

## Contents

1	Introduction: AIATSIS and our concerns .....	2
1.1	English as a Second Language (ESL) and Indigenous students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE).....	3
1.2	Indigenous languages and their place in improving Indigenous education outcomes .....	4
2	Addressing the questions in the submission guidelines .....	4
3	National Collaboration .....	4
3.1	Engagement and connections .....	4
3.2	Literacy and numeracy .....	7
3.3	Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development.....	8
4	Summary .....	8
5	Appendix: Comments on the priorities of the Northern Territory .....	8
6	Appendix: Comments on the NAPLAN testing.....	9
7	References.....	9

### 1 Introduction: AIATSIS and our concerns

AIATSIS commends the MCEECDYA for creating an action plan for Indigenous education and making the draft available for public comment. As "the world's premier institution for information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, past and present", we are pleased to be able to offer our contribution.

The goals of the action plan are commendable, ambitious, but achievable. The focus on outcomes, targets and performance indicators is commendable. However, we see some omissions and important issues that seem to be ignored or downplayed in the draft plan.

In summary, the two major issues we see as lacking emphasis in the draft action plan are:

- 1) The lack of emphasis of the ESL issue in English literacy and fact that Indigenous students come from different language backgrounds (see below), including the fact that many Indigenous students come from a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE); and
- 2) The lack of emphasis on Indigenous languages and their place in improving Indigenous education outcomes, especially in the identified domains of 'engagement and connections' and 'literacy and numeracy'.

These two major issues and other smaller ones are detailed in the body of our submission below.

We are also disappointed that MCEEDYA has not apparently collaborated with the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the group of key Indigenous leaders who have been working together since 2009 towards developing and implementing a long-term strategic national action plan for Indigenous education (Mogensen 2009a; Mogensen 2009b; M. Dodson, personal communication, 4 February 2010). This group describe a 25-year program that "would set clear targets to be reviewed annually within five year cycles" (Mogensen 2009a:22).

Furthermore, we are disappointed that the call for submissions expressly forbids comment on 'Chapter 3 - Jurisdictional Priorities'. Our opinion is that the listed priorities of the Northern Territory fall below the standard set by other jurisdictions. Although we are not asked for comment on jurisdictional priorities, we include in this submission an appendix especially commenting on the priorities of the Northern Territory.

We also attach to this submission a fact sheet relating to Indigenous Languages in Education prepared by SIL Australia (AuSIL, 2009, [\*Indigenous Languages in Education\*](#)).

In preparing this submission, we have come to know of a separate submission made by the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), the Australian Linguistics Society (ALS) and the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA). We consider the points made by these organisations similar to ours.

### **1.1 English as a Second Language (ESL) and Indigenous students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE)**

In the view of many Australian linguists, Indigenous students come from four general language backgrounds:

1. Students monolingual in a traditional Indigenous language;
2. Students monolingual in an English-based creole language;
3. Students bilingual in an English-based creole language and a traditional Indigenous language;
4. Students monolingual in English or a non-standard variety of English.

More attention needs to be paid to the variety of language backgrounds of Indigenous students and the different literacy strategies required to address these differing needs.

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. Indigenous students are not homogeneous: they reflect the cultural, social and economic diversity of the communities in which they live. (MCEETYA 2006:13)

The NAPLAN reports of 2008 and 2009 clearly state that many Indigenous students come from a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). In some remote schools, students with an LBOTE may form 90 to 100 percent of a school's total enrolment. However, in the draft plan, there is no mention of addressing the LBOTE/ESL issue. The NAPLAN reports state, for example, that...

... many Indigenous students in remote communities in the Northern Territory are also considered to be LBOTE students. This is also true for students in Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, although to a lesser extent. (NAPLAN 2009:222; NAPLAN 2008:203)

The varying language backgrounds of Indigenous students needs to be taken into greater account, as detailed below.

## **1.2 Indigenous languages and their place in improving Indigenous education outcomes**

Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have been emphasised in 2009 by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts the Hon Peter Garrett and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs the Hon Jenny Macklin. In contrast, we note the low emphasis on Indigenous languages in the draft plan. Indigenous languages should be given greater emphasis in the Action Plan. A greater emphasis on Indigenous languages is especially important in the priority domains of engagement and connections and in literacy and numeracy.

## **2 Addressing the questions in the submission guidelines**

In this submission, we have focussed our comments on Chapter 2: National Collaboration. Our comments are primarily on the domains of 'engagement and connections' and 'literacy and numeracy'.

