**Committee Secretary**
**House of Representatives Standing Committee on**
**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs**
**PO Box 6021**
**Parliament House**
**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

26 August 2011

Dear Committee members

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) is pleased to present for your consideration a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities.*

The submission was prepared and reviewed by ACTA councillors and state and territory association members who possess extensive expertise in the field of English language and literacy education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It has the endorsement of ACTA's constituent state and territory associations for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in Australia.

ACTA is firmly committed to the position that the specific home language backgrounds and skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be acknowledged and valued so that educational programs and initiatives can cater in an effective way to the English language and literacy learning needs of these students, in order to achieve the objectives outlined in the Australian Government's *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach* document, the MCEECDYA *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010-2014)*, and the Australian Curriculum.

We would welcome the opportunity to consult further with the Standing Committee and to collaborate in the planning, development and implementation of programs and strategies which will assist educators to continue to bridge the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australia.

To this end, 'Indigenous Education and Indigenous Language Issues' has been chosen as one of the main strands for our third ACTA International Conference to be held in Cairns on 2-5 July 2012. Our conference organisers have scheduled Keynote Presentations which will specifically address English language learning issues and initiatives for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning

English as an additional language or dialect in Australian schools and other educational settings, and we will be holding a colloquium to explore some of the intersections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander home languages, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language education initiatives, and TESOL, which will address many of the specific issues raised in the Standing Committee *Inquiry*. At the conference we are also planning to convene a round table forum for program managers who have responsibility for English language and literacy education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in national and state and territory educational jurisdictions, in order to map a way forward in the provision of appropriate educational support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect.

We would certainly welcome the attendance and input from members of the Standing Committee at our conference.


Yours Sincerely

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**WHO WE ARE**

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (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 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.

ACTA's objectives are

- to ensure *access to English language instruction* for speakers of other languages and dialects (from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, refugee and migrant backgrounds, and international students)

- to encourage and facilitate *implementation and delivery of quality professional programs* at all levels, and

- to promote *study, research and development of TESOL* at state, national and international levels.

ACTA's membership comes from all educational sectors: pre-schools; schools; adult, community, TAFE and other VET settings; consultancy services in state and territory education departments and the independent and Catholic sectors; and university teacher education departments.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

ACTA is firmly committed to the position that the *specific English language and literacy learning needs of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* must be acknowledged and addressed in educational programs and initiatives in order to achieve the objectives outlined in the Australian Government's *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach* document, the MCEECDYA *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010-2014)*, and the Australian Curriculum

In conjunction with Language Revival projects and programs for the revitalisation, renewal and reclamation of traditional/heritage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, *educational authorities and institutions must adopt a targeted and thoroughgoing approach to the teaching of Standard Australian English to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak a traditional/heritage language, creole or variety of Aboriginal English as their home language*. *These students are learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D).*

Recognising and valuing the *actual home language backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* and catering to their *specific English language learning needs* are essential components in seeking to bridge the gap in educational outcomes and achievements for these students in order to maximise their learning opportunities and life chances and create cultural connection, strengthened intergenerational relationships and community building.

In order to learn Standard Australian English – and to learn *about, in and through* this variety of English – and to facilitate their successful transition into mainstream curricula, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners at all year levels require *targeted instruction and support from specialist English as a second language (ESL) teachers*, where these are available, the *provision of appropriate ESL teaching and learning pathways, programs and resources*, and *access to trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers*.

However, ACTA also recognises the imperative that *many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect in Australian classrooms will do so without access to specialist EAL/D or ESL instruction or support*. The EAL/D support materials which have been

developed for the Australian Curriculum by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), in conjunction with existing state and territory ESL teaching and learning documents and resources that specifically address the particular learning contexts and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect, provide guidance to *all* teachers to support these students to access the content and skills of their learning areas (including subject specific language and literacy) and to develop general language proficiency in Standard Australian English.

The EAL/D language learning progression developed by ACARA describes key phases in English language learning for students whose home language is not English and demonstrates the 'bridge' into each of the Australian Curriculum learning areas for this particular cohort. The accompanying annotations to the learning area content descriptions and annotated EAL/D student work samples will assist teachers to identify some of the linguistic and cultural demands of the curriculum and to cater more effectively to the English language learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their classrooms who are learning English as an additional language or dialect.

The development of a world-class educational curriculum requires a cutting-edge understanding of the impact of increasing globalisation on languages and modes of communication, on the complexities of cultural transmission and cross-fertilisation within and across national borders, and on the optimal and most ethical strategies for the teaching of English as a global language. Most important, however, is that the curriculum affords *equity of access and equal entitlement for all learners*. To this end, ACTA has worked in extensive collaboration with ACARA in the ongoing development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum and the planning and facilitation of programs and strategies which will better equip all Australian teachers to understand and utilise the diverse skills, abilities, experiences and cultural understandings of EAL/D learners in their classrooms, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to assist these students in their English language learning journey.

**GENERAL REMARKS**

This ACTA submission takes as its starting point the description of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' language backgrounds in the MCEETYA (2006) report *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* and a subsequent review of that report commissioned by MCEECDYA and undertaken by prominent Aboriginal academics from across Australia (David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research 2009). These are the key documents identified as underpinning and informing the development of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010-2014)*.

