What works?
Explorations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students

A report prepared for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs by the IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team
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March 2000
Dear Dr Kemp

On behalf the Australian Curriculum Studies Association and National Curriculum Services, we are pleased to present the final report of the National Coordination and Evaluation Project for the IESIP Strategic Results Projects.

The report, entitled *What Works? Explorations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students*, is a significant achievement in Australian education. It summarises what has been learnt from one of the largest Indigenous educational exercises ever undertaken across Australia and is without precedent in terms of scope and scale. The IESIP Strategic Results Projects valued and challenged the professional capabilities of educators; it valued diversity and yet was also highly ambitious in wanting to show accelerated learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

This report represents a landmark in practice in Indigenous education and training. It says that the learning outcomes for Indigenous students can be accelerated when educators combine commitment with high expectations and with what is generally regarded as good teaching and learning practice. It demonstrates that educational equality can be achieved, in a short period of time, through hard work and the means already at our disposal.

The task of analysing the work of about 80 projects, undertaking site visits, organising 2 national workshops and then developing a report based on this work was an extremely difficult one. The report could not have been written without the dedication and commitment of the team of researchers working on the project, especially Mr David McRae, the principal writer.

This report offers hope for a brighter future for Indigenous students in terms of educational equality, and also in terms of reconciliation, by providing rich detail on how to ‘get to know each other better, with respect, as differing equals’. We commend this report to you.

Mike Rowland,  
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National Curriculum Services  
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Australian Curriculum Studies Association
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Introduction

The fundamental change here has been that Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people have discovered that they need no longer be controlled by the past negative images that they may have had of each other but assert, collectively, control over a mutual area of interest (Johnston, 1991: 25).

— Commissioner Dodson, in conversation with Commissioner Johnston, on the topic of relations between police and Indigenous communities in the context of Aboriginal deaths in custody, but applying very precisely to the outcomes of these projects.

This is not a comprehensive study or review of education and training for Australian Indigenous students. While it contains some general data for reference and comparative purposes, it makes no attempt to either outline the process of historical change or to assess the current state of play. Nor does it document current failings or the wide range of successful practice which exist at present in this area.

It is an account and discussion of a government initiative, the non-capital Strategic Results Projects element of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (henceforth IESIP SRPs, or just SRPs), designed to explore how improvements in achievement might be made relatively quickly through dedicated resources and effort.

The initiative has no direct precedent in this country and would be rare in international practice. They should be considered as a series of experiments on a very wide scale. There are very few issues of moment which one or more did not deal with, sometimes in a fairly slender fashion, but frequently in considerable detail in very differing contexts around the country. It is of fundamental importance that the projects are about what people have done, not what people say should be done.

The results of the work are extremely rich in detail, a gold mine for policymakers and practitioners alike. While generally confirming ideas and strategies which have now become conventional for improving achievement among Indigenous students, the SRPs have provided an opportunity for trialing a number of promising new practices and a foundation and impetus for much other work which will be of continuing value.

For these reasons, if no others, they have been of great moment and should be seen as a major plank in the platform of revitalising efforts to support formal education and training for Indigenous peoples.
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The primary title, ‘What works?’, may elicit ambiguous reactions. They could be cries of anger, disappointment, or even despair. What works? The bridge is out; white and black cultures are still at a mutually uncomprehending stretch. Is the damage that has been done irreparable?

But this report contains a message of great hope — that people who are thoughtfully committed to their work, who care and persevere and are well supported do make a difference for the group in our community which, in important respects, is the most disadvantaged. Targets for improvement are not out of range, but achieving them relies heavily on acts of will to that end.

Reconciliation is a process based on getting to know each other better, with respect, as differing equals. The SRPs have consistently had effects of that sort, and it is correct to make much of that experience. A report like this can never capture the glow of the classroom, the meeting room, the community centre, the training site. And that is a shame, because it should taste vividly of people learning to understand and enjoy one another, learning to live together productively in a spirit of increasing mutual confidence and trust.

This report suggests this challenge to members of the teaching profession. A good job is what is required, and all that is required — a job done with the sensitivity and persistence that mark professionalism. The SRPs have proved beyond doubt that people of good intent and considerable capability exist. Their numbers must expand.

Contemporary education and training in Australia are generally of high quality, but defined by a cultural landscape which makes access difficult for those who don’t conform to their frequently unstated expectations. One of these expectations is that consistent attendance is a fundamental requirement. There are many reasons why Indigenous communities find such a requirement problematic: circumstances of poverty, poor health, high mobility and shocking histories of past engagement. But the often alien, and unbending, characteristics of Western-style formal education and training are pre-eminent among them.

There is reason to believe that, after decades of effort, some of these qualities have either been modified or are susceptible to further modification. The challenge the SRPs present to members of Indigenous communities is that, if you want the benefits that formal education and training may bring, regular attendance is essential and must be encouraged and supported.

Improving outcomes for Indigenous students is not a special favour; it is not a matter of providing some plum unwarranted prize to Indigenous peoples. It is simply just. If we, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike, are serious about achieving improved outcomes, the results will be felt, immediately and significantly. That is what the SRPs have told us; and that, above all, is why they have been important.
The Structure of this Report
Four sections follow the summary of findings below. The first provides some background about the SRPs, and the source and development of this report. The second describes the projects and their outcomes. Some guidance about efficient ways to access its contents and the links that should be made to the material included in Section Four is contained in its introduction. The third synthesises and discusses the findings. Finally, the fourth contains summaries of the project reports to hand. Some relevant statistical data is contained in an appendix, along with a full listing of projects and providers.

In keeping with standard practice, particular identifiers (names, locations, etc.) have been deleted from project descriptions as they appear in the body of the report except in specific cases where permission has been sought from those concerned.

Acknowledgments
There have been many people who have contributed to the preparation of this report.

Project personnel have been enormously generous with their time and views. Each time they have been asked for help, they have provided it without question. We are in their debt.

Jim Tognolini and his team from the University of New South Wales worked on the preparation of the data which appear in the course of the report. Mike Long from the Australian Council for Educational Research went to some lengths to help us with additional data. Mark Williams and the staff of the South Australian Department’s Aboriginal Education Unit generously provided access to their excellent resource collection and additional help and support. Trish Hollonds of National Curriculum Services did a great deal of the work to support the functioning of the two national conferences.

Finally, Peter Buckskin and Pat McDermott of the DETYA Indigenous Education Branch provided unstinting support and advice.

We thank them all.
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Summary of Findings

The requirement for this report was:

**to summarise what all projects have achieved and learnt about significantly improving Indigenous students’ learning outcomes and demonstrating success in Indigenous education.**

The 83 IESIP SRP projects have been conducted in highly varying contexts and have covered a very wide range of topics. Thus it is necessary to direct readers to the relevant sections of its contents for topic-based summaries. There is, nonetheless, a series of key points which have emerged from their operation.

**Results**

- It can be firmly asserted that the general objective of the SRPs was achieved. Providers of education and training were challenged, and did ‘demonstrate that improving Indigenous student learning outcomes can occur in a relatively short space of time through concerted efforts’, across a very broad range of projects in varied locations and contexts.

Eighty-four IESIP SRPs were funded. One did not commence.

Final performance data are available for 60 projects. Forty-one of these (68%) achieved or exceeded their targets. Eleven (18%) have either achieved or exceeded one or more of their targets but not the complete set or achieved them at one or more sites but not at one or more other sites. In six of these cases, project work is continuing, with the expectation that further gains will be made.

Eight projects (13%) did not achieve their contracted goals, but five of these achieved what they actually set out to do (eg, the development of courses, programs or teaching materials). In each of these cases performance indicators were used that were either unsuitable to the nature of the task or that would only show improvement over a longer period than that allowed for by the time span of the project.

Of the 24 for which final data are not available, four report that they are likely to achieve or exceed their targets. Work appears to have been limited or truncated in four others. However, it is anticipated that the final results of these projects will not significantly alter the pattern of success described above.

- The results were achieved in areas closely aligned with national targets for Indigenous education. The major emphases were: improved attendance rates, improved grade progression and completion rates; improved rates of secondary completion and articulation to further study or training;
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participation and completion rates in vocational education and training; and acquisition of skills in literacy in Standard Australian English and numeracy.

Levels of achievement were evenly spread across these topics; that is, there were no particular areas of success or failure.

• The project performance targets ranged in levels of ambition. The largest group, however, established benchmarks for improvement in performance or participation which were in line with local, state/territory or national rates for non-Indigenous students, reflecting the core goals of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy.

There are some examples of striking success, but ‘solid’ or ‘steady’ gains have been more characteristic.

• There were many project outcomes unrecorded by the formal performance indicators. They are very diverse, but their dominant theme is the evident growth in self-confidence and engagement among the students involved.

• In addition the SRPs have made a contribution in terms of educational artefacts and infrastructure: as a few examples, seven new sets of teaching/learning materials; four newly-accredited courses; four completed research projects; and four programs of professional development conducted.

• Reviews of levels of success by location (urban, rural remote) and by scale (multi-site, single site) were conducted.

Location factors (on this broad measure) appear to have made little difference to levels of project achievement, although there were a small number of cases reported where students at more remote projects sites did not achieve the same level of improvement as students at sites that were less so.

In terms of scale, there is no discernible trend although an issue of the importance of project ‘localisation’ does appear. (This is discussed further on p. 170.)

Reasons why these results were achieved

• The work was not conducted in ‘exceptional circumstances’, meaning carefully controlled and favourable situations. It was carried out in ‘normal’ preschools, schools and training institutions, under conventional conditions. Project work was described as being hampered by a number of customary factors (eg, turnover of personnel, low prioritisation within an institution, etc). Many projects reported difficulty with its short timelines and the point during the year when funds were distributed.
The strategies adopted could not be described as innovative or unusual, although, in context, they may have been both. The results have been achieved by people working more intensively with strategies that are widely familiar, that could be described as conventional good practice, and that are readily portable to other similar contexts.

A major factor in the achievement of the results was that the people involved believed that something could and should be done about the topic chosen. The significance of the will to make improvement is very high.

This process was supported, importantly, by the use of a defined outcomes focus and by access to funds. Performance targets have generally been most helpful in defining and driving the work. A focus on the indicators has progressively sharpened definitions of what has been achieved, and data collected through the projects have been fairly widely used to bid for additional funding support or to continue project work. There have been, however, weaknesses in their formulation which should be corrected in future work.

The funding made available through the program was an ‘enabler’, an incentive to mount projects and a condition which allowed them to proceed. Some project per capita costs have been significant (in excess of $7500), but the considerable majority have been $2000 or less.

Costs were examined according to sector, topic and level of success of projects. The conclusions are as follows.

— Projects related to the early childhood sector have been in general less expensive than those related to older students.

— Projects related to supporting attendance of secondary age students and participation in VET courses tend to be more expensive than others.

— More expensive courses tend to be those which will not be sustainable without additional funds.

— There is no obvious relationship between funding levels and degree of project success.

However, for various reasons (among them, the range of project ambitions and structures, absence of standardised costings and consistent threshold costs) these conclusions must be treated with caution. (A discussion of the question of sustainability is on pp. 162–163.)

The work of the projects broadly supports the ‘theory’ underpinning the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. That is, that improved learning outcomes will be achieved by the involvement of Indigenous people in education decision-making, equality of access to educational services and equity of participation.
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• In terms of project strategy, the three general factors that appeared most consistently were:
  — cultural recognition, acknowledgment and support
  — the development of requisite skills, and
  — adequate levels of participation.
  (These issues and their practical forms are, again, discussed in detail in the body of the report.)

• Two other essential factors in the achievement of success were noted.
  — Success is genuinely derived from a partnership of these parties to the educational process. Cultural support, recognition and acknowledgment can only be achieved by active and effective relationships between Indigenous communities and those who work in schools and training institutions. Both parties have a role to play. The development of requisite skills will evolve from teachers’ high expectations of students and the skill and, especially, the sensitivity with which they approach their work. Support, even in limited forms from home, will aid this process. Adequate levels of participation will only be achieved by active encouragement from home and the provision of a welcoming and accepting climate in the institution.
  — Holistic approaches are essential. The absence of any of the three components noted in the point made above will seriously impair the likelihood of progress. For example, it is fruitless to have an excellent literacy program if students are not attending school. Equally, if students are attending, quality programs are required for progress to be achieved.

• The operation of the SRPs confirms that there are three key focal points for continuing work, each of which must be underpinned by improvements in levels of attendance:
  — the establishment of good functional levels of literacy in Standard Australian English and numeracy;
  — continuing participation during the secondary years; and
  — clear and accessible pathways to futures in further education, training or employment.
Section One:
Background
Policy and Programme Context

In October 1989, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (commonly referred to as the ‘AEP’, and included here on pp. 165 and 167) was endorsed by all Australian governments and came into effect from 1 January 1990. The AEP set out 21 long-term goals with the objective of achieving educational equity for Indigenous Australians by the year 2000. In particular, the AEP establishes as the standard for Indigenous Australians, the level of educational access, participation and outcomes achieved by non-Indigenous Australians.

Following the first triennium of its operation, the effectiveness of the AEP was reviewed in 1993. The review indicated that although considerable progress had occurred in education and training participation and outcomes, these improvements were inconsistent across sectors and jurisdictions, and that there are still marked discrepancies between outcomes in education and training for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In May 1995, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs reaffirmed their commitment to the AEP, established a number of priority areas and agreed to an outcomes focus for this work. In particular, Ministers agreed to ensure significant continuous improvements to make outcomes for Indigenous Australians similar to those of non-Indigenous Australians.

In 1996, in response to the recommendations of the national review of the AEP, the Commonwealth’s Indigenous Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989 was amended to restructure the then Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program. Since January 1997, the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) has provided funding to education and training providers in the preschool, school and VET sectors under three elements: Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA); Transitional Project Assistance (TPA); and Strategic Results Projects (SRP).

The majority of IESIP funding is provided under SRA and is based on an enrolment-based per capita rate, with additional loadings for geographically remote providers. IESIP has an outcomes-focus and performance indicators and targets for the 1997–99 triennium were developed in eight areas:

- literacy achievement;
- numeracy achievement;
- Indigenous employment in education and training;
- educational outcomes;
- Indigenous enrolments;
- involvement of Indigenous parents and community members in educational decision-making;
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- professional development of staff involved in Indigenous education; and
- culturally-inclusive curricula.

IESIP non-capital Strategic Results Projects

In December 1997, the Commonwealth launched a series of Strategic Results Projects (SRPs) under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP). There were two types of projects: capital to upgrade the educational infrastructure of non-government providers; and non-capital projects. The latter are the subject of this report.

Over $12 million was provided through the non-capital Strategic Results Projects for the State and Territory government and non-government preschool, school, and VET sectors for a range of short, sharply-focused initiatives related to literacy, numeracy, vocational education and other areas of education and training delivery.

The overall objective of the SRP non-capital projects was to ‘challenge providers of education and training across the government and non-government preschool, school and VET sectors to demonstrate that improving Indigenous student learning outcomes can occur in a relatively short space of time through concerted efforts’ (DETYA, 1997: 2).

Projects were intended ‘to contribute to the achievement of the overall objective, by

- demonstrating that improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students can be achieved quickly;
- drawing on and promoting better articulation between the successful outcomes of Indigenous and mainstream Commonwealth and State/ Territory equity programs;
- being practical initiatives with clearly-stated performance indicators and targets;
- building on advice from experienced practitioners and researchers;
- referring to recent relevant reports including *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996–2002*, *Desert Schools Report* (1996), *Bringing Them Home* (the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, 1997) and *Ara Kuwaritjakutu Project: Towards a New Way* (An investigation into the working conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers, 1995); and
- building on advice from Indigenous community representatives’ (ibid: 3).
Those submitting for projects were asked to address the question ‘What changes to education and student support delivery practices will result in improved Indigenous student learning outcomes within a relatively short period of time?’ with regard to:

- **educational delivery practices**: curriculum/syllabus; teaching and learning practices, including alternative delivery modes; assessment and reporting practices; administrative practices; student support services including health, housing and juvenile justice

- **current Commonwealth priorities**: literacy; numeracy; and accredited vocational education and training in schools

- **key transition points**: preschool to primary; primary to high school; Year 9 to Year 10; school to post-school options in vocational education and training, higher education or work; and others

- **issues**:
  - increased participation and attendance, and increased responsiveness to Aboriginal community and ceremonial requirements;
  - accurate assessment of students’ readiness to move from one stage to another;
  - recognition and accreditation of Indigenous cultural knowledge;
  - successful management of the impact of student mobility on educational participation and outcomes;
  - parity of recognition and esteem between English and community languages, especially through better recognition of the range of languages spoken by Indigenous students at school and within their community;
  - better articulation between community goals for self-determination and self-reliance, mainstream educational goals and individual student goals, especially in sites with low numbers of Indigenous students; and
  - use of competency-based approaches, recognition of prior learning, and multi-mode, flexible delivery approaches to support culturally inclusive education.

Projects could cover these issues singly or (as they more usually did) in combination.

Submissions were sought in August 1997 and notifications were provided over the period late 1997 to April 1998. The possibility of immediate commencement was a condition of successful tendering and the time-scale for completion of the work was one year.
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The National Coordination and Evaluation Project (NCEP)

This report is a product of the National Coordination and Evaluation Project which ran parallel to the other IESIP SRP projects. A team from a consortium of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) and National Curriculum Services did the work.

As suggested by the title ‘Coordination and Evaluation’, the task had two components which were described as follows in the first project newsletter circulated to all project officers.

The coordination element is to help build the interaction between the projects in the IESIP SRP program, sharing and learning from what other people are doing, on projects with a similar focus or from more varying ones. Because we are involved, this process will inevitably feed into our knowledge and understanding of what is happening and thus support the evaluative process. … In terms of evaluation our main task is ‘to summarise what all projects have achieved and learnt about significantly improving Indigenous students’ learning outcomes and demonstrating success in Indigenous education’.

This description summarised the main deliverables which included:

- providing draft and final reports describing and discussing project results in the terms above by
  - analysing all progress and final reports due by the end of the writing period
  - conducting two two-day national conferences to allow project officers to workshop their own projects and for the consultants to receive feedback on their own preliminary report, and
  - interviewing project officers;
- supporting project officers through newsletters and website access; and
- providing a statistical annexe on Indigenous educational attainment across the preschool, school and VET sectors, based on currently available data.

The NCEP commenced in September, 1998. Initial phone interviews were conducted with officers from each project to generate some familiarity with the nature of the projects. These were completed where possible (ie, where the project had commenced) by the end of 1998.

A visiting program commenced shortly afterwards and continued into 1999. At 10 May 1999, 68 of the projects had had some form of ‘face to face’ contact with NCEP team consultants, either on-site or in Departmental and other offices.

These two processes generated information, recorded in note form according to the following outline.
The information gathered in this way was fundamental to developing an understanding of a widely dispersed and complex set of projects. It was, as well, a crucial medium for making contacts and exchanging information.

The two conferences were both held in Sydney. The first (3/4 December, 1998) had 82 participants and the second (30 June/1 July, 1999) more than 150. The dominant purposes of both these activities were to describe and explore project findings; to provide some new and useful information; to develop a sense of community of interest and common purpose among participants; and, to generate new contacts among people undertaking similar work. Participant evaluations suggest these purposes were achieved.
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A preliminary paper containing summarised findings to date along with some additional discussion outlining the direction of the NCEP team’s thinking was provided to participants at the second conference. While helpful comment was provided, the broad thrust of its contents was largely undisputed.

Four IESIP SRP newsletters have been published and circulated. Their purpose was to provide an avenue for all those involved to share the knowledge gained from the various projects and to celebrate the contributions they had made to Indigenous education and training.

The first largely introduced the NCEP and its purposes. It included project contact points and means of communicating through the newsletter and website. Subsequent issues have reported on the conferences and other activities, and contained articles on particular projects. An effort was made to ensure coverage of all sectors involved and to encourage a focus on factors which enabled projects to meet their goals.

A web-site (http://www.acsa.edu.au/indigenous/srpnews) for the Strategic Results Projects was placed on the existing ACSA site. The web address was also advertised on the ACSA discussion group site. There has been little feedback with the result that we are unable to estimate the usefulness of this process.

It is envisaged that the life of the web-site will continue beyond the timeline of the SRPs and be maintained by ACSA personnel. The discussion group will continue, giving SRP participants continuing opportunities to share information and ‘discoveries’ within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

While it is not our job to comment on the value of this process, it is readily apparent that the design decision to include the NCEP in the IESIP SRP process did generate a valuable dynamic and a strong sense of support for many of those involved. It unquestionably made the process of describing outcomes easier, and it is rare that a government initiative on this scale produces this level of detailed information. We believe this approach should be noted and, where relevant, considered in the design of other DETYA programmes.

Methodology relating to the preparation of this report

At the first conference an outline for reporting was proposed. There were two reasons for doing so: the guidance and support it would provide to project personnel in preparing their own reports; and the increased ease of locating, sorting and analysing information for members of the NCEP team preparing this report. This outline was largely derived from a reporting and monitoring framework proposed earlier to MCEETYA and has served the purposes of the NCEP team usefully. It was as follows.
As many final reports as possible were collected. Sixty were available at the time of writing. In other cases, progress reports along with the notes made during contact with the projects were consulted. (See p. 21 and pp. 151–153 for further summary of project numbers.)

The final reports were grouped by topic in a process explained in the introduction to the following section, and summaries prepared. These summaries were returned to project officers for confirmation of their contents and any necessary revisions were made.

The results were consolidated to produce the data contained in Section Three, and scanned according to issues of interest. A literature review with a fairly specific focus was conducted to support the discussion of cultural issues. Finally, the summary accounts of the projects were reviewed again several times to yield summative information about strategies the projects had used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1: Background</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Summary of intentions and activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What did you set out to achieve? Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What (in summary form) did you do?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Project Performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What performance targets were set for your project?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What measures were used to establish baselines or benchmarks to reflect the achievements of your project?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How was improvement measured?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What were the outcomes of the project with relation to the performance indicators?</td>
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<td>• How do you explain why your targets were, or were not, achieved?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Analysis of Project Performance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>In terms of generating educational success for Indigenous students …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• which aspects of the project activity had the most positive impact? What were the key factors which supported this success? (These could include, for example only, raised awareness of the issues, access to expert personnel, community engagement, generation of new practice, knowledge or strategies, and so on. These are very general concepts. Please be as specific as you can.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• which aspects were least successful? Why? (Please be frank. What didn’t work is, in many ways, just as important as what did.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• what have you learned that could be made more widely known?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• will the impact of the project be sustained? If so, how? If not, why not?</td>
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Section Two: The Projects and Their Results
What works?
Introduction

The Projects

Eighty-three projects began operation in 1998/99. Four have (at the time of writing) recently commenced; others have been completed since the end of 1998. Two, for various reasons, were abandoned.

Total funding outlay has been approximately $12.7m. Individual grants have ranged in size from $7,200 to $650,000. Most (56 of 83) were less than $200,000, with about one quarter under $50,000. Only three have been over $400,000.

The projects range in scale from small single-site operations to large systemic initiatives. Thirty-one projects have operated at more than one site (approximately 320 sites across Australia in total). The number of students who have been directly involved is approximately 3,800.

Range and focus

The projects relate to early childhood (10 projects) and school education to the end of the secondary years (44, excluding vocational education and training (VET) in schools projects), as well as VET during (12) and after the school years (10), and other adult education (6).

The projects have covered the wide range of topics suggested by the brief for submissions, most of them integrating several of those topics in their design and delivery.

Delivery emphases

• Most projects (54, or two-thirds) involved direct delivery to students.
• Seven have had materials production as their major component; courses have been developed in four others.
• Eight involved delivery to or from adult members of Indigenous communities as a major feature.
• Five have been research projects with no specific delivery element.
• Four were primarily concerned with teacher professional development.
• The same number were targeted to support service improvement (educational resources, health, provision structures, and information technology).
• Three involved experiments in structural change within an institution, and two to system practice.

Again, there are many overlaps in these strategic focal points within specific projects.
The Results

The project work has been done in the real worlds of education and training. While some projects were remarkably ‘neat’ in research terms, others could not be described in this fashion. Presumptions about procedural methodology that might be relevant in large urban sites with a discrete and stable target group of students, well serviced by facilities and a stable group of staff, and supervised by experienced and supportive researchers, are not appropriate.

Several of the projects had sites spread across vast expanses, not just of individual states or territories, but of the country as a whole, providing a reminder of how important contextual variations are in formal education and training for Indigenous students. In some cases projects were generated from, and well-embedded in, single sites; in many, institutions and their staff had to be located and encouraged to participate. Many experienced significant turnover in personnel — of project officers, teachers and students. Floods in the Darling Basin, the Kimberley and Arnhem Land affected the work of more than 10 per cent of the projects. For these and other reasons, the stories and anecdotal records of project procedure are important. Some of these have been included at various points in this report to illustrate typical or interesting findings or views.

But the performance data are the main medium for judging outcomes. The results are self-reported. Teachers are not necessarily researchers. Their core task is teaching, and it was evident that this responsibility sometimes legitimately took precedence over additional responsibilities generated by participation in projects.

It is nonetheless obvious how much care was taken with measurement procedures. In some instances the actual intention and nature of projects created difficulties with the assessment of achievement (see the discussion of this issue on pp. 159–161), and in a number of cases there were no benchmark data to work against. But in the majority of cases pre- and post-testing was carried out assiduously. The instruments used were generally standard and directly relevant to the task.

A Guide to reading this Section and Section Four

The projects have been organised firstly into three themes:

- Coming to School
- Building Skills, and
- Pathways to Futures.

This structure has been used partly for the sake of convenience and partly, to reflect the chronology of participation in formal education and training. But
it should also be noted that these three themes reflect the social, academic and instrumental purposes of education and training.

Each of these three themes has then been sub-divided by major topics. The assignment of projects to these topics has been difficult and has resulted in some fairly arbitrary decisions. Most projects cover more than one of these topics. They were placed together sometimes because of the light they help to shed on each other, and sometimes for the sake of balance in treatment.

Each of the three themes contains one longer topic: ‘Support for secondary students’, ‘Literacy in English’ and ‘VET in schools’. These topics are longer because of the number of projects that dealt with these issues, but they also reflect the key issues where those successfully submitting for projects felt that a difference needed to be made.

It has been difficult to decide just how to include the vast quantity of information the projects have provided. A number of the project reports have been in excess of 100 pages, and filled with careful detail, none of which deserves to be lost. There were three considerations in the final decision.

• It should be possible to read sections of the report and still get a fairly comprehensive view of what happened and what the key things learned have been. This can be achieved by reading the summaries contained in this section.

• As much detail as possible should be recorded from each individual project to allow more detailed analyses, to get a sense of the mechanics of the project and to understand how results were collected and validated. As a result the final and current progress project reports to hand have been summarised in a regularised format. There is material in each of these not included elsewhere. These summaries can be found in Section Four (p. 181), and should be read, in many cases, as only a guide to the detail actually provided to the Department.

• Finally, ‘flavour’ is crucial to understanding what happened. ‘Flavour’ comes from people’s views, from sample products and from more developed descriptions of context and process. Thus within each topic we have tried to include some material for this purpose.

Still we have a sense that justice has only barely been done to those who worked so hard in the conduct of these projects. But within the confines of an already long report, we have tried our best to reflect what happened.

There is some variation in the pattern of the topic material which follows. Three general headings have been used.

• The Projects: generally introduces the number, location and intentions of the projects dealt with and, where relevant, to cross reference to other like projects.
What works?

- Action and results: provides a short account of these matters, sometimes grouped by similarity in purpose or strategy. Reference should be made to the more complete individual accounts for reasons why project personnel believe that particular results were achieved.

- Observations: indicates our summative thinking about the material which precedes this heading. The term ‘observations’ has been used deliberately to signal that it is the work and outcomes of these particular projects being noted rather than any larger conclusions being drawn. Many of these observations may appear obvious or well known. There is no harm in that. In others, they may be seen as unduly tentative, for example, in the treatment of the ‘middle years of schooling’ topic. However, in that example we are dealing with one project in a specific context which is on-going. This sort of issue recurs elsewhere. Nonetheless, we believe that these observations are generally of sufficient substance to warrant attention.
Coming to School

The five topics included under this theme concern contact with new learning environments and the issues that process entails, but they are underpinned as well by issues associated with participation and attendance. The first four are arranged in a chronological sequence: transition from home to school; transition from primary to secondary school; providing support for students, primarily during the secondary years; and re-entry to education by older adolescents and/or adults. The fifth, dealing with student mobility, is relevant across the board.

The First Step: Home to school transition

Why Aboriginal people use early childhood education services, and why they don’t

(Adapted from the results of Project HS1)

The proportion of Indigenous five year-olds not in formal education (13.2%) is more than twice the rate (5.9%) for other young Australians. The reasons for this are partly to do with ease of access to preschool centres, but there are other reasons as well. This project, conducted in three rural cities, explored reasons why Aboriginal people sent their children to preschool and why they didn’t. A sample of 60 parents/carers were among those interviewed. Their answers were not discrete, they overlap significantly, and they represent ‘first responses’ rather than reactions to a listing of possibilities.

But these results provide an excellent place to begin thinking about Indigenous education and training. The pattern is clear; and resonates with Indigenous reactions to formal schooling well beyond the early years.

Why they do

Nearly all respondents cited educational reasons for sending children to preschool: it provides a good start to education — knowledge of routines, the stimulus of learning different things and about non-Aboriginal worlds, etc. (75%); the children have an opportunity to mix with children who are not members of their family or extended family (33%); and they have fun there, are confident and happy (10%).

Personal relationships with staff and the climate of the centre were important factors. Familiarity with the staff and ease of communication was mentioned in more than 15% of the responses. Others mentioned the knowledge staff had of their children. Ten per cent commented on the welcoming and comfortable environment that centres provided.
What works?

Why Aboriginal people use early childhood education services, and why they don’t
continued

Cultural factors were given as reasons by about 15% — ‘It's an Aboriginal centre’; ‘It has Aboriginal staff’; ‘There is a high number of other Aboriginal children’; ‘There are opportunities to learn about Aboriginal culture’.

Nearly half mentioned that some form of care was required because of work or other commitments. Other functional issues were mentioned such as: ease of access to transport or close at hand; the manageability of fees; and the existence of a lunch program.

Why they don’t

One respondent didn’t know about the early childhood education service. Several thought that the restrictions it might impose could well come later (‘kids want to play not work’; ‘too many rules, too much structure’). Several parents wanted to maintain their supervisory role. In other cases reasons cited included the availability of additional family support or other children to play with. In a small number of cases transport, the payment of fees or the need to access a range of (unco-ordinated) services were problems.

But by far the largest incidence of reasons were cultural: little consideration given to Aboriginal culture (10%); few other Aboriginal children attending; and, in one case, ‘didn’t want his/her children mixing with white kids’. Negative staff attitudes to Aboriginal people, coupled with consequent poor communication, were cited in about 10% of responses.

The projects

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 184–191.)

A number of projects dealt with early childhood education. Because of their emphasis on home-school transition, three are dealt with in this section. The others can be found on pp. 239–246.

Project HS1, referred to above, was a research project with a product designed to improve awareness of Indigenous home-school issues among early childhood educators. The other two projects were conducted in a rural region at sites where access to preschool education is limited. One (Project HS2), system-sponsored, provided a transition to school program for Indigenous children, and a parent awareness program at ten different sites; the other (Project HS3) provided support for parents in developing school-readiness skills, especially in literacy and numeracy, at a single site.
2: The Projects and Their Results

**Action and results**

Some of the key findings from HS1 are confirmed by elements of HS2 and also from Project EC1 (p. 239), and provide some strong direction for early childhood educators working with Indigenous children.

Both the other projects had a considerable degree of success. The program mounted in schools through HS2 provided transition programs where none had existed before, an automatic gain, but in addition attendance levels were generally very high (around 90%) and the rates of achievement of foundation outcomes in numeracy and literacy achieved by Indigenous children were consistent with those achieved by their non-Indigenous peers. Of the 100 students in the target group, 92 satisfied providers’ expectations of readiness in literacy and numeracy for entry to Kindergarten.

This project also produced a significant increase in productive local partnerships and issues of cross-cultural awareness, and improvements in the smoothness of home-school transition. ‘All 10 schools perceive this program as the most positive program they have run for Indigenous children and their families.’ One of the major factors in success was the central role played by Indigenous staff.

Project HS3 was located in a neighbourhood centre in a country town and provided several short courses for Indigenous parents to help them support the development of their children’s literacy skills, concurrently and interactively with play groups for their children. The courses were both popular and well-patronised, and produced results.

The targets for this project were very ambitious (eg, 90% of the children involved satisfying education providers’ literacy expectations for preschool entry from a base near zero), and yet around 80% of the children achieved the targets. This is one of many examples which will recur among these projects of a local small-scale initiative having an impact far beyond its scale.

**Observations**

- As a general but not universal rule, Indigenous people value early childhood education for similar reasons non-Indigenous people do.
- Well-established personal relationships and a climate which is ‘culture-friendly’ will have a significant positive impact on the use of early childhood education centres by Indigenous parents/carers.
- Well-structured early childhood programs, which pay attention to the issues immediately above are likely to produce outcomes for Indigenous children which are at the same level as those for non-Indigenous children in the same or similar locations.
**What works?**

**In Transit: The middle years**

Although young adolescents make up a distinct developmental group, they are placed squarely across the two traditional cultures of primary and secondary schooling, with a sharp transition in the middle. … The fact is that, at this level, schools are dealing with a developmental group for which they have not been designed. … These students have characteristics and needs so different from those of young children or emerging adults that they warrant special attention (Eyers et al., 1992: 4).

It is evident that Aboriginal adolescents share the universal development tasks of their age group with their non-Aboriginal peers. These include the need to develop a strong sense of personal identity and self esteem. This study [focused largely on Aboriginal adolescents living in urban provincial cities and towns, the vast majority] could find no distinctive way in which they meet and deal with these tasks. To an external observer their lifestyles, world views and interests are indistinguishable from those of their peers, especially peers in the same socio-economic group.

Aboriginal adolescents do, however, have a distinctive sense of identity as Aboriginal people. The ways in which they experience and express this identity will vary greatly from individual to individual. In early puberty it may be a source of confusion and embarrassment. However, the majority of Aboriginal people work on this issue positively, their Aboriginal identity becoming a growth area of their lives which they foster and nurture, valued as a source of personal strength and self esteem (Groome and Hamilton, 1995: xi).

Since these reports were issued there has been considerable activity related to the middle years of schooling. Many options have been explored, but the trend could be described as trying to find an effective middle way between the conventional structures of a single teacher with a strong pastoral care role and a curriculum which is, to varying degrees, integrated in the primary sector and multiple teachers teaching a discrete (many) subject-based curriculum.

The issues referred to above apply to Indigenous students just as they do to the rest of the population. Their adolescence is no less turbulent, and their transition from primary to secondary schooling no less traumatic. In fact, loss rates from involvement in formal education tend to escalate from this point. Because of location factors, a higher proportion of Indigenous students is required to move from the comparative comfort of a local primary school to a more distant secondary school, making the transition between the two even
more challenging. However, this was not the case in Project MY1, based in a remote regional centre, where they need to make a shift from one side of a road, albeit a reasonably busy one, to the other.

**The project**

(The longer individual project summary can be found on pp. 192–196.)

Although a relatively high proportion of the SRPs have been concerned with providing support for secondary age students, this is the only one which has taken structural reform to the middle years of schooling as its centrepiece.

The school is now a single unit K–12, but until 1996 it had been three separate schools run by different Catholic teaching orders: primary, boys secondary and girls secondary, with boarding facilities for secondary students. A new principal was appointed at the time of the amalgamation and one of her tasks was to find ways of uniting the closely-located but still disparate units. A project focused on the middle years and transition processes was an obvious place to start. This project may run over five years, but the SRP provided support to begin.

The project’s intentions were to improve the quality of student transition from Year 7 to Year 8, retention rates, pastoral care, academic progress and community involvement.

The reasons for its generation were both site-specific (alluded to above) and more general. ‘Students in Years 5–9 are changing physically, emotionally and socially. These pressures have had adverse effects on our students’ enjoyment and achievement at school. It is now widely recognised that if students prosper between those years they have a good chance of success in the upper secondary years and later in life.’

**Action and results**

Action has been wide-ranging, with some conventional evidence of reform resistance and fatigue among staff now being addressed.

**Structural Change**

The secondary timetable has been revised so that Year 8 groups are each taught five different learning areas in the same room by two teachers. Pastoral groups have been altered to match.

These moves have enriched relationships and enabled closer monitoring of academic progress and behaviour, added to student ‘ownership’ of their working space, and saved time spent moving to different classrooms.

**Curricular Change**

Curricular integration is proceeding. English and Society and Environment have been integrated as far as possible and the inclusion of Science is being
trialed. Computing is complementing many subjects rather than standing alone. Staff responsible for different learning areas meet to discuss the students’ progress and to find links between the different learning areas.

Content overlaps have been removed and continuity in teaching and learning practices has been increased significantly. Learning time has been extended allowing experimentation with a wider variety of learning strategies. It is hoped that the staff structure may shortly move from faculties to learning teams.

Pedagogical Changes
Teachers have been encouraged to alter their classroom practices towards more collaborative, student-centred approaches. Graphic and written literacy teaching and learning practices have been explored, annotated and applied increasingly consistently. Primary and secondary teachers have exchanged strategies. Portfolio assessments have been introduced to enhance students’ self-concept and encourage parental involvement. (More work is required in this last area.)

With fewer teachers and blocked subjects there are fewer time restrictions so collaborative learning becomes increasingly possible. The professional exchange between teachers in the two sectors and across subject boundaries has been most valuable.

Year 7 Transition Program
The possibility of moving Year 7 students to the secondary campus is being investigated. In the meantime, Year 7 students visit the secondary campus every fortnight to use the facilities and to mix with staff and students.

The benefits of last year’s transition work are evident in students’ increased familiarity with the environment, older students and staff. Staff who worked with the students have also been able to gauge their ability and class dynamics allowing students to be grouped appropriately.

Observations
- Experiments in middle schooling have an important place in Indigenous education, just as they do with the broader population.
- The changes made through this project are obviously yielding benefits. They might be considered for implementation more widely.
At Home at School: Supporting students

That in responding to truancy the primary principle to be followed by government agencies be to provide support, in collaboration with appropriate Aboriginal individuals and organisations, to the juvenile and to those responsible for the care of the juvenile; such support to include addressing the cultural and social factors identified by the juvenile and by those responsible for the care of the juvenile as being relevant to the truancy.


They …

… told the class to keep up the good work and made us feel good by saying that
… help us work together and sort out our own problems
… settle people down when they are angry or upset
… made me realise I can do the work by myself
… helped me fix up my mistakes.

— Aboriginal students commenting about Aboriginal classroom assistants (Project SS2)

His involvement has been fantastic. He has been involved with all practical activities, has provided resources and helped with excursions. The students have really benefited from his knowledge.

— Non-Indigenous teacher, discussing the role of an Aboriginal support worker (Project SS4)

Teachers are more aware of the abilities that Aboriginal kids have. Some of them thought you had to be a special kind of teacher but they found out you don’t, so they gained confidence. They realised that any good teacher can do this. You don’t have to be specialised, you just have to be sensitive, know your [Aboriginal] community and have some kind of empathy.

— Aboriginal Education Worker, commenting about the importance of professional development for teachers (Project SS3)

I felt young at heart again and it was wonderful to know that I have done my special bit for the day.

— Aboriginal parent volunteer (Project SS6)

I met a lot of new people I wouldn’t usually see … it was good to be able to communicate with other Aboriginal people.

— Aboriginal student, commenting on student network camp (Project SS7)
Some research studies show that Indigenous school students attend school about 84% and non-Indigenous students attend about 93% of the time. However this gap widens in secondary school. In Year 10, which is often the lowest point in attendance for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, Indigenous students are absent up to three times more frequently than non-Indigenous students. In addition, according to 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics data, only 45% of Indigenous students are enrolled at school at 16 years of age compared with 78% of their non-Indigenous peers.

There are many reasons why young Indigenous adolescents might not come to school regularly or might leave altogether. It is logical to think that providing them with additional support might assist in sustaining attendance and thus provide greater opportunities for educational success. But what sort of support is required? How does it work in practice? And what is it meant to achieve?

**The projects**

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 197–222. Note that reference is made to two projects from which final reports have not been received, hence only nine summaries appear.)

The eleven projects referred to in this section were primarily devoted to providing various kinds of support to Indigenous secondary students. One project provided support to primary students and another included here supported students in upper primary as well as lower secondary school.

