, along with other state and territory resources specifically designed for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners in Australian schools (such as the '3 Way Strong' framework produced by DET Queensland and the 'Tracks to Two-Way Learning' materials produced by DoE Western Australia) might also be included in a bibliography or reference list in the Capability Framework, to provide additional sources of information and professional support for teachers.

3 Domains of teaching

The two domains of teaching highlighted in the Capability Framework are undoubtedly the most important for effective teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners and ACTA approves this focus. However, we do not believe it is possible for the Standards in these two domains to come fully into being without reference to the domain of Professional Engagement. This is because there is very particular specialist learning that is required (NPST 6), as well as particular forms of professional engagement (NPST 7) through reciprocal intercultural relationships. We therefore most strongly recommend the inclusion of at least one Essential Element related to each of these NPST Standards, as outlined in our Recommended Additions.

4 Capability Standards

In order to succeed in school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose home language is a language or dialect other than English need to become proficient in how and when to use the varieties of Standard Australian English which are valued in education. To achieve this, explicit teaching of the principle of 'code switching' is strongly recommended. Switching from a home language to SAE and back again is an important feature of becoming proficient in SAE, whilst also valuing and building on the home language. It is also important in learning across the curriculum, which mainly occurs through SAE, but which can be supported by students working in groups and code switching in whatever ways they find helpful in order to grasp key concepts. Students also learn when, where and with whom it is appropriate to use a particular language variety or code. Thus the teacher fosters multilingualism whilst promoting SAE for academic work and other relevant contexts. ACTA recommends the inclusion of code switching as

Essential Element 4.3, following on from the one valuing vernaculars, as well as its assessment within Essential Elements 5.1 and 5.2.

ACTA considers that the teaching standards would benefit from the inclusion of more sociolinguistic perspectives, particularly in regard to the connection between language and culture, and how language functions as a resource for meaning making within social contexts. Teachers need to understand and work with language as a social practice, rather than merely as a linguistic practice. They also need to recognise attitudes towards SAE among those required to learn it as an additional dialect, since these attitudes are often negative within the peer group and can hinder learning if not negotiated effectively through the teaching process. For these reasons, ACTA recommends the inclusion of sociolinguistic perspectives in Essential Elements 1.2 and 2.1-3.

Details of our proposed amendments to the Capability Framework are attached as Recommended Additions, following the format of the Framework, and highlighting the additional components.

We would welcome the opportunity to consult further on the Capability Framework and to collaborate with national Indigenous EAL/D online resource project officers in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies and programs designed to enhance educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners in Australia.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Robert Jackson
ACTA President
robert.jackson44@hotmail.com

Dr Jenny Barnett
ACTA Vice-President
jenny.barnett@unisa.edu.au