ACTA also strongly endorses the presentation by Michael Dodson to the Ninth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on 20 April 2010 entitled 'Indigenous peoples' development with culture and identity – education for bilingualism and multilingualism in an Indigenous Australian context'.

The aforementioned documents

- provide a clear description of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect

- acknowledge the importance of the traditional/heritage languages, creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- demonstrate that, to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teaching and learning programs and pedagogy must take into account the specific home language backgrounds and language learning needs of these students.

**1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect**

The MCEETYA (2006) report notes that

> Indigenous students are not homogeneous: they reflect the cultural, social and economic diversity of the communities in which they live. (p. 13)

This report also records that these students 'are widely dispersed across schools in remote, rural, regional and urban Australia' and that they 'represent a high percentage of enrolments in remote and community-based schools, [while] the majority attend regional and urban schools where most of their peers are non-Indigenous' (p. 13). These schools 'are also diverse in terms of size, resources, staffing levels and the quality and retention of principals and teachers' (p. 13).

In regard to the cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their language backgrounds, the MCEETYA (2006) report makes the following important distinction:

> Some Indigenous students start school speaking standard Australian English, however, the majority will speak Aboriginal English (a non-standard dialect of English), a creole, one or more Indigenous languages or any combination of these as their first language. (p. 13)

The MCEETYA (2006) report further notes that

> [i]n the 2001 Census, about one in eight Indigenous Australians (12 percent) reported that they spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language at home. The majority (about 80 percent) reported that they spoke English. However, the Census does not differentiate between standard Australian English and Aboriginal English. Kaldor and Malcolm ('The language of school and the language of the Western Australian Aboriginal schoolchild – Implications for education', *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Their Present*, p. 411) suggest that 'Aboriginal children's speech today is probably best seen as a post-creole continuum,' and Harkins ('Structure and Meaning in Australian Aboriginal English', *Asian Englishes: an international journal of the sociolinguistics of English in Asia/Pacific*, 2000, 3.2: 60) asserts that 'Australian Aboriginal English ... is now the primary language of internal and wider communication for the majority of Australian Aboriginal people.' The literature also reveals that standard Australian English spoken by Indigenous students frequently shows evidence of conceptual features that are not shared with non-Indigenous speakers. Aboriginal English shows itself at the level of conceptualization, even when it is not so apparent at the level of linguistic form. (See, for example, the extensive body of work by Ian G. Malcolm, as well as

> recent work by F. Sharifian, 'Cultural conceptualisations in English words: A study of Aboriginal children in Perth'). (p. 33)

Accurate understanding and reporting of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language backgrounds is crucial to any plan to improve educational outcomes for these students. In the Northern Territory, for example, several dozen different traditional/heritage languages are in active use by Aboriginal people, who constitute approximately 30 per cent of the territory's total population of 200,000 (Grimes 2009: 2), and up to 49% of the population in remote and very remote areas (Baxter, Gray and Hayes 2011: 2). The dominant or only language of the majority of Aboriginal children entering Northern Territory schools is any one or more of these languages and/or a variety of Aboriginal English and/or an Aboriginal creole. All remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory are thus operating in bilingual and bicultural contexts because that is the nature of the students in the communities they serve. In addition to this, in a number of multilingual communities there is an expectation that, as they grow older, Aboriginal young people will maintain, learn and/or become fluent in one or more of these traditional/heritage languages as well as English.

This same diversity is found, to a greater or lesser degree, across Australia, and most notably in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. In many areas of Australia, the traditional/heritage languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are no longer in everyday use, so they are no longer spoken as the ***home language*** (sometimes also referred to as the 'first language' or 'mother tongue') of the young people within the community. These young people may speak a variety of Aboriginal English and/or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait creole and/or Standard Australian English as their home language.

Varieties of Aboriginal English and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creoles have significantly distinct and systematic differences from Standard Australian English, both linguistically and conceptually (Sharifian, Rochecoust and Malcolm 2004; Butcher 2008). These languages are sometimes referred to as 'contact languages' or 'mixed languages'; they will be the only language spoken by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students beginning school, and thus these students' ***strongest language for learning***.

For educational approaches to be effective, they must take into account both *the diversity of language backgrounds* that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students bring with them to school, or that constitute a part of their cultural and community heritage and identity, as well as *the specific languages, creoles and/or varieties that the students use as their home language*.

Our members who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have first-hand experience of these interrelated linguistic, cultural and conceptual issues and distinctions, and their impact on students' educational outcomes.

## 2. The importance of the traditional/heritage languages, creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

This submission cannot emphasise too strongly that the range of languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia must be acknowledged and valued, and that this diversity must inform policy making and curriculum development, in order to improve educational outcomes for these students.

The University of South Australia review of the MCEETYA (2006) report states that

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the same right as any other people to receive instruction in their own language. (David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research 2009: 54)

This right has international recognition going back to the late 1940s (UNESCO 2010b) and is supported by numerous international agreements and mechanisms including the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (Article 4); the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Article 14); and the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (Articles 5 and 6). The right applies equally to first language maintenance programs, Language Revival programs for traditional/heritage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, and to *bilingual education programs* (also sometimes referred to as 'two way teaching and learning').