A review of these projects’ expressed intentions reveals that ‘support’ should be read as a means to improving levels of participation, often as expressed through levels of attendance, year level completion or grade progression, and skill development. But it should also be understood as a means of ‘holding’ some students, who would otherwise be at risk, in constructive, satisfying and socially acceptable activity. The incidence of the strategy of developing individual progress plans and goals suggests also that part of the process of support is seen as trying to keep students’ eye fixed on the future as well as the present moment.

A widespread belief is evident that a key strategy is to reduce the level of cultural alienation among these young people and to replace it with a sense of cultural pride coupled with a sense of achievement in other spheres.

Success has been reported in terms of improvements in literacy and numeracy, attendance and retention. In more qualitative areas, growth in student self esteem, confidence and engagement with the culture of the school are consistently mentioned.
Action and results

The strategies these projects employed can be discussed in terms of providing cultural acknowledgment and support, and then using that process as a springboard for more intensive focus on skill acquisition and development in both conventional and alternative classrooms.

Cultural acknowledgment and support

Every one of these projects began from the proposition that cultural acknowledgment and support were fundamental to making any gains for their target groups of students. In most cases this meant establishing a process, formal or informal, of developing cultural awareness among non-Indigenous teaching staff. Professional development programs were conducted on this issue in the majority of cases, but one of the most efficient ways of achieving the same goal was to employ additional Indigenous staff or to find other means of increasing the presence of Indigenous people as mentors, assistants, tutors or just someone to talk to. Their primary role, of course, was not to educate the educators but to support Indigenous students. However there is consistent reference in the reports to the significance of their presence for all concerned.

Project SS2, which took place in a rural secondary school, was the most ambitious in terms of numbers of Indigenous adults participating. Seven part-time Indigenous ‘classroom assistants’ were employed to assist with pre-teaching and in-class support for students in Year 7 and Year 9. (These levels were considered crucial at this site in terms of students’ engagement with the school and its culture.) Most of the classroom assistants were people who had left school ten or so years ago and were not in secure employment. They were initially provided with training for their role in the classroom and, as the project unfolded, they developed much larger roles in the extra-curricular life of the school.

This was a highly successful project. According to a State-wide language and literacy test, Year 7 students made marked improvements during the project. For instance, there was a 125% increase in the number of Indigenous students regarded as ‘proficient’ or ‘high’ in language and a 50% increase in the number of Indigenous students regarded as ‘proficient’ in reading. As well, the number of discipline referrals fell by 48%. There were also incidental benefits for the classroom assistants, many of whom have gone on to further study themselves.

A different approach was taken in another marked success, Project SS4. An Aboriginal School/Community Worker was employed full-time to provide support in a variety of ways to Indigenous students at secondary schools in two neighbouring rural towns. Among his many activities, the Worker acted as a mentor and resource person to Indigenous students (particularly those assessed as being ‘at risk’ of leaving school or getting into trouble). He also ran an ‘alternate school’, for two afternoons each week, at a local Catholic Family Services agency. The ‘alternate school’ provided an opportunity for Indigenous
What works?

students ‘at risk’ to work intensively on literacy and numeracy with a tutor, as well as discussing personal problems and school issues with the Worker and explore aspects of Indigenous culture.

In terms of literacy and numeracy, the project exceeded its targets, which were to increase ‘the number of Indigenous Year 9 students meeting the literacy and numeracy expectations of providers’. From a baseline level which in the larger of the two schools was only 50%, the project achieved 100% of students meeting expectations. Another target was exceeded when the number of students participating in vocational courses increased from 12 to 25. There was a positive influence on retention rates in both schools.

It is suggested that the fact that the Worker was based outside the school contributed to this level of success, because it allowed him ‘the freedom to work

‘We are about changing attitudes to school’

Larry Towney has been able to slash truancy rates and improve literacy skills among Aboriginal students in Narromine in an alternative schools program coordinated by Catholic Centacare.

Larry Towney is a softly spoken man who left school early. He is a trained bricklayer, loves playing his guitar and might just have pulled off the impossible — getting Aboriginal kids to stay at school.

The 48 year-old is the support teacher for a brave initiative — an Alternative School which saw Aboriginal truancy rates slashed and literacy skills soar.

The school run by Catholic Centacare, was funded for 12 months and $70,000 under the Federal Strategic Results program.

‘We are about changing attitudes to school’, said Larry.

‘I was very lucky to have a mother who knew the importance of an education. I went to school and I wanted to achieve — but I didn’t. I left at 15. I’ve told these young people they have to learn to read and write while they have the opportunity. I ask them things like “what do you want to do with your life?”’

For a program that only got under way last year the results have been stunning. In 1997 only 50 per cent of 21 Aboriginal students at Narromine High School gained the skills to move into Year 10. Last year that figure jumped to 100 per cent. School dropouts were also becoming a thing of the past. Two years ago 29 Aborigines failed to complete the educational year. By the end of last year that was down to 10.
outside the parameters of the school system to respond most appropriately to students’ needs’. The fact that Indigenous students were able to spend part of their week at the alternate school, with other Indigenous students, was reported to be positive in terms of building confidence and self esteem.

Project SS6 was small-scale and intended to increase the Indigenous presence in a program of volunteer student mentoring, helping students to develop self esteem, confidence and a positive attitude to learning. The project met its performance targets but did so unevenly across the sites. Three Indigenous parents were recruited, two were in the same school and the other’s participation was curtailed due to a shift of home. The school where volunteers were recruited had an active ASSPA committee, active support from the school administration and an enthusiastic Indigenous Education worker.

‘We are about changing attitudes to school’

continued

The results speak for themselves according to Margaret Flynn of Centacare which also runs an Aboriginal education program in Trangie.

‘It has been brilliant,’ she said. ‘It gives students better self esteem and acceptance of their Aboriginal culture — even the police have acknowledged that there has been a decrease in the number of juvenile incidents in town.’

The accolades don’t stop there. In October last year the Rotary Club of Narromine wrote of the program: ‘Even in the short time the behavioural problems in the town have decreased. Although the program is in its early stages the obvious potential for Aboriginal youth is significant.’

Alternative school make sense for Adam Carney, a 16 year-old caught between two worlds. Before the program started he would miss up to four days of school a month, often to go droving with his grandfather. His family still likes to live traditionally and when possible he hightails it out of town for a dose of the old ways.

‘My family has got a property. We’ve got a very good house but sometimes we still take our swags down the back and sleep out.’

The program, he said, doesn’t make the restrictions of school appealing it simply gives him an incentive to go.

‘I was always getting into trouble at school’, he said. ‘I wasn’t doing my homework and missing school and going to work with my grandfather. Then I was told if I missed school I couldn’t do the program, so I pushed myself to go to school.’
**What works?**

Project SS9 took place in an alternative setting on the outskirts of a State capital. The setting is intended to cater for educationally disadvantaged students and it usually has about 25% of Indigenous young people among its clients. Typically, they have very low levels of literacy and numeracy and are ‘at risk’ of leaving school altogether and getting into trouble. An Indigenous secondary teacher was employed to develop a specific focus on literacy and numeracy and, when that person gained ongoing employment elsewhere, he was replaced with two part-time Indigenous school support officers who worked as teacher aides and community liaison officers.

The first performance target was to have every Indigenous student with a personal plan related to developing literacy and numeracy skills. This was achieved. Other targets related to achieving 80% of Indigenous students with literacy and numeracy skills comparable to their non-Indigenous peers. Both literacy and numeracy targets were exceeded. Other outcomes have, however, also been significant to the setting. For example, non-Indigenous staff have learned to use culturally-appropriate approaches when dealing with incidents, leading to more satisfactory outcomes and students being more likely to remain at school.

**Changes to teaching and learning practices**

All the projects mentioned above involved some changes to teaching and learning practices, but the six discussed below had such changes as a primary focus. They were based on notions that changes to school structure, curriculum or style of schooling can be supportive of Indigenous students and lead to improved outcomes.

The inclusion of Indigenous culture and understandings in school education has been a consistent factor in supporting Indigenous secondary students. Some of these projects found direct ways to do that. In one case (SS5), for instance, new Indigenous language courses were introduced for students from remote areas. Other projects did so less directly and all had ultimate intentions in terms of skill development or participation. In two cases, attention was paid to different styles of learning (based on Gardner’s theory of ‘multiple intelligences’).

In terms of the actual learning setting, several projects ran workshops, camps or networks specifically for Indigenous students.

Project SS1 took a fairly conventional approach to supporting students who are struggling with literacy and numeracy. It provided for periodic withdrawal of students from normal classes and intensive assistance from a ‘literacy teacher’ employed through the project. An Indigenous aide was also employed to liaise with students’ families and encourage consistent attendance.

The first performance target was 100% completion of Year 10 by Indigenous students. This ambitious target was not achieved, but there was an
improvement from 50% to over 80% and it was noted that the main reason for lack of completion was inadequate attendance. Student performance in a Statewide language and literacy test also showed significant improvement. In terms of attendance, some improvement was shown but the issue remains a concern.

Project SS3 involved the identification of ‘gifted and talented’ Indigenous students among those initially considered underachievers and the professional development of teachers so that they might be more alert to students’ special talents. The project was testing an assumption that Indigenous students would perform better if more account was taken of their preferred learning styles. Two ‘talent and enrichment’ camps (which also included aspects of Indigenous culture) were held. Among other activities of the project, a ‘virtual’ mentoring program to link students with successful Indigenous adults was begun and is in progress at the time of writing. This all took place in close consultation with members of the local Indigenous communities.

Performance targets were in terms of numbers of Indigenous students participating in project activities and numbers of teachers undertaking professional development. The targets were achieved. Beyond the targets, however, it is reported that teachers’ attitudes towards their Indigenous students have changed. This in turn is reported to be leading to higher levels of teacher expectation and increased motivation and improved levels of attendance among students.

A further project responded to the fact that large numbers of Indigenous students were being ‘lost’ to formal education during the secondary years in a provincial city. It intended to establish procedures for planning alterations to existing structures of schooling. This activity is ongoing.

Project SS5 took place in three schools which have recently begun to attract numbers of students from remote areas whose first language is an Indigenous language. The project provided an opportunity to incorporate the culture and language of this group of students into the school program. This was done by implementing two existing courses in specific Indigenous languages, developing a proposal for a third at Year 12 level and by devising and implementing a professional development package for teachers.

In the past, some Indigenous students have been considered unable to join mainstream classes and have been educated separately. An aim of the project was to be able to include as many of these students into mainstream classes as possible. Indigenous parents and community members were involved at all stages of the project as advisers and resource people.

One performance target was to increase the number of Indigenous students in mainstream classes from 56% (27/48) to at least 60%. This was achieved and the result was actually 70% (54/77). A second target was to increase the
proportion of Indigenous students who successfully complete Year 11 courses from 20% (1/5) to 40%. This target was also exceeded, with a completion rate of 60% (3/5). Other targets involved increasing the numbers of primary and junior secondary students who successfully complete their year levels. These targets were also achieved. There have been other significant changes to the curriculum and teaching practice.

Project SS7 was based in a state Independent sector agency. It sought to establish support mechanisms for Indigenous students in schools where they were in small and isolated minorities. This project operated in ten schools and appears to have had a significant impact on a wide scale.

The first step was collection of data about attendance, retention and completion levels. Then a student network was established, professional development was provided for teachers (including setting up a teacher network) and schools were supported to provide intervention strategies for students with low literacy levels. Indigenous people were involved in the provision of Indigenous Studies courses in the schools.

The first performance target was to increase the number of Indigenous students receiving special literacy support from 55% to 74%. This was achieved when the number was increased to 77%, (of 87% requiring such support). A second performance target was to increase the number of schools offering Indigenous Studies from 60% to 90%. It was actually increased to 100%. A performance target to increase the number of Indigenous people involved in designing Indigenous curriculum from 0 to 2 was exceeded when the number was increased to three. Other performance targets involved reducing absence rates and increasing completion and progression rates. These individual targets were achieved in most cases, and closely approached in others.

Project SS8 operated in a Catholic Diocese. It set out to assess the needs of all Indigenous students arriving at secondary school, identify those ‘at risk’ and develop individual development plans for each. Teachers were provided with professional development so that they could take more account of differing learning styles (based again on Gardner’s ‘multiple intelligences’, as well as ideas about ‘information literacy’). A range of software packages was examined to see which might be most effective in improving literacy and numeracy and a review document produced. Teachers were then encouraged to use the most effective packages.

The first performance target related to the proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students starting high school who had individual development plans: 65% did so. The second target related to numbers of those students satisfactorily completing the year: 75% did so. It is also reported that the professional development provided for teachers was effective in raising teacher awareness
of the needs and potential of Indigenous students — ‘a wake-up call’. This in turn is reported to have improved the motivation and performance of students.

A further project operated at a number of sites. Final data are available about one of these, operating an alternate campus for 32 Indigenous young people aged 9–15 ‘at risk’ of not completing compulsory schooling. Its ultimate aim was to support students to reach their potential, including transition to mainstream schooling or training. Most students are referred to the alternate campus by schools or other agencies and many are not attending school regularly at the time of referral. The program runs in an ‘out of school’ setting at a large shopping centre and provides for intensive, small group work in areas of pro-social development; physical and social well being; life skills; communication, literacy and numeracy; culture, recreation and leisure.

One performance target related to the proportion of Indigenous students regularly attending the alternate campus. Average attendance was recorded at 80%, from a baseline at which many students were not attending school at all. A second performance target concerned re-entry to mainstream education or training, and the result was that 78% of those students ‘at risk’ of non-attendance did, in fact, re-enter. In the third performance target, 73% of participants progressed to the next phase of development in writing, 86% in reading and 73% in oral language. In general, those not progressing are reported to have been those with the shortest periods of time involved with the alternate campus. It is also reported that the biggest factor in student success has been engagement with programs which explicitly teach pro-social skills such as protective behaviours, practical life skills, cross-cultural understanding, Indigenous cultural identification and pride, classroom survival skills, classroom relationship skills and emotional response skills.

**Observations**

- Most of these projects were successful in dealing with issues and an age group which are widely seen as among the most difficult in Indigenous education. There were several pronounced cases of success on very differing scales.

- Indigenous students’ participation and achievement are likely to be improved where their culture is acknowledged and supported. One of the best ways this can be achieved is through the employment or voluntary presence of Indigenous adults in the school. This is a tangible symbol of the commitment of both the school and Indigenous community to the value of education. Such people should have well-defined roles and themselves have support and training for these roles.

- Many Indigenous students benefit from spending periods of time in Indigenous-only learning groups, that generally include cultural studies. This appears to produce gains in terms of self esteem and confidence, leading to consequent improvements in school performance. Where small
numbers of Indigenous students are isolated from each other, opportunities for networking can produce similar results.

- Professional development focused on cultural awareness for non-Indigenous teachers is important in terms of their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous students and their cultures, and frequently leads to some re-shaping of teacher attitudes. It is reported that this leads to more positive and productive interactions between non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous students, and thus enhanced learning.

- High teacher expectations of student success and more intensive classroom support are critical factors in improving outcomes.

- There is some evidence that Indigenous students can be supported through increasing the range of learning styles and opportunities employed in the classroom.

- Structured, explicit teaching of ‘pro-social’ skills can provide avenues through which Indigenous students ‘at risk’ of leaving school can improve their self esteem, confidence and engagement with the school. This in turn can lead to improved educational outcomes.
Re-entry: Adult and further education

What is ... clear is that essentials are right — community involvement and ownership, an Aboriginal curriculum framework, intense interaction between Aboriginal community people and young participants and, most importantly, the determination to target the most ‘at risk’ youth within the community and to encourage and challenge these young people to take ‘the risk’ and change their lives (Australand Investments and Co., 1999: 29).

Coming back to education/training after a break, for whatever reason, is one aspect of what lifelong learning is about. It opens new life opportunities and may offer new employment options. For the Indigenous population it may be a chance to repair damaging experiences of formal education and training, and to recover and build a sense of cultural pride and self esteem.

The term ‘school’ in this context is not appropriate, because the places of education and training referred to in this section are bridging locations, formal in some ways, informal in others. One is well-established and has offered a range of courses over a number of years. The other two exist on a more fluid basis.

The Projects
(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 223–231.)

Two of these three projects have strong similarities. They have operated at several sites in rural communities for young Indigenous people who are described as being ‘at risk’. Both have provided accredited VET modules in the context of courses with a strong flavour of, and connection with, their communities. The third, in a provincial city with a large Indigenous population, was designed to provide students with access to tertiary studies.

Action and results
These projects share a number of characteristics. The programs were designed to accord with the needs and interests of students; they had major elements of literacy in English and numeracy; they were staffed entirely or mostly by Indigenous people; they had strong contributions of various types from local community members. Two of them have made use of camping, excursions and other whole group activities. Project R1 provided additional support to students in terms of individual tutoring, nutrition, health and travel.

All students were engaged in accredited courses, although Project R3 has had considerable difficulty in gaining accreditation from the most obvious responsible body. Project R2 included industry visits, and employment and/or further education placements in the second half of the course. All of the courses engaged in were replete with concerns related to Indigenous issues.
What works?

In terms of results, Project R1 moved from an enrolment of 12 to 46. Several participants have become eligible for their Higher School Certificate and School Certificate in addition to completing their VET modules. Very high rates of engagement and attendance were reported from a group of young people who were previously alienated from formal education processes and were otherwise considered to ‘at risk’.

In Project R2, 75% of the participants completed one or more VET modules, 40% completed all those on offer and more than 60% have gone on to further education, training or employment. Only three of the 41 ‘at risk’ participants had trouble with the justice system during the course of the project. (One of its major goals was to reduce the incidence of young offenders.) The report on this project makes the point that far more was achieved in terms of students’ own intentions and outcomes valued by their communities.

Although not meeting its target, Project R3 managed, in the year in question, to increase the number of Indigenous students accredited to access tertiary education from this provincial city by 500%. Three are now enrolled in tertiary courses, one is considering doing so and one has a full-time job.

Observations

• These projects provide a very strong message, which has been noted by other commentators. (See, for example, Rizzetti, 1994.) Programs for Indigenous students returning to study, especially for those at risk with a history of alienation from formal education processes, must follow some basic guidelines.
  — They must be built around the interests and needs that Indigenous students have a part in defining. Issues of moment to their communities are likely to play a major part in this curriculum.
  — They must operate as a medium of support for cultural identity and self esteem.
  — They must have a strong and authoritative Indigenous staffing presence, preferably known to and accepted by the community, and active participation from Elders and other influential community members. ‘Community ownership’ is one way of expressing this issue.
  — They must take into account the range of relevant background issues, such as levels of literacy in English, health matters, juvenile justice issues, pressing financial demands, family problems and other personal issues. Support with these matters is vital.
  — They must have a high level of flexibility to accommodate variations in attendance and participation. This flexibility also needs to apply to student grouping. Two of the projects reported the influence of gender, age and/or skill level on the functionality of groups. It may well have been a factor in the third.
In Motion: Dealing with student mobility

M. is an 11-year-old girl for whom five school movements have been registered in the past six months.

13/11/98: Left a primary school in Orange (Year 5). Last day of attendance unspecified. Two possible destinations, Bourke or Bathurst. … was only here 2 days

1/3/99: Re-enrolled in the original school in Orange (Year 6). Her previous school(s) is/are not registered.

18/3/99: Left the primary school to go to primary school B in the same town. … wasn’t here long enough to assess literacy & numeracy levels

21/4/99: Enrolled in a primary school in Bourke. Previous schools were registered as being in Penrith (2) and Bathurst (2). … the student she said she had attended the above schools in term 1, 1999

9/6/99: Left school in Bourke, going to Bathurst or Orange.

Literacy level: Stage 2 … can achieve, provided easy instructions are given in turn

Numeracy level: Stage 2 … often needs concrete situations to work things out

M.’s whereabouts are presently not registered. She may have enrolled in a school which is not connected to the database, the school she is enrolled in may not have registered the enrolment, or she may not be attending any school.

P. is a 7 year-old boy for whom five movements were registered between November 1998 and May 1999.

9/11/98: Enrolled in a remote central school in the west of the state.

24/11/98: Exited this school. … has demonstrated pleasing potential in numeracy/literacy

27/4/99: Re-enrolled at this school. Previous school registered as being in the ACT.


— Data from Project M1
The degree of mobility of the two students in the cases above is not necessarily characteristic. Data from one of the projects dealing with this topic indicate that from a total enrolment of 793 Indigenous students registered from the 76 schools participating, there were 1039 movements (both in and out and including transition from primary to secondary school) in a nine-month period. Of these, 604 students had moved only once; a small proportion had moved more than twice. These data also indicate that, during the period studied, while the beginning and middle of the year are the busiest time for movement, it occurs throughout the year. They also show that some particular schools have very high levels of Indigenous student transience.

A remote school, where another project related to this topic was conducted, consistently doubles its fairly small population during the period October–April on an annual basis.

Mobility is a fact of life for some Indigenous students, is likely to remain so and should be accepted as such. It is culturally characteristic that children and young people will sometimes move between relations living in different parts of the country. Frequent movement is also characteristic of groups in the population as a whole which are struggling economically.

Schools have a legal responsibility to ensure that students of compulsory schooling age are attending, but attention has been drawn to the needs of mobile students and ways in which they might be met in a number of government and agency reports over a substantial period of time.

**The projects**

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 232–238.)

Three projects had these issues as their topic. The two larger systemic projects were related to the development of student tracking and information exchange systems, with the prospect of eventual operation on a statewide basis, coupled with provision of forms of support for mobile students. The other, based in the school referred to above, has worked on devising useful curricular strategies for its ‘Category 2’ (‘reliably’ mobile) students.

The projects’ intentions illustrate three concerns:

- to record student movements effectively (Projects M1 and M2)
- to improve the quality of information exchange between schools (Projects M1 and M2), and
- to provide support which will enable students to counteract any negative effects of school mobility, through offering literacy support programs for targeted group of transient students (M1), improving the continuity of programs offered to students (M2), and a program of intensive numeracy and literacy tuition (M3).


**Action and results**

**Recording student movements and exchanging information**

In consultation with relevant Indigenous community and other groups, Projects M1 and M2 have developed central databases in which schools in a sample of Districts register student movement. (Both systems are on trial and final progress will be measured after the completion of this report.)

In neither case has this been an easy task. There are significant issues of privacy and ‘unreasonable focus’, as well as difficulties in the design of the systems and the logistics and consistency of their use. The ability to track students has been limited by the compass of the areas of operation, that is, when students move outside the trial Districts, intra- or inter-state, they are not necessarily ‘lost’, but they are much harder to ‘find’.

However, both systems have operated successfully on a trial basis, with a larger operation in one state due to come on-line next year.

The report from Project M1 suggests that its system ‘offers an efficient and sensitive way of transferring positive, helpful information’. The process is that every time a student enrols in or exits from a school a pro forma, developed through a workshop of interested parties, is completed and sent to the database. The entry school receives information (including the name of a contact person from the exit school) which helps with the student’s transition into the school. Student details remain confidential. Data entered in the period 10 October 1998 to 29 June, 1999 show that: 854 pro formas were completed and returned; 739 students were registered; and 967 movements (551 enrolments and 416 exits) were recorded.

Electronic Student Portfolios which will provide useful information to classroom teachers about (and by) new students are in development. These portfolios will contain a collection of up-to-date samples of student work, including: a photo of the student, with their name and year level; an example of their best handwriting; a sample of their most creative art work; a written piece that demonstrates their writing ability; and an audio recording of their best reading from their favourite text. Transferring the portfolios between schools can be done electronically or through mailing by the student or the school (with student consent).

Project M2 reports that transient students have been identified and patterns of transience plotted to target the provision of educational programs at the point of need. Since March 1999, the project has successfully tracked 83% of the students referred to it. Of the remaining 17%, the majority are understood to have moved interstate. Information has been insufficient to track the remainder. Results to the end of Term 1 indicate a 40% improvement in chronic absentees’ re-engagement with school. The Education Department’s list of students whose
Whereabouts are unknown has been reduced by 65% since the end of 1998 with 85% of those students located as enrolled in other schools.

In both cases, project work has managed to draw wider attention to the issue and to the need to provide additional support.

Providing support

In Project M1 a network of five Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs), four mobility teachers and 12 targeted classroom teachers has been involved in designing, implementing and evaluating strategies and resources in literacy support for mobile Indigenous students. An intensive reading support program has been developed for use with targeted students. The effects of this program on students’ interest in and enthusiasm for school have been evident from an early stage. ‘From all districts we have received reports suggesting that the scaffolding the AEAs and mobility teachers are providing not only improve literacy levels but the levels of student confidence and participation as well.’

Schools in Project M2 Districts have been encouraged to include improved attendance as part of their School Development Plan. This is universal in one of the targeted Districts and widespread in the other. In conjunction with Department and project personnel, an Aboriginal Education Centre has worked to help schools to develop attendance plans to target the attendance of all students. This Centre is also conducting a survey of parents, students and teachers in the two trial Districts to identify, trial and publish best practice in methods of improving attendance.

In Project M3 a numeracy expert was engaged to be on-site for four weeks (two periods of two weeks) to provide intensive tuition to identified students and in-service education for all staff. The focus of his work was the numeration strand of maths curriculum and associated teaching strategies. He was also involved in pre-and post-testing procedures which indicated that four of the ten Years 1–7 Category 2 students were working at an age appropriate level, a doubling of the previous rate. ‘The inservice education for the teachers proved to be most beneficial, generating new strategies which are now being implemented in the classroom.’

Observations

• Where Indigenous students are targeted, it is essential that student tracking systems be developed in consultation with, and with the agreement of, relevant Indigenous community representatives.

• To be fully effective, they must
  — be widescale, intersystemic and interagency
  — have a component of appropriate support.

• The type of portfolio under development in Project M1 has high potential and value for students, their teachers and their parents.
Building Skills

The nature of this theme is self explanatory. Again it begins with early childhood education and, in this case, finishes with adolescent and older students returning to education. On the way the topics include literacy, Indigenous languages, using information and communication technologies, numeracy and education in the Arts. Although these are treated as discrete, the very significant overlaps among them will be noted.

Getting a Good Start: Early childhood education

The research points to the need for the preschool teacher to be placed more centrally with regard to literacy learning in the early childhood years in that much of their accumulated knowledge of children and their families could be utilised in the transition process. The historical divide between preschool and school demands bridging ... The literacy curriculum in the early years 3–8 must become seamless and ensure that children are engaged in satisfying literacy based activities on a regular and systematic basis across that period. ... Knowledge of the ‘lifeworlds’ of children, and strategic practices so that all children have consistent, coherent engagements with print are required to ease transition through the early years (Hill et al., 1998: 12).

...the reference group acknowledged the highly desirable role of explicit teaching and learning goals, based on the data gleaned about the child’s learning through the observations and for the modelling and explicit teaching of some skills which are then practiced through play in low-risk situations. — Project report (EC1)

Koori children respond better to a physically-based program rather than something static. And by using occupational therapy activities prior to cognitive activities they can receive, process and respond to information more efficiently. Kinaesthetic exercises help strengthen the link between the left and right sides of the brain and this improves Koori children’s ability to adapt to different learning situations. That’s what’s needed to succeed in the mainstream school environment. — Preschool director (EC2)
What works?

There is considerable debate about what should happen at preschools, with some arguing for a purely play-based curriculum while others promote increases in more structured learning. At the same time, there is little dispute about the importance of the preschool in providing children with a bridge between home and school. For Indigenous students, preschool can assume an even greater importance because the bridge to be crossed may be longer and the traverse more complex. Additionally, preschool can also provide grounding in foundation skills related to literacy, numeracy and the social behaviours required at school. The demands of home-school transition can be significantly eased by appropriate preparation.

The projects

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 239–246.)

Five projects are described in this section. All were fairly small scale, and only one operated at more than one site. All took place in preschools and all aimed to improve the readiness for school of Indigenous students. ‘Readiness’ was defined in a variety of ways but typically related to early literacy, self esteem and ‘school-type’ behaviours. Improved attendance was also a common goal.

These projects began from the position that many Indigenous students were observed to be underachieving at school from the very beginning and that changed practices at preschool could have an effect on this situation. Clearly, the impact of their work in this regard can be assessed only after students have gone on to school. Thus judgements about degrees of project success in the longer term are provisional. Nevertheless, most projects achieved performance targets expressed in terms of providers’ expectations for students entering primary school.

Within the range of projects described here are variations on both ‘play-based’ and ‘structured’ learning but it would be fair to say that most projects adopted a mixture of the two broad styles. At the same time, there is an acknowledgment that the needs of Indigenous children require special attention within whatever program is offered.

(This material could usefully be read in conjunction with that contained under the topic ‘Home-School transition’ p. 184.)

Action and results

Final reports are unavailable for two of these projects. One, in a rural city, aimed to improve the success rate of students when they go to school by introducing concepts of numeracy — ‘100 maths words’. It was believed that students would be more likely to succeed if they had more ‘school language’ on entry to school and that these concepts could provide a foundation structure for its development. Research was undertaken to investigate the
children’s language use and to choose the 100 words, which were then taught in a wide variety of often inventive ways, through stories and work conducted in the local Aboriginal language, drama, songs and other activities.

Performance targets were expressed in terms of school expectations for entry but final performance data are unavailable at the time of writing. Indications are, however, that students visiting a primary school as part of the transition process were more comfortable and confident.

In the second project an additional early childhood learning support teacher was employed to support the development of individualised programs for Aboriginal students who needed extra help in preparation for primary school. Intervention and support were also provided for students’ health (predominantly otitis media) and speech problems. Work was also undertaken to produce a culturally-relevant tool for assessing students’ performance. Performance targets were again in the area of meeting school expectations for entry but, at the time of writing, final performance data are unavailable.

Project EC1 was based in two preschools, one in a country town and one in an urban location. The question ‘What changes to early childhood teaching and support services delivery practices will result in improved early literacy learning outcomes for Indigenous students within a relatively short period of time?’ was explored through action research, based on intensive observations of child activity over a period of five months. Five Aboriginal and five non-Aboriginal students were chosen at each site to provide a representative sample. On the basis of the initial observations, an individual learning plan was developed for each student. The impact of a variety of new practices were investigated. These included the use of a locally-developed literacy kit (containing puppets, tapes and other ‘tools’ to develop literacy as well as reading matter), redevelopment of reading corners, an increased level of community liaison, special work on oral language and efforts to increase the ‘engaged’ learning time.

A project target was to have the spread of English literacy development (literate behaviours) in the groups of Aboriginal children be commensurate with the spread for non-Aboriginal children. Indications are that this target was either met or very closely approached. A further target was to have gains made by Aboriginal students in literacy match the gains made by non-Aboriginal students. This target also appears to have been met. Other results focussed on child-child and child-adult interactions, both of which were seen to increase markedly, with some interesting individual variations, during the course of the project.

Project EC2 took place in a preschool in a rural town. It originated from the observation that some Aboriginal children were not satisfying expectations for entry to primary school and was based on the notion that school readiness skills could be facilitated through a perceptual motor program and aspects of an
occupational therapy program. A structured program was devised according to these specifications and implemented with small groups of eight children.

Performance targets were to increase the numbers of Indigenous students who satisfied schools’ literacy and numeracy expectations to 80%. This was, however, based on a preliminary estimate that 60–70% of Indigenous students already satisfied such expectations. Baseline testing later showed, however, that no Indigenous students initially satisfied the cognitive test and only 18% satisfied the gross motor test. The inaccuracy of the initial estimate meant that the targets were difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, after five months, 50% of Indigenous children satisfied the cognitive test and 69% satisfied the gross motor test. In addition, it is reported that continuing progress is being made and that the 80% target could well be exceeded by the end of the year.

Project EC3 employed an expert to help develop and implement a music program designed to encourage student attendance and motivation and ultimately to enhance literacy and numeracy. The program was run initially by an early childhood music specialist and was based on Aboriginal music. It attracted a deal of community interest and support from parents and others. A performance target concerned with increased attendance and participation was achieved. At the same time, the project enabled the preschool to develop and use new teaching strategies which will continue after its completion.

Observations

- Most performance targets were in terms of readiness for primary school and, although some data are as yet unavailable, it seems that targets were generally achieved.

- The underlying trend in all these projects has been to seek and develop new options for young children to learn foundation skills: whether by more attention to the ‘teaching moment’, through new program structures or via the employment of more ‘tools’ or strategies for direct teaching. Their work suggests that the readiness of Indigenous students for primary school can be facilitated in a variety of ways. All the methods noted have been sufficiently successful to warrant further investigation.
This is the set of topic headings used with relation to developing literacy in Standard Australian English for the comprehensive literature review contained in Volume 3 of *Desert Schools*, a recent research report to the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs on schooling in seven Aboriginal communities in central Australia. It provides some indication of the nature of discussion in this area: its complexity and the variety of and contentiousness among views espoused. (Note: For ease of reading, the term ‘English’ is used in the following to mean ‘Standard Australian English’ (SAE).)

The development of English literacy skills was a widespread concern among the projects. It appears in many of these topic-based sections: in the reasons for the use of information technology; in components of courses for older adolescents and adults returning to education and training; in VET courses; as a means of supporting secondary students; as a primary concern for skill development in younger children; and in the discussion of the importance of being able to switch between dialects in the section on Indigenous Languages. The section on numeracy suggests the importance of literacy in English to achievement in numeracy. One of the main means of support proposed for mobile students relates to literacy in English. It can be fairly said that it figured everywhere, reflecting its fundamental importance to success in both formal education and training.

The mix of projects dealt with in this part of the report again suggests the difficulty of drawing a line around literacy development. It begins with a report on a large scale project related to hearing issues, included here because as pointed out in a support document developed by the SA Aboriginal Education Unit, ‘A hearing impairment is not just a deprivation of sound, it is a deprivation of language’ (SADECS, 1995: 3). Phonological, semantic and syntactical problems are likely to arise from chronic hearing impairment. Where students are learning English as a second or third language or SAE as a second dialect, hearing impairments can make the task profoundly difficult.
The second part of this section deals with four projects related to learning resources: literacy resources in libraries in schools in remote locations; and three projects devoted to collecting and recording cultural material for use in teaching and learning. (Two ongoing projects referred to under ‘Language’ p. 79, are involved in similar processes.)

The third part describes five of the seven projects which had the development of literacy in English as their primary concern. (We lack current information about the other two.)

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 247–281.)

Supporting students with hearing impairments

Project L1 involved a major auditory testing program of 1032 students, many from remote communities but attending six schools in two urban centres and at one remote location. The students were generally learners of English as a foreign language. It was coupled with an intervention process based on teacher education about relevant issues, the introduction of technological hearing support processes and a phonological awareness program to help students ‘hear’ and identify sounds which they may have been previously unable to because of difficulties generated by auditory impairments during their developmental process.

A very high proportion of students (79%) was found to have an educationally significant hearing disability. Forty per cent would conventionally require medical services to treat active middle ear disease and/or provide reconstructive ear surgery. In addition, 38% had indication of a Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAP-D) displayed by poor speech discrimination scores and intolerance of background noise. CAP-D impairs the ability to make sound intelligible, especially against a background of ambient noise. People who suffer from it mis-perceive words, miss parts of sound communications and find keeping track of speech difficult and fatiguing.

Students’ SAE literacy and phonological awareness levels were tested at the beginning and end of the project to measure the impact of the school-based intervention program.

One of the significant factors for the researchers was the very high turnover of student enrolments and level of absenteeism. The criteria for inclusion in the target group for assessing the impact of intervention were availability for both pre-and post-testing and attendance for 75% of school days in the project period. Just over 20% of the students (none of primary age) satisfied these criteria.

On spelling and reading age scores, students who satisfied the criteria for involvement improved an average of one year over the course of the project, on phonological awareness scoring they improved, again on average, ‘18 months’.
On an individual basis, there were very marked differences in gain. Other findings note:

- the very high comparative rate of ear disease and persistent hearing disability among these students. Hearing support services at school are especially important for Indigenous students learning English as a foreign language.
- that, in these contexts at least, there is a strong correlation between lower levels of hearing impairment and higher levels of attendance and achievement.
- direct teaching of phonological awareness especially for students of English as a foreign language is of value.
- the prevalence among these students of very high levels of visual awareness or ‘vigilance’, which may have strong implications for the design of learning experiences. As noted in the SA Departmental document referred to above: ‘The student might resign from making active sense of the world and rely heavily on visual experience. ... The consequences of this in the classroom that is highly verbal, means that students do not use auditory skills that they have to interpret information ... The effect of fatigue resulting from listening also needs to be considered by educators. When they become tired students are likely to tune out’ (ibid.: 40).

The findings of this project go far beyond issues of literacy development and replicate findings from elsewhere. For example, Neinhuys, quoted in the Desert Schools report, notes that, ‘Hearing loss has multiple ramifications for young Aborigines, including its most significant effect which is on education, both in the classroom and in the otherwise rich, informal and formal, out of school environment in which learning occurs. The children with most severe hearing loss may not attend school at all, so negative has been their experience. Children do not like to admit they cannot hear properly and it is likely that many teachers ... erroneously conclude that certain children are slow learners when in fact they have hearing loss. Hearing aids are strongly disliked [and] associated with acute embarrassment and shame ... The learning disabilities associated with poor hearing exacerbate school refusal and absenteeism (especially among teenagers and boys more generally)’ (NLLIA SA, 1996: 37). But the findings are compelling in terms of literacy development, especially for learners of English as a second or foreign language.

**Developing culturally-appropriate materials**

Provision of adequate and effective resources are a significant component of literacy learning.

Project L2 was devoted to upgrading library resources (books, shelving, computer cataloguing and barcode scanning) in 18 remote schools, because of the absence of teachers with requisite training and experience and the need for additional resources to support literacy learning adequately.
Each of the three project targets was met in full (or nearly so, a flood interrupted the work in one case), to the decided satisfaction of the school personnel concerned. Three typical comments from the evaluation:

> Since our library was created, the children have made constant use of it. The children’s interest in books has increased dramatically.
> Renewed vigour in our reading program. … A marked change in the attitudes to books and reading.
> The overall literacy levels of the children who attend regularly are improving. The library with its enhanced and attractive appearance provides a stimulating environment which is encouraging the children to choose books and read.

Three projects set out to collect and record culture-based stories and/or oral histories. Two were system-based and one was located in a community college. The reasons were consistent: the importance of recording cultural history for reasons including the development of cultural pride and identification; the need to develop a greater understanding of Indigenous history and culture among students from all backgrounds; and the value of such materials for developing literacy skills.

The products differ. In one case the intention was to produce three publications — two based on Dreaming Stories and a lexicon for the local Indigenous language. Issues have arisen about ownership of these materials. Another project has focused on engaging students in collecting and recording (on videotape as well as text) stories from Elders of the local community, realising one of the long term goals of the school. This project will be completed in 2000 and was described as part of a process of surrounding kids with supportive people and a supportive context, lots of Aboriginal role models, heaps of culture. The kids should say, we are proud of who we are every single day.

Project L3 has produced some reactions of this sort already. It set out to develop and publish a collection of audio recordings of interviews with eleven Tasmanian Aboriginal people, capturing some of their lived experiences, in order to support improved literacy among Aboriginal students (focused on Years 5–8). The impetus was the suggestion in Bringing Them Home that there are important stories about Indigenous people that have not been told and could soon be lost. In the historical context of Tasmania, it has seemed particularly important that Aboriginal students have culturally relevant learning materials that affirm their identity, respect their past and verify the lineage of their people. Furthermore, the assumptions and prejudices of some non-Aboriginal people need to be challenged and refuted.
The stories were collected and recorded by three Aboriginal people, an interviewer, a researcher and a photographer. They were organised into themes: educational opportunities, schooling, family life, work, and their use was trialed in three schools. After a generally enthusiastic reception from both students and teachers, one of the conclusions drawn by the project officer was that, *Recognition and accreditation of cultural knowledge and experience has a powerful effect on the sense of identity and self esteem of Indigenous students, as well as their school performance.* These materials will be circulated on a state-wide basis.

**Skill development**

Seven projects are dealt with in this section, two of which are still in train or for which final reports are not available at the time of writing, and four for which we have final information. They vary markedly in scale and location. Firstly, a brief description of two of the projects for which we have limited information.

One, in a provincial city school, was for primary-aged second or third language learners of English who were also irregular attenders. The strategy adopted was to group students according to their ability and to provide them with intensive support in class. Some marked improvements in literacy performance have been recorded as well as improvements in attendance levels.

A second has used a video-conferencing network to improve the literacy standards of the Koorie students involved. Twelve schools are participating. The project has a significant element of professional development for non-Indigenous and Indigenous teachers 'working together in a cooperative and equal manner' focused on a variety of issues, but especially genuinely suitable pedagogy, resources and assessment.

