

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS

This is one of seven Teacher Guides in the series 'Teaching in Remote Australian Schools: Enhancing Pre-Service Teacher Education – A Resource Package'.

STANDARD

1.0 Know students and how they learn

FOCUS AREA

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

GRADUATE DESCRIPTOR

Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

INTRODUCTION

For pre-service teachers, an excellent starting point for building a broad knowledge base about the current status of education for Aboriginal students is Volume Three of the findings of The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey titled *Improving the Educational Experience of Aboriginal Children and Young People (2006)*. While the findings are Western Australian based, pre-service teachers will identify that many of the findings are relevant to all of Australia. The report also shows that generally the greater the relative geographic isolation the greater the relative disadvantage in education outcomes.

As noted in the other teaching guides, it is important not to see geographic isolation, cultural diversity or for that matter any factor as a reason for poor educational outcomes. The role of the teacher is to build an understanding of the factors impacting on educational outcomes and then employ teaching skills to ensure that all students are working towards achieving their full potential.

The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey found that: *There are two key principles that emerge from the survey findings that underpin the recommendations (for improving educational outcomes). These are:*

- *the need for schools to engage carers and communities to break the cycle of the transfer of educational disadvantage between generations*
- *the need to improve early childhood and early school learning for Aboriginal children to prevent children falling behind in the crucial early years of life (p. 497).*

Based on these two principles the survey report goes on to offer *15 actions as a basis of forming strategies to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students (p. 497)*. While the actions are directed to the systemic level, teachers need to consider the role they

can play at the individual, classroom and school level in addressing the actions.

This Teacher Guide encourages pre-service teachers to reflect on Actions 3 and 4 of the report and identify how teachers and schools can work with communities to support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and apply these understanding for the benefit of other students.

Action 3 states (p. 498): *Education systems should set strategic directions to address the disengagement and alienation from schools of carers of Aboriginal children in order to improve their involvement in their child's educational progress and their capacity to support their child's schooling. Schools must reach out to carers and communities proactively to:*

- *establish a relationship of trust with the community based on shared values;*
- *shared decision-making and expectations;*
- *address issues surrounding carers' own poor experiences at school;*
- *demonstrate the value and positive culture of schools;*
- *actively promote the benefits education can provide to children;*
- *provide opportunities for carers to obtain positive educational experiences;*
- *demonstrate respect for Aboriginal people and culture; and*
- *eliminate racism in schools.*

Action 4 states (p. 498): *Programmes should be developed to set school, community and carer expectations for improving attendance at school and monitor their success.*

The Teacher Guide also encourages pre-service teachers to reflect on Action 6 of the report *Improving the Educational Experience*

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of Aboriginal Children and Young People with the intention of designing teaching sequences targeting learning area-specific literacy needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learners of English as a Second Language.

Action 6 states (p. 498):

Substantial direction within the education system is now needed to target:

- *explicit teaching of standard Australian English language features throughout all;*
- *years at school;*
- *strategies to identify and manage Aboriginal children who have speech and language impairments that interfere with learning; and*
- *development of appropriate educational risk-management strategies for Aboriginal students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, their implementation and reporting on their uptake and impact.*

OUTCOMES

Graduates know how teachers and schools work with their communities to support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the remote context.

Graduates employ a range of skills and strategies to design teaching sequences to target learning area specific literacy needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the remote context.

Graduates develop socio-linguistic and socio-cultural understandings and apply them to design teaching sequences targeting learning area specific literacy needs of English as a Second Language students in the remote context.

TOPICS

Identifying how teachers and schools can work with communities in the remote context to support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other students through:

- Establishing relationships of trust with the community based on shared values.
- Building processes for shared decision-making and expectations.
- Addressing issues surrounding parents/carers' own poor experiences at school.
- Demonstrate the value and positive culture of schools.
- Actively promoting the benefits education can provide to children and young people.
- Providing opportunities for carers to obtain positive educational experiences.
- Demonstrating respect for Aboriginal people and culture.
- Eliminating racism in schools.
- Developing programs to set school, community and parent/carer expectations for improving attendance at school

Design teaching sequences targeting learning area-specific literacy needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learners of English as a Second Language through:

- Targeting the explicit teaching of standard Australian English language features throughout all areas of learning and years at school.
- Developing strategies to identify and manage Aboriginal children who have speech and language impairments that interfere with learning.