## **3 National Collaboration**

### **3.1 Engagement and connections**

We note the low emphasis on Indigenous language in the priority domain of 'engagement and connections'. We suggest that the IEAP place a higher emphasis on Indigenous languages as language is essential to cultural identity.

We note that the emphasis on professionally training and equipping local Indigenous education workers in the domain of 'leadership, quality teaching and workforce development' has an influence with this domain of 'engagement and connections'.

One of the five key areas of focus that Ministers Garrett and Macklin outlined in their August 2009 media release regarding a National Indigenous Languages Policy is:

... supporting the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools. (Garrett and Macklin 2009)

This statement is expanded on the National Indigenous Language Policy web page as the fifth of five objectives:

Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools:  
To support and maintain the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools. (DEWHA 2009)

This objective in turn is further expanded into four specific actions that we will not quote here for reasons of space. We also note that the National Indigenous Language Policy makes a further four points on the relationship between Indigenous languages and literacy and numeracy.

This contrasts to the somewhat vague and tokenistic statement in point 10 of the National collaborative action:

As part of a National Strategy for Indigenous Languages, a study will be commissioned into the feasibility of a national panel of experts framing the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and considering how out-of-school schemes might work.  
(Page 9)

Several issues may be raised:

The core action of this statement is only a "feasibility study" on a "national panel of experts" rather than the actual formation of such a panel of experts. An informal network of experts on Australian Indigenous languages already exists that AIATSIS is aware of, the core of which are the authors and contributors to two important reports: the National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) Report of 2005 and the "Way Forward" report by Purdie et al released by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in 2008.

The reference to "the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages" is too broad and needs elaboration. The state of each Indigenous language varies across the country. Both the NILS report (2005) and the "Way Forward" report (Purdie et al 2008) describe the various conditions and the different strategies required to 'teach' them. In some cases, traditional Aboriginal languages are the first language of almost all of a particular school's students. In other cases, modern Indigenous languages such as Kriol in the Top End are the first language of the majority of students. In both these cases the priority is not to 'teach' these languages but to 'teach in' them.

The following Table from the NILS report summarises the Indigenous language situation.

**Table 1 Language maintenance program categories and their corresponding situations (NILS 2005:25, Table 2.1)**

<b>AILF categories</b>	<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Defining characteristics (AILF)</b>
Language maintenance (first language maintenance)		All generations full speakers
Language revival	Language revitalisation	Generation of (older) speakers left—children likely good passive knowledge
	Language renewal	Oral tradition but no full speakers—children likely little or no passive knowledge
	Language reclamation	No speakers or partial speakers—relying on historical sources to provide knowledge
Language awareness		Non-speakers learning about the languages where it is not possible to learn and use the language—vestiges only documentation poor
Language learning (second language learning)		Non-speakers learning as L2

Point 10 only refers to "out of school schemes" and does not mention schemes within schools. This contrasts with the statements by Ministers Macklin and Garrett quoted in the beginning of this section on support for Indigenous languages in schools.

We recommend replacing point 10 of the national collaboration actions with the following points:

- "As part of a National Strategy for Indigenous Languages, an Indigenous language curriculum component will be introduced into all Australian state and territory education departments and all states and territories will fund a state language centre, following the example of the NSW government."

[See Recommendation 5 in NILS 2005:117:

All Australian states and territories should consider the introduction of initiatives such as those being employed by the NSW government, including the introduction of an Indigenous language curriculum component in state schools and the funding of a state language centre.]

- "Training of Indigenous teachers should be a priority and should include training in the development of local language and culture programs. This should especially include training for early childhood work to support the establishment of Language Nests."

[See Recommendation 49 in NILS 2005:122. This point also relates to the key focus area of 'readiness for school'.]

- "A pilot program of Language Nests, which are Indigenous language programs for early childhood, should be established."

[See Recommendation 1 in NILS 2005:116:

A pilot program of Language Nests, which are Indigenous language programs for early childhood, should be established following consultation and a scoping report.

The Language Nests will provide early childhood exposure to local languages and should be run in communities for all language categories (strong, endangered, and no longer spoken).

The development of Language Nests should involve coordination with state and Australian Government education authorities. The pilot phase of Language Nests could include a planned evaluation process.

A working party should be established to examine ways of linking language teams/centres and schools/education systems as a first step in developing a pilot Language Nests program.

Discussion should focus on the way that children graduating from such programs to primary school can continue their Indigenous language learning.]