We also have a very detailed final report from one site (a remote school with mainly primary-aged students) of a widely-dispersed multi-site project (L9). This school had an ambitious set of aims to improve the rate of literacy learning for its younger students: work on collaborative teaching and other forms of appropriate pedagogy; increased attendance and retention; increased community involvement in the school’s programs; increased contact with parents/carers; adaptation of the ways in which teachers’ work was organised; use of various information and communication technology programs to support student learning; and development of additional culturally-relevant literacy teaching materials.

Much was done in most of these areas. Recruitment of reading tutors from the community was largely unsuccessful and there were difficulties with the appointment of a community liaison officer, although a series of community social gatherings were highly successful. A sound field amplification system
What works?

(for use by students with conductive hearing loss or impairment) was installed which had a noted effect on levels of concentration and on-task behaviour.

Of the 53 students involved, only seven showed no improvement in their reading. Some of the improvements were very marked. Four of the seven who showed no improvement attended for fewer than 20 (of 120) days; the other three have defined learning difficulties.

This site report is notable for the emphasis it gives to two issues common to schools in such locations: student attendance and teacher turnover. The total number of students attending the target classes in the nine month project period was 107; only 22 attended over 50% of the days; there were 32 formally-recorded student enrolments and departures. In terms of staff, no teacher or teacher aide who began working in the project was still working on it at its end.

The Children’s Home and Community Knowledge (Project L4)

Young Aboriginal children in the Kimberley have a rich variety of experiences before they come to school. This list, compiled by the Aboriginal Teaching Assistants at the schools involved in this project, outlines some of the experiences and knowledge that students are likely to have had by the time they get to school.

At Home

Helping to look after younger siblings
Learning their first name and surname
Copying the activities of adult role models around the home, eg packing away, cleaning, raking, watering, naming and using the utensils in the home
Learning the family relationships of their immediate and extended family
Learning the sign languages used in the community, eg pointing with the chin, mouth or hands, nodding their head
Using pens, pencils or crayons to scribble or draw on paper
Learning to answer the phone to talk to family and friends
Learning to give directions about where they live
Helping with the preparation of food
Learning about people’s moods, and understanding the positive and negative attitudes expressed through body language
Making their own beds
Learning to count using number names but sometimes making mistakes in the sequence
Listening to Dreamtime stories and stories about their families
Most new teachers were beginning their professional careers and had little or no previous experience teaching Indigenous students. Both these factors were exacerbated by the timing of the project: over two school years with the Christmas holidays intervening.

On the student attendance issue, the report states that: ‘Elders working in the school indicated that although it was seen that the school was reaching out to the community, the community was not responding. The time has come for the community to recognise, value and reciprocate the school’s attempts to build networks. … Any valid program to increase attendance needs to be largely community-driven and have the active involvement of parents, the Community Council, community representative organisations and police.’ On teacher turnover: ‘There is a desperate need for experienced teachers who will stay for longer time periods than is now the case.’

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**The Children’s Home and Community Knowledge**

*continued*

Understanding when they are sick and reporting it straight away

Talking to Kartiyas [non-Indigenous people] and maybe understanding that Kartiya language is different from home language

Identifying and caring for their own pets

Distinguishing between fruit and vegetables

Learning to use the electrical equipment around the home

Dressing themselves and choosing what they like to wear

**In the Local Environment**

Recognising and copying local animal tracks

Catching small animals

Collecting eggs from birds

Knowing the names of different bush foods and understanding which ones are poisonous

Knowing the route and the direction to places in the natural environment such as fishing areas, hunting areas, sacred sights, law grounds and other dangerous places

Knowing how to use fishing rods and spears when out at fishing holes

Knowing how to cook food in the bush

Knowing how to safely make a fire and use it to cook fish and small animals

Knowing how to roll up a swag

Watching larger animals be gutted and cooked
What works?

Project L4 evolved from a need to help the inexperienced teachers who typically work in this remote region, develop an understanding of the knowledge and experiences young students bring with them to school in order to support their skill development in Standard Australian English. These students’ first languages were exclusively Indigenous, and there had been a tendency for teachers, in the face of the failure of ‘standard’ classroom practices, to retreat to more rigid structures and alien content.

Experienced early childhood and ESL-trained teachers were seconded to work with the teachers at nine schools, including Aboriginal teaching assistants (ATAs). These teams explored and described the background knowledge and experiences their students brought to school, a particular task of the ATAs, and developed a wide range of teaching strategies to test for their effectiveness.

The outcomes sought related initially to the use of oral language in familiar settings, and subsequently had an emphasis on questions, simple requests and directions. The students learnt the conventions of SAE use in the classroom through such activities as practising greetings and responding to instructions. The examples of home learning experiences and knowledge were used to set up classroom environments and plan learning activities that were relevant to and built on the students’ previous experiences. All teachers emphasised the need for students to use their first language to interpret new concepts introduced in the classroom.

Students made significant progress in two areas.

• Increased confidence. The extra teacher in the classroom meant that the students received more individual attention. Many of the students became increasingly eager to join in group activities, to answer questions at mat periods and to participate in drama.
• Improved skills in SAE in the following areas: classroom routines; joining in repetitive language from favourite books, repetitive parts in drama activities, simple chants and songs; playing structured games and using the correct SAE sentence; using simple SAE sentences rather than gestures or single words; and using more descriptive words in games.

Two procedures that seem apparently straightforward contributed most to the teachers’ knowledge of their students and community.

• A successful teaching team consisting of an ATA and a non-Aboriginal teacher, with equal contribution of their particular knowledge is probably the most valuable asset in classrooms in this region.
• Bush trips enabled non-Aboriginal teachers, ATAs, Aboriginal parents and students to learn about each other in a relaxed environment. In this environment the teachers were able to observe most clearly the extent of students’ knowledge and the language they used to express it. In this environment also the teachers were more obviously learners themselves.
The report suggests that the value of these excursions as an important educational resource needs to be more widely promoted.

**Advice for new teachers** *(Project L4)*

Before this project was implemented, community meetings were held to develop advice for new teachers. The following is a list of the major points raised at these meetings.

- New teachers need to visit the parents and the community.
- New teachers need to be aware of the different culture of the students and be open to learning about that culture.
- Teachers should seek advice from community members about the places they can go in the community.
- If there are disciplinary problems the teachers should seek advice from the Aboriginal teaching assistant.
- New teachers should participate in the school bus run so that they can see first hand where the students come from.
- New teachers will need to be made aware of the names and words that are not used in the community so that they won’t unwittingly cause offence.
- Teachers should not be reserved about speaking with and getting to know community members. If possible they should go out together on weekends.
- Community members should be involved in the classroom.
- The teachers must teach English well as the students want to be able to get a job when they leave school.

The report points out the continuing challenge of the task. One of the issues investigated was the desire of parents and community members for their children to learn SAE. This was firmly positive. However, it was noted that many of these students speak Kriol as their first language. The difference between this language and English is not readily apparent to many adults and even less so to many children. Young Kriol-speaking students have several steps to take to acquire SAE. Firstly they must realise that the language of the school is different from their own. Secondly, they must have the desire to use that language. Thirdly, they must learn the structures of the new language. As one teacher commented: *I think it is very important to remember that we are teaching children of a very young age who are still experimenting with their first language. The children at this school are in fact learning three languages — Kriol, Standard Australian English and Jaru. This is a formidable challenge and they appear to be embracing it.*
Only a small minority of Aboriginal people in this region use SAE as their main form of communication in their everyday lives. All the important issues of their lives are discussed in one or more of their Indigenous languages. The project has not only raised teachers’ awareness of how young Kimberley students learn SAE but also their awareness of the students’ need to learn in their first language.

The work instigated through this project will continue. One of its concrete products will be a resource book for use by early childhood teachers in this region.

Project L5 (in primary schools at 11 different rural locations working with 142 Years 3–5 students) selected two groups of students for additional support, one which had poor decoding skills and another with decoding skills but low levels of reading comprehension.

The project used the principles and practices of Reading Recovery in a series of one-to-one lessons of 45 minutes every day for ten weeks for the lower-achieving students. Components included: familiar reading; re-reading of previous day’s material; shared reading to model use of meaning, structure and visual information; guided reading of new books at the suitable instructional level; reciprocal questioning, summarising or retelling; writing short texts with word analysis. The second group was taught in small groups, using Reciprocal Teaching and other strategies for a daily 25-minute session.

Students in the first group made improvement ranging from two to 13 Reading Recovery levels, with the average being five levels. Of the 105 students in the second group, 64% were accelerated in their reading comprehension compared with 53% in a control group. Almost all students improved their scores on the Metacomprehension Strategy Index (believed by project personnel to be the most useful instrument for measuring increases in performance).

One of the reasons these results are interesting is because of the effective use of Reading Recovery (RR) strategies for students in Years 3–5, that is, for students outside its intended range. (The second year of schooling is prescribed.) The availability of a trained RR teacher correlated positively with levels of student improvement. Reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning structures and strategies were found to improve learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

The report also notes the same two factors referred to above as problems. ‘Seven of the 11 schools were staffed by a majority of teachers in their first or second year of teaching. Six of the schools had difficulty staffing the extra components due to a lack of available casuals. Staff turnover took place in all but one of the schools. … Poor attendance of some students proved detrimental to their success.’

Project L6 operated in a large urban secondary school that enrols and provides boarding accommodation for students from remote areas. These students have
a series of challenges: few have English as a first language, and all have to learn to accommodate the demands of very different living and school environments.

Two groups of male students, younger and older, and the most limited in terms of English skills, were selected for intensive help. The project was designed to redress a series of issues which were believed to exacerbate their problems: among them — placement in ‘normal’ large classes, an unsuitable curriculum, and an absence of ESL-trained and Indigenous teachers as well as a ‘school orientation’ program in need of improvement.

Each class had 18 as its maximum size and was taught by an ESL-trained specialist. As well as improving students’ level of English literacy and numeracy, the teachers’ tasks included orienting them to the ‘culture’ of schooling, and maintaining home-school links.

The results with the younger group (aged 12–14) were impressive. The target was for 50% of the students to progress at least one level of the NT ESL Outcomes Profile. Of the 13 students who were enrolled for the whole year (a loss during the year of only three): six students progressed at least two levels of the Profile, four students three levels and three students progressed at least four levels. Of seven students enrolling during the course of the project, six remain enrolled. All ‘original’ students completed two units of Foundation Studies Maths, two units of English, one unit of Social Education and one unit in Science.

Finding a suitable curriculum for the older group (aged 15–17) proved a problem. The curriculum for the younger group was built on introductions to English literacy through orientation to school and school culture, personal background, aspirations and beliefs. They then moved into two NT Board of Studies courses, Foundation Studies and the Indigenous Bridging Course, with relative ease.

The older class had had a longer and more negative experience of school. They saw themselves, legitimately in cultural terms, as adults and finding an appropriate curriculum was not easy. The Certificate for Community Aboriginals Level I and II Remote Area Local Government was tried. It seemed to fit in terms of its areas of focus: community structures, work opportunities, etc. It was ‘sold’ to the school as ideal for this group of students: literacy and numeracy development in the context of more remote communities with a work-orientation. However there were two major problems. The first was that the design of the course assumed that it would be taught in remote communities and hence the sorts of things that would be available in the communities would be accessible. This was not the case at the school’s location. The bigger problem was that, although the course was supposed to be pitched at Level 1 English, it contained tasks like conducting a series of interviews and turning them into a research report.
What works?

What have you learned that could be made more widely known?
(extracted from the final report of Project L6)

The students who were the focus for this project possess individual life stories that are highly complex. Working with them is highly rewarding, but a long-term task requiring skills of a most special nature. While we are focusing on their educational outcomes, many of the real issues these students are dealing with include staying strong in the face of: histories of major health problems and family dysfunction; negative and/or intermittent histories of schooling; poor hearing; frequent experience in dealing with grief; regular participation in ceremonies; developing appropriate behaviour both in the classroom and in a residential setting.

But for a school [in an urban context with a significant number of Indigenous students from varying locations and backgrounds] we believe the following principles of best practice are portable.

- Small class size — no more than 18 students, with consistent access to trained English as a second language and Aboriginal teachers.
- A curriculum which starts from what the students bring to the classroom, allows students to negotiate learning plans and outcomes, deliberately scaffolds student literacy learning, monitors student progress, makes explicit the worlds of dominant cultures, and celebrates and affirms the individual cultures the students bring to the classroom.
- Teaching methodology which includes sharing and negotiation, that makes literacies (Indigenous, Standard Australian English, classroom) explicit and that makes links across cultures.
- Specific outcomes for each class within a designated time frame.
- A swift, organised and personal/individual response to attendance retention issues.
- Specific specialised assistance which responds as a team (eg, community liaison, counsellor, nurse, pastoral care) to complex issues as they arise.

Staff searched through a wide range of other courses and finally found one that will be used in the future: the SA Certificate Level I and II Pathways to Work for Aboriginal People. What actually occurred was to trial a range of ideas, working from students’ interests, producing a ‘negotiated’ curriculum.

Over the year, 20 students have been placed in this class. Of the original students enrolled during the year, 10 are still enrolled. Of those, five have progressed at least one level of the NT ESL Outcomes Profile, three have progressed two levels, and two at least three levels. The factors leading to
success noted by the project coordinator which might be generalised can be found on the previous page.

Projects L7 and L8 both worked on Scaffolded Literacy practices, an approach designed by Brian Gray, and distinguished by the establishment of high expectations of students, the use of carefully scaffolded age-appropriate texts and tactics of questioning which differ substantially from standard teaching practice.

The central issues addressed by this approach are as follows. (These issues are treated more fully in the summary project report, p. 267.)

- Low and self-fulfilling teacher expectations of students resulting in low levels of academic activity in the classroom.
- Tactics needed to shift the focus of teaching from behaviour management, and consequent low order busy work.
- The need to move from literacy activities which assume culturally-embedded literacy understandings and do not adequately support Indigenous students to become effective readers and writers.
- The problem of varying ability levels in each class, another cause of low level educational activities in Indigenous classrooms as teachers try to include weaker students in activities. The scaffolding practices are intended to enable all students to be able to read and participate at some level in all activities.
- Tactics to remedy the problem of irregular attendance.
- Dependence of students on continuous one-to-one support from teachers for difficult learning activities, and the encouragement of a higher level of independence in learning.
- The perception among some Indigenous students of reading, writing and other educational activities as ‘ritual’ practices of schools.

These are obviously intensely practical issues, drawn from many years of experience in the field both as a teacher and as a researcher.

One of these projects operated at two sites, an urban high school annexe which provides a different form of schooling for students from central Australia (see case study pp. 67–70), and at the school from which some of those students may have originally come. The project team provided extensive training and support for staff at these schools on the wide range of issues surrounding the use Scaffolded Literacy. The aim was to progress targeted students one or more levels of the National English Profile within the project timeline. The results to date indicate that average improvement has been from 1.5 to more than two Profile levels over two–three school terms. The case study indicates that there were many other associated areas of improvement.
Project L8 occurred in an urban primary school which has 65 Aboriginal students among its enrolment. Scaffolded Literacy was introduced in four classes (Years R–7). Again there was a major and continuing training process for teachers concerned, who were supported by the project research officer, a school-based expert on functional grammar, and two Aboriginal educators.

In addition, a Reading Support Program from Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers was introduced in order to establish ways that Aboriginal parents could have a recognised and valued role in the school, at the same time supporting their children’s literacy learning. The parents were employed and trained to assist with regular and consistently-structured reading sessions. Each child had a 25-minute session twice per week.

The report of this project notes: ‘At this moment, we have built up an Aboriginal Education team in the school which is of high quality. … We have an assessment process established that [can be maintained] and a recording system for data already established. We have strong Aboriginal community support. Those who have been in Aboriginal education for some time would know just how rare it is to have all these conditions in place simultaneously.’

The project’s initial target was to move the literacy achievement of the school’s Indigenous students to reflect the same levels as those for the school’s population as a whole. For several technical reasons the target was adjusted to use national levels of literacy achievement as the benchmark. The results are difficult to summarise because of the diversity and specificity of the data collected (see pp. 271–272), but they can be described, as they are in the report, as ‘very promising’. Of special interest is the ‘pick up’ of the least able students in the middle and older years.

**Observations**

- Hearing difficulties present a severe impediment to the development of literacy in English for all students, but especially for students for whom English is not a first language and whose contact with it is limited. Indigenous students in some parts of the country have an extremely high level of hearing impairment. This is not by any means a new finding, nor has it been ignored by teachers, although the extent of its significance may not have been fully appreciated. The ramifications are far-reaching and profound. Culturally-sensitive interventions, both medical and educational, are crucial as a basic starting point for any success in formal education — with literacy in English or in any other regard.

- The value and effectiveness of curriculum materials based on the histories, experiences and knowledge of Indigenous peoples for use by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is also not a new finding. These projects have added to the stock of gradually increasing resources of this type. It must grow substantially yet.
Hunches about success
(from Project L8)

Repetition
The repetitive nature of the Scaffolded Literacy process does not bore students; it gives them a chance for success.

Small steps
The slow and steady nature of Scaffolded Literacy means that the process is achievable by all students; no quantum leaps are needed. New learning builds on old learning in clearly apparent ways. There is no mystery in this process.

Spelling
Spelling within this program employs students’ visual acuity, and is not just reliant on phonics. This seems an important difference. We have observed children, Aboriginal and ESL, unable to sound out words who could write whole sentences using their visual memory. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that this reliance on aural acuity disadvantages children whose pronunciation is so different from standard English.

New vocabulary
Teachers and students together develop a language for talking about language. This unlocks the secrets about why one piece of writing is successful and another is not. We are no longer working on hunch. We can show students how to do it themselves. Students are developing a sense of control over their own writing and a critical eye for other people’s writing. Can I put that mark in to show that she is excited? (Year 1 ESL student).

Consistency and familiarity
The nature of the reading support given by Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers provides many reasons for success. Some are well-documented by Marie Clay. Students know what to expect when they arrive for a session; the routine is clear and predictable. In addition, the warmth and the familiar Nunga English with which they are greeted moves the school experience further along the continuum towards home. For students in transition from home to school, this is a comforting and reassuring experience.

Confidence, once developed, is self-generating.
What works?

- The procedure and findings from Project L4 strongly confirm the need for non-Indigenous teachers of Indigenous students in remote areas to base their work on a cultural understandings which are as deep and sympathetic as possible. Almost all other projects confirm that it is equally significant even when cultural differences are less marked. This is another observation which might appear overwhelmingly obvious, but there are clearly instances where it is still at issue.

- Intensive, focused and thoughtful efforts to increase English literacy levels will produce results. The strategies used by the project described on p. 55 is indicative of the range of activities which might be considered. (See also the ideas generated from Project L6 noted on p. 62.) Scrutiny and suitable revision of pedagogy and teaching arrangements, resources, the use of information technology, assessment processes, community involvement and encouragement of regular attendance will all yield results without moving outside the compass of what might be considered generally effective practice. However, the finding from Project L5, a project working in fairly challenging circumstances, about the useful impact of Reading Recovery (RR) processes for Indigenous students outside the prescribed age range for its application is significant and, again, might be considered more widely. The key factor: intensity of individual support in structured, routine and well-validated teaching practices. The results suggest that where RR has not ‘worked’ for Indigenous students in their second year of primary school, the strategies should not necessarily be abandoned for use only with students who appear to be more receptive to its impact at that stage, leaving others to struggle on as best they can.

- The Scaffolded Literacy approach is a most important avenue for exploration. The students in the two projects where it was operating ranged in age from beginning primary to older secondary students. The strategies have been generated from issues which plague Indigenous education — problems with low teacher expectations, the substitution of busy work for real achievement, behaviour management problems, variety in learning levels and styles. In these instances, one very favourable circumstance with a very high degree of development and alignment of all concerned, and at two sites with teachers working on the basis of skilled but irregular support, the impact has been marked, quite sufficient to say that as the approach is refined and additional support materials become available, it will represent a most important resource for the teaching of English literacy to Indigenous students and should be adopted more widely.

The staff of Project L8 are correct to caution against viewing it as a panacea. Despite the impressive results, it is not a ‘quick fix’. Like many effective teaching strategies, it will come only at some professional cost, including attitudinal change and the development and use of new skills, to those who make use of it.
Perhaps because of the focus on data collection which characterises these projects, precise attendance levels came under the spotlight. In every one of these projects where teaching students was the focus of the work, poor attendance was almost always associated with lower levels of student improvement. Common sense says this should be a fact. Findings from these projects validate common sense. Nor can the issue of teacher turnover and its impact on student success be ignored. It might appear that both these issues are rehearsals of the well known and obvious, but they must be included in any consideration of the success of Indigenous students at school.

**Scaffolding Reading and Writing at Wiltja (Project L7)**

The project is an accelerated reading and writing program for primary and secondary Indigenous school students from remote communities in South Australia. Coordinated by a team of researchers from the University of Canberra, the project has been implemented on two sites — the Wiltja Annexe of Woodville High School in Adelaide, and the Amata Primary School located south of Uluru. This case study is drawn from the Wiltja Annexe.

Wiltja provides three programs for Indigenous young people from the Anangu and Pitjantjatjara lands. The opportunity is provided to access urban secondary schooling, and to complete South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) courses. Students with potential for further academic development are nominated by their teachers in these remote communities, and following consultation with parents and family members, travel to Adelaide to participate. Students live in a hostel at Northfield, and participate in a tutorial program on most week-nights that is designed to support their school-based program. Around seventy students are enrolled in the Wiltja program at any one time. The demand for places far exceeds those that are available.

Brian Gray, with his University of Canberra colleagues Wendy Cowey and David Rose, have been developing a ‘scaffolding’ approach to literacy for more than a decade. The reason for this work has been the apparent gap in literacy outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The team’s research indicates that many of the current literacy practices in use with rural/remote Indigenous students limit their chances of success. The team found, for example, that the copying and memorising of text were common practices, and that relatively few students were able to independently read and write by the time they reached secondary school age. Many adolescents were being instructed with literacy materials designed for much younger students in the early years of schooling.
What works?

Scaffolding Reading and Writing at Wiltja

continued

‘We have found that much of the literacy work that we do with teachers of Indigenous students is ‘counter-intuitive’... a typical response of a teacher confronted by a student who cannot do something, is to reach for something at a lower standard ... another is to reduce kids’ activity to ‘busy work’ (colouring in, painting and so on) often as a means of maintaining order or controlling behaviour. (R1)

Building on the work of Bruner and Vygotsky, the team has developed an approach that makes the knowledge of literacy development more explicit.

The approach employs a sequence of strategies that provide scaffolding support for students to read complex texts fluently and accurately, and then to use the features of literate language that they are learning to read in their own writing. (R3)

A group of five teachers has worked collaboratively with the research team to implement the scaffolding approach at Wiltja. As the following comment reveals, some members of the group were highly receptive.

I have been teaching Anangu students for about seven years, and have never felt particularly successful in the various schools in which I have taught in terms of literacy outcomes. After looking for some time for an alternative, I was relieved to get involved in the scaffolding approach. Other schemes that I tried, such as phonics, didn’t address the needs of fifteen year olds with reading ages of six or seven year olds. Junior primary methodology just wasn’t working with these kids. (T4)

One of the main changes to teachers’ practice involves a significant change to their questioning technique. Rather than asking students questions that they may not be able to answer, teachers construct their questioning in ways that clarify appropriate responses before answers are sought. The objective is to create a supportive learning environment that will foster greater student participation.

Initially, some teachers were sceptical of this technique, fearing that they would be stifling student creativity and self-directed learning.

A major point of resistance for many experienced teachers, given that it is so personally challenging, is the need to review your whole questioning technique. This was certainly the case for me, as I was concerned that by feeding answers to students I would be inhibiting independent thinking skills. Actually, this has tended to have the opposite effect, because the kids feel so much more confident, and are asking more critical questions. (T1)
Significant increases in student achievement have been measured. For example, all students have advanced by one or more levels in reading and writing based on the national English Profiles. (For later results see the project summary, p. 69.)

In the Bridging Class at Wiltja the average improvement in reading and writing was 2.5 Profile levels. In Year 8 the average improvement, in English and Science, was also about 2.5 Profile levels. In Years 9 and 10 the average improvement was slightly less, at about 1.9 Profile levels overall since these groups had started with higher levels in the baseline assessments.

At the same time, teachers have noted a range of student learning outcomes that are more difficult to measure, like an increased level of student engagement in their learning. Video and anecdotal evidence reflects much higher levels of student participation — especially in terms of the quality of dialogue between students and teachers as well as students themselves. Another reported outcome was student enthusiasm to select their own texts, something no teacher in the project had experienced previously.

Kids are more prepared to have a go, in terms of volunteering answers. There is no shame involved about making mistakes, and students are more willing and able to help each other along. Previously, these kids were really reluctant to participate. For example, students would pull their jumpers over their heads and suchlike. I have also noticed that words like ‘Wiya!’ (No!) and ‘Lanma!’ (Boring!), which were commonly used by students last year are noticeably absent this year. (T1)

The familiarity of students with the texts means that they are becoming more directly involved in the learning process. For example, when we do ‘chunking’ exercises as part of spelling, or develop writing plans, students are contributing and feeling part of the whole process. This is all part of building their confidence and generating success. (T3)

What factors are critical to ensuring that the process that has been initiated at Wiltja can be maintained and/or expanded in future?

It was clear that input from the external research team was crucial, both during the early planning and implementation stages and for monitoring and refinement. Throughout the project, researchers have provided various teacher support materials in the form of notes and ‘scripts’ to assist with teaching processes. Video and other materials that will assist in the transfer of the scaffolding approach to settings and contexts beyond Wiltja are in development.
Of equal importance has been the development of a team approach among a core group of teachers, together with the enthusiastic support of the principal. Teachers made frequent reference to the value they place on being able to work cooperatively on the scaffolding approach, along with the practical and moral support they receive from each other. While this approach appears to have taken root at Wiltja, continued nurturing and support is needed to ensure that it grows and develops further.

*There is the issue of critical mass. You need a group to become strong enough to support each other and assist in the training of new members. … As awareness grows that something good is happening in the Wiltja program, so too is our confidence that the program can work in other settings.* (P1)

Teachers spoke at length about the importance of developing skills that are absolutely fundamental to the futures of all Indigenous students.

*Teachers need to be much more honest about what they are achieving with their literacy programs. For example, you can run a phonics or some other literacy program, and make a judgement about this on a range indicators such as attendance and behaviour. However, if the kids are not really getting any closer to obtaining the learning outcomes that they really need, then it is not really all that effective.*

*Our previous lack of success in literacy almost made us want to focus on other aspects with a view to generating student success. For example, to work on technology or practical activities offered greater potential for demonstrating higher levels of student engagement. However, while students might be more engaged, they might not be any closer to gaining the kinds of skills that they really need.* (T4)

Third, is the need to maintain a determination and commitment to improve learning outcomes for all Indigenous students. It means developing a consistent approach to the development of literacy skills that are internalised by students as well as staff. The following comment by the school principal summarises this well.

*We are maintaining literacy as a core focus, rather than taking on a range of issues. In other words, we are trying to do as well as we can in literacy, and not be distracted by other things. There is a real sense of determination here, with a view to making this approach work. It is certainly not a half-hearted attempt that might be thrown out if it isn’t seen to be working. That means persistence, and hanging-in there when there are frustrations and difficulties.*

**Acknowledgments**

Data for this case study was obtained through focus group interviews with the researchers at the University of Canberra and program staff at the Wiltja Annexe.
**Harry, Daniel, Tina and Joanna: Four case studies**
(extracted from the report of Project L8)

As part of the research design, we decided to identify four students, one in each class, for closer observation. We were determined to improve the skills of children at risk, and these case studies would give us more detail about how we were going.

**Harry**

Harry is in Year 1, aged six. He had trouble in his previous class with behaviour, had speech problems, and was generally not happy with school. His attendance record was:

<table>
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<th>Absent</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We were very concerned about Harry’s literacy development; his 1998 results clearly marked him as at risk. He has had a great deal of help in small groups or one-to-one this year.

The results from the Marie Clay Observation Survey show the dramatic leap in some of Harry’s achievements over the past six months. His concepts of print show a growing understanding, and he is reading independently at Profile Level 1.3. Harry is able to read a scaffolded text of Level 1.7.

Another indication of his development is his writing vocabulary. Here is a comparison of his December and August words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Vocabulary, December, 1998</th>
<th>Writing Vocabulary, August, 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Harry up mum dad look fat pond Rosie he sat the and hat hen went foot for cat rat Matt she</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There has been other evidence to suggest a change in Harry’s participation in school. Although lateness is still a problem, his attendance has improved, and he has stopped giving his mother such a hard time about coming to school.

Harry’s behaviour and confidence in the small group have changed remarkably. At the beginning of the year he spent a lot of time fighting and bickering with his cousins, or removing himself from the group to lie in a corner. Now the video footage shows him in the front row and demonstrating close attention to the text we are studying. The challenge now is to get him to let other children have a turn!
Harry has a very good visual memory, and is able to learn how to read and write the words we are studying from the text quickly. The Scaffolded Literacy has enabled him to use that skill while his aural skills, hampered by his speech, catch up.

Daniel

Daniel is in Year 2, aged 7. He is a cheery, charming child who wins the hearts of everyone he meets. He travels with his brothers each day from their home in the country because their parents like our school so much. Consequently, this means some lateness, but his mother always gets them to school eventually.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 4, 1998</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We were concerned about Daniel’s literacy development. His 1998 results were a worry. The assistance he has received has been mostly in the form of small group work with me, in a class which participates in Scaffolded Literacy.

The results from the Marie Clay Observation Survey show that Daniel has improved strongly in some aspects of the test, while others are still lagging behind. His letter identification is now fine and his concepts of print are average for his age. He was obviously not familiar with the sight words in the test, although that has improved significantly when tested with the words we have been working on.

Daniel’s independent reading Profile Level has moved 0.6. At this level he is able to read from several sentences to a page of repetitive text. This level is still of concern at Year 2. Nevertheless, the fact that he is able to read a scaffolded text at reading Profile Level 3.0 with confidence is an encouraging sign.

Daniel’s ability to hear the sounds in a word in a dictation test is now well above average for his age. Although not as marked as some of the other Year 2 students, Daniel’s writing vocabulary has improved. Here is a comparison of his December and February words.
Apart from test results, it is Daniel’s attention to text and to the challenge of learning about literacy that has shown the most change. Video footage at the beginning of the year shows his body turned away from the overhead projector, looking at something else around the classroom. When reading ‘The Sunflower that went Flop’, Daniel was asked to find the words that tell us where the sunflower was growing. On the two occasions when I was observing, he pointed to the illustrations rather than the text. In contrast, Daniel recently walked in late to our small group session while I was holding up sight words from the text we were studying. Daniel accurately called out ‘ruins’, with a big smile on his face. He has driven us all mad with his enthusiasm for reading the ‘Lion and the Mouse’ to anyone who will listen, and has been able to reproduce a significant proportion of the text independently.

Tina

Tina is in Year 5, aged 11. Of all the students at risk, Tina was and still is one of our greatest concerns. She was new to the school in Term 3, 1998, and was noticeable mostly by her absence, and the fact that it seemed she did not know all the letters in the alphabet. Tina’s relationship with school was demonstrated very clearly by the fact that she just stayed away.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 4, 1998</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tina’s pre-project test results, as a Year 4, confirmed our concerns: her viewing and writing scored at beginning Profile Level 2, while her reading score was at Level 1. Tina recently qualified for a Negotiated Curriculum Plan, meaning that, according to the Special Education Branch, she is in the lowest 7% of the population for intelligence and eligible for extra assistance. I don’t believe that she is unintelligent, rather that she has missed out on important bits of schooling.
The results from the DART tests show just how much Tina has improved in the past six months. Her viewing skills, according to the test, have moved one whole Profile level. Her reading scores have moved from Profile Level 1 to beginning Level 3. Her writing has not yet caught up. At the beginning of the year, Tina’s independent reading Profile level was 1.6. We have not yet gauged her current independent reading level, but she is reading scaffolded text at Profile Level 4.

These improvements have coincided with a dramatic improvement in attendance. We wonder whether the success is due to the more regular attendance, or attendance due to success. Most rewarding about Tina’s success is the change in her confidence level. She walks with her head up, will put her hand up in whole class settings, and is willing to take the risk of talking in front of her peers. In the small group setting, Tina is absolutely focused on the literacy task, and admonishes students who distract her.

Two anecdotes tell part of Tina’s story. During the study of our first text this year, Tina’s attention was drawn to the fact that ‘elephant’ and ‘restaurant’ both end in ‘ant’. Her comment? ‘I think we’re on to something here.’

Later, in Term 2, Tina approached me while I was on yard duty. In her hands was a thick reference book on astronomy. She interpreted for me the photographs of Mars, and told me she was going to be an astronaut. Her confidence has grown enormously. I only hope we can assist with literacy skills to match.

Tina’s spelling has improved with Scaffolded Literacy, but my observations support the test results, that her fragile skills tend to fade when called upon for any extended text. We are working on it.

Tina’s classroom teacher has been overwhelmed with the change. She identified as a positive in her evaluation of the project: *being able to be there when students like Tina ‘get it’— the pride and sense of accomplishment she has is what makes this teaching game all worth it.*

Tina’s mother has noticed the difference in her daughter’s behaviour: *Tina is reading much better. She still asks for help with hard words. She reads a book confidently and is able to finish a book on her own. Keep it going. It is helping Tina and her brother a lot.*
2: The Projects and Their Results

Harry, Daniel, Tina and Joanna: Four case studies
continued

Joanna

Joanna is in Year 6, aged 11, and has attended the school for 6 terms. She has a specific learning difficulty and has been on a Negotiated Curriculum Plan for most of her school life. Joanna, for various reasons, travels from a distant suburb each day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 4, 1998</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Joanna was a quiet student in class. She sat at the edge where possible, head down so as not to attract attention. She did not put her hand up in whole class lessons. In small group work, Joanna often lay stomach down on the floor, with her hair covering her face. She did not volunteer information unless asked. Joanna also spent a lot of time going to and coming back from the toilet in lesson time. She walked slowly. In fact, Joanna seemed to lack energy to such an extent that it was suggested that she be tested for an iron deficiency. She does not have one.

Joanna’s pre-project test results, as a Year 5, confirmed our concerns: her viewing and reading scored at beginning Profile Level 3, while her reading score was a solid Level 2.

The results from the DART tests show that Joanna’s viewing and reading skills have improved by about half a Profile level. Her writing skills have not improved under test conditions, but when scaffolded in class, there has been a remarkable improvement. Here are samples of her writing under test conditions, compared with her ‘Spooky story’.

Text from DART assessment

*This map is in Adelaide. One day I was walking in the city I did not know where the place were and then I saw a map the map took me were I have to go the lady have me the map. To do shopping in the city. And then I saw a crash in the city as I was crossing the road it was a red car and a white car that had a crash. And than I went to the pool. And then I went back to the lady at the shop and then I saw a one mory crash when and I saw my mum.*
What works?

Harry, Daniel, Tina and Joanna: Four case studies
continued

Scaffolded text
‘Spooky Story’

A little way off behind some trees I heard a tapping noise. I felt goose bumps run up my body. I shivered with fear. I tried to scream but nothing came out. It was a crunching noise. It sounded like somebody walking in the leaves. But I knew nobody was home in my family. The noise grew louder.

And then I saw it. Or whatever it was. It was tall and white, glowing like a bright light. One bone fell down off his body. I wished I was at home with my mum in a nice warm bed. I ran through the tall dark trees. The leaves were on the ground.

It was a white skeleton. It was just staring at me. He was holding an old dirty hat. He was walking towards me. With a terrible shuffle, its bones were shining bright white in the moonlight. He was limping. His back was bent. He had one hand on his back. His other hand was out to get me. He was saying ‘I’m going to get you!’

And then I noticed it. The skeleton — it had no insides. You could see right through it. It was the skeleton from the death.

Joanna’s skills have grown slowly and we are beginning to see signs of a growth in confidence. One sign is the fact that she will put her hand up in class now from time to time. Another intervention that assisted her was showing her DART results so that she could see that she was learning.

Joanna was very proud of her ‘Spooky Story’, written after studying a Paul Jennings text. She not only took control of the writing process, but she typed out her story with some assistance. When she took her story to school camp and voluntarily read it out in front of an audience of 60 children and adults, I cried.
Yangkana’s Message

Jarla lamparn marna ngujjangkagunajakurangun jaa ngarpungu paji pila wangkiyunganjiny Walmatjarrigurnu.


Jiljigurnu palu pirriyaniny Walmajarri jartini wangki.

Wali.

When I was a child living with my mother and father, they taught me to talk my language and to understand every word they told me.

When I went away to school I still remembered my language. I was away for a long time at a mission in Fitzroy Crossing. They never let us talk our language there, but we used to sneak away and talk where we couldn’t be heard.

I taught myself to write Walmajarri. I studied the Christian songs that were written in Walmajarri. Now when the old people tell me stories, I can write them down.

There are a lot of people talking Walmajarri along the Fitzroy River and in the Great Sandy Desert.

I am happy that I can speak, write and teach kids Walmajarri, so I teach our kids our language.

— Yangkana (Madeline) Laurel (1997) Preface to Wulungarra Stories Kadjina Community School
In 1788 there were probably about 250 Indigenous language families in Australia with more than 600 discrete languages. Today it is estimated that there are 25 languages with more than 1000 speakers, 11 with between 500 and 100 speakers and 43 with between 100 and 500 speakers (SSABSA, 1996: 51). An unknown number still exist with a handful of speakers, but more than half of those existing two hundred years ago have disappeared forever.

One of the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy is to ‘develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use

My Own Schooling


When I was going to Yuendumu School, I can remember that they hardly taught us Warlpiri. Just a little bit of reading, writing and singing. They didn’t have any Warlpiri teachers teaching in the classrooms. Nowadays they have Warlpiri teachers teaching Warlpiri in the classrooms. The kids are now learning to read and write in their first language. The teachers are doing a great job teaching Warlpiri. Let’s keep the Warlpiri language strong and in the future you could teach your children Warlpiri too.

— Christine Nungarrayi Spencer (1998) Introduction to Junga Yimi Magazine: Warlpiri and English literacy edition No. 3 Bilingual Resources Development Unit, Yuendumu Community Education Centre

Aboriginal English is a highly valued cultural identifier among Aboriginal people. It is an expression of Aboriginality and it carries subtle yet profound cultural meanings. It is ‘home talk’, the kind of talk with which Aboriginal people feel comfortable, and is very effective at carrying Aboriginal meanings (Cahill, 1999: 11).

Students who have a contemporary and/or traditional Indigenous language as their first language have a right to access formal school programs in those languages for the same reasons English Language Programs are developed for students whose first language is English. — Project Report, LA4

In 1788 there were probably about 250 Indigenous language families in Australia with more than 600 discrete languages. Today it is estimated that there are 25 languages with more than 1000 speakers, 11 with between 500 and 100 speakers and 43 with between 100 and 500 speakers (SSABSA, 1996: 51). An unknown number still exist with a handful of speakers, but more than half of those existing two hundred years ago have disappeared forever.
of Aboriginal languages’ (goal 17). When a workshop group at the second SRP conference was asked to explain why this should be the case, the answers were strong and immediate: cultural identification, ownership of cultural knowledge, cultural pride, no shame, connection with our land, a sense of personal empowerment and cultural connectedness, they are part of a ‘national treasure chest’. Language is fundamental to what you are, what you do, and what is important. It’s one area where Indigenous kids have an advantage.

About 50,000 Australians speak an Indigenous language as their first language. For many of these people, English is at best a second or third language and, in the way these matters are categorised, often a foreign language. Many thousand ‘top-enders’ speak Kriol or Torres Strait Creole, creoles or languages which have developed from interaction between groups who speak differing languages. Beyond that, many Aboriginal people speak a dialect of English known as Aboriginal (or Koorie or Nunga, etc.) English which has its own rules and referents. As Ian Malcolm writes: ‘Aboriginal English phrases sometimes include Indigenous words, but this is not a defining feature. Rather it is the consistent patterns of sounds, grammar, usage and meanings that set it apart from Standard Australian English dialect’ (1995: 22).

In any of these cases the language spoken is generally not the language of school. There are two issues for educators here: how to maintain and support the existence and use of Indigenous languages and to recognise their inherent value and their importance to their users; and the challenge of developing strategies to enable users of Standard Australian English as a foreign language, as a second language or as a second dialect to develop skills in the language of mainstream power in this society.

The projects

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 282–295.)