- Development of appropriate educational risk-management strategies for Aboriginal students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, their implementation and reporting on their uptake and impact.

TASKS

Identifying How Teachers and Schools Can Work With Communities to Support the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.

1. Locate the Power Point Presentation used by Mr Paul Bridge, Principal Derby District High School, at the National Conversation with Principals, 2011 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/NationalPrincipalsForum/Pages/Presentations.aspx>

Note:

- The features seen as important at Derby District High School in making it an effective school.
- The importance of “building engagement”.
- How community engagement is built at Derby District High School.
- The correlation between Action 3 offered in *Improving the Educational Experience of Aboriginal Children and Young People (2006)* and the work taking place at Derby district High School.

2. As a teacher appointed to Derby District High School, what actions you could take to support community engagement (what could you do in relation to each of the bullet points listed in the presentation given by Paul Bridge)? How would you “quality assure” that your actions are in line with the overall school approach?

3. Write your own personal teaching philosophy which reflects a culturally inclusive learning environment including classroom management, diversity, and language in the classroom.

4. **Group activity.** Using the publication *Improving the Educational Experience of Aboriginal Children and Young People (2006)* especially chapter 6, identify three or four factors influencing the academic performance of Aboriginal students. Brainstorm how you will address this as a teacher.

Designing Teaching Sequences Targeting Learning Area-Specific Literacy Needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students Who Are Learners of English as a Second Language.

The Department of Education in Western Australia, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the Association of





Independent Schools of Western Australia joined forces to produce an excellent publication called *Deadly Ideas: A collection of two-way bidialectal teaching strategies from the Deadly Ways to Learn Project (2000)*. The publication “contains a selection of teaching strategies that were collected from teachers involved in the *Deadly Ways to Learn project*” – a project specifically designed “to improve the literacy outcomes of Aboriginal students through the development and application of two-way bidialectal approaches to literacy instruction” (p. 1).

The strategies are built on pedagogy that incorporates:

- Collaborative group work;
- Building rapport (mutual respect – teacher/student; student/student; teacher/families; school/families);
- Whole-part-whole (the critical role of the teacher making “explicit for all their students where each part fits within the whole skill of understanding being learned”, p.12);
- Modelling;
- Hands on activities;
- Teach about talk (constantly talking about language);
- Working in Aboriginal English (code switching);
- Language and literacy across the curriculum;
- Use of educational technology;
- Expectations declared and adhered to;
- Cues for listening; and
- Using the expertise of AIEO’s.

In addition to *Deadly Ideas* (2000), the *Deadly Ways to Learn* package included: *Deadly Yarns*, “a book of anecdotes about language, culture, identity and power that emerged from the *Deadly Ways to Learn* action research project”; *Talking Deadly*, a video designed for all school personnel and the wider community to explain what Aboriginal English is, where it came from and why it is important”. *Deadly Ways to Teach*, “a second video that goes into more detail about two-way bidialectal education in the classroom. It contains footage collected from ‘working’ classrooms and interviews featuring teachers and IEOs involved in the *Deadly Ways to Learn* action research project” (p117).

In the year preceding the publication of the *Deadly Ways* materials, the *Towards More User Friendly Education for Speakers of Aboriginal English Project* published their work (Malcolm, 1999). This project resulted in the production of the *Solid English* curriculum materials (Education Department of Western Australia, 1999). Note the similar messages and strategies across the *Deadly Ways* and *Towards More User Friendly Education for Speakers of Aboriginal English* projects.

5. Review more recent publications than the two projects mentioned above, on addressing the literacy needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Compare and contrast these strategies. Has the message/strategies changed in more recent time? What is new? What has remained the same?

6. Based on your review of literature including your analysis of the materials from the *Deadly Ways* and *Towards More User Friendly Education for Speakers of Aboriginal English* projects:

- design a teaching sequence targeting the learning area-specific literacy needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learners of English as a Second Language.

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