The definition below was taken from the United States Bilingual Act of 1967 and was used by the Commonwealth of Australia when introducing bilingual education into Northern Territory schools in 1973:

> Bilingual Education is the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well organized program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures. (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985: 108)

The 2006 MCEETYA report describes many previous policies and practices of Australian governments as 'predicated on the supposed 'inferiority' of Indigenous Australians' and contributing to 'a tendency for systems and schools to devalue the educational potential of Indigenous students and to overlook the cultural, linguistic and social capital they bring to the classroom' (p. 16). In regard to students' 'engagement in learning', which also comprises one of the six priority domains in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010-2014)*, the 2006 MCEETYA report states that

> [e]ngagement presupposes that teachers and students (and schools and communities) understand each other and that there is effective two-way communication. Most Indigenous students are not native speakers of standard Australian English. Their home language is usually Aboriginal English, a creole, one or more Indigenous languages or any combination of these. ***The home language, whether an Indigenous language or a contact language like Aboriginal English, not only carries the culture of Indigenous students but also encapsulates their identity. For schools to put standard Australian English in an oppositional relationship to the home language, for example, by making it the only recognised vehicle of oral communication in schools, will be to invite resistance, whether active or passive, on the part of Indigenous students.*** (p. 17, our emphasis)

In addition to issues of basic rights and student engagement, purely pragmatic considerations support the use, maintenance and strengthening of children's home language/s in their education. Decades of practical experience and an overwhelming body of research show that second/additional language learning is most effective when it is based on a firm foundation in the learner's home language (see Grimes 2009, for a comprehensive bibliography, including 257 publications since 2000; also

Purdie, Milgate and Bell 2011; August and Shanahan 2008; Bialystok 2007; Datta 2007; Deadly Ways to Learn Consortium 2000; McKay 1997; McKay, Davies, Devlin, Clayton, Oliver and Zammit 1997; Collier, 1992; and Cummins 1980, 1978).

It should be noted that ACTA is the peak body for TESOL (the teaching of English to speakers of other languages) in Australia. Our members are unanimous in affirming that students' home language/s must be central to thinking, policies and action in English language and literacy education, and for Australian education in general.

## 3. Improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through teaching and learning programs and pedagogy which take into account their specific home language backgrounds and language learning needs

ACTA is committed to the position that distinctive, differentiated and expert second language pedagogies and assessment programs are required to meet the needs of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect.

The issues identified in Points 1 and 2 above illustrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English come to formal education in general, and to English in particular, *from distinctive and differentiated linguistic and cultural starting points*. Their starting points for learning are linguistically and culturally embodied skills and understandings of the world, as is true for all human beings. The maintenance, development and use of students' home language/s in the classroom are thus an essential foundation for effective learning.

### 3.1 Pedagogy

Effective pedagogies are based on at least four essential principles:

(i) understanding what learners *already know and can build from* (i.e., learners' starting points),

which helps determine

(ii) specifications of what learners *don't know and need to learn* (i.e., desired educational outcomes)

(iii) an understanding of *the processes* by which learners move from (i) to (ii) and of *recognisable milestones* along the way (i.e., an understanding of learning pathways)

(iv) strategies (i.e., teaching plans, methods and materials) that are informed by this understanding and that assist learners *to move between* what they already know and what they need to know.

These principles apply to all curriculum learning areas – as much to learning mathematics or history – as they do to learning English as an additional language or dialect.

The University of South Australia (2009) review states that

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander home languages are almost always different from the languages required by mainstream education. That difference must be both respected and provided for from the early years and on, in a connected and continuing way – for many, by treating English *as a second language*. (David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research 2009: 25, our emphasis)

Specialist pedagogies for teaching English as an additional language or dialect are based on the four principles listed above. The MCEETYA (2006) report identifies a lack of this specialist instruction at the centre of the educational achievement gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

Disproportionate numbers of Indigenous students do not meet national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7 – results are generally about 20 percent below the national average. Of grave concern is the fact that the proportion of Indigenous students who meet these benchmarks drops significantly from Year 3 to Year 7. Research attributes this drop to the difference between the acquisition of basic interpersonal communication skills in a new language (which takes about two years) and academic language proficiency (which takes around seven years). From preschool to Year 3, most learning is based on acquiring interpersonal communication skills. At Year 4, the focus changes to the acquisition of academic language proficiency. *Without second language or dialect instruction at this point, students fall behind at increasing rates.* Lack of academic achievement and loss of

confidence in these early years mean that most Indigenous students never catch up. (p. 13, our emphasis)

In regard to specific (as distinct from *specialist*) 'interventions', the MCEETYA (2006) report describes some 'Indigenous specific intervention programs (including strategies, pilot projects and trials) that supplement mainstream effort' as 'highly successful' but also states that 'only a small proportion of the total population of Indigenous students is able to access them' (p. 16). The report notes further that

> [a]lthough invaluable, these programs have had unintended consequences. Indigenous education has come to be seen as peripheral rather than integral to core business. In addition, the funding of Indigenous education through special programs has led to dependence on short-term solutions. In other words, Indigenous education has been 'bolted on' rather than 'built in' to mainstream effort, becoming the province of specialists and committed individuals instead of systems as a whole. (p. 16)

We agree that 'bolted on' programs, as described in the MCEETYA (2006) report, can have and often have had the consequences described. We also agree with the report's recommendation that 'the lessons learnt from strategic intervention programs are "built in" to core business to become everyone's business: departmental staff, principals, teachers, school staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents/caregivers, families and communities.' (p. 16)

However, a 'built in' approach – also described as a whole-of-school, mainstreaming and inclusive approach – can have the equally unintended consequence of becoming a 'one size fits all' approach, as has happened in Australia and elsewhere (see, e.g., McCarty 2009 for an analysis of the shortcomings of this type of approach in the United States). The 'lessons learnt from strategic intervention programs' (MCEETYA 2006: 16) which have been identified  and evaluated as successful and invaluable must be consolidated upon.