Seven projects could be said to have had these issues as their main focus. One (Project SS5, pp. 207–210) which provided courses in Aboriginal languages for the first time in a school setting is dealt with in the section on supporting students, a reminder of one of the characteristics of this process. Another project took place in a remote community school. Its purpose was to produce a set of ten illustrated story books in Walmajarri for student use, combining literacy acquisition, language maintenance and the development of high level skills in the use of information technology.

The same combination exists in two other projects which are still at work. In both cases development work is proceeding on multimedia resources to record, teach and promote the use of two local languages — Ganai and Ngarrindjeri. Oral histories, songs and stories provided by Elders and other language custodians are among the material included, but so are lexicons and
language exercises, with the capacity of information technology to match visual image, word and sound usefully exploited. Both projects, based on clusters of schools, report good progress on major undertakings. Both also note the impact on students in terms of motivation and cultural pride.

The four projects that are dealt with in more detail here differ considerably, but are complementary in terms of dealing with the issues of Indigenous language maintenance, acquisition and development.

Project LA1, conducted by personnel from an Education Department and a university, had two purposes: to develop syllabus frameworks for two Indigenous languages, Arabana and Adnyamathanha, building on similar successful work which had been done previously for Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara; and to investigate and document motivational issues associated with the delivery of Indigenous languages.

**Literacy in English and language survival**
(extracted from the final report from Project LA1)

Concerns have been expressed that the predominantly English focus of the literacy drive runs the risk of further pressuring speakers of Indigenous languages and non-standard Englishes to linguistically assimilate with the dominant national standard. Lo Bianco’s comment, that literacy education for Aboriginal peoples ‘has a regrettable history of cultural bias and deficit images, of remedial and inappropriate developmental approaches and assessment models in education, resulting in damaging educational and social outcomes from schooling for Indigenous people’ (1997: 62), signalled the need for a break from past literacy approaches.

The Strategic Results Projects, in seeking to identify key success factors in Indigenous education and to institutionalise best and most appropriate practices, are seeking to do just that—to break from past practices.

Additionally, it is appreciated that SRP and the literacy agenda are seeking to seriously and meaningfully respond to the demands from Indigenous parents for successful engagement of Indigenous students with the education and training sectors, and for successful outcomes from them. At the same time, as Lo Bianco again has written, ‘It is important to guard against the potential intrusion of schooling into Indigenous forms of education and socialisation, including through English literacy, as a “normalising” force which may be incompatible with family and community values’ (ibid.).

From one perspective, taking into account the diversity of personal, social, cultural and linguistic realities and needs that are woven into the fabric of
Project LA2 developed and ran a course to provide adult Aboriginal language speakers with the opportunity to improve their literacy skills in their own vernacular (Arandic, Western Desert or Warlpiri languages) and English, because of a recognised need in central Australia for a higher standard of literacy in both Aboriginal languages and English for professional Aboriginal language workers. There are known to be vocational opportunities for Aboriginal language speakers with sufficient literacy proficiency. A shortage of workers exists because of limited training possibilities.

Project LA3 concentrated on issues related to teaching practice in classrooms where bi-dialectal issues (Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English) are apparent. It focused on the professional development of teachers and Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) in understanding the features of the two dialects, promoting parity of esteem between them and

**Literacy in English and language survival continued**

Indigenous Australia, the drive for literacy in English may well be the final straw for numbers of remaining Indigenous languages. Within minority groups, under pressure from the dominant culture, intergenerational transmission links are fragile lines of communication. Were Indigenous languages and literacies to be excluded from the national literacy agenda, or indeed only marginally included within it, the literacy model(s) promoted would be quite probably ‘out of tune with crucial aspects of Aboriginal cultures, beliefs and values’.

The challenge is to get things right nationally, in terms of the literacy focus, vis-a-vis the balance between economic outcomes and community needs and outcomes. These two agendas aren’t necessarily incompatible.

The English literacy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students does need to be addressed, and Indigenous parents and children should not have to wait another thirty years for slow improvements to take place. However, it should not be at the possible expense of the very languages that are ‘gems in the nation’s heritage treasure chest’. Languages which, once no longer used by communities of speakers, cannot, unlike French in Australia for example, be ‘booted up’ by recourse to overseas communities of speakers.

Just as we now view and judge our own history of neglect of, and genocidal practices towards Australia’s Indigenous languages, so, at this very moment, we need to be aware that we are creating the futures from which others will judge our actions.
developing code-switching practices which would improve literacy levels. This project operated initially at 14 widely-dispersed sites and later at nine.

Finally, the purpose of Project LA4, set in a remote community school, was to develop teaching and curriculum materials based on a recently published book which contains a number of stories about the local area and life experiences written in Kriol, the first language of the students. The students had found these stories deeply engaging. Their content provided strong links between home life and school.

**Action and results**

Both strands of Project LA1 began with consultation/negotiation phases with Indigenous and education stakeholders, and through these established jointly-developed and jointly-owned operational frameworks. The products of the first strand — content and teaching outlines and advice on programming and assessment for teaching the two languages in Years R–7— were generated from a series of nine writing workshops attended by the writing team, relevant community members and linguists.

Strand Two work was developed concurrently by a university research team which developed survey questionnaires, and interviewed groups of stakeholders connected with Aboriginal languages programs (students, parents, teaching teams, principals, etc). The product has sections on ecological approaches to Indigenous languages revival, motivation/demotivation in Aboriginal language programs, an annotated bibliography of texts addressing motivation in languages learning, and a short account and evaluation of the conduct of the research project.

The performance indicators (student progress according to the national Languages other than English Profile) established for this project proved unsuitable, given the timeframe of its work. However as the final report notes: “This is not to say that the project has not been a success to this point. Quite the reverse is true. … New ground will be broken in the LOTE field with the publication of the Strand 2 text, and to our knowledge, no studies have been undertaken either within Australia or beyond that investigate motivational aspects of school-based Indigenous languages programs.” In addition, the two syllabus frameworks now exist and are available for use by schools.

In Project LA2 the course was developed and delivered to an initial enrolment of 15 students. It consisted of developing higher levels of literacy in both English and the students’ vernacular; comparative linguistic analysis; recording, transcribing, translating and editing skills; a survey of employment options; and a four week work placement. This course has subsequently been accredited by the relevant agency and is running again this (the following) year. Nine students completed the initial course. Of the nine, four are now working as teachers, three have other full-time jobs and one is working part-time.
Project LA3 started with a professional development forum which all fourteen participating teachers attended. An opportunity was provided for the teachers to learn about Aboriginal English and two-way bidialectal education, and to reflect upon issues that emerge from such an approach. Each teacher used the ESL Bandscales to collect baseline data about the Standard Australian English development of target students with respect to reading, writing, speaking and listening. Qualitative data was collected about inclusivity practices, use of AIEWs, community participation, and general school-community contexts.

In each school, teachers and AIEWs engaged in action-research: reflecting on issues discussed during the forums and looking for ways to incorporate ideas in their schools and classrooms. A second round of school visits was conducted — observing, discussing and documenting strategies seen, ideas to try and any issues of concern. These visits also enabled a follow-up audit of inclusivity practices, the work of the AIEW and community participation, and the collection of qualitative data about code-switching and the extent to which Aboriginal English is valued and accepted in day-to-day classroom activities.

The performance indicator chosen for the project proved unsuitable, but classroom observations indicated a marked increase in students’ willingness to attempt code-switching in speech, good progress in reading and writing acquisition and a new awareness of the roles that AIEWs could play. Most of the teachers have also given consideration to the purposes and uses for literacy in the lives of their students outside school and have made the literacy tasks at school more congruent with out-of-school contexts.

Project LA4 was incomplete at the time of writing. A team consisting of a school-based ESL classroom teacher, an English language consultant and a linguist have been engaged in developing a literature-based literacy program designed to develop students’ (in Years 7–9) skills in reading, writing, talking and listening, and will provide: a guide for sequential skill development; outcome indicators for programming and assessment; reproducible student worksheets/workbook; and a framework to guide teachers in development of curriculum materials from other relevant/appropriate publications. The trialling suggests these materials produce a high level of student engagement, and that they should be seen as a step in the continuing process of treating languages in use at the site on an equal basis.

**Observations**

- Only one of these projects achieved its specified targets during their 12-month span, but all achieved a great deal. This suggests two things: the challenge of working in this area, an area with limited resources and a fragile base; and the considerable impact of these efforts on the use and recovery of language skills as a fundamental cultural resource producing a very fertile student response.
What works?

- These projects are among those which indicate the productivity of effective partnerships. Progress was achieved in each case by linguists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and the deep involvement of community members.

- Information technology and specifically multimedia programs and desktop publishing provide a very useful resource for recording and teaching Indigenous languages.

- Much work remains to be done on code-switching and awareness of the nature and impact of Aboriginal English on ‘school language’, at school and in other aspects of mainstream Australian life.
Screening Processes: Using information and communication technologies

I wish the computers had been more reliable, especially at the start of the project. We had many problems at the beginning with the batteries and this greatly hindered their use. I had problems with power in the portable because of the new air conditioners — they kept blowing the fuses. Once most of the problems were fixed the children flew ahead.

The confidence of the children improved enormously over the time that they used the computers. They loved using them and were very excited as each new use was either taught or discovered.

The kids love e-mailing. They get so excited when they get mail from other students. It also helps with their literacy.

It was difficult to monitor the students on the computer as well as teaching my classroom program and developing my other students. For the students to make significant gains they really needed to have an adult sitting with them, guiding them through and giving assistance when needed.

The students who were stronger in literacy seem to benefit more from using the computers than the students weaker in literacy. Those weaker in literacy tended to muck around and waste time on the computers.

Students enjoyed use; confidence increased, enthusiasm increased; given more time could get better results.

— Comments from teachers involved in Project IT2

School education must make effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In contemporary life the use of ICTs is becoming both normal and expected. Most employment which students will enter relies increasingly on a range of skills in its use.

Emerging research evidence suggests that, in the right circumstances, the use of ICTs can enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The benefits for distance learning are obvious. There is evidence too, that when used in conjunction with good, ‘live’ teaching practice, it can provide more highly focused individual support and effective intervention for some students with learning problems.
The Projects
(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 296–306.)

A considerable proportion of the projects have used information technology to support their work (for other examples see especially the sections on literacy, Indigenous languages and VET in schools), but four which had it as their major focus are described in this section.

Two of these were multi-site projects exploring the value of using ICTs to support literacy development, in one case (Project IT1) for primary students and in the other (Project IT2) for both primary and secondary students. The other two (multi-site, and at a single location) worked on providing access to the development of familiarity with and skills in the use of ICTs.

Supporting literacy development

The tactics adopted by these two projects differed. Students in Project IT1 spent regular periods of time withdrawn from their conventional classes to computer rooms where they worked with the software programs ‘WiggleWorks’ and ‘LiteracyPlace’, both designed to develop literacy skills. They progressed at their own pace through these programs while receiving support from Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs). (See following case study.)

At two sites in this project the ambitious target of making 1.5 years’ literacy progress in one year was achieved by 50% of the students involved. At the third, students had had more limited contact with ‘school literacy’ and took time (over six months in some cases) to develop the knowledge and skills to be able to use the software. More elementary software was purchased to help with this situation. Unsurprisingly, the results were not as good: 20% reached the target, and a third improved so that their reading age was in line with their chronological age.

The project report suggests that the use of information technology may not have been the defining factor in achieving these results. Small class sizes, the value of the work of the AEWs, and both the ‘specialness’ of the circumstances and the whole school nature of the effort all contributed. But the use of information technology provided an excellent stimulus and allowed students to work at their own pace. Project officers also note the direct relationship between consistent attendance and the level of progress students made. The attraction of the use of ICTs may have helped in this regard.

Project IT2 provided portable computers for use by students in their conventional class work. The ways in which the computers were employed varied much more widely than in the previous project. The many project sites were widely dispersed, there was a relatively high level of technical trouble, and the structural arrangements (class mobility, multiple teachers) in secondary
serving up a select group of students was obviously more difficult to embed in conventional programs.

In terms of literacy development, the target group of primary students generally showed a level of improvement in tested areas. The targeted secondary students did not. Both groups improved their ICT skills and enjoyed using the computers. More than half the teachers involved indicated that they felt the experiment had been a success.

Both projects reported students’ enjoyment of using e-mail to communicate with students from other schools and the value of the literacy practice this entailed.

Developing ICT familiarity and skills

Project IT3 was designed to develop computer skills for upper primary students in a series of remote locations in the context of the Key Competency ‘Collecting, analysing and organising information’. A very high level of success was reported.

Project IT4 in a secondary school used five laptops across a range of subject areas. Some of the same problems occurring in the secondary component of Project IT2 were reported, but the project was critically hampered by the limited amount of hardware available. However, it had enough success to see the potential of more widespread ICT use.

Observations

- The use of ICTs has a useful motivational impact for Indigenous students (as is likely for all students).
- Skills in its use are relatively easy to acquire, although general literacy development is significant for access. In educational terms, it is clearly a tool rather than an end in itself.
- As a tool for developing literacy, these projects suggest that it is more effective for use with primary students rather than with secondary students, although a large number of other factors could come into play: students’ school histories and the differing structural organisations of the sectors among them.
- Its effectiveness is contingent on a number of factors. There must be adequate hardware for ease of access; it must work; and its use must be effectively embedded in school programs as a whole, rather than as an ‘add-on’.
Computers Assisting Literacy, at St Joseph’s, Eden (Project IT1)

I am 7 and I like to go shopping.
My birthday is July and I’m in Year 1.
My favourite food is tomato soup and I like skipping.
Please could someone write back to me?

This is the text of an e-mail message sent by Jo, a Koori student in Year 1 at St Joseph’s Primary School in Eden, to a group of Koori students at a primary school in Lakes Entrance. The author is one of 13 students in Years K–6 at St Joseph’s who participated in a computer-assisted literacy project.

The students’ involvement in e-mailing was a spin-off from the program, the main focus of which was to have them work with software programs designed to support their literacy development.

Two other primary schools participated in this program. Each school purchased hardware (computers, networking facilities and a laser printer), and two software packages. ‘WiggleWorks’ is a program designed for students either in the early years of schooling or for those experiencing initial difficulty with literacy development, while ‘LiteracyPlace’ is a core language program for students in middle-upper primary school. The full versions of the packages include an extensive range of student and teacher material that is available in a variety of complementary formats (eg, CD-ROMs, books, audio tapes, manuals, etc).

The project came about because Kerrie Dean, the Resource Teacher at St Joseph’s, followed up a suggestion from a Koori parent interested in making greater use of technology in children’s learning. Kerrie explored the idea with her principal and the Catholic Education Office. Once the proposal was approved, a significant amount of time was devoted to ordering, establishing and operating the computer hardware and software; exploring and coming to grips with unfamiliar programs; and pre-testing the students.

The equipment was set up in the school’s Resource Centre where the target group of students would attend a session for at least half an hour each day. Students were trained to log on and to work with the program using an extensive electronic toolbox. For example, they selected their own story, explored the text (via sound, animation and print) and constructed their own stories (typeset with illustrations and graphics).

A corner in the Centre was dedicated to photos of the students, stories they had produced and a selection of Indigenous cultural resources. In Kerrie’s words, There was a great sense of ownership. The kids felt that this was their program and that they were special.
At the same time, considerable effort was made to ensure that the program was implemented as a whole-school initiative, as distinct from an exclusive activity for a minority of students. Several strategies were significant in this regard. First, when the Indigenous students came to the Centre each day, they were part of a larger group. A typical situation would involve a maximum of eight students of a similar ability range, drawn from different classes. In other words, any group might contain one or two of the school’s thirteen Indigenous students.

Second, there was extensive consultation between the coordinator and other members of staff, so that the activities conducted in the Resource Centre were part of a coordinated approach to literacy. Every effort was made to establish links between the work of classroom and specialist teachers, and to avoid creating a discrete program that was isolated from mainstream curriculum activity.

Third, every student in the school had opportunities to access the new hardware and software at some stage during the year. This generated another spin-off from the program. Because of their greater experience, Indigenous students were able to tutor students who were unfamiliar with the program.

Various assessment instruments were used to assess student achievement in literacy during the program, across the areas of reading, writing and spelling, as well as talking and listening. Sources included the NSW English K–6 Syllabus, the First Steps Program, elements of the ‘WiggleWorks’ Program and the Waddington Diagnostic Reading Test. Students were assessed periodically to monitor their performance over time.

The evidence shows that as well as having fun, Jo and her colleagues each increased his or her level of competence in a range of areas during the course of the program. Some degree of improvement was noted in each of the thirteen students who participated in the program. For instance, Jo who was 6.6 years of age in February 1998, had a reading age of 6.2 prior to entering the program. This increased to 6.7 in May and to 7.4 in August, at which time Jo left the school. Jo was also assessed as progressing from Phase 1 to Phase 3 in reading and writing and from Phase 2 to Phase 3 in spelling, within the context of First Steps Developmental Continua; and from Early Stage 1 to Middle Stage 1 within the NSW English Syllabus.
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Computers Assisting Literacy, at St Joseph’s continued

Outcomes from the program were not limited to improvements in the students’ standard of literacy. Additional benefits that were recorded included increases in students’ motivation, self esteem, independence, confidence and computing skills.

The students became highly independent learners. They would log on and go to where they up to previously on the program. They worked at their own pace and experimented all the time with different ideas. Some of the more advanced students became tutors for their peers. For example, when they had finished their work they might assist other students with the next step in their work, or support students in their writing or spelling. Once they mastered the program, they became very confident in themselves and their capacity to help others. (KD)

Issues of transience and absenteeism were factors in the project. Eight of the 13 students (61%) who entered the program left Eden over the project period. Six (46%) were absent for more than 13 days, while four of these were absent for periods of 28–47 days.

What has been learned as a result of this project?

Consistency and continuity — the importance of the following ‘essentials’ to success in education was emphatic in this project: regular attendance; participation in structured and sequential learning experiences; and guidance, support and monitoring for students at work.

There is no doubt that those students who attended regularly and participated for at least half an hour each day achieved the most. They were the ones who were not only enjoying the program, but also getting the most out of it. (KD)

Whole-school approach — a computer-based literacy program designed to improve outcomes for Indigenous students is more effective when it is implemented as part of a broad, comprehensive literacy strategy for the whole school. In this case, teachers felt that the project was supporting them in their work, and was not an additional activity conducted in isolation.

The students were able to take writing samples that they had produced back to their own class. These were then put either in their portfolios that went home to parents, or in their writing folder that remained in the room. In other words, this project was part of their regular classroom activity. Given that I worked closely with each student’s main teacher, I had a good idea of what they were doing in class. … Teachers were happy for their students to be using the computers and the software, because they could see how enthusiastic the children were, along with the progress that they were making. (KD)
Computers Assisting Literacy, at St Joseph’s

Parental Involvement: While it was hoped that parents might become involved in the use of information technology, they showed little personal enthusiasm to engage directly with the computers ... The kids loved showing their parents what they could do on the computer and what they had produced. (KD)

Integration of Technology: The focus on ‘literacy-based’ technology, as distinct from the development of computer skills in general, together with the advantages of up-to-date hardware and software, were significant in terms of enabling students to work at their own pace and to become independent learners.

The technology was highly motivating for the students. They could see the books on the screen, hear the stories through the speakers as well as record and play back their own words. Students went over and over the material until they got it right... No matter how good a teacher you might be, this technology is really something special for children ... For example, the nature and extent of the animation, the full colour and sound, together with the capacity for students to create, illustrate and print out their own stories is definitely empowering. (KD)

In reflecting on the project, the principal, Kris Ayres, had this to say:

Educationally, this program has really made a difference, not only to the literacy levels of children, but also their attitude towards learning. From the outset, the program has been a collaborative exercise which was initiated (and subsequently owned) by the local Indigenous community. This ownership I believe has been critical to its success.

Our Indigenous community was delighted that an integrated approach to groupings was adopted so that all students in the school could be involved in the program.

Without doubt, this initiative has had a significant impact on our school’s achievements in literacy. Its success can be measured in the children’s eagerness to attend classes, their joy in the accomplishments, their spontaneity to communicate, their willingness to share knowledge with friends, and their increased performance levels.

Acknowledgments

Data for this case study were obtained through interviews with the site coordinator with and other stakeholders in the project, February 1999.
Some commentators suggest that mathematics is an area where the differences between Indigenous and European culture and world view are most pronounced. Space, number and measurement are construed differently, while chance and data and algebra draw on concepts and their linguistic expressions which are alien. Harris, for example, in her compelling study of mathematical understandings of Aboriginal peoples in remote communities suggests that while mainstream primary maths will give highest priority to number (the ‘arithmetical of the ‘three Rs’), Aboriginal people may give highest priority to kinship relations, for example, ‘a topic which does not appear on the standard syllabus’ (1991: 19).

This is not to suggest that Indigenous students cannot succeed in developing understandings of Western mathematical thinking and manipulation; but it does suggest that it may be more difficult than for students where those concepts and practices are more culturally embedded. The data available suggest that this is the case. The fact that well-developed numeracy skills are one of the cornerstones of school success makes this a telling issue.

**The projects**

(The project summary related to this topic can be found on pp. 307–310.)

While 13 projects had numeracy development as a minor goal, two had it as their primary focus. One of these is described in the section on mobility (Project M3, p. 46 and pp. 236–238). The other was conducted by a national professional association at five widely-dispersed sites in rural and remote areas. The task was to explore varying teaching practices to improve levels of numeracy acquisition among Indigenous students.

**Action and results**

At site 1 two primary classes (approx. 50% of whom were Indigenous students) were taught using the theory and practice of Mathematics in Context. The medium for the work was a trip to the Adelaide Show. The subsets of the ‘topic’ were People, Accommodation, Transport, Money, Time, Preparation of Camp Booklets and a reconstruction of camp experiences. This
experience produced work on, among other things: collecting, recording, organising and calculating data; developing appropriate terminology; mapping, graphing and use of co-ordinates; place value; calculator use, units of distance and manipulation of these; and timetabling. The target was to achieve 80% of students moving one or more levels on the national Mathematics Profile. Eight of 11 students (72%) did so.

At site 2 the project teacher worked with small groups of (mostly) Year 7 and 8 students in a withdrawal program of two or three regular sessions per week. The focus was for students to develop underpinning numerical skills by encountering fundamental concepts in a range of contexts (‘multiple representations’). The target was to get 90% of students working at Level 3 of the National Mathematics Profile (number, measurement, working mathematically). Seven of the eight students (88%) involved achieved this.

At site 3 the project teacher had daily intensive numeracy sessions (15–30 minutes) with small groups of primary-aged students and released another teacher to work in a similar way with the secondary-aged students. There was an emphasis on underpinning place value knowledge through games, physical activity, repetition and computer use. A locally-designed counting machine consisting of sticks and stones was used in this process. The target was for 90% of the students to progress 1 or more levels in terms of the national Mathematics Profile. Twelve of the 22 students (55%) did so. It is interesting to note that only one student over 10 years of age failed to advance at least one level, and a number went well beyond this; little progress was evident for a number of students aged under 10. This might be attributed to their more limited command of English.

At site 4, where most students had Standard Australian English as a second language or dialect, a teacher aide worked with small groups in a withdrawal program of two or three regular sessions per week focusing on the Number Strand and ‘Time’ (from the Measurement Strand) as well. Students were drawn from K–3, middle primary and secondary aged classes, with appropriate programs of activity planned by the teacher aide in collaboration with the local project teacher. Additional language support was provided for the youngest students. Fifteen of 18 students progressed one or more Stages of the Profile, two improved half a level and one did not improve at all. Very low levels of attendance were factors in these last two cases.

At site 5 (the subject of the following case study) in-class support of the learning of some Year 3 students by the project teacher was supplemented by occasional withdrawal of individuals or pairs requiring particular attention. Initially a small group of Year 4 students was withdrawn from daily mathematics sessions for intensive work with the project teacher and AI EW with the Year 3 model being able to be successfully adopted in second semester. Teaching approaches were built from the Education Department of WA’s First
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*Steps in Mathematics* trial materials, with an emphasis on developing base ten understanding and associated number sense. The target was to have 50% Year 3 students and 80% Year 4 students achieve level 2 of the WA Student Outcome Statements in number. Seven out of 10 (70%) Year 3 students and six out of eight (75%) Year 4 students achieved this.

**Observations**

- The targets were demanding but were generally achieved, as a result of intensive and inventive teaching.
- There was general agreement on the significance of developing an understanding of place value as the key to further progress in number. (There were other key concepts which could have been usefully dealt with, but this was the area chosen.)
- The importance of attention to the development of students’ understanding and use of the language of maths in English was also crucial. (This was also a finding from the other project which had the development of proficiency in mathematics as a priority.)
Pam Sherrard, a school-based project officer at site 5, was asked to expand on her presentation to the second conference. This is an edited version of her response.

The goal of this project was to improve the numeracy levels of 18 Years 3 and 4 Aboriginal students in a large district high school in a remote location. The targeted students in the group were all speakers of English as a second language or dialect (ESL/D) and described by their classroom teachers as being at ‘educational risk’. Initial data, gathered through classroom teacher interviews, work samples and discussions with the students indicated the students’ understanding of number concepts was below that usually expected of children in their year groups. One of the Year 4 students was working in Level 1 in Number as described in the Western Australian Student Outcome Statements; all the other students were working below this level.

The records of student achievement show that by the end of the project seven of the ten Year 3 students and six of the eight Year 4 students were working in Level 2. Two students, one from each of Years 3 and 4, left the school during the year, but the progress which they had made indicated that they would have reached this level. Anecdotal data from classroom teachers suggests marked improvements in students’ self confidence, which was transferred into other areas of the curriculum.

A glance through what follows may suggest that little occurred which was very different from current practice in many schools. Good practice has long incorporated such strategies as para-professionals working in classrooms, community involvement and a move away from rote learning. However, something was different for these students.

Maximising the conditions for learning

Three significant changes were made to the learning circumstances of the target group of students.

- The project provided a mathematics teacher to work 0.4 time to facilitate the support program for the targeted students. In addition, the school reallocated existing resources to enable Colleen Morris, an Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker (AIEW) to work full-time on the project. She liaised with the community and was a mentor for the students and teacher, making use of her distinctive perspectives and knowledge.
The close working partnership between the teacher and AIEW over an extended period of time allowed the teacher to learn much about the children and their community, and helped to develop strategies which were more effective for the group and for other Aboriginal students in the school. In turn, Colleen was able to observe, practise, discuss and reflect on the strategies used in teaching the children mathematics. Her confidence and skills in assisting students’ numeracy development grew substantially and thus some of these strategies were instituted in the school’s homework program for Aboriginal students. She also instigated professional development in mathematics for the other AIEWs in the school, insisting that numeracy should be added to the current focus on literacy. This was different.

- Colleen had a liaison role in informing and reporting student progress to parents, as well as encouraging parent participation in the program. She organised parent visits to the school to allow them to watch their children’s work on maths, and coordinated a workshop for parents followed by a celebratory lunch for all concerned. Students had the opportunity to share what they had learnt with their parents, and the parents were shown how to use a set of cards, developed specially for these students — the basis of practice at home. As a result, parents clearly felt more able to participate in their children’s learning. They requested the continuation of the program the following year and its extension to more students. This was different too.

- The program was designed so that the advantages which students gain from peer modelling in a mainstream classroom were balanced with the value of learning through one-to-one or small group discussions with a skilled adult. The model included features to counter problems sometimes generated by withdrawal programs. These differences became key elements which were vital to the success of the support program.

The Year 3 support program was very flexible. The students were considered as members of the mainstream class, not the withdrawal group. One, two, three or up to ten students were withdrawn during any, but not all, maths lessons. Withdrawal depended completely on students’ needs at the time. Student progress was closely, individually and constantly monitored. Strategies were developed to overcome misconceptions as they were diagnosed or to assist further development at the point of need. Sometimes the extra support was used to help students who had been absent catch up.
Some things different

Given the students’ language difficulties and the varying teaching styles of individual teachers, it could not be assumed that the students in the target group could transfer what they had learnt in their small group back into the mainstream classroom without this high level of support. Integration of the students in the program into the mainstream class was a priority.

Students who were not part of the target group were sometimes included in the withdrawal sessions. The support teacher planned and worked closely with the mainstream Year 3 teachers. Ongoing teacher collaboration ensured that strategies which were developed for the withdrawal students were used in teaching the mainstream class. The teacher of the withdrawal group and the AIEW often taught in the mainstream classroom, modelling strategies for other teachers and allowing members of the withdrawal group to see all children ‘learning what they had learnt’. On these occasions the students in the target group were often the ‘more able’.

The students in the Year 4 group were working at a level well below that hoped for from students of this age. For the first semester, they were withdrawn from all daily mathematics lessons before being integrated back into the mainstream classroom using a similar model to that described for the Year 3 program. Again, individual student progress was constantly monitored and strategies developed to deal with specific difficulties as they arose.

In the past our school has worked to provide additional in-class support for students with specific needs. At times students have received additional support in withdrawal groups. However, the level and continuity of these programs have been limited by resourcing. This project provided the opportunity for students to receive the benefits of frequent and intensive in-class support and further support in a withdrawal setting, from both a mathematics teacher and an AIEW with specific skills in mathematics, in a way that ensured the possibility of transfer between the two experiences.

The teaching and learning of the mathematics

For the students to come to view themselves as successful mathematicians they needed to feel in control and have ownership of their mathematics. At the beginning of the program the students were happy to complete many repetitive ‘sums’ rather than be challenged or think about new ideas. As long as the ‘sums’ were done, whether answers were copied or even wrong, they believed the maths was done. They became agitated if asked to solve a problem or to generalise an idea. They saw the sums as an end in themselves and viewed maths as a series of rote learnt facts.
What works?

Some things different

While rote learning may provide immediate success, that success is usually only temporary, setting students up for failure when basic conceptual understanding is required. It also encourages the behaviours of students who already have the tendency to be ritual learners. The aim of the teaching program was to show students that maths is about ideas as much as it is about ‘sums’. The mathematics was delivered in a way that allowed the students to work through understanding rather than by rote. It was important that the students were able to verbalise their thinking and to make generalisations about how the number system worked.

It was decided at the outset that an understanding of place value would allow students to access the ideas involved in calculations, operations and number patterning. Flexible use of place value and language development became the focal points of the teaching. If place value was to be the key to accessing other ideas of number then it was essential that students understood the concepts of counting, including skip counting, and partitioning numbers.

At the beginning of the program a particular student, typical of the students in the target group, could count forwards by ones to one hundred and by twos to twenty. She could not count backwards at all. This set the beginning point of the program for this student. The aim was for her to be able to generalise that ‘If I can count forwards and backwards by twos I can already add two and subtract two. I also know numbers which are two more, two greater, two less or two smaller than other numbers’.

Although the student could count by twos to twenty, she could not answer such questions as: When you are counting by twos, what number do you say before twelve? What number is two more than eight?

Over a period of two months, this student received 145 minutes of individual help, in addition to coverage of the same ideas in the classroom. The extra time was spent considering terms such as ‘before’, ‘after’, ‘more than’, ‘less than’, and their relationship to counting. For example, a calculator was used to record the counting of objects by twos, and the connection between the next number on the display and adding two more to the group of objects was made explicit. The student was asked to commentate, using the words ‘more than’ and ‘less than’, on what was happening to the size of the collection of objects as the teacher removed two or added two to the group. After counting a collection of objects the student was asked to say how many were in the group as the teacher removed two or added two to the collection.
period the student received a further 165 minutes of additional support to build her skills in and ideas about counting by fives and tens. This example illustrates the typically high level of support required to make the difference for these children.)

The students in the target group were all ESL/D speakers. Each student needed much support to develop the language necessary to be able to make these generalisations about counting. But being able to make those generalisations was most empowering for them. Rather than believing counting by two was a process distinct from adding and subtracting two, the ability to see the relationships simplified the mathematics.

Often discussions about generalisations are reserved for more able students. In this program these discussions were used as a strategy to enable the students to become more able.

Students who are ‘naturally mathematically able’ make these connections for themselves and therefore view maths as making sense. ‘Less mathematically able’ students do not see the interrelationships and view maths as a plethora of isolated number facts. ‘Less mathematically able’ students can be led to see these relationships through explicit teaching. However, if students do not have the necessary language and cannot make the generalisations for themselves, they are denied access to these ideas and maths does not make sense. They resort to rote learning, construe incorrect rules for themselves to try to make sense of the numbers, or give up trying to understand.

The language of mathematics, in particular number, is sometimes thought of as a list of synonyms for the four operations. This language is essential, confirming that literacy is necessary for numeracy, but it is not enough to compensate for lack of understanding. Literacy alone will not ensure numeracy. The word ‘subtract’, for example, can be taught to be synonymous with ‘take’, ‘less’ and ‘minus’. However, this is not very helpful when a student is asked a question such as ‘If you had $57 and your friend had $34, how much more would you have?’ Without adequate understanding of the subtraction operation the key word ‘more’ would probably trigger the student to add the two numbers.

We broadened the normal language of mathematics to include the language needed to discuss ideas. Conversations about how a student arrived at an answer, alternate methods of calculating an answer and their efficiency, and whether an answer was possible or made sense were used to help students to understand that maths is about ideas and not just about
What works?

Some things different

continued

‘getting answers to sums’. The program incorporated opportunities for students to work individually or in small groups with the teacher or AIEW so that the students could be actively involved in these conversations.

The decision to help students progress in their understanding through conversation was confirmed during a lesson with the Year 4 group early in the program. The students were very angry when they came to their session. It became apparent that they had been teased. They believed that they were blessed with different, even inferior, brains to their non-Aboriginal peers. It seemed to them that non-Aboriginal children were born with answers to all questions already present in their minds, waiting to be called upon when the right question was asked. This fitted well with their disposition to be ritual learners.

To challenge the students to see themselves differently a ‘brain check’ was carried out on each child. Each child was asked a place value question, for example, ‘How many tens and ones are there in thirty-seven?’ Every student passed the first section of the brain check. Each child was then asked a basic addition or subtraction number fact. Every child passed the second section of the brain check. With both questions answered correctly it was jointly concluded that there was nothing wrong with their brains! They were working quite adequately.

The teacher then described thinking as putting little ideas together to make big ideas. She explained that to think about adding 42 and 23 in her head she just used the two little ideas which the students already knew and then put the ideas together. Firstly, she thought about the tens and ones in each number and then she did ‘little sums’. She thought about the four tens and two tens which together gave six tens and then she thought about the two ones and three ones which added to give five ones. Six tens and five ones was the same as sixty-five. The teacher modelled the steps in a cartoon of her brain as she described the process.

This lesson marked the turning point between the students looking at mathematics as a mass of isolated facts and seeing it as a network of interconnecting ideas. The focus shifted from getting the answer to the thinking involved in reaching an answer. The students took turns to ‘draw their brains’ and explain to the group what was happening in their brains as they mentally processed a problem. The strategy was used to encourage students to verbalise their thinking, drawing on the relevant language. A deliberate emphasis was initially placed on mental calculation as it forced the students to use strategies which made sense to them and over which
the students had control. After reaching the point where the students could orally describe their strategies they were asked to write down their ideas on paper. Written work, as informal algorithms, was therefore an account of their own thoughts not algorithms imposed by the teacher. The students came to view maths as making sense and being under their control. They gradually came to see themselves as successful mathematicians. Conversations in small groups with a skilled adult, in which everybody could actively participate, were vital for students to make this step.

A final example will demonstrate further that seemingly small differences from common practice in classrooms contributed significantly to the success of the program.

A decision was made not to use the Multibase Arithmetic Blocks (MAB) commonly used to model place value. For younger students these materials are used to demonstrate the equivalence of ten ones and one ten. Students who understand place value have the flexibility to move between both representations as the situation demands. For example, to add 46 and 23, the forty can be considered as four tens and the twenty as two tens. Each ten is thought of as one unit. However, to add 7 to 37 the situation can be managed by thinking about three tens and fourteen ones. To compute the answer, ten of the fourteen ones must be thought of as one ten. While MAB are used to model these ideas, the concrete aid itself embodies ten ones as one ten. For students to manipulate a ten as ten ones teachers introduce a system of trading or exchanging. This process involves much language to explain and understand. For students who have difficulty with numbers or do not have the necessary language, the concept of place value is actually made more confusing by the use of this aid.

We used plastic straws held together in bundles of ten by rubber bands. This concrete representation allowed flexible, easy and obvious conversions between one ten and ten ones. While the replacement of MAB by plastic straws may seem a trivial point, its significance cannot be underestimated if it removes a barrier to understanding for children who have difficulties with number concepts which are compounded or caused by a lack of Standard Australian English.

This short description of some of the teaching strategies used is an attempt to capture the approach taken to the teaching of maths in the program. But any one of these ideas in isolation is unlikely to bring about improved mathematics outcomes for students.
Some things different

The aim of the program was to support students to make sense of mathematics and to have ownership of their thinking. The strategies used clearly demonstrate that empowerment to access real understanding of mathematics was dependent upon language, conversation and explicit teaching.

The project provides evidence to show that it is possible to improve numeracy outcomes of Indigenous students within the relatively short time span of less than one year. Although the project was small and took place at one isolated site, the findings could be considered by many schools across the country. But there are several matters to consider.

The main one is that a very high level of support was required. Any level of support below this would have been unlikely to have made such a significant and measurable difference. The success of the program was dependent on the combined effect and intensity of a series of factors used to support students in their maths learning. Each on its own may be commonplace; but they must be carefully integrated and used in combination for maximum effect. Finally, the success of the program was very much dependent on the approach taken to the teaching of the mathematics. It could be glibly suggested that it is possible for teachers and schools to reflect on their view of teaching mathematics and adopt changes to their teaching practice. However, it would be unreasonable to expect that significant change would or could occur without professional support for teachers.
Media for Improving Outcomes: Arts education

There are many opportunities in the Arts for students to gain confidence in organisational, interpersonal skills and teamwork. Although they sometimes have a specific arts connotation, there are often instances involving verbal communication, research methods, organisational and personal interactions of a more general nature that could be directly applied in other contexts — (NAAE/ACER, 1996: 128).

There’s a lot more practical in it than actually sitting down and doing pen and paper stuff. And the Aboriginal kids really love to get out there and have a crack at it, instead of sitting behind a desk and watching someone else perform. They’re not observers, they’d rather have a go at it.
— Aboriginal Education Worker, Project A2 school.

They love it, absolutely love it. They love the music, they love playing, they love their teachers … just totally rapt.
— Parent, Project A2 school.

There are two inter-related theories that underpin these projects. One is that the Arts constitute a way of engaging students in learning that will result in the development of generic understandings and competencies, found across the curriculum. Terms such as ‘vehicle’, ‘gateway’ and ‘bridge’ are used.

The other is that the Arts can play a unique role in improving learning outcomes for Indigenous students. The Arts are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and have been used to pass on those cultures through many generations. These students need to make strong connection with their heritage. The Arts are also seen as a powerful means by which students can express themselves and their identity, in order to achieve further personal and academic development.

But there is a third notion at work as well, and that is that the practical emphasis in the Arts has an implicit influence on teaching practice and learners’ roles which improves student motivation and outcomes.

The projects

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 311–317.)

Two projects are dealt with in this section. One operated at four school sites, three urban, one remote, in four States/Territories, and was run by a national
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professional association. It set out to investigate the extent to which student involvement in arts education could support attainment of the (Mayer) Key Competencies, by trialing teaching and learning practices in arts-centred programs aimed at improving literacy and numeracy skills, and career pathways for Indigenous students.

The other offered a new course in music at senior level, embedded with several TAFE modules. This was trialed in five schools, two metropolitan and three in rural areas. Its goals were to provide an avenue for increased participation and success for Indigenous students and to actively encourage further community involvement.

Action and results

In Project A1, each site adopted a different focus and set of performance indicators. In all cases production of visual art works or performances was an important component of the project.

Site 1 focused on improving oral literacy skills for non-English-speaking background students through arts modules that had English as a second language strategies built into them. Daily sessions focused on arts concepts and English language development and were supplemented by hands-on activities with local community artists. The target was 75% of students with generic skills related to Key Competency 2 (‘Communicating ideas and information’). On entry, 18 of the 37 students in the project were assessed as having the relevant skills. On completion this number had increased to 27 (73%), though not all students were available for the assessment.

Site 2 sought to build language skills and career options for senior secondary students by developing an artists-in-residence program. An additional purpose was to support students in identifying with their Aboriginal heritage. All seven students earned their Year 12 Certificate, considerably exceeding the target (65%). Six of the seven students (86%: target 100%) satisfied the requirements in all of the nominated KCs.

At site 3 students ‘at risk’ developed career pathways through arts programs that contribute directly to the Year 11 South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). (See following case study.) Eight of 11 students (73%: target 67%) successfully completed their year of schooling and achieved the requirements of KC 7 (‘Using technology’).