### **3.2 Literacy and numeracy**

We applaud the intention of government to improve Indigenous literacy and numeracy. However, we are deeply concerned about methods and approaches to English literacy that ignores statistics on language background and ignores well-founded national and international academic research on literacy pedagogy, research that AIATSIS is well placed to direct the MCEECDYA to.

Page 13 of the draft plan states that:

Evidence shows that mastering the basics of English literacy and numeracy is a foundation for lifelong learning, economic participation and effective citizenship.

This statement is a bit too universalist. English literacy is *not* a universal foundation for lifelong learning. The statement devalues the achievements of millions around the world literate in languages other than English. This statement is better re-phrased as:

"Mastering the basics of numeracy and English literacy is essential to participation in the wider Australian economic and public domain."

The action plan does not acknowledge that mastering English literacy and numeracy should not be at the expense of the child's 'home culture' and that Standard Australian English (SAE) needs to be taught explicitly in an ESL pedagogical framework alongside the 'home language'.

Developing and trialing induction programs for pre-service teachers and re-training for existing teachers in Indigenous education is mentioned several times (e.g. p16) but there is no mention of who will develop and trail such courses. It is crucial that this is designed and implemented by Indigenous teachers and academics.

The preamble on literacy and numeracy in the action plan (page 13 in the draft) should include the following paragraph:

"We recognise that Indigenous students come from varied language backgrounds, including backgrounds where students come to school monolingual in a traditional Indigenous language or a creole. NAPLAN results have clearly shown that many Indigenous students are considered Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) students. These students require ESL (English as a Second Language) strategies in the learning of oral English and English literacy. All schools with a population of Indigenous LBOTE students shall have fully qualified ESL teachers."

The following sentence should also be included:

"The development of literacy in Standard Australian English should not come at the expense of students traditional languages."

Under 'targets', include:

- "Numbers of teaching staff with professional ESL qualifications will be proportional to or greater than the proportion of LBOTE students in the school. That is, if one-fifth of the student population is LBOTE, at least one-fifth of the teaching staff will have a professional ESL qualification."

Under 'National collaborative action', include:

- "The Australian Government will work with education providers to address the ESL needs of Indigenous students. Indigenous students in urban areas may speak Aboriginal English (AE) and may have ESL needs."

### **3.3 Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development**

We reiterate our point made in the previous section about the need for ESL qualified teachers. An additional point needs to be made regarding high teacher turnover rates and teacher retention strategies.

Under 'outcomes' or 'targets' include:

- "lower teacher and principal turnover rates and better retention strategies to keep good teachers and principals in hard-to-staff schools."

Under 'performance indicators' include:

- "lower turnover rates for teachers and principals in hard-to-staff schools."

## **4 Summary**

In summary, the two major points that we see as crucial to include are:

- Emphasise the ESL/LBOTE issue in Indigenous English literacy.
- Emphasise Indigenous languages and their place in improving Indigenous Education outcomes, especially in the identified domains of 'Engagement and connections' and 'Literacy and numeracy'.

## **5 Appendix: Comments on the priorities of the Northern Territory**

In the individual state and territory priorities for literacy and numeracy, only Queensland and WA mention anything about LBOTE/ESL:

Queensland: "Provide targeted support to students whose first language is not Standard Australian English." WA: "Provide targeted support to students whose first language is not Standard Australian English."

The NT strangely makes no such mention when the LBOTE/ESL issue is clearly a major issue for the NT - except under 'leadership', on training teachers. There is extensive literature on Indigenous education issues in the Northern Territory. Good

starting places are the work of Simpson, Caffery and McConvell (2009) and AuSIL (2009).

## 6 Appendix: Comments on the NAPLAN testing

There needs to be a body of Indigenous educationalists involved in the setting of the NAPLAN tests to ensure that they do not contain socio-cultural biases.

Research (longitudinal ethnographic studies) needs to be undertaken into the challenges for Indigenous students imposed by the classroom focus on the preparation and management of the testing regime.

Test results for Year One children focus on lack of school readiness rather than capacity to learn.

What (if any) Indigenous perspectives are used in the teaching of literacy and numeracy?

NAPLAN reporting should also include a 'report card' on jurisdictional and Federal indicators related to reported indexes, such as the percentage of ESL qualified staff against percentage of LBOTE/ESL students; and, staff retention rates.

NAPLAN reporting reported on LBOTE rates in 2008 but discontinued doing so in 2009. Reporting of LBOTE rates should be reinstated in future NAPLAN reports.

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