The required 'paradigm shift in how education systems and schools respond to the learning needs of Indigenous students' (p. 16) is that schools view diversity in their populations *and* programs as integral to educational provision for all. In other words, *difference* should not be equated with *deficit* in either individuals or programs. From this standpoint, differentiated, targeted programs can respond to students' diverse

starting points and accord respect to *all* learning pathways. Programs must not devalue students' educational potential by regarding disparity in educational outcomes as 'normal' or assuming that 'students are to blame for their poor educational outcomes' (MCEETYA 2006: 16), and they must be open-ended and supportive in providing further learning and vocational pathways for students.

If proposals to improve languages education provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (including the learning of Standard Australian English) are committed to having a basis in evidence-based strategies, much can be learned from schools where the linguistic and cultural diversity of students and communities has been acknowledged and valued as an integral feature of the school's core business (cf. MCEETYA 2006: 16). Case studies of schools and programs that accept, value and build on the linguistic and cultural diversity of their students and communities are presented in the 2008 Australian Council for Educational Research report *Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools*. These case studies exemplify the principle that '[l]earning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in the English language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive activities' (Purdie, Frigo,  Ozolins, Noblett, Thieberger and Sharp 2008: 190).

For example, while the Noongar language revitalisation program at Moorditj Noongar Community College near Perth is embedded within all aspects of the school curriculum, students' home language/s and their English language development needs are also fully integrated into the teaching and learning program:

> Students at Moorditj mostly speak Aboriginal English and learn Noongar as a second language. A two way approach is used in teaching all programmes at the school. This means that while teaching Standard Australian English, staff at the school also acknowledge and value the students' first home language. (Purdie et al. 2008: 148)

The Gumbaynggirr language program implemented at Mary's Primary School at Bowraville on the mid north coast of New South Wales also produced positive outcomes for both teacher professional learning and students' English language development:

> The rigour of the programme at St Mary's is enhanced by staff understanding of the general principles of language teaching. Classroom teachers commented

that not only were the children learning Gumbaynggirr, but that their English language skills had increased as they were introduced to how languages worked – notions of syntax, structure, and grammar were being applied to English in ways teachers had not been able to get children to apply before. In the words of one teacher, 'students now have some vocabulary to use in our discussions about the English language.' (Purdie et al. 2008: 176)

These two programs, along with four others, were identifed in the report as 'case studies of good practice in the provision of Indigenous languages programmes in schools' and as having achieved 'positive student outcomes' in terms of 'language success, participation, involvement, and positive school attitudes' (Purdie et al. 2008: 130). Some of the common elements identified as contributing to the success of the programs are that they

- were embedded into the total school program and were not envisaged as short-term, add-on or 'quick-fix' initiatives

- involved qualified and expert personnel at all stages of program development and implementation

- incorporated a strong commitment to the provision of training and ongoing professional learning for teachers

- had strong leadership from the school principal and involved systemic support for the planning, implementation and documentation of programs and extensive provision of training, resources and networking

- had strong community support and participation. (see Purdie et al. 2008: xiii-xiv, 130)

Most importantly of all, however, within these programs, '*[l]iteracy skills in the target language are transferred to English language learning*' (Purdie et al. 2008: xiv, our emphasis).

Similarly, successful bilingual education programs operating in Northern Territory schools prior to 2010 (e.g., at Yuendumu CEC, Milingimbi CEC, Yirrkala CEC, Shepherdson College CEC and Maningrida CEC, amongst others) were held accountable through a rigorous Appraisals Process conducted every three years. Integral to the Appraisals process was clearly demonstrated evidence of ongoing

community support for the programs. Without this support, the bilingual programs would not have continued.

By their nature, those schools implementing formal bilingual programs in the Northern Territory devoted a substantial amount of instructional time, particularly in the early years, to instruction in and through students' home languages. The exact proportion of instruction in and through the home language and Standard Australian English varied from school to school and from class to class. However, within any given bilingual school, the breadth of learning experiences, when inclusive of literacy development in the students' home language, was more extensive for students in bilingual schools than for those in non-bilingual schools (Devlin 2011).

As one model of effective two way teaching and learning, bilingual education is proven to be a valuable pedagogical approach for all young people (see, for example, Bialystok 2007: 71). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect it provides the fundamental tools for reflection, critical thinking and social interaction. It also provides the pathway for becoming literate in the language they speak before mastering literacy in another language (i.e., Standard Australian English, effectively a *foreign language* for many of these students). The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers in the classroom further integrates and consolidates linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills and understandings within bilingual education programs.

## 3.2    Assessment

The fact that the very many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect have different starting points and follow distinctive language learning and other educational pathways also makes uniform specifications of milestones and standards of achievement problematic. *Assessments of literacy and numeracy that are derived from age-based norms for speakers of Standard Australian English as a mother tongue – whether they are diagnostic or formative – will yield distorted and largely worthless data about beginners in English and those in the process of learning it, including speakers of varieties of Aboriginal English and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creoles*, for the following reasons.