At site 4 the focus was on using the arts to build community links through an artists-in-residence program to complement the existing performing arts courses in the school. Ninety-three per cent of students involved in the program achieved the writing outcomes at a satisfactory or higher level, and 100% achieved similar results in terms of oral language outcomes. (The target in both areas was 70%.)
To qualify for the SACE, students must satisfy an assessment of literacy, the Writing-Based Literacy Assessment (WBLA, known as the ‘wobbler’), based on samples of written work done during the normal course of SACE studies. Assessment is based on a folio of written work containing one piece from each of four SACE categories.

One of the most successful aspects of this Project has been the practical element. The weaker link for some of the classes was the written assessment task. Many of the students interviewed stated that they were more interested in learning their instruments and playing together as bands than they were in undertaking any theory and/or writing.

While most students completed the actual WBLA assessment, some classes faced greater difficulties than others in achieving this task. Obviously some teachers were pleased to be able to run a class where the main emphasis was on the practical music instrumental learning and basic attendance and retention. There was an underlying concern in these classes that if teachers attempted to implement a literacy strand then attendance would drop off.

_The WBLA didn’t work real well. They enjoy the practical side more, that’s what they’re here for._ (T1)

Staff at one school where success had been marked with relation to attendance and retention obviously felt more confident in introducing the writing element.

_The WBLA … we need to perhaps be a little bit stronger in terms of getting that into the course._ (T3)

_The writing element and the music theory. They hate it, it’s a weak link, and in the past there hasn’t been quite enough of that. … I think, in the past it’s all been practicalities of the band and the music stuff, and now he’s got them in, now he can work on the WBLA stuff._ (T4)

Students at the two metropolitan schools barely mentioned the writing aspects of the course. At both these schools students were well supported with more than the one classroom teacher and extra support staff. The Aboriginal Education Teachers supported the students and assisted with the literacy requirements of the unit.

_My main assessment was the WBLA and they’re all in. Oh, we sort of slotted it in so the kids just sort of did it without noticing it … but the fact I think, is the music was something they could relate to and it did include an area for their personal opinion at the end. So they liked that._ (T5)
What works?

In Project A2, 55 Aboriginal students enrolled in a new SACE Music unit with embedded VET modules. Thirty-eight students completed the SACE unit, and 52 VET modules were completed. In each of the five schools where the course ran, community involvement increased.

When students, parents, and teaching/support staff were asked about what they perceived to be the main benefits gained from the course, issues such as improvements in attendance, self esteem, confidence, relationships, and knowledge about and planning for future options were cited.

The Arts curriculum area enabled students to experience a Stage 1 SACE unit in a very positive environment which may not have been possible in some other subject areas. These classes enabled teachers to implement changes to their teaching methodologies and to create a collaborative approach to learning among the students. The practical nature of the subject created more opportunities for students to be actively involved in decision making in the classroom and to work and develop at their own rate. Music was identified as an important curriculum area for Aboriginal students as it is highly valued by many of the communities, but has not always been accessible to the students in some of the schools.

Three schools reported students having some difficulties in completing the Writing-based Literacy Assessment (WBLA) required by the SACE (see previous page), suggesting that this requirement provides a hurdle that some students at least find difficult to get over. It should be noted that this was not an issue in the other two schools, where teachers used reflection on what had been done as the subject for the written work. The interaction between ‘academic’ and practical elements in arts education is contentious and presents challenges of a degree of difficulty, albeit an acceptable degree of difficulty, to teachers to manage.

Observations

- The outcomes of these two projects make a strong case that engagement in the arts is likely to assist in the development of productive learning relationships and can enable students to experience success on a regular and public basis; thus, for both reasons, encouraging increased student motivation, attendance and participation.

- It is equally clear that arts education can be an important medium for development and expression of contemporary Indigenous cultural history and pride.

- Although a challenge remains, a focus on arts learning which incorporates Indigenous culture and heritage can also extend to other areas such as literacy, numeracy and employment-related competencies.
Jewellery-making at Le Fevre (Project A1)

Le Fevre High School has a population of 500 students, ten per cent of whom are Indigenous (the largest percentage in the western area of Adelaide). In 1999, it is anticipated that there will be ten Indigenous students in Year 11 and four in Year 12, a significant increase over previous years.

Various initiatives have been taken by the school to develop an approach to education that is more inclusive of Indigenous and other cultures in the local community. Several of these have involved the Arts as a means of exploring new approaches to learning, teaching and community participation. The school’s Karrendi Centre is a large room that is managed and decorated by Indigenous students, who also produce ‘Karrendi’ newsletters that include features containing student art, design, poetry, stories and discussions of contemporary issues.

The jewellery enterprise involved 11 Indigenous students from Years 8–11, a number of whom seemed unlikely to complete Year 11. Completion of course requirements would contribute to their SA Certificate of Education (SACE) results.

Two jewellers from the local community were engaged to work with the students in the design and production of copper, aluminium and silver artefacts (eg, pendants, bracelets and brooches). An Arts teacher, Aboriginal Education Worker and other staff provided ongoing support. The Tandanya Arts Centre, the Museum of SA and local jewellers were visited.

Skills and outcomes were clarified, measured and verified in each student’s ‘learning log’. Students also produced portfolios containing their original vision statements, design briefs and personal reflections, as well as their final artwork.

The finished pieces of jewellery have been exhibited and constitute a tangible outcome for students, which they intend to develop into an ongoing enterprise. Five students have completed Stage 1 units that will contribute to their SACE results. School attendance has increased significantly for two students, who were still struggling to remain on task in other classes.

But less tangible outcomes were regarded as possibly more significant for those involved.

*I am the only Aboriginal person in my normal classes, so it is good to be able to work with other students like me.* (Student 6)
What works?

**Jewellery-making at Le Fevre**

In this group we are more open with each other… In other classes you might be put down for expressing your views, but here there is greater acceptance. (S1)

A major difference in this class is that you can talk to teachers as people, which is different to normal classes. (S5)

There is an opportunity to express something about your identity and culture in this class that doesn’t occur as often in other classes. (S3)

This class makes it easier to get through Years 11 and 12, and gives us a head start... It’s also good to have Aboriginal teachers involved. (S2)

Teachers identified improvements in student attitude, behaviour and performance that had occurred, however they also placed considerable emphasis on the value of cultural self-expression and the need to acknowledge the complex backgrounds and experiences of many Indigenous adolescents.

The jewellery class has made an enormous difference to one of my students in Year 8. While he is an able student with considerable potential, he has been very unsettled and has not been achieving well this year. Being with other Aboriginal students who are in different year levels has had a very positive impact. He has been at risk of being suspended several times, and I believe that the workshop has been instrumental in keeping him at school. It has not only modified his behaviour, but has also led to dramatic improvement in his other subjects. (T3)

Sometimes circumstances and events seem to take over these students’ lives by the end of Year 9 or early in Year 10 — especially the girls. Situations associated with domestic violence and related issues often mean that simply getting to school is a huge task. We don’t let them use this as an excuse, but we can’t just ignore it. … Many of them have little or idea what it is going to be like further down the track. They believe that they have relatively few options. So it is very important that they get a head start with SACE units, career education and pathways. (T1)

The jewellery program has had such a positive impact that it will continue for another year. Further efforts will be made to promote community participation by continuing to offer after-school jewellery workshops.

In response to the question, ‘What has been learned from this project?’, three points emerged.

First, there was a strong affirmation by teachers and students regarding the crucial role of the Arts in the education of Indigenous students.
Jewellery-making at Le Fevre

continued

The Arts are important for all students, but especially so for Indigenous students. … They provide a hook for engaging students, for example, by increasing levels of attendance, motivation and achievement. It is vital that we make the connection between culture and curriculum. … The Arts constitute an excellent vehicle for this. (P1)

Second, teachers regarded the development of more flexible approaches to teaching, learning and organisation as fundamental to improved learning outcome for Indigenous students.

The capacity to negotiate is critical with these kids. While they do tend to chat and talk periodically, they also return and get on with their work in time. In traditional classes, there is so much pressure to get through the course — and these students do not respond well to that kind of constant pressure. If you lose your cool as a teacher, you also lose the kids. The strategy I have found most useful is one of evolution. If you let the learning situation develop on the basis of agreed guidelines and mutual respect, then students generally respond positively. (T1)

Third, is the value of an approach designed to create a culture of success for Indigenous students. The enterprise jewellery workshop is one part of a comprehensive program at this school that features many Arts-related activities. For example, during a student-organised Cultural Week, a range of music, drama and other performances were presented. The following is an excerpt from a letter to the school from an audience member at one of these events, the Chief Inspector of Police:

What we witnessed was young Aboriginal adults demonstrating a high level of social awareness, sophistication and commitment with regard to the way in which they produced and presented a very interesting, balanced and thought-provoking program. … those who stood up in front of the audience and performed were enthusiastic, articulate and confident; they showed a great deal of pride, not only for what they were achieving at that particular time, but of their Aboriginal heritage and their school.

Acknowledgments

Material for this case study was derived from interviews with students and teachers at Le Fevre High School and representatives of the NAAE national project at the University of Canberra.
Pathways to the Future

This theme focuses on issues in the provision of Vocational Education and Training (VET): at secondary level, after leaving school and in less formal settings including juvenile justice centres.

It has been treated separately because of the consistency of its interests, and because such a large proportion of projects devoted their efforts to this area. As the following authors note, it is an area of great importance to young Indigenous people.

Youth unemployment is an issue of immense concern to those involved in developing policy concerned with education, training and employment. Decisions made by young people regarding education, training and employment options beyond the post-compulsory years have long-lasting consequences for them. Over the last few decades, there has been a substantial increase in the number of young people completing Year 12, combined with significant structural changes in labour market conditions. It is widely acknowledged that over the past 15 years there has been a substantial decline in the availability of full-time employment for school leavers. Young Australians face a range of difficulties in securing a place in the labour force. For Indigenous Australians the difficulties are even greater (Long et al, 1999: i).

Where there are very few positive life models, meaningful opportunities or creative pathways to follow, anomie is bound to exist among young people, especially for teenage boys. Work (paid or unpaid) has become the focus of adult life in mainstream Australian society, and the inability, the seeming impossibility, to enter meaningful employment will obviously impact negatively on a community’s well-being, and on personal dignity and self esteem (NLLIA, 1996: 33).

Education is the largest single factor associated with the current poor outcomes for Indigenous employment. Indeed, the influence of education dwarfs the influence of most demographic, geographic and social variables (Hunter, 1997: 189).
Building Pathways Early: VET in schools

In short, what we’re trying to do is to keep our students interested in learning, give them a pathway. The learning environment must be flexible and supportive, we’re working on that. It’s not so hard. We want our kids to be able to see that education and training can have a purpose which is valuable to them. So far the results look very promising.

There are classes running all over the place, lots of sites. … Each site is doing it a bit differently, because of various local issues and differences in the kids. We’ve got more than a hundred students involved.

In the TAFE environment the learning is directed at vocational opportunities — hands-on activities that reflect work in a variety of industries. Each group has an Indigenous facilitator with them each week. The trust factor is critical, and that’s one way of achieving it. The facilitators work as a mentor and being a role model as well.

We’ve had positive comments from students, parents, community people, the staff at schools and TAFE and most importantly, from the kids themselves. They like it. The Careers Adviser from one school has been really encouraged by the confidence the students have gained from the program. It’s been a hit.

— A Project Coordinator

The Projects

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 318–338.)

Ten projects explored the provision of VET in schools. A further project (VS11) has been included in this section because of its focus on developing career pathways for students still at school. They ranged in size from quite small projects (for example, providing 15 students with on- and off-the-job training) to large, multi-site projects (40+ schools across a number of state education districts). But, irrespective of their size, there was a marked consistency in the strategies they adopted to improve student attendance and retention in school-based programs. They are alluded to in the comments quoted above and could otherwise be described as follows.

- Development and delivery of flexible courses to develop industry specific and/or generic work-related skills.
- Provision of career information and mapping pathways into further education/training and/or employment for individual students.
- Use of Indigenous mentors to enhance student confidence, to encourage consistent participation and to build a sense of group and cultural identity (sometimes through means such as camps and excursions).
**What works?**

- Provision of workplace experience of some sort, ranging from business/industry visits to work placements over a substantial period of time.

**Action and Results**

**The courses**

In most cases, courses focused on generic work skills. Project VS1, for example, funded more than 40 schools to provide over 200 Indigenous students with programs that delivered elements of the state’s Board of Studies ‘Work Education Framework’ (that includes the ‘Focus on Skills’ module alluded to several times below).

Project VS7 combined the generic with the specific by providing students with a taste of a range of training options so they could select a vocational pathway and associated program to pursue. Central to the project was the provision of Work Education classes for students not yet ready to undertake industry-specific training; targeted literacy and numeracy support for those with skill shortfalls relevant to their chosen career pathway; specific career development for a number of students with potential in sport; and a camp/conference for all students on developing and refining career choice and job seeking skills.

Other projects chose a more specific industry focus because of its relevance for prospective employment. Project VS2, for instance, was designed to enable Indigenous students ‘at risk’ to complete modules associated with a Retail Traineeship. The project officers noted that, while very few Indigenous people are presently employed in the retail industry, it exists in every town. This course was delivered via audiographics (ie, software that allows on-line interaction between students and school sites in a ‘virtual’ classroom), so that students could participate even though separated by considerable distances. The use of audiographics also added a technical component to the course that, when mastered, boosted students’ information technology skills and confidence. The six students who have completed this program at the time of writing were all offered part-time work at their work placement. In addition, all are committed to going on to Year 12; three students who did not complete have gone on to TAFE.

Project VS5 also offered vocational training with local business and community work placements to students from two secondary schools in the same town, but in a wider spread of vocational areas. The program, which targeted 12 Year 10 Aboriginal students ‘at risk’, involved a TAFE course component, an industry visit and a work placement of one day a week for five weeks. Of the nine students who completed it in full, three have been offered part-time work following their work placement, which is seen as a significant breakthrough for the Aboriginal community at this location. As one of the project personnel put it, *I believe our objective of breaking down stereotypes and countering the*
discrimination our Aboriginal youth experience are being met. Our motto was, ‘Koori faces in the workplaces’. We’re going to see that happen.

This project found that extended work placements were better than short periods of work experience, not just because it was better for students to be in the workplace working with other employees and practising the theory they learnt from TAFE teachers, but because ‘over a six-month period the students and retailers form a working relationship’, with mutual benefits.

Project VS8 also provided training in areas of prospective local employment which were also of considerable interest to students. The modules offered by the local training college, after consultation with schools, included Farm Tractor Operation, Motor Cycle Operation, Small Motors, First Aid, Farm Welding, Stock Horses, and Sheep Handling in Yards. Attendance and completion rates of 90% vindicate the decision to explore students’ own priorities.

The VET options available to senior students at a large secondary school on the fringe of a provincial city were dramatically expanded (from a choice of three to 15) through Project VS9. Students were offered a wide range of pre-vocational modules — motor mechanics, welding, office skills, art, fabric design, tourism, food production, wood technology, child care, music, media, rural training, ranger work, information technology and garment making. Thirty students completed one or more of these modules. The modules were seen by school staff as a valuable addition to its academic program and will continue to be offered.

Project VS10 sought to expand pathways for Indigenous students in remote areas by providing access to VET training and work experience either on-site, using visiting staff where necessary, or through block release to a regional centre. In doing so, the project sought to take account of local skill shortages and industry needs, whilst also addressing the disadvantages of geographical and socio-cultural isolation.

An important feature of many of these projects was flexibility of both structure and delivery to support student participation and engagement within and beyond the school or TAFE college involved. Many personnel from these projects commented on the willingness of the TAFE teachers involved to be flexible and accommodate a range of learning arrangements. Some, however, had difficulties with schools in this regard.

Cultural support
Cultural support, often provided through ‘team-building’ is also a consistent feature of these projects.

Project VS6 adopted an ‘holistic approach … to develop confidence, self esteem, lifestyle skills and cultural awareness’. The project manager explained, 

"this was the only approach likely to gain the support of the students and provide"
What works?

information on vocational education and training that would be absorbed. Activities such as studying Koori culture and the life stories of successful Kooris, relevant team building games and excursions were included to develop rapport and a genuine interest among the students in the project. Regular, time-tabled sessions were the medium for this process in the three participating secondary schools.

Similarly, a three-day camp with a cultural awareness focus was conducted for students in Project VS3 which drew very positive reactions from those involved. The evaluation indicates specific outcomes such as: increased understanding of the local Aboriginal community, and the aspirations of people working within their culture; the establishment of a broader local network; introduction of emerging Aboriginal role models; and further development of self esteem and team building.

Project VS4 ran a series of TAFE College Open Days which were supplemented by a camp for Year 10 Indigenous students. At the camp participants studied an amended version of the Focus on Skills course. The staff involved in this camp saw its location as a major factor behind its success. It was important in terms of providing an alternative learning environment that was quite removed from the rules, regulations and culture of school. The bushland setting ... scattered with artefacts, rock art and other sites of significance provided the camp with more culturally-appropriate surroundings, which in turn had a positive effect on motivation. In addition, a range of outdoor activities designed to build confidence, team work and increase communication and coordination between students were used as a precursor to “pen and paper” activities. This style of delivery worked well.

The use of Indigenous mentors was widespread and fundamental to four of these projects.

The case study of Project VS6 (p. 119) illustrates one of the most interesting and apparently successful cases of Indigenous adult trainees working with young people and talking to them directly in authentic, respected and positive ways about their futures. The report from this project notes: ‘Even those students with a history of a high level of truancy, at first mistrustful of the project leaders, have developed sufficient self-confidence to approach the team for assistance in discussing possible career options, including options they had not considered previously.’

The provision of mentors was also a major strategy of Project VS1. Municipal authorities in several towns supported this process by providing mentors for all enrolled Indigenous students, one of many examples of widespread cooperation generated through the IESIP SRP projects. In addition, Aboriginal people in business visited sites to talk with students and provide support.

It is clear that in a number of cases the students themselves functioned as role models or ‘explorers’ for their communities, breaking new ground and challenging unfounded stereotypical views of Indigenous people.
Information provision and pathway mapping

The basis of Project VS11 was to enable students to make informed decisions about their educational and vocational pathways, while providing relevant information on New Apprenticeships, TAFE courses and higher educational programs via the Internet. The project developed and trialed curriculum modules aimed at improving individual planning, choice of possible career options, gathering of information related to individual interests and so on, and developed an Australian Job Guide section of the program to highlight job vacancies throughout the region. Reportedly, this has proved popular with students and encouraged them to consider other potential career pathways. The personnel involved in the project view it as an important program, arguing that ‘there are limited sources of information available to Indigenous students and this project, which promotes powerful, identifiable and accessible pathways into employment avenues should be incorporated into school curricula far more broadly.’

Project VS4 sought to introduce Indigenous students in Years 9–12 to a range of VET opportunities and to help them map possible career pathways and develop individual action plans. Activities at the camp provided students with an opportunity to identify and describe their own skills. This was the initial step towards preparing individual skills profiles, identifying employment and training possibilities in which students were interested and matching the two. Students ‘developed a greater awareness of how to align their academic prowess and skills to educational options and future employment areas’. This aspect of the project enabled the TAFE College involved to tailor the Open Days it ran for Indigenous students more efficiently. Attendance at the Open Days was followed by a series of focus groups which provided an informal opportunity for students to discuss, explore, identify and share their experiences in and outside school — a skills audit to inform future planning. (The project officer notes that attendance at the Open Days was sometimes ‘disappointing’. Students at one school indicating a reluctance to attend a ‘Koori open day’ for fear of racial harassment, but other reasons included transport and cost difficulties and reluctance of schools to participate.)

Project VS5 provided students with an employment-related TAFE program (supplemented by work placements) that included individual goal setting, communication processes, job searching and application and participating in interviews, as well as workplace rights and responsibilities, and dealing with customers.

A number of projects, but especially VS5 and VS6 used the practical experience of work placements as a means of creating pathways for students. In the case of Project VS5 this was enhanced by a TAFE course which focused on individual planning and goal setting, as well as a range of key employment-related issues.
Work placements

Work placement in one form or another were central to most of these projects. At its simplest level, students made a series of visits to industries and businesses. This was a feature of Projects VS1 and VS7 for example.

Work site visits coupled with work experience of up to four one-week placements, aimed at helping Year 9 and 10 students ‘decide on their preferred vocational pathway’, were a major component of Project VS6. These work experience opportunities/work site visits were organised by local group training companies to complement the structured vocational training activities at school, and were used to encourage students to take up a part-time traineeship at Years 11 and 12.

Some projects adopted a more expansive view of work placement and engaged students in specific industry placements for a substantial period of time, as a central component of the training they received.

Project VS2, for example, conducted work placements of one day per week for a total of 60 hours. Project VS10 sought to provide students in remote locations with VET placement opportunities, using a ‘block release’ approach to overcome problems with distance. Students were either provided with two week VET placements in a regional centre or, where resources and facilities could be made available, programs were conducted on-site.

The second alternative produced some highly inventive solutions to portability problems. The main difficulties were derived from the remoteness of the sites, and thus, a lack of qualified trainers and training facilities, local job opportunities and limited accommodation for visiting staff and trainers. Nonetheless, one school developed partnerships with the local community and industry that enabled students to spend an average of one week on work placement for every three weeks at school. Another school, in conjunction with its local community, ran some of its VET courses from a locally-owned property. This enabled the school to offer students a wider variety of courses through the money saved in travel and accommodation costs and provided work experiences on site.

Attendance and Retention

Each of these projects used the provision of VET in schools as a medium to improve attendance and retention rates. Were they successful? The results are incomplete, and the causal relationship between project participation and improved attendance and retention, especially on a continuing basis, is not absolutely firm. But it would appear that the majority of these projects have succeeded in doing what they set out to do.

• Progress in Project VS3 has been described by project personnel as excellent. Of 112 students who started in July 1998, 70 are continuing with...
the program; 30 are no longer attending but are still at school or have gone into other training courses; eight have left school; and only four have not attended school or the project programs.

• One of the more successful outcomes in Project VS6 has been more regular attendance at the timetabled sessions with the Indigenous mentors, even by those with a history of high levels of absence.

• Project VS7 has met its target of 80% retention of participating students at school which compares favourably with a rate of 58% in a control group of similarly ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students.

• Average completion and attendance rates were 85% and 86% respectively in Project VS8 (compared with a target of 90%), though it did range from 100% on each count in a number of sites, to only 40% completion in one site and 58% attendance in another for specific modules. Data provided by three schools involved in the project indicates an increase in attendance rates from 1998 to 1999.

• Project VS9 managed to raise the average number of terms attended by students from 1.2 out of 4 terms, to 2.05 out of 4. (The target figure was 1.6.)

• Project VS11 results are not to hand, but at one school, where 14 students were interviewed about participating, 22 actually enrolled. There is substantial interest from students and the project has attracted almost 200 participants.

**Observations**

• Providing Indigenous secondary students with employment-related training and/or industry specific skills can assist in encouraging student attendance and retention at school, while also providing pathways into further education and training, or employment.

• The common key elements in the design of these projects were:

  — design and delivery of courses tailored to local needs with a high degree of flexibility, mostly with the cooperation of a number of parties: schools, TAFE institutions, representatives of Indigenous communities, employers either individually or in association, municipal and other community groups;

  — provision of information about careers and ways to achieve students’ goals by mapping pathways through further education or training options or directly to employment on an individual basis;

  — strong elements of cultural support, through mentoring and access to people who could function as role models and building a sense of common identity and purpose (through means such as camps and excursions); and

  — provision of workplace experience, ranging from visits to more substantial work placements.
What works?

• Location has an influence on the viability of VET in schools programs. However, even in more remote locations some ways were found of providing access to training and work experiences.

• The consistent emphasis on developing pathways for individual students countered possible criticism that alternatives lead nowhere. The effectiveness of this approach for the longer term cannot be assessed at this stage. However, given the age of the students involved and the difficulties they are likely to encounter, it is probable that they would need continuing support to realise their goals.
The Straight Paths Program (Project VS6)

I remember getting into real trouble with a welfare officer at one stage when I refused to go to school. I was very upset given that I was the only Aboriginal kid in the class and kids were calling me names. When it came time to go to school in the morning, I'd be hiding under the house, on top of the roof or down the drains. I hated the constant humiliation that I had to endure all day and every day. Each time we moved to another town, the same thing happened. (T6)

I was very shy, and ashamed to speak or get up in front of the class. So I learned to simply keep my mouth shut and as a result, didn’t learn very much at all in school. (T1)

I remember a portable classroom down the back of the school called the ‘Dunces’ Room, or the ‘AO’ (Aboriginals Only) Room. We just used to muck around and the teachers wouldn’t do anything about it. The only educational activity I recall was copying down notes from the blackboard. (T2)

School was hard for me and I left when I was fifteen. I arranged my own apprenticeship in hairdressing with no outside help. This meant going to Sydney all by myself with no Koori or other support. I ended up coming back fairly soon because I missed my family so much. (T5)

These are reflections on their own schooling from a group of adult Indigenous trainees in their twenties and thirties. They are now full-time participants in a traineeship in tourism and marketing that began in 1998. They took on the task of becoming mentors for younger Indigenous students living on the south coast of NSW, sharing their wisdom and a very positive outlook on the future.

After one year of training, this group became a ‘team’ to support Indigenous students undertaking vocational education in schools. As the program coordinator explained, we endeavoured to establish ‘a program within a program’… to make the most effective use of available resources for Indigenous people in this region.

The prime objective of this program was to provide practical support for students engaged in vocational learning, but there was also a focus on broadening the horizons of Indigenous students beyond some of their more traditional vocational preferences. For example, while many boys were enthusiastic about opportunities in the building trades, and girls were often interested in the hospitality industry, the team put effort into raising awareness about professional careers in both the private and public sector in fields such as education, health and community services.
What works?

The Straight Paths Program

In the words of the program coordinator: Our objective is to focus on these students as individuals, by ensuring that they understand that (a) they are important; (b) they have a future; and (c) they can get support from us. In other words, we are endeavouring to provide special attention and encouragement to each student.

This was amplified by one of the adult trainees: One of our aims is to help these students explore their culture in a contemporary way. Rather than dwell on the past, we’re trying to make our input about careers and the world of work as relevant as possible to the 1990s. We are using a lot of exercises and activities to get their young minds thinking about what it means to be a Koori in the 1990s. In other words, we are saying that you don’t have to sacrifice your Aboriginality to live and work in today’s changing world. Our message is that you can have the best of both worlds, by making your life a success through work and expressing yourself as a Koori at the same time. One of the great things about this program is that, given our diverse range of trainee backgrounds and experiences, we all have something different to offer these kids. We need to get more Koori kids into the workforce, not just as labourers or as support personnel in the government sector, but as professionals or as members of the private sector setting up their own businesses. We want to help them be able to do all these things as Aboriginal people functioning effectively in the 1990s. That’s who we are and where we are going. We can’t go back, we must go forward. (T8)

The program coordinator negotiated with the principals of Narooma, Bega and Eden High Schools to allocate one period (about one hour) per week for working with Indigenous students in Years 7–10 (as well as Years 11 and 12 in some cases). The team of eight trainees interacted with groups of twenty to thirty students, establishing relationships, providing information and advice about vocational options, and offering on-going support to students when they were engaged in work experience and related activities.

When we go into a school, we are not trying to be teachers, but friends and mentors instead, so that the students can draw on our experiences in ways that will be meaningful to them. (T7)

We are building up a sense of trust with these kids, and trying to make the activities fun as well as informative and useful. One of the major things we are endeavouring to promote is a sense of hope, so that above all, students will have a belief in themselves. (T4)

Having dropped out of school so early, one of the things that we can offer students is the benefit of our experience and to suggest that they don’t always follow the same tracks that we did. (T6)
The trainees established a procedure that involved the production of one-page ‘session plans’ containing the key objectives, methods and outcomes for each one-hour period. For example, at the beginning of the program, students participated in a ‘Koori Proud Quiz’ the purpose of which was to identify and discuss the careers and achievements of present and past Australians such as Mandawuy Yunupingu, Cathy Freeman, Charles Perkins, David Unaipon, Neville Bonner and Sir Douglas Nicholls. Information and feedback sessions were run for parents/caregivers and teachers at each of the three schools. Home visits also were conducted in some instances to ensure that parents understood the program’s objectives.

The team introduced and refined a range of techniques — including talking circles, team-building exercises, Indigenous music/art exhibits, a system of incentives and rewards — that distinguished the sessions from more conventional patterns of schooling. In subsequent sessions, the trainees conducted individual interviews and focus group discussions with students to identify their vocational interests, aspirations and possible pathways.

Local and regional employers were briefed to ensure there was an appropriate level of cultural awareness and understanding of the program objectives. As part of this process, a number of dedicated work placements and traineeships for Indigenous students were secured from several local employers such as the Bega Valley Shire Council. A key feature of the placements was students attending in pairs (rather than individually) to provide mutual support and encouragement, supplemented by periodic visits from the trainees during the course of the program. Most of the traineeship opportunities were created for senior students with a view to possible employment in the longer term.

The program will not be completed until the end of 1999, but it has already resulted in the development of participant self confidence and self esteem, and greater awareness and understanding of vocational opportunities in the local and surrounding areas. More significantly, however, has been the extent to which the team has been able to identify and support a number of additional ‘at risk’ students. In many cases, these young people have been classified as actual or potential ‘early school leavers’. The depth of the relationships established by the trainees and the students, together with their knowledge of local families, has meant that these young people have received information and advice about vocational and other options they otherwise may have missed.
The Straight Paths Program

One of the things that we have noted already is that the students are coming back. We have also been advised that a few truants are participating. Surely that’s a sign that these kids are interested and keen to learn more. It is possible that they have picked up on the fact that we genuinely care about them. (T6)

As the program coordinator explained:

I think the real strength of the program is the fact that a cluster of like-minded adult trainees are walking into schools and working with students on a dedicated basis to raise their self esteem and create a careers focus for the future. … A mother from Bega rang me the other day to ask me to quickly arrange a placement for her boy in National Parks. We also chatted about how we could find different experiences for her daughter. I love the fact that some parents are coming to us.

Schools should not reward Koori kids by suspension when they get into trouble at school. Rather, they should bring in a Koori task force at the critical moment and work through a special and intense mentoring program to keep that kid in school. … We need to move away from the model where white teachers do all the talking in schools where Koori students are enrolled. We need to look carefully at small regions and critically examine why kids have low attendance rates, and then develop a range of creative retention programs.

Acknowledgments

Data for this case study were obtained through focus group interviews with the program coordinator, trainees and community members at a series of meetings in Eden, with additional information from project progress reports.
Getting Ready for Work: VET in colleges

Students felt that they were learning worthwhile skills that they could transport into the workplace ... They were contributing to a worthwhile community project that they would have pride in and could feel a sense of accomplishment.
— Project Officer, Project V2

The Projects

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 339–346.)

Ten projects provided vocational education and training for Indigenous students. Two, Projects R1 and R2, are dealt with in the section on adult and further education (p. 41 and p. 223); one, Project LA2, appears in the section on Language, and two of the projects in the section on students in the justice system provided VET-accredited modules. The other five are dealt with here.

They were relatively small in terms of the number of students involved, ranging from 14 to 40 participants. Project V1, in a college for Indigenous students outside a rural centre, provided an avenue for Elders to contribute to the delivery and management of courses. Project V2, the subject of the case study which follows, delivered a construction course in a provincial centre. Three remote area projects were very specifically designed to support Indigenous employment: in the mining industry, in the accounting area and in broadcasting.

We have final reports for four of these.

The purpose of the fifth, for which we do not have a final report, was to adapt curriculum, delivery and assessment tasks to enable Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) unit operators to progress, through additional training, to ASF Level III or higher, and to develop workplace support for (generally very isolated) media students and thus improve retention and completion rates.

There are more than 200 BRACS operators across the ‘Top End’. Many of them speak English only as a third or fourth language, are working in restricted circumstances because of the nature of their equipment and have very limited access to on-site course delivery. In addition most students work at sites where they are either volunteers working full-time, or nearly so, or get paid and find their employers reluctant to give them time to study.

Results have been mixed. The first element of the project proved too difficult. The two relevant course structures that were explored required access to high level technology and complex production facilities. Quite a few of the students
What works?

didn’t even have access to functioning cassette recorders. What they did want — technical trouble shooting and simple maintenance, negotiation and liaison with communities, etc. — didn’t appear in either course.

However there were two successes in the workplace support component of the project. An excellent result was achieved from students working at a media centre in Alice Springs. Apart from the technical skills gained, students produced written work (mainly scripts), some for the first time for many years. In addition, some of the site-based teaching was able to be sub-contracted to a regional Indigenous media centre. Because of the similarity of tasks and experience, there was a very strong empathy between the staff of this centre and the students. This has made it possible to extend the scale of the work and build new partnerships.

The other four projects had common general concerns. Key among them:

- to strengthen student motivation by incorporating aspects of Indigenous culture in their VET programs; and
- to promote student engagement in learning through hands-on activity and workplace experience.

The similarity of these concerns with those in the next section might be noted.

Action and Results

Incorporating aspects of Indigenous culture

Projects V1, V2 and V3 each focused directly on including Indigenous culture as a key component of their work. In each of these three projects, the role of the community and especially local Elders, has been important for encouraging student involvement and retention in programs, and has contributed to the motivation required to complete the course/module and gain the associated credentials.

Project V1 employed community Elders to provide substantial input to accredited courses in health and aged care for young Aboriginal trainees. They were able to inform students about aged care from the perspective of the aged, and about nutritional issues, bush medicines and other aspects of local cultures. They also played an enhanced role in college management and direction-setting.

Their involvement demonstrated their support for and approval of the college’s VET activities. It helped promote the value of the students’ Aboriginal culture and raised their awareness of Aboriginal history contributing to increased student confidence and higher self esteem. This combination of factors has contributed to improvements in motivation, attendance and course/module completion rates.
Project V2 demonstrated that students could more readily acquire employment-related skills, as well as improved literacy and numeracy, by contributing to a process highly valued by their local community — in this case building part of a cultural centre. The project delivered a structured pre-employment course (the nationally registered Construction Fitout and Finish (CF&F) course) to a group of 14 students who had not participated in formal education or training for some time.

All students completed at least one module in the CF&F course, and 30 percent of students completed them all. The majority of those who did not complete them all gained employment during the course of the project.

Project V3 was designed to develop literacy, numeracy and other training programs for Indigenous people employed in the mining industry and the broader local community. It was soon discovered that success was dependent on a ‘holistic, cultural awareness-based approach’.

A survey was devised and conducted by key Indigenous people at each of four remote sites to provide baseline data before proceeding with the training. This activity revealed the need to focus more clearly on cultural awareness as a threshold requirement for the conduct of the literacy and numeracy training, resulting in the development and trialing of a generic cross-cultural awareness program and the establishment of a peer support network.

A survey of participants in the relevant workshops has produced an extremely favourable response. The cross-cultural awareness aspect of the project has also led to greater awareness of some of the changes the industry itself may need to make to increase employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

‘Hands-on’ activities

Most of these projects demonstrated the importance of ‘hands-on’ activity for generating and sustaining student participation and engagement in the module/course.

The case study of Project V2 indicates that the decision made to pursue this direction more actively was a turning point for the project and students’ levels of success in the more academic components of their course.

Project V4 supported the delivery of accounts and payroll training with hands-on use of new computers and software packages related to the specific needs of (in this case) mining industry employers. As a result, students were able to gain competencies in such areas as Cash Control, Computer Operations Fundamentals, Database Fundamentals, Spreadsheet Fundamentals, and Writing Skills for Work — with 100% of students achieving competence in many of the modules and no less than 60% achieving it in any one area.
What works?

Observations

- The involvement of the local communities and willingness to incorporate aspects of Indigenous culture has contributed significantly to the achievement of targets in these five projects.
- Linking college-based directed learning with on-the-job training and experience can enhance motivation, attendance and learning outcomes.
- Students are more likely to engage in literacy and numeracy programs if they can see a connection to the development of industry-related competencies and pathways to genuine employment.
- There is some suggestion that the competency-based approach of VET better suits students who need some additional support by making requirements very clear and having regular staging points for success achieved and noted.
The Dreamtime Cultural Centre (Project V2)

Over recent years, there has been a shortage of skilled labour in the construction industry in the Rockhampton area. Supported by the local Indigenous community, the Central Queensland College of TAFE developed a strong partnership with the Capricornia Training Company and the Dreamtime Cultural Centre to provide 14 Indigenous students with the opportunity to complete an accredited VET course in Construction Fitout and Finish while building an Information Facility at the Dreamtime Cultural Centre.

As the project officer, Kim Harrington, explained, in previous building programs students had been engaged in building things they then have to knock down, … very demoralising. This program, however, was ‘a first for TAFE in Queensland’ because it involved the students not only in directed learning, but in actual on-the-job training and experience in a community project of considerable cultural significance. What’s more, by the end of the project there was a product in the form of a building that will continue to exist as a testament to the work of the students and to the program as a whole.

The students were aged between 22 and 34 and had mostly completed Year 9 without further experience in education or training. Each was tested on entry to the course to determine their literacy and numeracy levels, and goals and plans for improvement were developed for each student individually. Students’ progress was mapped using log-book sheets to record the attainment of defined and recognised competencies. The project began by providing the students with some basic skills in construction and a degree of literacy and numeracy training in the college environment.

Prior to starting work at the Dreamtime Cultural Centre, the students built an amenities block at a local tennis club, and a BBQ/picnic area in a park to practise their skills and build confidence. In addition, community representatives briefed them during this time on the nature and meaning of the task.

During this phase of the project, attendance at the components of the course delivered in the college was excellent and, in fact, better than mainstream attendance rates. All 14 students were usually present, and staff were generally notified about any absences. However, attendance at literacy and numeracy courses was not as regular, with only about half attending many classes.
What works?

**The Dreamtime Cultural Centre**

Once construction started at the Dreamtime Cultural Centre, the teachers decided to explore the impact of delivering the literacy and numeracy lessons on site. The result: attendance increased markedly. By linking literacy and numeracy training to practical activity and employment-related learning outcomes, the students gained an increased appreciation of the need for these skills in the workplace. *They could see the relevance more clearly, … the need to read the plans, or work out a calculation.* (PO)

This was accentuated by the significance of the project to the community. *Students felt that they were learning worthwhile skills that they could transport into the workplace. … They were contributing to a worthwhile community project that they would have pride in and could feel a sense of accomplishment.* (PO)

This required a new degree of flexibility from the College and its teachers. *The project presented new challenges for us. They’ve been met by adopting new strategies which can now be employed in other aspects of operations and which have been useful for non-Indigenous students as well.* (T1)

The success of the approach is evident from the results. All students completed at least one module, and 30% completed them all; the majority also found employment; 50% of students successfully achieved all learning outcomes specified in the literacy and numeracy components of the course, and a further 25% completed more than half.

The competency-based approach to assessment, with skills achieved being recognised as they are acquired, was deemed to be an important factor in the project’s success. *Students are assessed as they go in the context of doing the work rather than through an exam. This eases the pressure for students who have not been in education and training for some time. They don’t learn any less, and the outcomes are better.* (T2)

The project has drawn strong support from the local community. *Between the student support office, the advisory committee and the community around town, there hasn’t been any need to advertise to get students … When two left, they were replaced virtually overnight.* (PO)

In the view of one of the teachers involved, the most significant factor of all is that the students take visitors to see ‘their building’, and demonstrate real pride in their achievement.

**Acknowledgments**

Material for this case study was derived from interviews with project staff.
The End of the Sentence:
Training in the justice system

That Corrective Services authorities ensure that all Aboriginal prisoners in all institutions have the opportunity to perform meaningful work and to undertake educational courses in self-development, skills acquisition, vocational education and training including education in Aboriginal history and culture. Where appropriate, special consideration should be given to appropriate teaching methods and learning dispositions of Aboriginal prisoners.


You give the blokes the chance to work … to put in … to see that if you want to be valued you’ve got to put in. Then they can go on and do their modules and leave here with a bit of pride. They see that you don’t have to be an idiot for the rest of your life.

— Aboriginal Station Manager, Project JS2

That initiatives directed to providing a more humane environment through introducing shared accommodation facilities for community living and other means should be supported, and pursued in accordance with experience and subject to security requirements.


Out here, for some of us … it’s our country. We feel okay when we’re here … like it’s our place.

— Aboriginal inmate, Project JS3

… that the greater involvement of communities and Aboriginal organisations in correctional processes be supported.

A vastly disproportionate number of Indigenous young people find themselves involved with the justice system and many of these are incarcerated for periods of time. It is also widely reported that many have low levels of literacy and numeracy, poor social skills and poor self esteem. Several Recommendations (some of which appear above) of the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* suggest the necessity of an emphasis on education and training programs for Indigenous people while they are incarcerated. This is justified for a variety of reasons including, importantly, the need for them to be able to find positive pathways in life after release.

The field of education and training for Indigenous people within the justice system is thus clearly one of urgent need and it is appropriate that it was taken up by a range of projects. Most did not operate in a ‘school’ situation. If they did, it was a ‘school’ within a correctional institution. Most looked for innovative solutions to the challenge.

**The projects**

(Individual project summaries related to this topic can be found on pp. 347–351.)

Two projects which are not discussed in this section had connections with the justice system. Several parts of one project designed to support secondary-age students took place in correctional institutions but at the time of writing data about these activities are not available. One part of Project VS8 (p. 330) took place in a school inside a juvenile justice centre and delivered nationally-accredited VET modules.

Three other projects are discussed below, all working with incarcerated Indigenous people. One took place in a juvenile justice centre for young females, and the other two at rural or remote locations with groups of teenage and older Indigenous men. Among other aims, all intended to assist participants in the transition from incarceration to more productive lives ‘outside’ through participation in further education or training.

**Action and results**

The first project was primarily a mentoring program for young female offenders in a juvenile justice facility, and included processes designed to build self-confidence esteem. It sought to attract a paid mentor for each participant who came from that participant’s community, reasoning that in this way participants’ transition to education or training could be facilitated after release. It was hoped that mentors would also provide more generalised support before
and after participants’ release. Some mentors began work with participants in 1998 and the project is at present the subject of an external evaluation.

Projects JS1 and JS2 had a number of things in common, including their origin, and were innovative in that they involved training (offered by the same institution) at Certificate II level at remote or rural locations rather than inside correctional institutions. A further innovation was that training was provided in blocks which necessitated trainers spending consistent periods of time on site.

Project JS1 took place primarily at a remote location, with Indigenous inmates of a large Correctional Centre. (See following case study) The Centre already had a program under which Indigenous inmates were able to spend part of their sentences working at sites of significance to Indigenous people. The project allowed them to receive on-the-job training in nationally-accredited VET modules at the same time. Inmates also completed a cultural awareness course, and the participation of members of the local Aboriginal community was fundamental to its operation.

Project JS2 dealt with young bailed offenders from a magistrate’s court in a rural town. These offenders have the opportunity to spend up to twelve months of their sentences at an Aboriginal-owned rural station. There, they participate in the tasks needed to operate the station. This project also provided opportunities for them to receive on-the-job training in nationally-accredited VET modules at the same time.

The performance target for both Projects JS1 and JS2 was to achieve 85% completion of modules by participants. Final data are unavailable at the time of writing but it is likely that the target will in both cases be exceeded. Beyond that, anecdotal evidence suggests that progress was made in the areas of literacy and numeracy, confidence and self esteem and pride in their culture.

Observations

- The evidence available from these cases indicates that incarcerated Indigenous people welcomed training which met their needs and which was well-embedded in aspects of their culture.
- At Certificate II level, characteristics of successful projects included:
  - the availability of suitable nationally-accredited VET modules;
  - on-the-job (rather than classroom) training;
  - the opportunity for groups of incarcerated Indigenous people to work and learn as a group;
  - the opportunity for them to live, work and learn on Indigenous properties or on land of significance to Indigenous people rather than in a prison;
  - local Indigenous input into work and learning undertaken;
  - training in sustained blocks of time rather than ‘once a week’; and
  - trainers who have empathy with Indigenous trainees.
There is no evidence about which, if any, of these characteristics are necessary for success but this list is a useful starting point for discussion of future education and training programs for incarcerated Indigenous people.

**Mutawintji and beyond (Project JS1)**

Mutawintji National Park is 130 km north-east of Broken Hill, NSW. It’s an area of low red ranges, valleys and gorges. In an otherwise arid zone, there is permanent water and along the ridges are overhangs containing important Aboriginal rock paintings. Until they were dispossessed by Europeans, Mutawintji’s traditional owners held ceremonies and meetings here. The area was a crossroads for other Aboriginal groups as well.

On 5 September 1998, the NSW government handed Mutawintji back to its traditional owners, who now manage the area jointly with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. Sacred sites and culturally sensitive parts of Mutawintji are either closed to the public or open only to approved guided tours.

An important IESIP project is taking place here at Mutawintji. For a couple of years already, some Aboriginal inmates of Broken Hill Correctional Centre have taken part in the Centre’s ‘Cultural Link’ program which allows them to undertake meaningful work on Aboriginal land such as Mutawintji. This program was developed in consultation with local Elders. The IESIP project, which is managed by Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture, adds a training component. While they are working at Mutawintji, participants can now complete nationally-accredited modules from the Certificate II in Australian Land Conservation and Restoration traineeship.

To develop and implement a project like this takes time, and the cooperation of a many groups and agencies — in this case local Aboriginal Elders and the Mutawintji Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Mutawintji Board of Management, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the NSW Department of Corrective Services. As well, it took time to attract a suitable Education Officer to oversee the project and coordinate training delivery. Careful planning and consultation have been key ingredients at all stages.

A group of about 10 inmates and one Corrections Officer spends Monday-Friday each week at Mutawintji. The Department of Corrective Services provides mobile camping facilities including a large truck and trailer, generator, marquee, tents and cooking facilities. Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture provides the required equipment and personnel for training, which is ‘on the job’ rather than ‘in the classroom’ and is at all times related to the work undertaken, ranging from fencing to building construction.
But the training is not isolated from the cultural context. Mark Sutton, one of the traditional owners of the land and a Sites Officer with the National Parks and Wildlife Service said:

We wanted to make sure the cultural component was strong, so all participants begin with a cultural introduction. This is not a US-style chain gang. The blokes are working to conserve and protect Aboriginal land. It’s a ‘caring for country’ philosophy which lets them be proud of what they do and what they learn.

At the camp where participants sleep and eat, the atmosphere is positive and the tension that is often felt in prisons is notably absent. As one participant put it: We feel okay when we’re here … like it’s our place.

What makes for success in a project like this? There are several factors. First, there’s a commitment to finding out what training is really wanted and what is useful. Then there’s the question of finding the right trainers, people who are not only competent but accepted by the trainees as well. In many cases, ‘the right trainers’ must be people who are prepared to spend days, and even weeks, on site. An Aboriginal client in another part of the country felt that the training provided by Murrumbidgee College was: good because their people come out and stay with you rather than wanting to come once a week.

A further factor is flexibility, which shouldn’t be thought of as lack of direction but rather as the ingenuity to incorporate local resources and conditions as positive parts of the training. At Mutawintji, this often means setting work such as fencing or the construction of a walking track in a cultural context. Or it could mean adapting available second hand materials in the building of a visitors’ shelter.

Flexibility is also the key to the incorporation of literacy and numeracy modules. One of Murrumbidgee College’s Education Officers put it like this.

A lot of the blokes have a history of failure with literacy and numeracy, so we try to wait until it’s required on the job before we teach it. How many fence poles should we order to do the fencing between here and there? How much wire will we need? That’s the way into numeracy. Literacy comes through things like having to read instructions on the side of a paint tin or having to write a letter to order materials. You don’t try to teach it in a classroom first.
What works?

**Mutawintji and beyond**

continued

In the short term, success will be in terms of numbers of participants completing training, but there is longer term vision here, both for participants and for the Aboriginal community as a whole. Ex-participants may well be less likely to re-offend. They may have better self esteem. Their range of new skills might mean that they are more likely to find jobs. They may be more constructively engaged with their communities. Findings about these longer term outcomes will not be available in the current life of the project but there is at least a sense of optimism among all involved, including current participants.

**Acknowledgments**

Material for this case study was derived from interviews with project staff and participants.
Section Three: Findings and Discussion
What works?
Introduction

We know why Indigenous students fail to achieve at the same level in education and training as non-Indigenous students. McInerney’s list above is a useful summary. When confronting the SRP research question, ‘What changes to education and student support delivery practices will result in improved Indigenous student learning outcomes within a relatively short period of time?’, those items should induce, at least, a pause for drawing breath, if not a level of despair that so many fronts are open at once, that there are so many massive issues with which to contend.

In his review of schooling in rural Western Australia (1994), Tomlinson notes the difficulty of separating ‘educational issues from problems of individual and community health, housing and sanitation, employment and economic independence, and the social and cultural alienation which pervade these communities’. He suggests that ‘Before any real progress in school learning is possible, these other problems will have to be addressed’ and that, ‘ideally’, they should be tackled concurrently. This, of course, is the right analysis; but it leaves all involved in a disposition of waiting — waiting for infrastructure to be put into place, waiting for employment to pick up, waiting for the right moment and the ideal circumstances when it will all come together, so that then we can move forward.

The information that can be drawn from the IESIP projects suggests a different way of looking at the issue: there is no panacea for improving outcomes for Indigenous students, but in circumstances that will never be ideal there are obvious opportunities for making significant incremental gains, right now.
We provided a paper of preliminary findings to the second SRP conference in mid-1999. Around half of the projects had completed their work at that stage and the level of success was becoming clear. We noted that of 53 projects for which reasonable data was available, 38 (about 75% of this number) appeared certain to achieve or exceed their targeted outcomes.

That paper commented on three integral design features which distinguish the SRPs: the outcomes focus, including the use of targets, performance indicators, and an emphasis on data collection to measure the impact of the work; the encouragement of innovation in practice; and the emphasis on making a significant impact in a short space of time.

It noted some general factors which appeared to be contributing to project success: the skills and attitudes of project personnel; the evolution of good relationships and mutual trust; flexible approaches taken by those involved; and the localisation of control of the work.

Finally, we proposed that the more specific practices which produced success could be grouped under three headings: culture, skills and participation.

Now, after reviewing the project work in its more complete form, it is apparent that we correctly identified the factors, but that the relationships among them were poorly explained in that initial paper.

It is possible that in our analysis we, like many of the project workers, focused too hard on the ‘big change quickly’ issue. ‘Innovation’ and the need for it provided a false trail and, certainly, too little attention was given to issues of culture. On the one hand, and paradoxically, they are so pervasive they tend to merge into the background. On the other, they are so complex and sensitive, it is easy to withdraw from discussing them in any depth. But it is there we must begin the discussion of our conclusions.

**Education and training at the intersection of cultures**

If the currency of non-Indigenous societies has been a pervasive disrespect for, and abuse of Indigenous knowledge and culture, then the central bank and the mint have been educational and academic institutions. … Our own unique ways of knowing, teaching and learning are firmly grounded in the context of our ways of being. And yet we are thrust into the clothes of another system designed for different bodies and we are fed ideologies which serve the interest of other people (Mick Dodson, from his Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture at the University of New England, Armidale in 1994).
Any discussion of how gains may be and have been achieved in Western-style formal education and training by Indigenous students must begin with issues of culture. The reason: success will not be achieved without recognition of the cultural factors which may impact on that success; nor will it occur without the consent, approval and willing participation of those involved. You can lead children to school, so to speak, but you can’t necessarily make them learn — especially when the learning environment is characterised by features which may be culturally alien and unintelligible.

The structure of formal Western education and training is built on a number of general assumptions. It is essential that these be made clear, if only to allow effective scrutiny, and challenge where necessary. They include the following.

- A very substantial part of childhood and adolescence (and, to an increasing degree, adulthood) will be spent in formal education settings and on work derived from these institutions set to do at home. This assumption is supported by legal compulsion to attend to certain ages on the basis that the outcomes of formal education reflect a common good, for both individuals and the community.

- Grouping of students will occur, largely by age cohort, with a directive and authoritative adult in charge; and that within that age cohort a relatively common range of abilities and rate of progress will be found.

- Development and growth occur in a reasonably consistent pattern, both generally and within formal education and training. Thus the social goals of education (like constructive behaviour of individuals in a group) tend to dominate the early years, while individual academic goals become increasingly important as time goes on.

As a general rule, student grouping in the early years is largely by age; the content of the curriculum is common, concrete, proximate and can be governed or influenced by local context; teaching styles assume the dependence of the learner, and instruction is comparatively specific and explicit. By the end of secondary schooling, there is a shift to ability grouping, either through student departure or through the election of subjects to study; curricular areas are largely chosen by students; there is an increased level of abstraction and generalisation in the subject matter; and the content and outcomes are externally specified and less subject to local influence. Teaching styles increasingly assume the independence of the student as a learner within the institution and at home.

- Success in formal education and training is generally derived from sustained, disciplined, physically-passive work and effort over a lengthy period of time.
What works?

- A process of selection and sorting, with outcomes that are more and less favourable, is implicit throughout the 13 years of formal schooling, and explicit in the final years.

- Success in formal education and training is related to forms of ‘life success’, whether utilitarian/material (in terms of paid employment, for example) or intrinsic (in terms of personal development).

- The values implicit in this process are congruent with those of the community it serves. This factor provides the foundation for student motivation and engagement.

These assumptions operate relatively successfully for a majority of Australian students. But there is a substantial proportion for whom they may be unsuitable or not shared. Each assumption has been challenged in various ways and at various times by close analysis of their anomalies and the establishment of alternative practices. Currently, for example, one of the best institutionalised is the drive to increase the range of study options available at senior secondary level, many with a more ‘practical’ focus. Nonetheless the pervasiveness of these assumptions and their structural and practical consequences is profound, and perhaps especially for the likelihood of education success in processes of formal education and training for many Indigenous students.

The amount of time required to be spent in formal education and training settings is a challenge, especially for adolescents who may find the attraction of a life of comparative freedom irresistible. In families where there is limited history of formal education, its processes and demands are likely to be mysterious, and to entail a process of ‘trail-blazing’ on the part of the student that can be costly at home as well as at school or college.

It has been interesting to briefly re-trace the attitudes of non-Indigenous cultural theorists who have turned their attention to Australia’s Indigenous peoples, and the implications of those attitudes for formal educative processes.

The initial dispossession was accompanied by only sporadic interest in the culture and life styles of those dispossessed. Indigenous peoples were widely deemed to be negligible, an inferior novelty, with some occasionally acknowledged streaks of genius for survival in the harsh landscape. The purposes and structure of formal education, where it was offered, were designed to ‘civilise’ its subjects, to teach, often forcibly, European ways of life and, because it was largely the domain of the churches, to encourage conversion to various forms of Christianity. From the perspective of the limited attempts at ‘positive’ intervention, Indigenous cultures were something to stamp out. As early as 1839, the Polish explorer, Paul de Strzelecki, noted the violence that these efforts had wreaked.
Amidst the wrecks of schemes, efforts and attempts to christianise, civilise, utilise, and preserve the aboriginal race, there remains yet to be adopted one measure, worthy of the liberality of the English Government, — viz., to listen and attend to the last wishes of the departed, and to the voice of the remaining few: — ‘Leave us to our habits and customs; do not embitter the days which are in store for us, by constraining us to obey yours; nor reproach us for our apathy to that civilisation which is not destined for us (1845: 348).

These white theories of Indigenous cultures and how to ‘deal with it’ (for decades they were assumed to be homogenous) have evolved in parallel or a step ahead of policy, often informing and justifying it. Assimilation, for example, in vogue for much of this century, had similar aims to those referred to above — to enforce conformity to the dominant culture. Its Darwinist underpinnings (‘the fittest will survive…’) carried a policy amendment (‘… our way, and on our terms’). Its sympathies were paternalistic: rigid, strict and having the authority of ‘actually knowing what is right’. The sort of education this produced, and, it must be said, continues to produce, reflected these sentiments.

More recently, much closer attention has been paid to distinctive features of Indigenous cultures and their variety, the aspirations of Indigenous peoples with regard to Western-style education, and its suitability for their life circumstances. The news from these sources is complex and, in some instances, troubling.

In his book of observations about schooling in the Anangu Lands in central Australia, Whitefella School, Folds provides a detailed account of a morning’s work for one class. Forty-five of the minutes went as follows.

10.00 [am] The next lesson involves writing a letter to a friend in order to thank the friend for sending a birthday present. (Anangu do not recognise birthdays and do not give presents as such. Also, the idea of thanking someone formally, or in any other way, receives little if any emphasis in Pitjantjatjara society. For that matter anangu do not send letters to each other.)

10.02 The teacher does not devote much time to explaining the lesson (the AEW appears to be lying low at the back of the classroom). The teacher solves the problem by having the children copy a letter from the blackboard.

10.05 The teacher insists that European rather than tribal names be used on the letter so that ‘I will know who wrote them’.

10.10 To help the children figure out what birthday presents they might have received, the teacher hands out some glossy catalogues showing part of the vast array of toys available to white Australian children (but which are rarely seen on the settlements).
What works?

10.12 After a very brief period of copying the letter from the blackboard (it is clear from the children’s attempts that they have little or no grasp of the meaning of the task), the main part of the lesson is taken up by copying the pictures of toys shown in the catalogue and colouring these in.

10.45 When the children swap their ‘toys’ around (collective ownership is the norm in Pitjantjatjara society) the teacher protests that they are presents from a relative and therefore must not be exchanged (1987: 31).

This story is not presented here as a typical case of contemporary formal educational practice in Indigenous communities. We do not believe it to be so. It is included to illustrate what might go wrong on a very practical level in classroom practice where there is an absence of cultural understanding. Folds uses this example to illustrate his thesis.

The conflict between school and community described here has a profound impact on the young. It produces resentment as well as contradictory aspirations among them, both of which are critical to any explanation of the failure of settlement schooling. On the one hand, the children who live in camps are exposed to the influence of Elders who espouse a traditional lifestyle. On the other, the children spend much of their time in school with its orientation towards the dominant culture. This is the environment in which the subculture of resistance develops, taking from both sides, but belonging to neither. In the lower grades the vision of white material wealth will begin to usurp traditional culture. Later, the unattainable nature of this vision and the community pressures its pursuit brings leads to disillusionment and petrol-snifing subculture (ibid.: 35).

Shortly after, he notes that among the adults in these communities, ‘While English literacy and numeracy are important … the main priority remains the historical one, control over culture’ (ibid.).

‘Culture’ is a complex term that must be applied with some care. There are several meanings which have relevance in this context.

- **Culture, meaning heritage** — traditional ceremonial and other knowledge and practices. This sort of culture is assumed to be fixed, but in practice it is often threatened by the impact of day-to-day cultural influences.
- **Culture, meaning regularities or tendencies in patterns of behaviour within groups across varied contexts.** These are frequently matters of contention, especially when conjoined with the following meaning of the term.
- **Culture, meaning the characteristics of life as it is lived on a daily basis:** for example, what is thought and talked about (and in what language); what activities occur; and which of these are participated in. Geographical and social context will be important factors, as will the influences of broadcast and other media that help to shape cultural knowledge and expression. This ‘culture’ is fluid and dynamic, constantly producing hybrids of former patterns.
The practical manifestations of these meanings are frequently both inter-related and interactive; but they are also sometimes quite distinct, making stereotypical views a constant danger.

These three notions of culture are dealt with in turn below with glimpses of why conventional Western-style education and training might founder or be problematic for, in particular, some Aboriginal peoples. (It should be noted that the sources from which quotations appear below reflect issues as they arose at a given time, now sometimes in the past, but they still provide indications of the nature of contemporary debates.)

‘Knowledge’ in the traditional Aboriginal conception, the powerful deep-rooted knowledge that defines how things came to be and relationships between them, is fixed and belongs to guardians of that knowledge. Its transmission is rule-bounded and not subject to general processes of speculation or trial and error.

The gulf between Western and traditional Aboriginal mathematical understandings has been one focus of the discussion about culture as heritage. Christie, for example, has suggested that: ‘all Western notions of quantity — of more and less, of numbers, mathematics and positivistic thinking — are not only quite irrelevant to the Aboriginal world, but contrary to it. When Aborigines see the world, they focus on the qualities and relations that are apparent, and quantities are irrelevant’ (1985: 11). Pam Harris’s book, *Mathematics in a Cultural Context* (1991), from which this quote has been drawn, provides a very persuasive account of what that might mean, with powerful implications for conventional educational practice. Seagrim and Lendon have gone so far as to say that, with respect to teaching numeracy skills, either the endeavour will fail or the culture will be radically affected. ‘[A] gross disruption of the culture will be avoided only if a general change from qualitative to quantitative concerns occurs very slowly, so that an indigenous adaptation, an Aboriginal solution can be worked out’ (1980: 67).

In short, the very content and status of the knowledge that is taken for granted in Western-style education may challenge and disrupt some of the foundations of Indigenous cultures. This is no small matter. Having an undivided sense of ‘how you are supposed to be’ is the most basic foundation for development and maturation, the platform for confident operation in the world.

Culture, as regularities or tendencies in patterns of behaviour within groups of Aboriginal peoples across varied contexts, has been a focal point of debate. Since the 1980s, ways of learning that may be specific and common to Aboriginal peoples, in concert with their basis — culturally-defined habits of discourse and personal interaction — have been a topic of debate.

Stephen Harris’s book, *Culture and Learning: Tradition and education in north-east Arnhem Land*, was a key work in this regard. On the basis of his work at a Yolngu school, he suggested that there were a number of important cultural variations, generalisable in that context at least: learning through real life
What works?

performance rather than practice in contrived settings; the mastering of context-specific skills rather than abstract, generalisable principles; learning through observation and imitation rather than through oral or written verbal instruction; learning through personal trial and error as opposed to verbally-mediated demonstrations; and an evident orientation towards people rather than tasks, information or systems (1984: 77–90).

Other researchers have pursued these ideas, among other things elaborating the cultural importance of cooperative rather than competitive behaviour (for example, Hughes and More, 1993) and different styles of discourse (Eagleson et al., 1982; Eades, 1993; Malcolm, 1995; etc.).

In his later book, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, Harris made a case for ‘voluntary compartmentalisation of incompatible cultures to allow sensitive but effective learning of both. Two-way living proposes that the small cultures should have free access to the majority society but restrict access to its own’ (1990: 20). The role he saw for schools in this process was to build two separate and equal educational domains, Aboriginal and Western, both of high quality, as ‘a potentially powerful means of handing authority over Aboriginal children back to their parents’ *(ibid.)*.

Reflecting on Harris’s position, Nicholls et al. criticised its ‘underlying binarism and reductionism’ (1996: 6) and suggested that the ways of learning described as distinctively Aboriginal were consistent with those of some other non-Aboriginal groups. Bell had already warned about generalising from members of tradition-oriented communities to those living in other environments (1988), and others cautioned against simplistic versions of these suggestions becoming writ (for example Malin, 1997). However, in the context of learning to understand how individual students might learn best, there is ample evidence to suggest that carefully-documented descriptions of culturally-distinctive ways of learning need to be part of the background knowledge of teachers working with Indigenous students.

Inexperienced non-Indigenous teachers of younger Indigenous children are often affronted by their non-conformity with ‘school’ behaviour: not following directions immediately or at all; choosing when and how to interact; reacting very negatively to ‘growling’; and dislike of being singled out for attention. Baarda is among those who have described the impact of culturally-different child-rearing practices on teacher and school expectations about behaviour, and the comparatively high level of autonomy among even very young Aboriginal children. She notes that:

In bush schools where white teachers are faced with whole classes of Aboriginal children, the most adaptable teachers tend to abandon strategies that don’t work. They abandon competitive or shame-inducing activities. They allow children to help each other. They don’t make children struggle with difficult things. They provide
more individual help and encouragement. They don’t bribe or bargain for cooperation, and they choose more relevant topics.

In urban schools, where teachers have a majority of white children who do respond to the usual kind of instruction, and a few Aboriginal students who don’t, the teachers tend to persist with the same strategies and the Aboriginal children are seen as deviant or backward. The most common reaction of Aboriginal children in this situation is to withdraw, speaking and participating as little as possible. There are occasional bursts of anger. They often stop coming to school (1990: 170).

In terms of culture, meaning the characteristics of life as it is lived on a daily basis, one of the most marked differences between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples is the comparatively high level of mobility among the latter. This mobility has an impact on the continuity of schooling and training, contributes to the level of absences, and is often seized on as a focal point for criticising Indigenous parents and carers and blaming them for its consequences. But as Eades explains, this mobility is, apart from anything else, an important medium for cultural maintenance and cohesion as well as a consequence of dispossession from homelands.

There is cultural pressure to travel for family meetings and group activities, while leisure activities and social networks revolve around the very wide network of the extended family. High priority is attached to community cohesion through activities such as funerals, initiations, and other ceremonies, and also to participating in social and cultural activities, such as football or basketball, other community and family business, and in meetings and social affairs organised by Aboriginal organisations, for example in pursuing land claims, and in affirming issues of identity and self-determination. ... Keeping in touch now means moving about. Maintaining family contacts may be one of the most important obligations or expectations, along with shared responsibility for child rearing, caring for old people, sharing of material resources and assisting in times of sickness (1988: 34).

In summary, certain aspects of Indigenous cultures may pose formidable challenges for Indigenous people achieving success in Western-style education and training: in terms of its content; in terms of its conventional media of instruction, and the skills and cultural background those media assume; and in terms of factors in Indigenous lifestyles.

To these issues must be added the instrumental value of success — the ‘why would you bother?’ question. The authors of the Desert Schools report suggest:

The Australian version of formal education as it exists presently does not seem to be overtly valued in many Aboriginal communities, despite their public assertions that education is important. Especially this is likely to be the case where the conventional range of job prospects and further educational and training opportunities seem inaccessible, as in the central desert regions under study. ... We need to remind ourselves that our ‘mainstream’ education system still principally prepares students for urban living, for employment and for further
studies, and consequently may appear irrelevant to those who cannot see these options in their own foreseeable futures (1996: 15).

It is not just in central Australia where this might be true. The areas where many Indigenous Australians live are marked by high levels of unemployment and a limited range of opportunities for paid work. If the pay-off for long-term participation in education and training is a life of comparative material comfort and security, this incentive is more likely to be absent for Indigenous people than it is for their fellow citizens.

Mention must also be made of the incidence of racism in our educational and training institutions. Many of the project reports we have received refer to ‘the risks’ teachers have been encouraged to take in the process of their work. We would suggest, however, that they are not in the same league as the risks a 15 year-old Aboriginal boy attending a provincial high school may take every single day.

In his Overview of the proceedings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Commissioner Johnston states:

The relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were historically influenced by racism, often of the overt, outspoken and sanctimonious kind; but, more often, particularly in later times, of the quiet assumption that scarcely recognises itself. What Aboriginal people have largely experienced is policies nakedly racially-based and in their everyday lives the constant irritation of racist attitudes (1991: 10).

‘The quiet assumption [of racial superiority/inferiority] that scarcely recognises itself’ is still alive and well in our training institutions. It may simply be the function of ignorance and be relatively benign in character, amenable to revision through contact and the acquisition of a better knowledge and appreciation of another culture. However, it may be more rigidly entrenched, clothed in attitudes such as ‘kids are just kids. I don’t make any exceptions. I treat them all the same.’ Thus when the 15 year-old Aboriginal boy acts up for the third time in a month, the process of easing him out of school via suspension or exclusion may be gradual but firm, and based on a set of unexamined and apparently unexamimable assumptions, shored up by prejudice and the commonplaces of community attitudes.

A number of the IESIP projects were designed to challenge such attitudes, and to generate more informed understandings of Indigenous culture and life experience. It is gratifying to be able to report their very high level of success.

One project in particular, in a provincial city, produced and trialed ‘a culturally-sensitive assessment instrument of Indigenous students’ outside-school living skills’ on the basis that, when Indigenous students are unsuccessful in coping with the academic demands of school, there may be a tendency for their ability to be underestimated in formal assessment as a
consequence of the use of culturally-inappropriate instruments, or to be underestimated informally by teachers who do not have the opportunity to observe the children coping successfully with the demands of everyday life. (The summary report can be found on p. 352.)

The theory was that if teachers could be given information about the ways in which Indigenous young people coped successfully outside school, that information might change teachers’ expectations and provide ideas for helping students to achieve better in the classroom.

A checklist was developed and trialed quite extensively. The final version contains 113 items related to: family; cultural and spiritual understanding; daily living; communication; social skills; thinking skills; health; well-being and safety; and employment. Fifty-two students’ parents/carers completed the checklist, and 49 teachers were provided with the information. Thirty-one of these reported changes to their work as a consequence of having received the information from the checklist, nine others supported the process in general terms but found difficulty in applying the information. Additional work on an accompanying manual has been carried out to rectify their problems.

But a comment by one of the nine teachers who rejected the value of the exercise illustrates a point made above: ‘Having insight into a student’s domestic situation does not, by itself, make any difference. Learning the reasons for homework not being done does not get it done.’ The second sentence is right. The first sentence is wrong.

In his book, *Culture of Complaint*, Robert Hughes suggests that:

Multi-culturalism asserts that people with different roots can co-exist, that they can learn to read the image banks of others, that they can and should look across frontiers of race, language, gender and age without prejudice or illusion, and learn to think against the background of a hybridised society. It proposes — modestly enough — that some of the most interesting things in history and culture happen at the interface between cultures. It wants to study border situations, not only because they are fascinating in themselves, but because understanding them may bring with it a little hope for the world (1993: 83–84).

Hughes, too, is right; but he is writing from a distinctly privileged position. Genuine bi- and multi-cultural understandings and operation require a confident grounded-ness, a firm knowledge of where you ‘sit’, as well as an openness to the variety and implicit interest in other expressions of culture. A sophisticated education and a decent level of material security support that process. For many Indigenous people, these conditions don’t exist. Yet access to some of the more obvious benefits of living in this society demand a degree of bi-culturalism from them, and to be effectively bi-cultural is hard. It requires considerable personal strength, even when you are not handicapped by social attitudes derived from the colour of your skin. Active or passive rejection of its demands are an understandable, even a necessary, response.
Despite these difficulties, many of the results of the IESIP SRP projects suggest that effective bi-culturalism is a lived possibility. The following quote from a young Indigenous adult working as a mentor to secondary age students in Project VS6 (case study, p. 119) captures the spirit of optimism on this topic which pervaded many of the projects.

One of our aims is to help these students explore their culture in a contemporary way. Rather than dwell on the past, we’re trying to make our input about careers and the world of work as relevant as possible to the 1990s. We are using a lot of exercises and activities to get their young minds thinking about what it means to be a Koori in the 1990s. In other words, we are saying that you don’t have to sacrifice your Aboriginality to live and work in today’s changing world. Our message is that you can have the best of both worlds, by making your life a success through work and expressing yourself as a Koori at the same time. … We need to get more Koori kids into the workforce, not just as labourers or as support personnel in the government sector, but as professionals or as members of the private sector setting up their own businesses. We want to help them be able to do all these things as Aboriginal people functioning effectively in the 1990s. That’s who we are and where we are going. We can’t go back, we must go forward.

A final word on this topic goes to Commissioner Johnston, again from his findings from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody:

All those who have come to this country this century have had a concept of the country and culture to which they were coming and made their decision to leave their own place and embrace the new. For Aboriginal people it is different. They did not go through the process of leaving the old to embrace the new. They never voluntarily surrendered their culture and, indeed, fought tooth and nail to preserve it, throughout dispossession, protection, assimilation, integration. In their own words, they survived and their culture survived; in different forms and to different degrees in different parts of the country as a result of different experiences. They have the right to retain that culture, and that identity. Self-determination is both the expression and guarantee of that right (1991: 19–20).

The decision about what sort of education is right for their children must, finally, be left to Indigenous parents and communities.

The focus of this report is fixed on Indigenous achievement in formal ‘mainstream’ processes of education and training. It is outside the range of our work to comment on forms of education which might be derived more explicitly from Indigenous cultures and that have outcomes which do not appear in the relevant official documents. Nor, in fact, are we required to comment about the immense value of widespread inclusion of studies of Indigenous cultures in the education of all Australians, even though it is
evident that this could make an impact on the level of racism, especially implicit racism, directed towards Indigenous peoples by other Australians.

It might appear that the choice of whether or not to participate in mainstream education and training is illusory. It is legally required to certain ages, and even in remote communities it is an accepted, and in many cases well-enjoyed, part of growing up. It does provide access to employment and the material advantages that ensue, and it is a choice made by several hundreds of thousands of Indigenous Australians in all parts of the country. And yet the choice is also made to not participate, because school may be a site of failure, of denigration, and of constant battles with non-Indigenous authority.

To this point, this section of the report beginning with McInerney’s listing (p. 137) has reviewed some of the major issues that are likely to inhibit success in formal education and training for Indigenous students. It has been dominated by an underlying but unstated proposition — the mystery is not why Indigenous achievement in formal education and training is so poor, but why it is so good.

Overall access and participation rates for Indigenous Australians have improved dramatically over the last thirty years and especially in the last decade, with participation rates in some but not all sectors of education and training either meeting or exceeding the rate for other Australians.

In 1996 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation in formal education and training was close to 2.5% of the total group. Indigenous Australians comprise 2.1% of the total population.

In the last decade the proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over with a formal qualification has increased from 10% in 1991 to 14% in 1996, with over 900 Indigenous people with a postgraduate and higher degree qualification in 1996. There has been a strong growth in Indigenous enrolments at school with a 40% increase from 1991 to 1998. Indigenous enrolments in VET have almost doubled from 1994 to 1998 and enrolments in higher education have increased by about 60% from 1991 to 1998.

An examination of the school participation rates by sector shows that primary school participation is approaching the non-Indigenous rate, with 83% of Indigenous children of primary school age participating in schooling, compared to 89% of non-Indigenous children in 1996. In 1997, the apparent retention rates of Indigenous students to Year 10 was about 80%, 50% to Year 11 and 30% to Year 12.

But these statistics should not be allowed to disguise the continuing disparity between the outcomes from education and training for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. While access and participation rates are improving, the achievement of equitable and appropriate educational outcomes has not occurred.
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For example, Indigenous students, 15 years and over, are less likely to achieve a post-school qualification with currency in the labour market. While the level has increased from about 10% in 1991 to 14% in 1996, there is considerable room for improvement in relation to the total population level of about 34% in 1996.

In addition, these improvements in current rates of participation disguise significant disparity in terms of the types of courses that are undertaken by Indigenous students. In 1996, for example, 2.7% of the total population aged 15 years and over, had a postgraduate or higher degree qualification, which was more than five times that for Indigenous people (0.5%).

While TAFE enrolments are high, they are skewed towards the lower level and shorter courses, compared with non-Indigenous Australians.

Participation in secondary schooling has increased from 54% in 1986 to 60% in 1996, but is only slowly improving in relation to the non-Indigenous rate of 84%.

Indigenous students record markedly lower levels in all academic subjects. Of particular concern is their poor literacy achievement which was reinforced by the findings of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey. Approximately 70% of all students in Year 3 surveyed met the identified performance standards in reading and writing. Less than 20% of students in the Indigenous sample met the reading standards and less than 30% of students in the Indigenous sample met the writing standards. In addition the data suggested that the lowest achieving Year 3 Indigenous students were likely to make little or no progress over the following two years. There was a similar trend for Year 5 students. Over time this situation deteriorates to the point where many Indigenous students are often 3 to 4 year levels below other students. This performance is not just a reflection of socio-economic and English language background, since 60% to 70% of Year 3 students from low socio-economic backgrounds and just over 60% with a language background other than English met the reading and writing standards.

The apparent retention rate to Year 12 for Indigenous students across the nation is less than half that for other students. In 1998, 83% of Indigenous students remained in schooling to Year 10, but only 32% to Year 12 compared with 73% of non-Indigenous students. In addition rates for both Year 10 and Year 12 retention vary considerably across the country with some regions of significant concern.

These figures illustrate how much has been achieved by all involved, and makes clear that a solid platform for further achievement exists. But if comparability is to be achieved, much remains to be done.

What have the SRPs contributed, and what can be learnt from them? The key tasks of the next parts of this report are to describe the degree and nature of their success, to draw out the factors which led to those successes and, as importantly, to explain the relationships between them.
What were the results?

The degree of success

Eighty-four IESIP SRPs were funded. One project did not begin; one which began did not continue due to student withdrawal; and activity appears to have been limited in three others. Thus the project attrition rate for an enterprise of this nature was comparatively low — just under 5%. Four projects have only recently commenced.

Final performance data are not available for 23 projects, although four have already reported that they are likely to achieve or exceed their targets. On the basis of progress reports and other contact, it is anticipated that the final results of these projects will not alter the following pattern.

Of the other 60, 41 (68%) have achieved or exceeded their targets, and 11 (18%) have either achieved or exceeded one or more of their targets but not the complete set, or achieved them at one or more sites but not at one or more other sites. In six of these cases project work is continuing, with the expectation that further gains will be made.

Eight projects (13%) did not achieve their contracted goals, but five of these achieved what they actually set out to do: in four cases, the development of courses, programs or teaching materials; and in one, delivery of professional development. In each of these cases, performance indicators were used that were either unsuitable to the nature of the task or that would only show improvement over a longer period than that allowed for by the time span of the project. One of the remaining ‘failures’ managed to increase access to tertiary education for Indigenous students by 500% compared with the current local rates. (The target was twice that figure.) Another failed because of a mis-judgement about level of hardware required to support an experiment with the use of lap-top computers in the classroom.

What were these results about?

Following is a summary of performance indicators selected for SRP projects by topic and incidence. (Note: in many cases there is more than one indicator per project.)
### What works?

The aggregated set of IESIP SRP performance indicators by topic and incidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful transition from home to school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early childhood</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>young adult</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mobility identification and support</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful re-entry to school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved progression rates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary-secondary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary completion/articulation rates</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a future development plan</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET participation rates</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET completion rates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeships</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other modules/courses</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation to further education/training</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English literacy improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early childhood</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>young adults</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy improvement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>early childhood</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>young adults</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOTE improvement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Findings and Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved achievement in terms of the Key Competencies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective assessment of outside-school living skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of teachers professionally developed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement in program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in culturally-inclusive programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous involvement in course development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data we have show that the pattern of achievement accords with the level of incidence of the indicators. In other words there are no ‘topics’ which have been particular areas of success or failure — achievement was spread evenly across them.

### Were the results worth achieving?

The performance targets ranged in levels of ambition. Some, a very few, proposed to achieve minor increases in attendance (from 92 to 95%, for example, based on the development of an excellent new preschool music program), or were to some extent self-fulfilling (for example, achievement of participation in VET modules within a school — the school offered the modules, the students took them and, as it happens, found them valuable and the school will continue to offer them).

The largest group, however, established benchmarks for improvement in performance or participation which were in line with local, state or national rates for non-Indigenous students, reflecting the goals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy.

There are some examples of striking success. For example, 13 younger secondary students improving between two and five Levels on an ESL Outcomes Profile; more than 100 students moving 1.5 or 2 Levels upwards in terms of the national English Profile over a nine-month period; 15 of 18 primary-aged students improving one or more Stages of the Mathematics Profile in the same time span; discipline referrals down by 48% for targeted students; 100% completion rate of VET modules compared with 42% previously.

But it would not be correct to focus on these cases as characteristic of project performance. ‘Steady’, ‘solid’, ‘still to be maintained’, ‘some sites good, others more problematic’ are more generally appropriate terms. It appears to us that some of the best work was done in challenging situations where some but not a great deal of progress was made. For example, attendance rates up by 5%, suspension rates down by 6%; retention rates improved from 82 to 95%; one
What works?

Indigenous parent newly involved in student support; 34 of 61 students having an individual performance plan. Such results are more prevalent than the dramatic gains, and perhaps more typical of what might be expected within a limited time span.

There were, too, many project outcomes that were not recorded by the formal performance indicators. They are diverse and can be explored in more detail in the previous and following sections of this report. But if they have a dominant theme, it is the evident growth in self-confidence and engagement among the students involved.

We also note the contribution the SRPs have made in terms of artefacts and infrastructure: seven new sets of teaching/learning materials; four newly accredited courses; four completed research projects; four programs of professional development conducted; a significant improvement to literacy resources in 18 remote schools; two interventions to improve learning for hearing-impaired students, one on major scale; nine cases where information technology has been purchased and put to use; and two projects provided far-reaching new tools for systems to support Indigenous students. Three of the projects have produced major structural change within an institution.

Context and scale as factors

There are very marked differences in the levels of participation and achievement among Indigenous young people in urban and remote areas. On the basis that there may have been higher or lower levels of success generated by context, we reviewed achievement by location. This was done by checking reported success against remote and non-remote locations and, as well, reviewing performance indicators to see if they had the same general level of challenge as those in the whole group. This was the case.

Twenty-two projects had one or more sites in remote areas. (We have included projects in centres like Broome and Ceduna in this group, although they are described as ‘rural’ in ABS data.) Of the 22, we do not have results from four; 13 achieved their targets; and five partially achieved their targets. However, in two multi-site projects, in one case slightly lower and in the other significantly lower results were reported from the remote sites. This is of some significance, but overall location factors (on this very broad measure) appear to have made little difference to levels of project achievement.