First, these assessments are *liable to make false assumptions* about learning contexts (Wigglesworth and Simpson 2009) and about age-appropriate knowledge of Standard Australian English. Second, because assessment tasks are written (from a particular cultural viewpoint) in a language that learners do not understand or understand only partially, and they require learners to respond in that language, *they do not permit learners to demonstrate what they do know and can do*. Third, such age-based assessments of literacy and numeracy *fail to provide data that relate to these learners' actual learning milestones or progress*, for example, in mastering the complexities of Standard Australian English question forms (see, for example, Lightbown and Spada 1999 for an overview of research into second language learning pathways). Fourth, because they do not take account of learners' home language/s, the data they provide is *open to misinterpretation* – for example, a failure to recognise phonemic differences in Standard Australian English has been taken, quite incorrectly, to indicate that learners have a speech or hearing disability.

In addition to being misleading, in painting a negative portrait of learners, assessments that fail to take account of these issues *impact negatively on learners' sense of worth and ongoing engagement with formal education.*

Some of our members report that when young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (particularly in remote and very remote areas) are assessed in Standard Australian English in the classroom by English-speaking teachers, they tend to withdraw or be silent. If the same children are taken outside to more familiar settings and are assessed by people whom they trust, in a language, creole or variety of English with which they are familiar, they demonstrate full competence in the skills and knowledge being assessed (see, for example, Moses and Wigglesworth 2008).

There is a role for assessments in Standard Australian English that seek to measure learners' knowledge of Standard Australian English and to monitor the development of their skills in that language, as distinct from their general language proficiency or proficiency in languages/varieties other than Standard Australian English. *However, assessments in Standard Australian English should not assume sole responsibility for measuring everything a learner knows and can do.*

Standardised assessments such as NAPLAN measure outputs of literacy and numeracy, but these are not correlated to any measures of language proficiency in

Standard Australian English. In other words, the degree to which students' progress in learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect affects their performance is 'invisible' in these data.

Accurate and informative documentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' starting points and progress towards appropriate uses of Standard Australian English requires mapping against **the benchmarks and milestones of actual, documented learner pathway**s. Such documentation exists in English language programming and benchmarking tools currently in use in the states and territories (e.g., Department of Education and Training Western Australia 2009; McKay 2007; NSW Department of Education and Training 2004a and 2004b; Education Queensland 1999 and 2002; Australian Education Council 1994), and in the EAL/D materials and resources developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. However, further research on the teaching and learning of Standard Australian English to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is required, along with concerted and continued commitment to policy and program development and implementation from governments and educational jurisidictions.

In light of these considerations, an essential requirement to ensure effective initial and ongoing assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect is the use of assessment tools that can map these learners' actual pathways *towards* agreed English language and other educational outcomes.

## ADDRESSING THE STANDING COMMITTEE'S SPECIFIC TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Standing Committee has indicated that it will inquire into and report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia, with a particular focus on the following terms of reference, to which we have appended detailed remarks:

### The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

Language and culture are inextricably intertwined phenomena. An individual's language background is an integral component of her or his personal, social and cultural identity. ***The active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' languages and cultures by teachers and educational authorities, within educational curricula, and through the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, are essential to students' wellbeing and success at school.***

Effective bilingual and multilingual education programs are one way of fulfilling these aims. The 1985 Report of The House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education explained 'the significant educational advantages' of bilingual education 'for Aboriginal children whose first language is not English', as follows:

> A bilingual program implicitly recognises and respects the child's culture and language. In this regard the school becomes 'an agent of cultural continuity rather than discontinuity' (B.H. Watts, *Aboriginal Futures: Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines,* April 1981, p. 889). The school curriculum suddenly becomes more accessible to the child who is operating in a familiar language area and therefore feels more secure. The child's language identifies him with his cultural group. The use of the mother tongue in schooling enhances the self-confidence and self-concept of the young child and improves his educational prospects. To ensure that the full benefits of bilingual education are obtained, the Aboriginal language should continue to be recognised and used throughout the bilingual program. (1985: 109)

In his presentation to the Ninth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Dodson (2010) notes the negative implications for students' self

esteem when their home languages are not acknowledged or valued in the classroom: 'the use of a particular language as the language of instruction in a classroom conveys to the learner both a practical and symbolic sense of supremacy. It suggests that the language of instruction is the language of status and the vernacular or the language of transaction, is inferior' (p. 2). He refers to a United Nations paper which asserts that

> [t]he choice of language in the educational system confers a power and prestige through its use in formal instruction. Not only is there a symbolic aspect, referring to status and visibility, but also a conceptual aspect referring to shared values and worldview expressed through and in that language. (UNESCO 2003: 14)

In all cases, the preferred approach to bilingual and multilingual education programs is ***additive bilingualism***, which seeks to maintain the home language as well as the target language/s, rather than 'so called subtractive bilingualism which aims to move children on to a second language as a language of instruction' at the expense of students' home language/s (UNESCO 2003: 17-18).

It is important to reiterate that, ***in many communities across Australia, the home language for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is a creole or variety of Aboriginal English***. These students are learning English as an additional language or dialect just as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak a traditional/heritage language as their home language are learning English as an additional language or dialect. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak a creole or variety of Aboriginal English as their home language may also be learning a traditional/heritage language at school in addition to learning Standard Australian English. Accurate information about and particular acknowledgement of the creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must inform the development and implementation of ***all*** educational programs and initiatives for these students.

**The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture**

There is a commonly-held deficit view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (implicit, to some extent, even in the metaphor of 'Closing the Gap') and to their home languages in particular. This viewpoint feeds a prevailing perception that

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities somehow lie outside Australian society and legitimate or desirable ways of life.

This is particularly the case for those students who speak Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander creoles or varieties of Aboriginal English as their home language. The processes of language contact and language shift have generated these 'contact language' varieties which are the everyday spoken languages ('vernaculars') in many communities. These creoles and language varieties often lack acknowledgement and prestige, and as a result have remained hidden or become stigmatised in the wider public discourse around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The term 'dialect' which is often used to refer to these creoles and language varieties is sometimes incorrectly interpreted to refer to a supposedly inferior or defective form of a language. This interpretation has no scientific foundation.

It should be noted that 'Standard Australian English' is itself a particular variety (or 'dialect') of English. While it is the dominant variety of the language in the public domain, it is but one of many legitimate varieties which are in use in the country and, furthermore, it is a variety which is not equally accessible to all members of the Australian community. To imply that there is an innate superiority of Standard Australian English over other languages or varieties of English – and the speakers of these languages – and to provide insufficient or inappropriate support programs to address the distinctive learning and language learning needs of speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait languages, creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English, will only serve to *preserve* 'the gap' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In considering how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages can contribute to bridging the educational disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, it is essential to acknowledge the ***orally-based practices and understandings*** that characterise many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures in Australia, and how these practices might support further learning. To illustrate, Kral (2009) writes that

> [i]n the Australian Western Desert, verbal arts are central to social interaction. … Recent research has shown that young adults in remote desert communities are adapting oral narrative skills and exploring an expanding repertoire of multimodal practices (Kral 2007). Young people, familiar with the oral, visual

and gestural features of sand story telling, readily embrace multimodal literacies by adapting the narrative schemata of sand stories to new multimedia forms. In other locations, traditional oral narrative schemas, verbal arts and speech styles have seeped into new song writing and recording practices. … [N]ew forms of textual communication and linguistic creativity are emerging where even those with few alphabetic literacy skills are using digital technologies to create song recordings, films and slide shows. (ps 43, 44)

In citing this passage, it should not be assumed that we are dismissing or downgrading the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students gaining conventional literacy skills in Standard Australian English. Rather, our point is that traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait literacy practices are salient and instrumental in the lives and learning of young people in these communities and should be acknowledged and valued. These practices should be encouraged in their own right and as routes into other skills and educational pathways.

ACTA recommends that educational initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are learning English as an additional language or dialect should adopt *‘inter-cultural’* or *‘two way’ approaches to language, culture and social interaction*, and to acknowledge the fact that, in many contexts, the linguistic interface might indeed need to become a *three way approach*. In other words, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be *learning both Standard Australian English and a traditional/heritage language* through a language revitalisation, renewal or reclamation program, *while their home language is different to either of these languages*. In this case, the students’ home language might be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait creole or a variety of Aboriginal English or, indeed, it might be a different traditional/heritage language.

Such inter-cultural, two way and bilingual and multilingual education approaches view cross-linguistic and cross-cultural interactions as dynamic processes which are interactive and negotiated. Students and teachers learn about one another’s languages and the cultural assumptions implicit to each, and they work together to understand and appreciate other cultural perspectives in order to reach new understandings and agreements (Reynolds 2005). In this way, teachers do not simply induct their students into fixed cultural and social norms, but rather are mediators of and between cultures.

In the classroom, the principles underpinning inter-cultural approaches can be summarised as follows:

**(1) Active construction**

- Learning involves the purposeful and active construction of knowledge within a socio-cultural context of use.

- Learners explore language and culture through active engagement.

- Learners develop a personal, inter-cultural space with multiple dimensions.

**(2) Making connections**

- Learning is based upon previous knowledge and requires challenges to preconceptions that learners bring to the classroom.

- These challenges lead to new insights through which learners make connections to reorganise and extend their existing frameworks of knowledge and belief.

**(3) Social interaction**

- Learners communicate about linguistic and cultural differences and similarities.

- Learners communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

- Learners recognise these boundaries and explore why they are constructed.

- Learners engage with unfamiliar conceptual systems through language.

**(4) Reflection**

- Learners critically and constructively reflect on and question linguistic and cultural differences and similarities.

**(5) Critically and constructively reflecting on one's own inter-cultural behaviour**

- Learners articulate the multiple dimensions of their own inter-cultural space and identity.

  (adapted from Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler 2003; Lo Bianco and Crozet, 2003; and Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, and Crozet 1999).

Additionally, even a minor shift in terminology, perhaps to something like '***Bridging*** the Gap' would imply an approach that was more respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, communities, cultures and languages, and would point towards two way (and three way) exchanges and inter-cultural learning. Such inter-cultural approaches accord true agency and legitimacy to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities in their interactions with teachers, schools and systems, in contrast to seeking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander compliance to externally-imposed indicators, outcomes and standards of language competence. A more thoroughgoing commitment to inter-cultural processes in planning at all levels of education is urgently required.

**The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education**

The benefits of bilingual, multilingual and inter-cultural education programs in the early years of education are manifold. As noted, these programs provide a breadth of learning experiences and equip students with fundamental tools for reflection, critical thinking and social interaction. They also provide a pathway for students to develop literacy skills in Standard Australian English by building on the literacy skills and understandings they have mastered in their home language/s.