We also reviewed levels of success against scale: single-site projects versus multi-site projects. Again there is no discernible trend, although an issue of the importance of project ‘localisation’ does appear and will be discussed further below.

In summary, it can be firmly asserted that the general objective of the SRPs was achieved. Providers of education and training were challenged, and did
‘demonstrate that improving Indigenous student learning outcomes can occur in a relatively short space of time through concerted efforts’, across a very broad range of projects in varied locations and contexts.

Before turning to the question of ‘how’, we think the issue of ‘why’ should be broached, further exploring the impact of aspects of the IESIP SRP’s design.

### Some reasons these results were achieved

#### Exceptional circumstances?

Were these results achieved by remarkable people in exceptional circumstances supported by very large amounts of funding which will not be continued? This is a question which must be investigated because, if so, they can be dismissed as a fortuitous blip on a steady horizon.

A ‘Hawthorne effect’ has been noticeable: that is, the increase in the level of energy and inspiration produced by a change in conventional circumstances, in this case a ‘special’, funded, defined task with reported and publicly scrutinised results. This has been expressed through the evident commitment and concern of people leading and working on the projects and the obvious determination to get as close as possible to achieving established goals. Such characteristics have not been universal, but they have been very widespread.

But the project work has not been conducted in ‘exceptional circumstances’ if by that we mean carefully controlled and favourable situations. It has been carried out in normal preschools, schools and training institutions, in so far as the term ‘normal’ can be used to cover the considerable variations in the contexts of these projects: from a training site at Darling Harbour in the heart of Sydney to a school for 30 Kimberley children an hour or more by light plane from Broome.

Although they don’t figure extensively in the reports included in this document, project work was hampered by a number of factors cited during interview and visiting processes. The most widespread comments relate to the shortness of timelines and the point during the year when the money was distributed.

The work of education and training institutions is strongly influenced by the calendar year. Christmas is when staff and students turn over. February is when planning is done for new projects. These don’t really get into full stride until the middle of the year. The rush at the end of the year is when work and its results are evaluated. These are patterns of activity that may not be essential, but they are yet to be revised in practice. Many projects received their funding in the second half of the year. Arrangements already in place needed to be revised. In a number of cases, staff who had been trained for their involvement left over the Christmas break, and the mobility of students in target groups would have been at its annual high point.
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In addition, there is a conventional incidence of references in these interviews to factors such as: lack of support in the school or training site; poor task definition; low priority being given to the project work; community support being limited or absent; loss of key project figures; negative attitudes expressed by colleagues, administrators or non-Indigenous members of local communities towards the project (especially, ‘Why should “they” get this extra support?’); refusals to accommodate fairly minor changes in organisational or other procedures; and several biting comments about barriers imposed from elsewhere, especially inflexible arrangements for credentialling. These factors did, of course, create stumbling blocks to project success, and they were as prevalent as could be expected — but no more or no less.

There was an underlying suggestion that the strategies employed in project work would be ‘innovative’. The source of this assumption is uncertain. The SRP guidelines state that it was envisaged that the work would be practical, and would build on advice from experienced practitioners, researchers and Indigenous community representatives, implying that what was already known, and done, could be usefully harnessed to meet the IESIP SRPs’ goals.

The term ‘innovation’ has an enticing cachet, and is often used in education and training circles to imply ‘better’. It may have been this which led us to try to provide a list of innovative practices generated by the SRPs in our paper of preliminary findings. This list was preceded by the caveat that ‘most projects have been devoted to doing something different or differently, and therefore could be described as “innovative” in their own contexts.’ We also noted that ‘innovation’ is not always easy to define and especially with relation to education and training practices.

However, a review of this list and more thorough knowledge of the work of projects indicates that to typify and confirm project work as ‘innovative’, is mistaken.

There were a small number of cases where projects appeared to ‘fit’ the funding, but most have histories. More than half were components of on-going work, either site-based or system/agency-driven, to develop or embed currently functioning priorities. The number of projects devoted to the development of VET in schools is a useful illustration of this point. Another one-third or more stemmed from ideas which had been in currency at the site/s for some time. The SRP funding provided an opportunity to pursue these ideas in a practical fashion.

When we look at the strategies adopted there are very few which differ in any significant way from what an able and experienced practitioner with some additional resources to improve outcomes in Indigenous education and training would have done.
The application of Brian Gray’s approach to developing English literacy skills in Projects L7 and L8 might be taken as an exception to this view. The Scaffolded Literacy approach does propose several significant changes to conventional pedagogy, but it has been in the process of development for a decade or more. In other projects, the development of tracking systems to help support mobile students is new, but has been subject to discussion for as long as the issue has been apparent. The engagement of elements of the mining industry in supporting the education of workers is valuable but not a ‘first’. The identification and support of gifted and talented Indigenous students may not have an obvious, formally structured precedent, but in individual cases in this country it has a long and important history. The strategies used in this project for building a sense of community, purpose and possibility have been employed by other projects and well beyond. The creation of a virtual classroom for young trainees and the use of information technology to support literacy learning is, in the first case inventive, but in both cases capitalising on new tools in relatively wide use. (Some of the earliest and best uses of information technology in education have occurred in remote schools with predominantly Indigenous enrolments. In some cases they house highly sophisticated desk-top publishing enterprises, an essential component of generating relevant curriculum materials.)

In no respect should these comments be taken to imply that these projects were not what they purported to be or of diminished value. As it happens all those mentioned have been entirely or partially successful with good prospects for continued gains. But if the ‘activity’ described in the project summaries in the following section of this report is reviewed carefully, the overwhelming sense it provides is of conventional good practice. There are a number of cases where comparatively rare expertise has been employed (projects focused on Indigenous languages, a case in point), but the bulk of the results have been achieved by people working more intensively with strategies which are widely familiar. Except in the sense of doing something new or different at a particular site or sites, ‘innovation’ is not a hallmark of the project work.

At the second conference a comment was made that what people had done ‘did not appear to be rocket science’. It is not. It is plain, and no more than should be legitimately expected on a far more widespread basis. Why did it occur in this instance?

**Motivation**

The will to make improvements

Change happens, but progress is the result of acts of will.

While many of the people we have met who have worked on the projects have indeed been remarkable, they probably represent a fairly standard sample of
What works?

people working in the area of Indigenous education and training. In the preliminary paper it was suggested that they appeared to share certain attributes. These included a capacity and willingness to solve problems as they arose on a case-by-case basis; an ability to see past the idea or the process to the person, while still remaining focused on longer term goals; a high level of attention to the interpersonal aspects of student motivation; energy, perseverance and a determination to succeed. Many were well-organised, had good skills in personal negotiation and, often but not always, a deep knowledge of their local particular Indigenous communities and cultures. The distinctive factor they all shared was a fundamental and fixed belief in the value of what they were doing.

Their professional motives for involvement are worth canvassing. Although the formal reports are, understandably, not self-reflective in this way, the visiting program provided some insights.

A small, but significant, minority were press-ganged into service. This occurred particularly in large, multi-site, system-sponsored projects. An undertaking had been given to mount the project, producing a subsequent need for someone to organise the work. In other cases positions became vacant through, for example the departure of one project officer and another having to be recruited in situations where such people are relatively hard to find. In some cases the attitudes of such people remained distanced and somewhat negative; more frequently they became caught up in the work and its implicit interest.

Others had well-established long term plans and their projects were shaped accordingly. But, again, they were in a minority.

The most common group could be described very broadly as opportunist, with an underlying sense that ‘something could be done here’. And so we have a group running a kindergarten that takes this opportunity to pursue an idea that, almost unintentionally, builds some new structure into their program; a coordinator who has a theory that smaller classes working with an appropriately-trained teacher might make a difference to a trouble spot in the school; a child-care centre coordinator who wants to develop better relationships with her Indigenous community; a researcher with a deep concern about the auditory health of young Indigenous people; a bureaucrat who sees a chance to rectify what he sees as an annoying and unnecessary problem in remote schools; an agency administrator who decides to challenge all the schools coordinated by that agency to provide a better deal for their Indigenous students; a principal who sees the possibility to develop better records of her people’s history; a teacher-linguist who, more or less on his own initiative, sees the opportunity to add to the stock of material to sustain Indigenous languages. This list could go on at some length and, even in this modest detail, would illustrate an enormous level of variation.
But the factors that appear in common, and which overlap considerably, are the need to satisfy professional interest, and the strong, but frequently implicit, belief that there is something that can and should be done. Again, these are not unusual characteristics among those who work in education and training.

There were two initial design features that reinforced these motivations — its outcomes-focus, a stick of sorts, and the carrot of the funding. We believe that both of these factors contributed in a major fashion to its success.

The outcomes focus
The only surprise in this statement may come from the nomination of the usefulness of the outcomes focus. Many project personnel were working for the first time to outcomes expressed in concrete terms as performance indicators, and a number found the process irksome and were suspicious about their relevance and validity.

The aggregated list of performance indicators above (pp. 152–153) is strongly reflective of the themes of the national goals. It has already been stated that this list provides a limited account of project intentions and activities. The apparently minimal focus on cultural inclusion and support, for example, is the antithesis of what happened in practice. No projects were inattentive to this issue. This is one necessary caution in reviewing data produced by the projects. It has also been noted that the vast majority generated worthy and valuable successes in addition to or instead of those which appear in their indicators.

That said, the indicators have generally been most helpful in defining and driving the work. They provided targets which project workers tried very hard to meet and a constant reminder, if one was needed, of the purpose of the work and longer term goals. We note a change in attitude towards their use which, while not universal, could be described as general. Familiarity, in this case, bred wider acceptance of their potential value. We note also a change in the nature of reporting over the course of projects. A focus on the indicators has progressively sharpened definitions of what has been achieved. Data collected through the projects have been fairly widely used to bid for additional funding support or to continue project work. Several projects define the outcomes focus as having been a major factor in the success of their work.

However, the evident impact that the performance indicators had on motivation placed more pressure on the quality of their formulation and their relevance to actual project intentions and work. They have not been unequivocally helpful in this regard.

There was some legitimate pressure applied to formulate project performance indicators exclusively in terms of the national targets. This was not successful where the products of projects were research reports, teaching and other
What works?

professional/community materials, or professional development activities, all of which might be expected to have an impact over time, but not within a one-year developmental period. Thus there is some evidence of ‘squeezing’ where actual project intentions did not sit easily with making a difference quickly. At the other end of the project, the impact of this ‘squeezing’ has become apparent.

Use of progression through Stages or Levels of the National Profiles or other conventional band scales was also problematic in some cases. Although there was one inventive circumvention of this difficulty, these scales tend to assume definable change over an 18-month period, and so were not calibrated finely enough to allow easy measurement of change in a year.

Failure to achieve targets because they were never going to be achievable, or because the wrong targets were prescribed, can be corrected and seen as one of the useful lessons of this process. Achievement of targets which were adjacent or barely related to the work of a project should be considered a larger problem. In such cases nothing can be learnt about causal factors. The logic connecting action with result is absent, leading to ‘papering over’, a tactic that efforts to make genuine improvements in Indigenous education cannot afford. This was not a significant problem in the work of the projects, but even limited evidence of its existence is enough to encourage more strenuous efforts to get design issues right from the outset. These difficulties are not marginal and should be addressed thoughtfully, but they did not interfere generally with the effective conduct of projects.

On this experience, an outcomes-based approach is most useful. The value of having clear and concrete goals, and the usefulness of collecting data, has been widely noted by participants. Overall, the advantages have substantially outweighed the problems.

The issues do, however, suggest that more experience and support is required for the effective formulation and widespread use of core targets and performance indicators in schools and training sites. On the basis of this experience again, performance indicators appear to work best when they are:

• strictly related to the work being done;
• well known to and a constant reference point for those involved;
• related to attendance, retention, grade progression and completion rates (enrolment and completion data are concrete and relatively easy to obtain); and
• confined to manageable units of students. A ‘manageable unit’ can be a class, a cohort of students within a school/institution and, in some exceptional instances, larger groups where a primary function of the project is data collection (eg, the student mobility projects).
This is not to suggest that performance indicators for skill development or cultural inclusion are unimportant, unobtainable or invalid. But a distinction appears in the national targets that must be noted, between confirmed success at certain points, for example, secondary and VET completion rates, and the achievement of conditions which it is believed might lead to success in education and training, for example, consistent attendance and the development of literacy skills.

The telling data are related to actual success rather than surrogates for it. A more intensive focus on those outcomes, rather than those which are supplementary or complementary, is an idea that should be considered further. Apart from simplicity of application, it is a way of accommodating significant differences in approach which may produce the same desired outcome and the wide range of scales and instruments which are currently in force in differing systems and agencies across the country.

The funding

The funding made available was an ‘enabler’, an incentive to mount projects and a condition which allowed them to proceed.

The considerable majority of project funds (which were, in total, $12.7m) were spent on personnel costs, mainly project officer salaries and money to increase the level of teacher and education worker support to students. A significant area of non-recurrent cost has been the acquisition of ICT hardware and software as essential components of project operation.

Some project per capita costs have been significant (in excess of $7500), but the considerable majority have been $2000 or less. Costs have been examined according to sector, topic and level of success of projects. Our conclusions are as follows.

- Projects related to the early childhood sector have been in general less expensive than those related to older students.
- Projects related to supporting attendance of secondary age students and participation in VET courses tend to be more expensive than others.
- More expensive courses tend to be those which will not be sustainable without additional funds.
- There is no obvious relationship between funding levels and degree of project success.

However these conclusions must be treated with caution because of the:

- range of project ambitions and structures, and the different levels of difficulty in the undertaking;
- absence of standardised costings, and the relatively ‘open’ nature of budgetary submissions; and
What works?

• consistent threshold costs associated with project start-up and maintenance, commonly one salary with on-costs.

Can the results be sustained over a longer period than that allowed for by the funding? To some extent this is an unfair question. It was not among the central considerations in the design of the IESIP SRPs. However, it is a matter of natural interest to those who ran projects and opens up a number of useful questions about the resource-dependent nature of change. Thus we did ask project officers to comment on this question in their reports and have collated 66 responses.

• Seven projects have completed their work, producing one or more products (for example, a new course, materials, research, an institutionalised system) that will have continuing use and/or will achieve completion with no need for re-iteration. (About one quarter of the projects will eventually produce products of this type. In several cases, the project funding has supplied infrastructure or equipment which will allow continuation of work. On our estimate this applies to about 10% of the projects.)

• In 26 cases (about 40%), responses indicate that costs will be taken on by the institution, and/or continuing support will be provided through voluntarism, and/or the practices have become conventions in their setting.

• Eight responses (12%) indicate that the project has been a component of change in a larger agency/system plan or has been embedded in an institution and will provide procedures for new practices which will be able to continue. To date there are five examples of system/agency funding contribution which will allow project work to continue, two State contributions of new money and one re-direction of aspects of Commonwealth funding, a recognition that individual cases of success have been identified beyond their immediate environment.

• In 17 instances (26%) any sustainability of the project work is contingent on additional resources. In particular this applies to those projects where higher levels of individualised support have been provided to students.

• In the remaining cases, the answer was not given or unknown.

This question could have been framed so that a distinction was drawn between the sustainability of the projects (‘will the salary be there?’) and the sustainability of the results of the projects (‘can we keep doing the same sort of thing?’). This may have made some difference to the nature of the responses, but probably not a great deal. Even allowing for the skewing that might be expected from responses to a question which might be interpreted as ‘do you need more money?’, this material suggests that there is a fairly high level of resource-dependency. That should not come as a surprise: the work was there to be done, and it costs money to do it.
The prior section stated that the IESIP SRPs achieved their intentions. This section has also illustrated the relative normality of the circumstances in which the projects operated and described two standard extrinsic motivational factors in its design which supported that achievement. But the intrinsic motivational factor, the will to do better, so obvious among those involved, should not be glossed over in any regard. It is the basic capital of improvement efforts, to which various interest payments should be added.
**Direction that can be drawn from the project results**

**Goals for the education and training of Indigenous students**

The same distinction appears in the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy as appears in the national targets — that is, the difference between goals as a means to an end (that is, those relating to the involvement of Indigenous people in education decision-making, equality of access to educational services and equity of participation) and goals as ends in themselves (those relating to outcomes).

The operation of the IESIP SRP confirms this relationship. Improved outcomes will result from increasing the level of involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making and service delivery. Community members may need support in this process. The projects provide indications that in some contexts their capacities in this regard are already well-developed and that in others access has been more limited and capacities are still to be given the opportunity to develop.

Access to some services, especially to preschooling and training, remains an issue in some areas, but the majority of these projects operated in locations where access to a range of services exists. More subtle inhibiting factors, such as the degree of welcome from institutions and their staff, operate to restrict this access in some instances. Project work significantly increased this ‘welcome’ in many instances. Increasing participation levels in all sectors of education and training was deemed to be an essential pre-requisite for achieving success.

Therefore the projects support the ‘theory’ underpinning the National Policy. In more specific terms, the basic requirements for student success in formal education and training, as they are conventionally structured and delivered, must include the following factors.

- **For students**
  - consistent attendance, and engagement;
  - a sense of security, comfort and confidence, and realistic and meaningful challenge;
  - fluency in the use of the spoken form of the language of instruction, including the ability to extract meaning from and produce relevant text; and
  - completion of required work.
3: Findings and Discussion

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

Involvement of Indigenous people in education decision-making

1. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Indigenous parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of preschool, primary and secondary education services for their children.

2. To increase the number of Indigenous people employed as education administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers’ assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Indigenous culture, history and contemporary society, and Indigenous languages.

3. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Indigenous students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

4. To increase the number of Indigenous people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and students’ services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

5. To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Indigenous people to participate in education decision-making.

6. To develop arrangements for the provision of independent advice for Indigenous communities regarding education decisions at regional, State/Territory and national levels.

Equality of access to educational services

7. To ensure that Indigenous children of pre-primary age have access to preschool services on a basis comparable to those available to other Australian children of the same age.

8. To ensure that all Indigenous children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.

9. To ensure equitable access for Indigenous people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and higher education.
What works?

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
continued

Equity of educational participation
10. To achieve the participation of Indigenous children in preschool education for a period similar to that for all Australian children.
11. To achieve the participation of all Indigenous children in compulsory schooling.
12. To achieve the participation of Indigenous people in post-compulsory secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of all Australians in those sectors.

Equitable and appropriate education outcomes
13. To provide adequate preparation of Indigenous children in preschool education for the schooling years ahead.
14. To enable Indigenous attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.
15. To enable Indigenous students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.
16. To enable Indigenous students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.
17. To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Indigenous languages.
18. To provide community education services which enable Indigenous people to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities.
19. To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Indigenous adults with limited or no education experience.
20. To enable Indigenous students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.
21. To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Indigenous traditional and contemporary cultures.
• **For institutions**
  — encouragement of attendance, and engagement (including exploring and supporting relevant and meaningful motives for participation);
  — provision of a climate which supports a sense of security, comfort and confidence, and work which provides a realistic and meaningful challenge. This ‘climate’ includes a belief in the potential of students and their capacity to learn, and expectations that this will occur;
  — provision of effective instruction in language and other required skills; and
  — provision of conditions which allow sustained work on set tasks, including time, space and access to learning materials.

• **From parents and caregivers**
  — encouragement of attendance, and engagement; and
  — provision of a climate of support and encouragement.

If these factors are regrouped for consistency, they fall into three inter-related topics:
  • cultural recognition, acknowledgment and support;
  • the development of requisite skills; and
  • adequate levels of participation.

The strategies adopted in the project work were almost always designed in the light of these conditions. The strategies recognised two essential factors in the achievement of success.

Firstly, success is genuinely derived from a partnership of these parties to the educational process. Cultural support, recognition and acknowledgment can only be achieved by active and effective relationships between Indigenous communities and those who work in schools and training institutions. Both parties have a role to play. The development of requisite skills will evolve from teachers’ high expectations of students and the skill and, especially, the sensitivity with which they approach their work. Support, even in limited forms from home, will aid this process. Adequate levels of participation will only be achieved by active encouragement from home and the provision of a welcoming and accepting climate in the institution.

Secondly, holistic approaches are essential. The absence of any of these three components will seriously impair the likelihood of progress. For example, it is fruitless to have an excellent literacy program if students are not attending school. Equally, if students are attending, quality programs are required for progress to be achieved. The ‘overlaps’ in the purposes of most projects, especially of those focused on delivery to students, indicate an appreciation of this fact.
What works?

The outcomes of these projects confirm other information that there are three key focal points for further work, each of which must be underpinned by improvements in levels of attendance.

- The establishment of good functional levels of literacy in Standard Australian English and numeracy.
- Continuing participation during the secondary years.
- Clear and accessible pathways to futures in further education, training or employment.

The next section of the report reviews some of the key strategies used by projects to achieve these goals in terms of the three topics noted above.

Cultural inclusion

‘Cultural inclusion’, like ‘language across the curriculum’, is a term often used in education and training to represent a worthy, but not very practical, aim. It is an extra that you might consider after your core business is done. It can take inconsiderable forms like sporadic ‘chomp and stomp’ (food and dance) activities, which may be better than ‘nothing, but which hardly get to the heart of what might be required to accommodate the needs of minority cultural groups within an institution.

Respect for and understanding of Indigenous cultures are fundamental prerequisites for improving the levels of achievement of Indigenous students. Some of the factors which this might entail have been alluded to above. It certainly means pursuing action that makes institutions more ‘culturally-friendly’ in genuine and thorough-going terms. Some of the effective actions that projects have taken are considered further below, but there are three consistent features which are necessary foundations.

- The establishment of good personal relationships and mutual trust

The quality and depth of cross-cultural relationships, and the establishment of mutual personal trust, were consistently mentioned in site discussions as factors in project success.

Racial harmony is hardly universal in this country, and relationships operate against a larger background of cultural misunderstandings, unmet promises and dispossession. It can also be forgotten what a personal process education and training is for all concerned.

One or more ‘translational figures’ appear frequently in most successful (and many of the most successful) projects. These people had a capacity to operate comfortably in both white and Indigenous societies, interpreting each to the other with the respect of members of each. They are frequently but not always Indigenous. This has continuing implications for the role and status accorded
to Indigenous education workers and the selection criteria through which they are appointed.

But it also part of a process which one of the projects (LA1) describes in some detail, and the outlines of which could be followed by anyone, with additional rewards in terms of developing cross-cultural awareness.

Communication. From the outset, all of the project cards were laid on the table: from proposed aims, goals, processes and purposes, to issues of copyright and the retention of intellectual property ownership by contributors, to invitations to participate and payment levels for participants, to dates and timelines, to establishing and operating local reference groups, and so on. Additionally, all of the stakeholders were involved ….

Negotiation. It is important, the project team found, that a spirit of negotiation between empowered parties prevailed from the outset, rather than just consultation (between unequals).

Predictability, about project events and developments. Perhaps this is an offshoot of communication and negotiation, but Indigenous participants felt an ownership of, and identified with, the project in light of the fact that they had co-determined the pathway and the pace of events, and knew how things were going to unfold.

• Flexibility

Where cultural values differ in significant ways, all parties involved need to be flexible. One of the major impediments to the educational success of Indigenous students is an unwillingness to modify any arrangements — content, pedagogical, structural, organisational, credentialling — on the basis that success must be achieved in precisely the same way, and by precisely the same means, as other students. There must be some room to move at the edges of this process.

Flexibility is a major issue in situations where Indigenous students make up a small proportion of the total student group, and where externally-devised standardised courses are taught.

It also comes to light profoundly where students’ home cultures diverge most broadly from the conventional expectations of formal education and training. This can occur in two contexts: where secondary-aged students’ past experience of schooling has been deeply unsuccessful and damaging, and where students are living in tradition-oriented communities. (These contexts may overlap, of course.) Projects R1 and R2 (pp. 223–228) provide two of a number of examples of the first context. Courses and associated support processes were designed from a knowledge of the students and in response to their needs rather than the other way around. Project R3 did the same and had difficulties with gaining appropriate formal accreditation, an example of flexible processes operating at one level but not the next. Project L4 was among those that tried to build a higher and more functional level of the educational use of
What works?

Indigenous cultures and the home backgrounds of, in this case, young children in remote communities. Success was achieved through observation, empathy and taking students on their own terms. This would be described in teacher training courses as ‘starting where the students are at’. The selective application of this very basic idea to Indigenous education remains an odd phenomenon.

Many projects have helped their target groups achieve success through minor modifications to conventional arrangements, for example, by the addition of a study week where students help each other prior to the examination period of a TAFE course, or by revising course requirements to tailor them more closely to the actual needs of students. Flexibility is implicit in the mobility tracking project which has developed a support process for mobile students. An alternative approach would have been to blame students and their parents for high levels of mobility and to try to limit it in some way.

Flexibility is also evident in the inventiveness and creativity displayed in personal professional responses to the detail of issues as they arise in individual student cases. This may be the form of flexibility which has the most far-reaching consequences, and requires a level of cross-cultural awareness, as well as personal and professional empathy.

- **Localisation**

The records of these projects indicate that there are different routes to the same goals; that these routes are sometimes in apparent conflict; and that contextual factors (personnel, place and history among them) count for a great deal.

The problems of delivery of Western-style formal education and training in remote communities have been widely discussed, sometimes almost as a proxy for discussion of Indigenous education as a whole. But the vast majority of Australia’s Indigenous people do not live in remote communities. They live in the towns and cities of the eastern sea-board and the south-west. More than half live in New South Wales and Queensland, most in urban settings (nearly 20% in Sydney and Brisbane alone). They come from different family groups and may or may not have strong traditional links with the area in which they live. They may be deeply urbanised with life styles which are very similar to those of non-Indigenous Australians (if such a category can be said to exist).

This is a caution against making unwarranted cultural assumptions, but it is also a way of stressing the importance of educators and trainers being clear about the wishes of local communities and soliciting advice and support which will be effective in context.

The implications for the design and construction of government programs are strong. One of the major strengths of the IESIP SRPs has been that overarching goals were established, but how those goals were reached was generally determined locally. Programmes operating on detailed single templates are unlikely to be nearly as effective.
These three factors — mutual trust, flexibility and localisation — are powerfully inter-related of course. Good relationships are local, they breed flexibility, and they produce ‘strong’ forms of cultural inclusion. Tactics that were fundamental to these strategies included the following.

- **High levels of involvement by Indigenous people in the management and delivery of project work**

Most projects had a significant level of formal Indigenous community involvement in management. There is a good correlation between that factor and project success. As one project reported, ‘A significant Aboriginal adult presence is the major factor in the gains we have been able to make in attendance, behaviour and learning in class.’

More than two-thirds of the projects engaged Indigenous personnel to work in the projects as teachers, tutors, researchers or other education workers.

Student mentoring by Indigenous adults was a feature of about one-third of the projects. In most cases this has been cited directly as a factor in their success.

Parents/carers were directly involved in about one-sixth of the projects, with a heavy emphasis among those working with younger students. There have been varying degrees of success in this regard, one project reporting it as its only area of failure, others having made modest or few gains. It may be completely unrealistic to expect Indigenous parents/carers to participate in Western-style meetings, social functions or parent-teacher nights. For example, the level of formality (derived from cultural conventions) may be off-putting, or it might be that, in some locations, contact is preferred through Elders. This issue quite evidently needs continuing thought and exploration.

- **Building a community of peers, and a ‘home’ in the institution**

Many Indigenous students are a small minority in their education/training institutions, and can feel socially isolated as a result. More than a third of the projects took steps to reduce this sense of isolation by establishing a community of Indigenous peers: through grouping practices within an institution; by running an excursion or camping program with students from different schools; or by setting up ‘companionable’ electronic networks where students exchange experiences and information. These activities have been highly valued by the students involved.

In circumstances where Indigenous students are in a minority, the creation of a space where students, their parents and members of communities feel comfortable, and which is ‘their own’, has been frequently regarded as an essential component of a project as well as an expression of institutional commitment. These spaces range from ‘a corner’ in early childhood settings, a room in a school or training institution, space off-site or a resource centre.
What works?

Location is important in another sense. Several groups have capitalised on the cultural importance of ‘caring for country’ in education and training programs. One project was able to develop skills in literacy and numeracy among adolescents and young adults (previously a very challenging task) through participation in building part of a local cultural centre. Another two appear to have worked wonders for juvenile offenders by locating their training in ‘country’. These activities have had a clear resonance for students. It should be anticipated that this would apply more widely.

- **Recognising and teaching Indigenous languages**

Language is a central feature of individual and social cultural development and identity. It has been noted that more than 15% of Indigenous people do not speak English as their first language, and for many others Standard Australian English (SAE), in the form required by formal education and training, is a second dialect. This is a major issue, not just in more remote areas, and a variety of strategies has been used to develop effective bi-lingualism and bi-dialectalism.

One central strategy has been to define and teach differences explicitly, for example, between light Kriols and Aboriginal English on the one hand and SAE on the other.

Programs designed to promote parity of esteem between languages have also been implemented, with efforts made to develop text material in relevant languages and dialectal forms of English. The project which had a similar topic but different purposes (the development and delivery of a course in vernacular and SAE literacy), indicates that there has been value for graduates in terms of employment. Additional courses of this type could be expected to meet widespread needs in similar contexts.

The maintenance or revival of Indigenous languages has also been a concern of about 15% of the projects. They have served at least two purposes (if in fact they are separable): providing a cultural record as well as more purely linguistically-defined purposes. Such projects make a major contribution to maintaining and supporting cultural heritage.

- **Cultural reference and expression**

This has been an important part of many projects whether as a primary strategy or as an important subsidiary activity. Mention has already been made of the benefits of having a substantial Indigenous presence in project management and delivery — whether as staff, counsellors and mentors, or other sources of support. These people provide cultural reference points by passing on their knowledge and skills both directly and indirectly.

In several projects Elders have delivered course components focused on culture and history. In six others, the collection and production of oral history or other cultural records has been a major component of the project work.
More than a third of the projects produced tangible and visible results of the work done with the opportunity for audience inspection and reaction. These products, overwhelmingly, have cultural expressions as their focus: in the visual arts, dance, drama, music, videos and multimedia. Efforts to build individual self esteem, cultural esteem and confidence in the potential of personal achievement merge demonstrably at this point.

Cultural reference can also be as simple as ensuring that visual displays include Indigenous items, confirming that institutions acknowledge the presence of Indigenous students. At one of the project schools, only about a quarter of the children who attend are Aboriginal, but as the Principal commented, the school *drips red, black and yellow. … We say we are socially committed to Aboriginal studies and we are. We try to get Aboriginal perspectives into everything.* Children’s projects and Aboriginal art and artefacts (land rights posters, murals, paintings, photographs of Aboriginal traditional life as well as of Aboriginal scientists, medical workers, doctors, lawyers, sports men and women, and teachers) cover the walls. *You have to keep working at it. If I took down the visual symbols of Aboriginality we could go back tomorrow to what we were. Not many people realise that. We have a very high level of commitment, but we have to demonstrate and show that commitment. Signs of it must be immediately visible.*

Attention to these factors *will* produce higher levels of motivation and engagement among students.

**The development of skills**

What was learnt on this issue through project work accords with what is already known about good education.

A good education makes its demands clearly known. It includes efforts to ensure that what is being learned makes sense to the learner and to generate an understanding of both its utilitarian and intrinsic value. It assumes all learners can and will succeed. It provides a series of well-structured steps relevant to the competence and background knowledge of students. It provides a maximum of explicit guidance and modelling. It accommodates variation in pace, and pays special attention to those who don’t get it first time. It searches for strategies to which students will respond. It includes a level of intensity and manageable challenge.

**Focus**

The project work again confirmed the centrality of skills in literacy in SAE to success in formal education and training, for all ages and across subject boundaries. One of the key findings of projects related to the development of numeracy, for example, was that students needed to be able to understand the nuances of SAE language, particularly in the application of prepositions.
In recognition of this fact, several projects increased the level of attention and time spent on the development of literacy skills. Some of the biggest challenges came from contexts where few if any of the students had English as a first language and where there were few social or economic demands for its use. But the more common need was the requirement for code-switching to modify dialectal variations of English to make it more ‘correct’ in school terms.

In broad terms, the strategies adopted included acknowledging and accepting dialectal differences and teaching the variations in SAE explicitly. While it is not an easy solution, some success was reported in this area. However it is an essential alternative to describing students’ everyday language use as ‘bad’ or ‘incorrect’.

**Content**

- Increasing the cultural relevance of curricula

Many projects included a process of review or exploration of alternatives to improve the relevance of curricular to students’ lives, interests, context and culture. These were largely, and not surprisingly, influential and generally relatively easy to implement. In most cases, it required getting to know students and their cultures better; in some cases, it was achieved by direct negotiation with students who were able to describe their preferences; in several cases, it was achieved by searching, sometimes arduously, through currently-available options. In eight cases, new courses were purpose-constructed. In each case where these were taught a high level of success was achieved, re-affirming the importance of the localisation. But equal success was achieved by the agency-sponsored courses which were delivered at a number of sites.

Note should also be made of the culturally-relevant materials which were developed. Although the full impact of these cannot be assessed at this stage, the reports indicate generally that increased student interest and engagement has emerged from trialing.

**Teaching practice**

- Intensity

Perhaps the most telling feature of the SRPs in this area was the intensity of the work made possible by the additional funding. Smaller class sizes, work with small groups and individuals, and thoughtfully-constructed grouping practices that provided for re-entry to mainstream classes (see, for example, the case study p. 95) were widely employed and in almost all cases were reported to have a significant impact.
• Achievable steps
These practices were frequently coupled with high expectations of success, but expectations which were broken into achievable stages and that were explicitly taught. This was a characteristic, for example, of the Scaffolded Literacy approach which operated in two projects, but was a feature of many more. The competency-based approach adopted in VET modules and courses is another important example.

The extensive rate of planning on an individual basis of what was to be achieved in terms of skills, and how, is another approach to the same end. Successful achievement of developmental steps were noted, celebrated and, in some cases, accredited, promoting a sense of competence and mastery.

• Working cooperatively
Working cooperatively (as opposed to individually) in conventional classroom situations is another factor which figures prominently in project reports. It is also often noted that this is a process some teachers found more difficult to accommodate, but this is a conventional divergence in the practical theory of teaching.

• Expanding the range of media through which learning occurs and increasing its level of ‘practicality’
The importance of this factor was again regularly noted in terms of its contribution to student motivation and engagement (and, again, could well apply to a much wider range of general teaching practice). Examples range from taking, or being taken by, young children on bush trips to older adolescent students working on building sites. They also include the projects referred to in the section on arts education, and there is a strong indication that it is one of the significant issues in the introduction of the use of information technology. It is also evident that it contributes to skill development, either explicitly or implicitly.

Teachers
Finally, the contribution of the presence and example of Indigenous teachers and other education workers to the development of students’ skills must be noted. Where these ‘school’ skills are seen and reinforced as being valuable, they are far more likely to be regarded as such and more likely to be acquired. The projects contain many examples of this process, but one of the more interesting was the employment of Parent Literacy Workers in Project L8 (p. 64 and pp. 270–275).

Attention to these factors will produce higher levels of skill development among students.
Participation

The established points at which participation is in most need of support are at school entry and before to shore up school-readiness and to support a smooth transition process, and during the middle secondary years when departure from formal education becomes most pronounced. The weighting of project emphases reflects this. It is clear, too, that participation in VET modules/courses during the secondary years has been seen as providing an important pathway for continuing education and training.

Context has an important influence on these issues, again reflected in the nature of projects. While remote communities may have high levels of mobility among students, a number report very high levels of attendance during the primary years in schools which can be defining points of community infrastructure. However, if young people wish to continue their education they are likely to need to seek it elsewhere. Access is the issue. Several projects sought to resolve this by developing new forms of provision on site. One, for example, had some success by seeking accreditation for courses with community members as trainers.

In rural areas and cities where Indigenous students are more likely to be a minority group, the central issue is departure during the secondary years. Access, at least in terms of availability of enrolment, is not the issue. Several factors appear to be at work: the loss of the pastoral intimacy which is characteristic of primary schooling; skill levels stretched past coping and hence an ever growing record of academic failure; an increasing incidence of confrontations about behaviour; impatience with the passive nature of much schooling coupled with influence from peers who have already left school; encounters with more aggravated forms of racism; and a curriculum which becomes more abstract and less obviously relevant to the lives of students.

This is the analysis which appears consistently in project designs and the one to which project work was most responsive. The following discussion is couched in terms of three issues: school entry, attendance and engagement.

School entry

There was a relatively small number of projects related to this topic, although one was large in scale.

One project explored why Indigenous parents in three rural areas chose or chose not to send their children to preschool education centres. As noted on p. 25, the ‘pattern of response is clear, and resonates with Indigenous reactions to formal schooling well beyond the early years.’ Participation was valued for a number of reasons. Most of those surveyed chose to enrol their children because of the good start this process provided to formal education. A second strong reason was because of the ‘cultural friendliness’ of the staff and the climate of the centre.
Among those who chose not to send their children, by far the strongest reasons were ‘cultural unfriendliness’, that is, little consideration given to Aboriginal culture, few other Aboriginal children attending, and negative staff attitudes towards Aboriginal people.

This is a situation which ought to be relatively easy to remedy and the excellent results from the projects suggest that, where there is a will to improve, it is easy to do so. What works?

- The presence of Indigenous staff or assistants.
- Good communication with parents, coupled with opportunities for parent involvement in ways they find useful and enjoyable.
- Well-established personal relationships and a climate which is ‘culture-friendly’ will have a significant impact on the use of early childhood education centres by Indigenous parents/carers.

Well-structured early childhood programs, which pay attention to the issues immediately above are likely to produce outcomes for Indigenous children which are at the same level as those for non-Indigenous children in the same or similar locations.

**Attendance**

A large proportion of projects report a very strong correlation between students’ achievement and their consistent attendance. In only two cases is there any variation on this theme, and the students concerned appear to be exceptional cases. Common sense also suggests that attendance is the first and fundamental requirement in achieving success in education or training. Little can or will happen without it.

Most projects have, understandably, demonstrated an awareness of this issue; a significant number took it as their major focus.

The most intensive efforts took what could be described as a case management approach — ‘dedicated customised support’ as it was described in one case. This included home visits and other forms of community liaison; an emphasis on personal contact with consistent follow-up where absence occurred; personal planning and goal-setting; some work-related studies and experiences; support with academic work; linkages (actual and/or electronic) with other students in similar situations; and counselling and mediation where problems were occurring. These projects also frequently made use of alternative settings that, for a part of the week, became a ‘home’ for the students involved.

Two key characteristics of these projects have been their attention to a wide range of issues and the intensity of their efforts. Success, in terms of keeping all participants involved, has not been complete, but some impressive gains have been made.
What works?

A larger number of projects included one or more aspects of the process described above with varying degrees of success. Personal planning and goal-setting, with some mentoring, access to ‘taster’ courses in the VET area, with a work skills course or course component, have been quite widespread as strategy. The underlying theory relates to developing and supporting student motivation and developing in them a sense of what may be possible.

In the non-school VET area, the main initiatives have related to course provision: by simply offering courses, for example, that might be relevant to the needs and interests of prospective students; customising existing courses so that they were more effective for the target group; and/or developing (or searching out) courses to serve the same function. On the available evidence it would appear that the highest level of success came from the second and third of these strategies. Again, a focus on motivation and engagement through increasing the relevance of study is the underlying theory.

In another twist on strategies created to help with attendance, mention should be made of a series of projects which have developed new forms of mobile delivery (in remote areas of NSW and, in a differing version, Queensland), taking relevant courses to where prospective students are and teaching on site. The indications are that these courses have been successful in terms of attracting and retaining students.

Engagement

Attendance is a crucial matter; productive engagement when attending is as important.

In responding to this issue the strategy of increasing the level of contact between adults (not necessarily teachers) and young people has been widespread. This has occurred through extensive use of mentoring, but also by reducing class sizes and/or providing intensive one-to-one or small group tutoring. These strategies have evidently had some effect. The usefulness of information technology as a tool for fostering engagement has also been noted by a number of projects where this issue has relevance.

However, much of the work related to engagement reflects on the perceived alien quality of school experience. Attempts were made to modify this, especially with young adolescents, the group in which this perception is most pronounced. It might be noted that with this age group, while tactics may vary, the issues appear in standard form across the whole cohort of students.

Some of the strategies used to try to rectify this problem have long been familiar.

- The establishment of closer and less formal personal relationships between teachers and students. (‘The opportunity to express what you think.’ ‘They talk to me as a person.’)
3: Findings and Discussion

• The establishment of a more informal and less regimented climate. (‘They chat away and wander round, but they get things done.’)
• The provision of a larger role for students in negotiation of work. (‘You can have a say in what you do, create stuff that you decide.’)
• Teaching so that success can be regularly and obviously achieved. Among other more prosaic and conventional activities, this can take the form of displays, performances, etc.