In consultation with their communities, some remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory will identify early print literacy in both home language and English as intended student literacy outcomes. These schools may opt to use a biliteracy approach to the end of Year 2 to achieve these outcomes.

Even in school contexts where English is the primary language of instruction, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' home languages can be used to support quality teaching across all year levels, particularly in the early years of education. Home languages can be used to introduce and/or explain concepts where necessary. Effective EAL/D pedagogies in the early years include use of students' home language as well as providing students with an opportunity to hear, use and learn about Standard Australian English.

ACTA strongly supports the '3 way strong' language approach developed for early education in Queensland which 'helps schools to recognise and work with the language varieties in the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'.

The '3 way strong' approach is based on the following principles:

1   Recognise and value the language varieties which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are using for their 'everyday' talk.

2   Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in learning and achieving in schools by teaching Standard Australian English explicitly, actively and meaningfully.

3   Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's access to their heritage by maintaining, learning or researching their traditional languages and cultures. (Queensland Department of Education and Training 2011: 4)

Additionally, assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's readiness for school – in relation to areas such as health and well being, social competence, emotional maturity, language, cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge – should be conducted in the language, creole or variety of English with which they are most comfortable. It should be socially, culturally, cognitively and interpersonally congruent with children's and families' experiences and expectations.

**Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language**

Support for home (or 'mother tongue') language development is the best foundation for learning other languages and varieties, in this case, Standard Australian English. Citing UNESCO (2010a) and Cummins (2001), Dodson (2010) refers to the 'overwhelming international evidence on the importance and efficacy of mother tongue instruction in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous children.' (p. 1)

In its 1985 Report, The House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education described the benefits of bilingual education as follows:

There are sound educational reasons for establishing literacy in the child's first language before developing literacy in English. It breaks the pupil's initial learning tasks into two: first they learn to read and write [i.e., in their home language], then they begin to cope with English. The child only has to tackle one major task at a time, that of learning to read without the added burden of

learning a new language at the same time. The child understands his mother tongue and therefore what he reads makes sense. Once the child knows how to read he can apply basic reading skills to learn to read in English. The child will also gain a sense of satisfaction, rather than frustration, at being able to read and express himself orally and in writing initially in his first language and later in English. (p. 109)

The Select Committee noted the distinction between a 'transfer' model of bilingual education where bilingual education is seen 'merely as an effective way of developing literacy in English', and a *'maintenance' model of bilingual education where bilingual education is seen to be 'an important means of maintaining Aboriginal language and culture while also enabling the acquisition of literacy in English'*. The committee asserted that the emphasis should clearly be on the 'maintenance' model of *additive bilingualism*. (p. 109)

Dodson (2010) notes that:

There is no doubt (or argument against the fact) that Aboriginal students in Australia should become proficient in English as the language of transaction. However, recent policy developments are based on political imperatives driven by the short-term need to improve standardized test scores, regardless of the preponderance of evidence that well-resourced bilingual and multilingual education programs improve educational outcomes. Furthermore, the evidence shows that 'having the official language of instruction as a home language significantly lowers the risk of having fewer than four years in education at age 17 to 22.' (p. 3)

In conjunction with programs for the maintenance and development of students' home languages, systematic and targeted support for the learning of Standard Australian English *as a language* must be provided in order to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect. Speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English must be supported to build a foundation in understanding and speaking Standard Australian English. This entails the acquisition of a new phonemic, syntactic, lexical and pragmatic system for

meaning-making. Development of students' oral communication skills in Standard Australian English is an essential precursor to developing literacy skills in English.

All students in Australia have the right to be taught to communicate effectively in Standard Australian English, to understand how the English language works, to think and learn through English, and to be given access to the cultural understandings it carries. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can be taught English and supported to develop knowledge, skills and understanding relating to their local culture and language/s *without loss of their home language*. Each of these objectives should be equally valued and recognised.

Community leaders and parents will continue to be primary agents for teaching traditional culture/s and language/s to their children. Schools and communities should work in partnership with their communities to perpetuate, grow and celebrate culture/s and language/s, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English which are students' home languages.

**The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities**

English language competency is fundamental to successful participation in contemporary Australian society and to accessing the wider public domain. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people achieve age and peer-appropriate levels of English language competency is one of the most important and effective ways of assisting them to broaden their 'post-school options and life choices' (MCEETYA 2006: 14). A lack of specialist English language instruction has been identified at the centre of the educational achievement gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

> Disproportionate numbers of Indigenous students do not meet national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7 – results are generally about 20 percent below the national average. Of grave concern is the fact that the proportion of Indigenous students who meet these benchmarks drops significantly from Year 3 to Year 7. Research attributes this drop to the difference between the acquisition of basic interpersonal communication skills in a new language (which takes about two years) and academic language proficiency (which takes around seven years). From preschool to Year 3, most

> learning is based on acquiring interpersonal communication skills. At Year 4, the focus changes to the acquisition of academic language proficiency. Without second language or dialect instruction at this point, students fall behind at increasing rates. Lack of academic achievement and loss of confidence in these early years mean that most Indigenous students never catch up. (MCEETYA 2006: 13)

Studies further confirm that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending schools in metropolitan and regional areas achieve at higher levels in standardised English literacy assessments than those enrolled in remote and very remote schools (see, e.g., Frigo, Corrigan, Adams, Hughes, Stephens, Woods 2004: 33). Although there are many factors which contribute to educational disadvantage for students in remote and very remote areas of Australia (Frigo et al. 2008: xi-xii), a particular factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in these areas is that they are learning English as an additional language or dialect. The research data also indicate that 'regional trends do not explain differences between students as well as differences between schools' (Frigo et al. 2004: 33).

If schools and other educational providers do not respond in targeted and systematic ways to the specific linguistic and cultural abilities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, then it is highly likely that these students will continue to disengage from the Australian educational system altogether. The ramifications in terms of these students ever becoming competent users of Standard Australian English and the impact this will have on their future educational and vocational opportunities and pathways are clear:

> These outcomes continue to limit the post-school options and life choices of Indigenous students and perpetuate intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage. (MCEETYA 2006: 14)

If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are to achieve positive educational and vocational outcomes, then education and employment providers must value the knowledge and skills which these students bring to the table, and implement language support programs which are tailored to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds and needs of the students, and to specific educational or vocational pathways. Educational targets, performance indicators and actions should seek to develop a broad range of

vocational and further education pathways and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, for example, in legal, environmental, artistic, media, educational and community domains. They should also address the need for support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in adapting to specific educational and employment pathways.

Schools should be encouraged and supported to establish closer links and collaboration with non-school education providers, for example, in developing innovative models, accredited curriculum containing competencies written by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and developing pathways into work, further training and tertiary study.

The focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' deficits in regard to both national education benchmarks and post-school outcomes should be contextualised to acknowledge the barriers created by the education system itself, the availability of appropriate and effective education and training opportunities in remote and very remote areas, and the labour market. Participation in the higher levels of education and the labour market is to some extent a two-way street, not least in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts.

**Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services**

ACTA warmly supports the adoption of measures to improve interpreting and translating services to assist schools to cater to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect, as outlined in the Australian Government's *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach* document. However, such measures (for example, the contracting of language aides to assist classroom teachers) should not be envisaged as a substitute for the implementation of systematic and targeted teaching and learning programs, and the employment of qualified specialist teachers, consultants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers who will address the specific language learning needs of these students.

Additional school, post-school, community and tertiary-level training courses should be provided for speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English to become formally accredited as interpreters and translators, and to be employed as language aides in the classroom.

The presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers, education workers and community members in schools and classrooms will also ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have positive role models and enable them to build connections, contributing to improved educational outcomes.

**The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages**

ACTA warmly supports the implementation of maintenance and revitalisation programs for traditional/heritage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools. However, these programs must also take into account *the home languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities* (for example, when the home language spoken by students is a creole or variety of Aboriginal English which is different from the traditional/heritage language being taught), and also the *specific English language learning needs* these students have and the support they will require to learn Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect.

ACTA strongly supports the principles and recommendations outlined in the ACER report *Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools*, and in particular Key Principle 4:

> Learning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in the English language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive activities. (Purdie, Frigo, Ozolins, Noblett, Thieberger and Sharp 2008: 190)

Language Revival initiatives for the revitalisation, renewal and reclamation of traditional/heritage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages must be implemented in conjunction with programs that seek to develop students' proficiency in Standard Australian English through explicit and systematic instruction, and through the acknowledgement, valuing and use of students' home language in the classroom.

An essential component in determining the degree and scope of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language maintenance and revitalisation programs in educational settings must be effective consultation with *all* groups (or 'mobs') that are stakeholders within the particular community or context. Teachers and principals should go beyond the classroom and school in seeking to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as invited and appropriate, to find out about

language maintenance and revitalisation initiatives and to incorporate these into their educational curricula.

**The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.**

Abilities to read and write in English and to be numerate are critical if young people are to complete their schooling successfully, exercise choice about what they do in life beyond school, participate fully in the economic and social development of their communities, and become global citizens.

All students in Australia have the right to be taught to communicate effectively in Standard Australian English to understand how the English language works, to think and learn in and through English, and to be given access to the cultural understandings it carries. The EAL/D support materials developed by ACARA to complement the Australian Curriculum in all learning areas will assist mainstream teachers in Australian schools to understand the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, skills and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to address their linguistic and socio-cultural learning needs.

National policies and programs and whole-of-school approaches by themselves will be most effective in schools where the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are relatively homogeneous. However, given that the majority of these students 'attend regional and urban schools where most of their peers are non-Indigenous' (MCEETYA 2006, p. 13), national and whole-of-school approaches alone will do little to assist these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Failure to develop and implement targeted and differentiated pedagogies and programs which cater to the *specific* learning and English language learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schools and other educational settings will serve to perpetuate the status quo of ***ignoring their distinctive learning trajectories and local literacies***, and thus will also protract inequality and educational disadvantage by failing to support them towards optimal educational outcomes.

Effective educational policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must entail

- accurate identification and acknowledgement of students' actual linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and

- the explicit valuing of the skills, knowledge and understandings they bring from these backgrounds to the classroom

- provision for empathetic and ongoing consultation and negotiation with local communities and elders, and for their collaboration, input and participation in the development and implementation of school curricula

- distinctive, differentiated and expert second language pedagogies and assessment programs designed to address the specific needs of the diverse cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect.

The recognition and active involvement of members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at all levels of educational decision-making is essential to enhance education policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Australia.

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