There is some belief that problems with conventional schooling for adolescent Indigenous students are so intractable that the solution must include providing an alternative setting (‘… somewhere they can put the problems of school behind them’). The main features of these sites include those above, but as well commonly include a mix of school and work activities.

Again, this is a strategy which is applied to non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous students. However, one distinctive aspect of these settings is their emphasis on building personal support through being part of a group with a similar cultural background. This is a factor which has had an important influence in success in keeping students involved and, in some cases on track, for a return to school or to enter forms of training or work.

The results of the work of projects focused on participation are satisfactory, but don’t display the leap that is evident in work related to some other areas. The unavoidable conclusion is that schools and training institutions must get help and direction on this issue from respected and authoritative members of Indigenous communities, and from the influence of encouragement and support coming from those communities operating as a whole. Where strong levels of participation have been achieved, that is what has happened. The project manager of VS6 put this succinctly and, we believe, accurately.

*Schools should not reward Koori kids by suspension when they get into trouble at school. Rather, they should bring in a Koori task force at the critical moment and work through a special and intense mentoring program to keep that kid in school.*
In conclusion

Without neglecting any of the detail contained in this or other sections of the report, if outcomes for Indigenous students are to be improved:

• **they must be given respect**

Self respect and respect from others is more basic to learning than any other factor. The high incidence of terms like ‘self esteem’, ‘self-confidence’ and ‘pride’ in this document is no accident. They are starting points for becoming an effective learner, more fundamental than literacy and numeracy skills. They underpin the acquisition of those skills. There is much ground to be made up here.

• **their culture and its relevant implications must be respected**

Cultural dispossession is a terrible thing. It can reduce people to shadows, a state of near invisibility. In the case of Indigenous students, the case is clear. Aspects of their culture must be recognised, supported and integrated in the processes of training and education, not just for their own success, but for the general quality of Australian preschools, schools and training institutions.

• **they must be taught well**

This report could be read as a lengthy description of cases of good teaching practice, not especially exceptional, but applied with commitment and a determination to achieve success for all involved. Good relationships, trust, flexibility, individual concern and problem-solving, perseverance, thoughtful observation and careful investigation of ‘best’ teaching strategies and possibilities, knowledge of students’ backgrounds: that is what good teaching is. This is what teachers can do.

• **and they must attend consistently**

As these projects have demonstrated so emphatically, the business of improving outcomes is a shared task. Regular attendance and consistent participation are key ingredients by which improved outcomes will be achieved. In some cases, additional support and encouragement from school personnel, from parents and carers and from other members of communities will be essential for this to occur.

A platform for marked and significant improvement in outcomes is beginning to emerge. The structural and cultural impediments are not as strong as they once were. The time for making improvement a reality is now.
Section Four: Individual Project Summaries
Introductory note

This section contains summaries of the final project reports received at the time of writing as well as a small number for which relatively recent progress reports were available. They should be read as more complete reference points for the topic summaries in Section Two. The ‘Analysis of project performance’ material is particularly interesting and informative.

Some of the material appears verbatim from the submitted reports. This is noted by the use of quotation marks. Elsewhere it has been summarised for reasons of length, ease of access and regularity of format. Some natural differences still exist in emphasis and level of detail. The accuracy of the contents has been confirmed by relevant project officials.

The summaries are sequenced in conformity with Section Two of this report. The summary final report of the project referred to in Section Three appears at the end.
Coming to School

The First Step: Home to school transition

Project HS1

Sector: Early childhood

Topic: Research into best practice in early childhood services for Aboriginal children and their families

Location: rural (3 sites)

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to research, design and trial a community education resource package to increase access and participation levels of Aboriginal children in early childhood services in three rural centres.

It was based on beliefs in the value of attending early childhood education services for Aboriginal children, and that a higher proportion could do so. The major direction of the work was to describe Aboriginal perspectives on the nature of ‘best practice’ so that communication could be improved between providers and prospective users of services.

Activity

A coordinator and three field workers were appointed, all Aboriginal people with much experience in the early childhood field, who worked to a steering committee.

A schedule was designed and administered to 60 families, 15 early childhood centre staff, 15 system personnel, six school principals, six school teachers, 15 Aboriginal Education Workers and personnel from Indigenous Health Services.

The schedule included the following questions:

1. Why do Indigenous parents/families use or not use
   — preschools?
   — toy libraries?
   — child care?

2. What is working/not working for Indigenous families?

3. What are parents’ expectations of preschools?

4. How do you know what is happening with your child in the Centre they attend?
5. How do Early Childhood Centres support
— Indigenous issues?
— families in Early Childhood Services?

Interviews were conducted and data gathered as planned, and a small scale professional development activity has been conducted at one of the sites. Publication of findings is under way.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

Number and proportion of Indigenous children in target area enrolled in preschool within three months of project completion.

**Target:** equivalence with non-Indigenous participation rate in target area.

**Result:** not yet available

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Enrolment data

**Analysis of project performance**

Factors in success

• The employment of Indigenous staff.
• Having an appropriate budget to complete the project.
• Being able to access support from Aboriginal people from other parts of Australia.
• Linking with other projects.

Less successful factors

• Staff leaving at the end of 1998.
• Geographical distance between field workers.

**Sustainability**

The project’s publication will provide a useful resource. To make the findings more effective, staff need to be appointed to support their take-up.

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**Project HS2**

**Sector:** Early childhood

**Topic:** Successful transition from home to school for Indigenous preschoolers

**Location:** rural communities

**Number of students involved:** 100 students at 10 sites
What works?

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to provide an alternative to preschool through two complementary components: a transition to school program for Indigenous children, and a parent awareness program.

By participating in the transition program, Indigenous communities and preschool age children had access to early childhood education which would not otherwise be available to them.

Activity

Ten schools in communities with a high proportion of Indigenous school enrolments and limited or no access to preschool were targeted.

In more detail the project aimed to:

- provide early childhood education for these children;
- encourage Indigenous children and families to participate in supported learning activities for two school terms: Term 4, 1998 and Term 1, 1999;
- prepare children for Kindergarten, particularly in the areas of literacy, numeracy and social skills enabling a smooth transition to school;
- advise parents on literacy, numeracy and health issues; and
- encourage parents and community to contribute to the planning, delivery and evaluation of the transition program.

Teams consisting of a transition teacher and an Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW) and other appropriate staff were selected in targeted schools. These teams were trained in cross-cultural awareness and other relevant issues. Professional readings on early childhood, transition, Aboriginal students and literacy, and partnerships with parents were widely circulated.

The parent awareness program was developed, along with culturally-appropriate assessment tools for use at entry into Kindergarten by each school and community. Children were assessed for entry to Kindergarten. Resources for schools were identified.

A conference was held for school Principals, kindergarten transition teachers and AEWs which involved group evaluation, development of a kit for best practice, purchase of appropriate resources, staff development and visits to services.

Project performance

Performance targets and results

Proportion of Indigenous Kindergarten students attendance Term 1, 1999 compared with non-Indigenous students Term 1, 1999.
**Result:** 86% of Indigenous children attended. The non-Indigenous rate was 83%


**Result:** Improved slightly or remained the same (around 90%) at eight sites except for two sites where it declined by around 10%.

Proportion of Indigenous students who accessed transition programs for 1998/1999 from each school compared to number of Indigenous students in Kindergarten 1999.

**Result:** 84% of total Kindergarten enrolments accessed transition programs

Proportion of Indigenous students achieving at or beyond foundation outcomes for numeracy compared with non-Indigenous students Term 1, 1999.

**Result:** 50% Indigenous children (with marked discrepancies between sites)  
47% non-Indigenous children (with marked discrepancies between sites)

Number and proportion of Indigenous students achieving early stage 1 outcomes for speaking, listening, reading, writing compared with non-Indigenous students Term 1, 1999.

**Results:**

Speaking and listening: Indigenous children — 50% (ranging from 0–100%);  
non-Indigenous children — 46% (ranging from 11–92%)

Reading and writing: Indigenous children — 40% (ranging from 13–85%);  
non-Indigenous children — 51% (ranging from 8–100%).

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement  
Attendance data.

Literacy and numeracy skills measured in Term 4, 1998 and Term 1, 1999, using instruments developed through the project.

Participation and ‘on task’ rates: anecdotal evidence of Indigenous students level of social skills (written and oral evaluations) from principals, teachers, AEWs and parents and community members through observations of Kindergarten students throughout the program.

**Analysis of project performance**

The proportion of Indigenous students in the target group who had full participation in the transition program and commenced Kindergarten in 1999
was 100%. Of the 100 students in the target group, 92 satisfied providers’
expectations of readiness in literacy and numeracy for entry to Kindergarten.

Schools were not able to assess non-Indigenous students (as they did not
participate in the transition program) until the students were enrolled in
Kindergarten in 1999. The ten schools assessed Indigenous children in the last
week of Term 4, 1998 and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in
Term 1, 1999.

There was a marked improvement in the smoothness of home-school
transition for Indigenous children.

The program has encouraged the early screening of Indigenous students for
possible health problems in all ten schools. This process provides for referral to
appropriate medical assistance and for schools to program appropriate support.

Factors in success

• The positive partnerships that were developed between the schools and
their communities. Where school staff took time to form relationships with
children/families and other community members prior to the school year
beginning young Aboriginal children were brought to the school to begin
Kindergarten. All ten schools perceive this program as the most positive
program they have run for Indigenous children and their families.

• Community trust in the Aboriginal Education Worker and teamwork with
schools’ Aboriginal Education Assistants led to increased Aboriginal
community involvement in all school events.

• The successful nature of home-school contact. Half the schools provided
workshops for parents on health, social, skills, literacy and numeracy at
school sites. The other five schools conducted a home visiting program.

• The most positive programs ran in the schools where a permanent teacher
was employed for the transition program and a casual teacher was
employed to relieve his/her class. This enabled the experienced classroom
teacher who knew the school routine, buildings, other staff to promote the
transition program. In all schools this permanent member of staff was a
well-respected teacher and therefore the transition program became a well-
respected part of the school.

Less successful factors

• From the data it appears that Indigenous students are still participating at
a level below non-Indigenous students in terms of attendance. Families and
other community members from the target schools suggest the differences
in participation could be due to:
  — little promotion/celebration of Aboriginal heritage in the school;
  — insensitivity to Aboriginal issues by some members of staff;
  — lower self esteem of Indigenous students;
resentment of the education system by Indigenous parents/carers because of personal experiences in the past;
— mobility of many Indigenous families;
— perceived discrimination by the education system;
— Indigenous parents/carers may be economically disadvantaged and not able to afford the costs associated with schooling; and
— illness due to inadequate access to health services.

• Eight of the ten schools, in consultation with community members, devised their own ‘culturally appropriate’ assessment tool for school entry. This process made data difficult to collect. But, more importantly, there were also aspects of these assessment tools which did not appear to be entirely culturally-appropriate suggesting that the wishes of community members were overridden or that they felt unable to offer suggestions.

• A relatively high mobility rate made collection of data problematic.

• The school transition teams which were formed had limited membership from Indigenous communities producing some cases of breakdown in communication.

Sustainability
A kit is being developed through the project for use by other schools.

Six of the ten schools have used other sources of funds to continue the project. Some of the schools have used this project to complement other programs, thereby integrating the transition project with other Aboriginal Education Policy strategies.

Project HS3
Sector: Early childhood
Topic: Fun Family Reading Project
Location: rural
Number of students involved: approx. 50

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project set out to provide Aboriginal students with a greater opportunity to develop their school readiness literacy skills, to reinforce the value of reading in the family and to empower parents to further develop their own English literacy skills and those of their children.

Many Aboriginal children in the area were not meeting schools’ literacy expectations. Although Aboriginal parents wanted to assist their children,
many were not sure how. Aboriginal children constitute 45% of enrolment at the local school but are under-represented in preschool.

Activity
A course was developed for parents and children (up to 5 years-old). The first course ran for eight weeks (two hours per weekly session); three subsequent courses for different groups of parents ran for five weeks.

During each session, the children were with Aboriginal childcare workers and participated in activities related to the subject matter of the course on that particular day. At the end of each session the children joined the parent group for an activity, story and song.

The experience of running the course meant that it changed a little each time it was run but typically the parent component consisted of:
• why books are important, the parent role as teacher, reading to children, setting up a story time routine;
• stories and language development, choosing the right book, tips for reading aloud;
• how children learn, stages of development;
• creating books and games from materials found in the home;
• numbers, books and maths; games, puzzles and rhymes using numbers; and
• course evaluation and presentation of awards.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— 90% of four year-old Indigenous students to satisfy education providers’ literacy expectations for preschool entry.
— 90% of Indigenous students (up to 5 years-old) with reading skills comparable to non-Indigenous students.

At the beginning of each course, few of the children were close to the performance indicators.

Results:
Course 1: Meeting literacy expectations (by the end of the course): about 75%
Reading skills (by the end of the course): 60–90%
Course 2: Meeting literacy expectations (by the end of the course): 80%
Reading skills (by the end of the course): 70%

‘Mothers left the course feeling more confident about their role in a child’s learning.’
Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
Informal observation of children in relation to:
— ability to sit quietly and listen to a story;
— showing an interest in books and borrow library books to take home;
— holding a book the right way up and talking about the pictures; and
— joining in with songs and games within a small group.

The NSW DET Early Learning Assessment for Literacy.

**Analysis of project performance**

**Factors in success**
‘Parents enjoyed the sessions and the time together.
Children mixing with others and having fun doing new activities.
The weekly visit to the library.
Each mother made a special book for her child.’

**Less successful factors**
Not all the target group attended.

**Sustainability**
Not without additional funding.
What works?

In Transit: The middle years
Project MY1

Sector: Primary/secondary
Topic: Middle years of schooling
Location: rural

Number of students involved: not available

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to improve student transition from Years 7–8 (primary to secondary campus of the same school), retention rates, pastoral care, academic progress and community involvement. In the first year we have been experimenting with structural, curriculum and pedagogical changes in Year 8. A transition program has also been set up.

‘It has been recognised that students in Years 5–9 are changing physically, emotionally and socially. These pressures on Aboriginal students in the Kimberley have had adverse effects on their enjoyment and achievement at school. It is now widely recognised that if students prosper between those years they have a good chance of success in the upper secondary years and later in life.

‘The primary and secondary campuses of this school stand alone. This has prevented Year 7 students from familiarising themselves with the secondary campus so they find their move to Year 8 unsettling. In addition, they are exposed to different teaching and learning practices. Last year staff from both campuses shadowed students across campuses to note these differences. As a result, structural, pedagogical and curriculum changes have been made to the secondary school to try to smooth the transition.’

Activity

‘Structural changes: The secondary timetable has been altered to allow for the Year 8 groups to be taught 5 different learning areas in the one room by 2 teachers. This is working well as a lot of time has been saved moving classrooms and the students feel they own their learning environment. Morning homeroom groups have been altered from vertical groups to homogeneous groups which are run by the students’ core teachers. A 20 minute session has also been timetabled once a week for further pastoral care and student enrichment.

‘Curriculum: Staff responsible for different learning areas meet to discuss the students’ progress and also to find links between the different learning areas. We have been able to remove content which overlaps and is irrelevant and create continuity in teaching and learning practices. English and Society and
Environment have been integrated as much as possible and we are experimenting with the inclusion of Science. Computing is complementing many subjects rather than standing alone. For successful integration to occur, more shared time needs to be made available for planning.

‘The “shadowing” program has introduced the Year 7 students to the academic standards required from them in secondary school. A booklet of common graphic structures and frequently used written genres has been compiled to encourage continuity across all middle school learning areas. The aim is for all staff to adopt a similar approach to the teaching of written and graphic forms to ensure that we have the same expectations from the students. Continuity across the board will enable the students to improve their literacy skills and it will also assist staff with cross marking.

‘Multiple posters have been produced on common literacy problems in the middle years. It is hoped that exposure to these structures over time will help the students to implement them correctly.

‘Pedagogical changes: Teachers have been encouraged to alter their classroom practices to take a more collaborative, student-centred approach to learning. With fewer teachers and blocked subjects there are fewer time restrictions so collaborative learning is possible. The year 8 Science classes are sharing their knowledge via the creation of their own CD-ROMs and web sites. The English classes are also hoping to perform their radio plays via Goolarri Media. Portfolios have been introduced to enhance students’ self-concept and improve parental involvement in the classroom. More work is required in this area.

‘Year 7 Transition Program: We are investigating the possibility of moving the Year 7 students over to the secondary campus so a true middle school can be established. We are still considering structural and financial issues and many people’s opinions need to be sought. In the meantime the Year 7 students visit the secondary campus every fortnight to use the facilities and to mix with staff and students.’

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results
— Student grade progression ratios
— Attendance rates during the compulsory years of schooling

**Results:** not yet available

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Primary concerns are to do with the extent to which:

• students are, and teachers perceive they are, comfortable and supported in the middle school
What works?

• particular social and learning problems can be successfully dealt with in the middle school
• school enjoyment increases
• absenteeism declines
• academic achievement increases
• parents accept and support the middle school model, and
• teachers support and see merit in the changes.

‘It is not relevant to use objective data to evaluate this program and the effectiveness of the resultant middle school. Many of the changes will be subjective enhancements. Longitudinal measures of improved achievement will be made, but these are likely to be useful after tracing students in the middle years for at least two years. Surveys will be applied at the end of this year to measure levels of satisfaction.’

Analysis of project performance

‘Unless a middle school is being built from scratch, which involves the employment of new staff, it requires time and patience. Staff who have taught for many years and who have been in-serviced in all the new educational initiatives are reluctant to change. New ideas must be owned by all parties and therefore must be implemented slowly.

‘The school has set aside five years to monitor the success of the project. Last year was spent on Professional Development and planning and this year has been spent implementing most of the concepts. Changes will continue to occur for the next few years.’

Factors in success

‘Structural changes: Relationships have been quickly formed with the staff and the students’ well-being is catered for. They have also benefited new staff as the revised structure has enabled them to settle in a lot quicker.

‘Our Year 8 group is made up of particularly difficult students. They also have quite poor skills. By limiting the number of teachers they have, we have been able to monitor student behaviour and academic progress. If the students had been exposed to the previous system of seven teachers many would have got “lost”.

‘Curriculum: By blocking subjects against each other, the learning time has been extended which has allowed us to experiment with a variety of learning strategies. Through integration the barriers between subject areas are disappearing and we have been made aware of the overlap of skills. It is hoped that faculty areas will soon collapse and make way for learning teams.

‘Pedagogical changes: It has been most valuable to learn new teaching strategies from staff across all learning areas and across upper primary and
lower secondary years. The secondary staff has particularly absorbed the superior teaching skills shared by primary staff. The use of the (school-created) booklet of graphic and written literacy practices, ‘Let’s do it this way’ and sharing strategies are effectively promoting literacy across the board.

‘Year 7 Transition Program: The benefits of last year’s transition work have been noticed. Having visited the secondary campus for extra classes, the present Year 8 students were already familiar with the environment and the staff. They were also confident to mix with the older students. Staff who worked with the students last year were able to gauge their ability and the dynamics of the class which allowed the students to be grouped appropriately. The students also felt comfortable having a familiar face teach them.

‘Professional development: Staff have benefited from the sharing of teaching and learning strategies and of being in-serviced in multiple intelligences and collaborative learning. Our classrooms have been re-energised!’

Less successful factors

‘Pressure: As this project was funded for a short time there seemed to be pressure to have results quickly so too much was done too soon. Unfortunately, the project was also introduced when the State Government was also changing its curricular definitions adding a new pressure.

‘Staff issues: The project required a huge shift in mindset for many staff who were not prepared for the scale of the changes. The staff were inundated with Professional Development on integrated curriculum, collaborative learning, multiple intelligences, curriculum framework and student outcome statements so were grappling with what to focus on. In some cases the middle schooling concepts (collaborative learning and integration) have been overlooked by some staff. We have agreed that the focus of our curriculum be on processes and skills but some staff are still emphasising content. The school framework booklet, Let’s do it this way, and regular sharing of successful strategies is slowly having an effect. New staff have injected fresh ideas into the project and positive results are being seen already.

‘For a staff of our size, communication is poor. Staff work stations are spread across the campus which makes planning difficult. Next year it is hoped that staff will move from faculty areas to learning teams. We need to own the students not the subject. Part time staff must be involved in morning homeroom duties as well as core subjects to retain the continuity required for pastoral care.

‘Planning time: Due to our small staff, shared planning time has not been made available to teachers involved in the middle school years. This has made integration difficult and staff are beginning to resent meeting in their own time.

‘Community involvement: On reflection, more input should have come from community members and parents when the middle school was being
What works?

established. This will be addressed when we plan the movement of Year 7 students to the secondary campus and when further curriculum changes are made.’

Sustainability

‘The project has involved a shift in structure, staffing, curriculum and pedagogy. These changes are continuing and a period of five years has been put aside to monitor the project’s success.’
At Home at School: Supporting students

Project SS1

Sector: Secondary, Years 7–10
Topic: Literacy support
Location: rural town, 1 site
Number of students involved: About 44

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to:

• implement literacy and numeracy support arrangements for Years 7–10 Indigenous students; and

• encourage these students to consider further study as a viable option.

There were concerns about the low rate of completion of Year 10 by Indigenous students due to poor attendance, compounded by low levels of literacy and numeracy among many of the students.

Activity

A Literacy teacher was employed to work full-time with Indigenous students, mainly in Years 7 and 8, one-to-one and in small group withdrawals. An Indigenous Aide was also employed to, in conjunction with an Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA), target attendance through home visits and to provide classroom support. Students in Years 9 and 10 also received literacy and numeracy support in their classrooms from this team.

Project performance

Performance targets and results

— Increase the percentage of Indigenous students who complete Year 10 and consider further study as a viable option.

— Improve the attendance of Indigenous students.

Results: In 1997, 50% of Indigenous students gained a School Certificate. In 1998, 82% did. (The 18% who did not, mainly failed to meet the 85% attendance requirement.)

English Literacy and Language Assessment (ELLA) results for 1998 were significantly better for students involved in the project.

Attendance rates have improved for some students, however these still remain a concern. Home visits are increasing in an effort to encourage even better attendance and parent support. The increase in the number of students receiving a School Certificate in 1998 is due in part to gains made in this area.
What works?

Measures used to establish benchmarks and improvement

Benchmarks were established to reflect the achievements of the project by assessing the needs of each student involved in the project in terms of literacy, numeracy and attendance, through data received from the 1997 ELLA, Support Teacher (Learning Difficulties) assessment of all students, numeracy requirements as determined by the mathematics faculty/primary schools and attendance records.

Improvement has been measured through an examination of attendance rates, a comparison of results in the ELLA for Indigenous students, the willingness of students and parents to be part of the program and the percentage completion of the School Certificate by Year 10 Indigenous students.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

‘The most positive impact has been the work by the Literacy teacher and the Indigenous Aide. Their work has resulted in a marked increase in student self-esteem (especially among those in Years 7 and 8) and their willingness to participate in classroom activities. There is also a significant increase in parent involvement in supporting their children at school. Successful parent evenings, especially those organised by the ASSPA committee, have assisted this positive attitude.

‘The improvement in the ELLA results is also attributable to cooperation between the Literacy teacher, Aide and the School Literacy Committee in implementing a whole school literacy program conducted each Wednesday for 40 minutes by every classroom teacher and involving all students from Years 7 to 12.’

Less successful factors

‘In Years 9 and 10, the majority of Indigenous students are reluctant to be withdrawn from class in order to be tutored on a one-to-one or small group basis. Many students find this situation uncomfortable and embarrassing. Hence, we have increased the level of classroom support for Years 9 and 10 students.’

Sustainability

‘It is hoped that when the project is completed its impact will be sustained, but without the necessary funding the employment of a specialist Literacy teacher and Aide will not be possible.’
Project SS2

**Sector:** Secondary

**Topic:** Support for Year 7 and Year 9 students

**Location:** rural town, 1 site

**Number of students involved:** About 55

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to:

- provide intensive support to improve levels of Indigenous student attendance and achievement in literacy in Years 7 and 9; and
- create a school system which represents a more multi-cultural environment, particularly supportive of our Indigenous population, through the employment of a significant number of Indigenous adults.

‘Poor attendance, with its associated knowledge gaps, creates classroom situations where students are not coping, become disruptive, face reduced on-task time and generally greater disciplinary intervention. Disciplinary action makes school unattractive and further reduces the chances of success. Often the poor attendance-poor learning cycle is then perpetuated in an accelerating model in which lower literacy and numeracy skills, disciplinary intervention and absenteeism feed on each other to significantly affect both success at, and length of, schooling.’

Years 7 and 9 were targeted as critical transition years in schooling.

**Activity**

Nine Aboriginal adults completed a TAFE-based training program aimed at enhancing their Key Competencies. Two tutor positions and five classroom assistant positions were filled by the nine through a combination of full-time and job-sharing arrangements.

Students were selected for the program through teacher recommendation focusing on poor attendance, poor work skills and often, but not always, poor behaviour. They were withdrawn from class three times each week and tutoring occurred on a week on/week off basis. Each student received four hours tutoring per week. In the ‘off’ week classes, information gained from the student’s English and Mathematics teachers was used to pre-teach students so they would arrive in class with a stronger base knowledge of what was expected. The students’ progress, attitude and behaviour were monitored in the classroom by the classroom assistants, who documented the results.
What works?

The Indigenous assistants provided role models and a significant presence in the classroom as adults, parents and valuers of education. They also played a role in raising the awareness, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal cultural values in non-Indigenous students. They encouraged high standards of work presentation, appropriate classroom behaviour and assisted in classroom and school routines.

All the IESIP staff were also involved in the day-to-day activities of the school. For instance, they taught guitar, assisted with the significant increase in the number of students involved in school bands, helped compile resumes for students seeking work, assisted with after school art and drama classes, provided a positive influence in the school ground at recess and lunchtime and planned and ran the school’s National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Week celebrations. They were an important contact with the Aboriginal community.

Project performance

Performance was measured through improvements on baseline data: ELLA tests, suspension and discipline referral data, attendance records, staff reports, student surveys, participant reviews. Students sat the 1998 Year 7 ELLA in Term 1 and the 1999 Year 8 test in Term 1. This gave them approximately 22 weeks of contact with the IESIP project.

Results:
Analysis of ELLA data relating to the Aboriginal cohort who did both tests shows the following.

• Over 50% of students doing the Tutorial Program showed consistent or good progress in each facet of the test.
• 125% increase in the number of Aboriginal students regarded as ‘proficient’ or ‘high’ in Language.
• 50% increase in the number of Aboriginal students regarded as ‘proficient’ in Reading.
• 21% movement of Aboriginal students from proficient’ to ‘high’ in Writing.
• 50% improvement in the gap above state average mark in Language.
• 6% better than the state-wide improvement in Language.
• 27% better than state average improvement in Writing.
• 3% score increase on average across the whole test.
• Reading for meaning still lags behind state average.

Suspensions have declined by 6% overall. Term 1, 1999 suspensions fell 20% in comparison with those in Term 1, 1998. Discipline referrals indicated a decrease in excess of 48% for targeted students.
Attendance rates for Years 7 to 9 have increased in 1999 by 4.7% with an overall school increase of 4%. Comparison between Term 2 1998 and 1999 indicate an overall improvement of 9.4%.

**Analysis of project performance**

Factors in success

The roles played by classroom assistants were widely praised by students and teachers.

Students said, for example:

- they [classroom assistants] give help when the teacher is busy or couldn’t help
- helped us read and spell
- told the class to keep up the good work and have made us feel good by saying that
- help us work together and try to sort out our own problems
- they were very friendly when we first started High School and knew none of the teachers
- they make me feel smart
- they have kept me calm
- have made me realise I can do the work by myself
- helped me not to get into trouble.

Teachers said, for example:

- they give the teacher a sense of support while facing a difficult class
- they have helped give information on a students’ mood or behaviour from the previous class
- role modelling of appropriate behaviour in the game (PE)
- dealing with students and talking to them, calming them down, sorting out disputes
- demonstrating that adults do find the work interesting
- reading out questions to students who have trouble reading
- encourage students to produce their best work
- encouraged and supported me when I feel upset about how a particular lesson has gone
- helping me understand certain kids’ problems
- they are a tremendous help and ensure I have the best chance possible of providing a quality lesson.
What works?

Sustainability
Some impact will remain, but without funding it is not possible to have similar numbers of Indigenous workers in the school.

All six remaining workers have enrolled in a teacher training degree to be based at the school through a Community Indigenous Teacher Education Program.

Project SS3
Sector: Upper primary and secondary to Year 10
Topic: Gifted and talented program
Location: rural towns, about 20 sites
Number of students involved: 33

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project set out to:
• identify gifted and talented Aboriginal students from across the full range of Gardner’s ‘seven intelligences’;
• increase the competence in professional skills of teachers and Aboriginal Education Assistants as they relate to working with Aboriginal students and the Aboriginal community in general;
• establish open and freer liaison between Indigenous students, parents and educators to ensure shared responsibility for decision making;
• develop a greater appreciation of Indigenous culture and learning styles by schools;
• increase the motivation of students to excel in their particular talent; and
• develop enrichment materials based on distinctive Indigenous culture, learning styles and eminent Indigenous people from the full spectrum of Australian society.

Activity
Schools were asked to identify appropriate in-school mentors from staff members. Mentors were given one half-day release per week to work with gifted and talented Aboriginal students. Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs) were also involved in mentoring.

Teachers and AEAs were given ten days of professional development, over a period of six months. Topics included: awareness of Aboriginal educational issues; Aboriginal cultural issues; identification of gifted and talented students; aspects of gifted and talented education and its relevance to Aboriginal education; virtual mentoring theory and practice; resource development, skills
and strategies; development of meta-cognitive skills in students; recognising and assisting gifted and/or talented underachievers.

Gardner’s theory of ‘multiple intelligences’ (1983) was used as a basis for identifying gifted and talented Aboriginal students in Years 5–10. Other tools used included those developed by Harslett (1996) and Gibson (1997) and the Raven’s Progressive Matrix Tests. The results of this testing, which focused on culturally-appropriate criteria, was supported by additional teacher nominations.

Two camps were held. At the first, students experienced a wide range of enrichment activities in a strongly positive environment. The second was in the context of a trip to the state capital, where students visited a range of successful Aboriginal people at their places of work and study.

A virtual mentoring program has been set up (to run in the second half of 1999).

Cultural awareness was central to all aspects of the project. Project leaders are aware of the importance of cultural awareness and pride to the developing Aboriginal child and cultural inclusions appeared in every aspect of the project.

Units of work focused on successful Aboriginal role models and aspects of Aboriginal culture, and informed by Gardner’s theory, were developed by participating teachers.

**Project performance**

**Performance targets and results**

Performance indicators for 1999 were essentially to maintain numbers involved in 1998, as follows:

— 33/78 Indigenous students enrolled in Years 5–10 in the Diocese participating in Talent Enrichment Days and Camps.

— 31/33 Indigenous students who are considered underachievers and are participating in the project.

— 58/300 teachers of Indigenous students involved in professional development to address the needs of gifted and talented Indigenous students.

— Units of work in use by teachers in 1999.

The project achieved maintenance of numbers of participants as above. All selected schools trialed units of work.

Other achievements included:

- Identified students performed in a superior way in every aspect of the project. Behaviour was outstanding, to the point of bringing constant positive comments from people outside the project.
What works?

• Characteristic ‘shaming’ response by Aboriginal students when asked to stand out from the group was conspicuous by its absence.
• Students rose to the expectations of the project in learning activities. This is remarkable considering that most students were considered underachievers.
• High levels of student motivation.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

• Professional development for teachers and AEAs assisted them to develop the skills to support students in the program.
• Strong community liaison, leading to community support and encouragement.
• Parent workshops and information sessions.
• The positive influence of AEAs.
• Bringing cultural awareness to all aspects of the project.
• Only one school in the Diocese with more than two Aboriginal students did not participate.

Less successful factors

• Initial trials indicated that several items in the culturally-unbiased language assessment tool were not suitable for the whole range of environments from which students come.
• Trialing of units of work was delayed due to floods.

Sustainability

Some teachers’ attitudes have been changed and this will endure. Other aspects which require the allocation of resources are less certain but there is a determination to continue.

Project SS4

**Sector:** Secondary  
**Topic:** Aboriginal School-Community Support Worker  
**Location:** rural towns, 2 sites  
**Number of students involved:** about 30
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to:
• improve outcomes for Indigenous secondary students particularly by incorporating intensive literacy and numeracy programs; and
• improve access for Indigenous students to vocational training and employment during school/post-school transition.

The program was established in an attempt to address concerns about the relatively poor performance of Indigenous students when compared with other Australian students in certain areas of their schooling such as attendance, retention, academic performance and standards in literacy and numeracy. There were concerns about the increasing drop-out rate of Indigenous students and the consequent increase in delinquency and vandalism in the towns.

Activity
An Aboriginal School-Community Support Worker was employed. The program involved close collaboration between school personnel, students, parents and community organisations within the towns. Significant strategies were as follows.
• Identification of students at risk, through consultation with the Principals, Aboriginal Education Workers and other relevant staff members in the schools.
• Establishment of an alternate schools program for Aboriginal students from one of the schools.
• Individual assessment of interests and capabilities of these students.
• Intensive tutoring in literacy and numeracy, shaped according to the students’ needs.
• Encouragement in the development of positive interests, such as art and music.
• Social skills development.
• Exposure to Aboriginal culture.
• Provision of assistance to students involved in work experience by accompanying students to work experience placements and assisting students to obtain funding through the Vocational Educational Guidance Assistance Scheme for work experience.
• Provision of support to Aboriginal Education teachers by locating and facilitating access to Aboriginal resources for the Aboriginal Studies course, particularly human resources to enable and enhance the understanding of Aboriginal culture in both schools.
What works?

- Initiation of the establishment of a Vocational and Educational Guidance Assistance Scheme Committee for the region in consultation with DETYA.
- Involvement of parents in discussions regarding the educational development of their children.
- Development of a Basic Skills program for parents, including a computer course.

Project performance

Performance targets:
- Proportion of Indigenous Year 9 students who met the literacy expectation for transition to year 10.
- Proportion of Indigenous Year 9 students who met the numeracy expectations for transition to Year 10
- Participation rate of Indigenous students Years 7 to 12
- Number of Indigenous students enrolled in Vocational courses.

Results:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1997 BASELINE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100% (3/3)</td>
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<td><strong>Numeracy:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100% (18/18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100% (3/3)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Retention rate:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>82%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vocational training:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
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<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Baseline data were provided independently by both schools from standard assessments for literacy and numeracy plus statistical data regarding retention rate and numbers of students involved in vocational courses.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

The three key factors were:
- The commitment and genuine interest of the Aboriginal Youth Support Worker (AYSW).
• The fact that this project was conducted from outside the school institution. ‘We believe this is a very significant contributing factor because:
— it gave the AYSW the freedom to work outside the parameters of the school system to respond most appropriately to students’ needs; and
— the students did not identify the AYSW with the school institution. This allowed the students to respond more freely and readily to the project. The “Alternate School” offering a non-threatening learning environment away from the main stream classroom situation. Students had the responsibility of working to their own guidelines and being able to set their own standards’.

• The focus on the strengths of Aboriginal culture encouraged students towards greater self-respect and pride in themselves.

Other factors included:
• Gaining the trust and confidence of the students, staff, community and parents.
• More individualised attention given to the students.
• The AYSW being a bridge to the wider community, parents and the schools and encouraging parents to take an active role in their children’s education.

Less successful factors
The fact that the program was only for twelve months. ‘We believe we have the foundations here for a very productive approach to the educational and vocational progress of Aboriginal students, but the timeframe did not allow us develop the program fully and expand on its most effective elements.’

Sustainability
‘It is anticipated that those students involved in the project will continue to participate more positively in their educational endeavours. However, further sustainability will only occur when more of the processes of this program are more commonly put into place in areas where there is a high population of Indigenous students.’

Project SS5
Sector: mostly secondary, some primary
Topic: Cultural support
Location: urban, working largely with remote area students (3 sites, the majority of the activity occurred at one of these)
Number of students involved: about 100 with some involvement
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to develop a curriculum package that recognised Indigenous cultural knowledge and learning styles, and which gave Indigenous community languages recognition in a similar way to other LOTE courses.

Enrolment of Indigenous students at these schools had increased significantly (from a very low base) in the two years prior to the project. There was seen to be a need for action to ensure that:

- the languages and culture of the Indigenous students became an important part of schooling and that Indigenous adults became increasingly involved in that process; and
- non-Indigenous students were encouraged to value and appreciate skills and knowledge of their Indigenous peers.

Activity

Two existing Indigenous language courses (Kriol and Djambarrpuynu) were offered in these schools for the first time. In 1998, twelve students enrolled and eight completed. In addition a proposal and course outline were developed for a Year 12 course in Dhuwal. This was approved and introduced in 1999 with six students enrolled.

Indigenous perspectives on content areas of the primary and secondary curriculum were developed and incorporated into teaching practice. New units of work have been developed on topics such as: reconciliation, Aboriginal technologies, mangrove studies, enviro-science.

An ‘Access Maths’ course for Year 11 students was introduced 1998.

A cross-cultural awareness professional development package for use in the schools was developed and implemented, and is in ongoing use. This work focused most intensively on staff who were teaching students from more remote areas in order to provide them with insights and strategies through which better support can be offered to these students.

Indigenous parents were invited to be members of panels to talk about their children’s needs and aspirations during staff development times. A network of Indigenous people to support learning on an ongoing basis has been developed.

Project performance

Performance targets and results

— Proportion of Indigenous students in mainstream classes
Baseline: 56% (27/48)
Target: 60%
Result: 70% (54/77)
Ten of the 54 received some additional in-class support. All students were enrolled in some mainstream courses, and all who attended school for the length of the course successfully completed them.

— Proportion of Year 11 Indigenous students who successfully complete Year 11 courses
Baseline: 20% (1/5)
Target: 40% (non-Indigenous rate: 100%)
Result: 60% (3/5)

— Proportion of Indigenous students in primary and junior secondary who complete their year level
Baseline: 52% (13/25, junior secondary), 85% (11/13, primary)
Target: 64% (junior secondary), 92% (primary)
Result: 82% (36/44 junior secondary), 78% (21/27 primary)

In addition:
• There are more culturally-appropriate courses taught in the schools in this sector.
• There is greater awareness of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous students by staff and non-Indigenous students. ‘Staff have come a long way in their understanding of the Indigenous students in the school. Before the project began there was resentment on the part of some students about the remote area students who came to the school. They perceived that the Indigenous students were treated differently (less strict about uniform code) and were “dumb”. These perceptions have mostly disappeared and the Indigenous students are increasingly admired for their linguistic skills, sporting ability and artistic talent.’
• Enrolment of Indigenous students in the sectoral schools has increased. (1997: 45 students, 1999: 66 students.)

**Analysis of project performance**

Factors in success
• Developing appreciation of Indigenous culture from a low base among administrators and staff required a vision of what should be achieved and a commitment to doing so. This existed.
• Introduction of Indigenous languages provided an opportunity to study relevant culture in a non-confrontational way for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
• Students appreciated the opportunity to learn in a ‘hands-on’ way from Indigenous adults.
• Students with very low English literacy levels can successfully participate in mainstream education with the right sort of program.
What works?

- Small classes allow teachers to work out alternative ways of assessing students’ learning and to plan learning tasks with an ESL focus.

Less successful factors

‘Accommodation difficulties, homesickness and family problems are among the reasons for the high turnover of students in the largest of these schools. The impact of these problems could be reduced if the school had an accommodation facility and staff with the specific role of supporting students outside school hours.’

Sustainability

‘Funding from the IESIP capital SRPs has provided a purpose-built facility for Indigenous learning. Resources purchased and programs commenced through the non-capital project are housed in this facility and will keep operating from it.’

Project SS6

**Sector:** Primary  
**Topic:** Learning Assistance Program  
**Location:** urban and rural (3 sites)

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to encourage Indigenous parents and grandparents to become volunteers in the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) in three Catholic schools in one State, as part of a process of acknowledging the contribution and the richness of cultures that Indigenous Australians bring to schools. Mentoring supports natural and longstanding patterns of kinship support among Indigenous peoples.

‘The LAP helps achieve educational outcomes for Indigenous (and all) students and with careful planning is a powerful tool in empowering Indigenous parents and other adults to take an active and vital role within their school community. It was hoped that the confidence and willingness to take part in other school programs would also be increased.’

**Activity**

A project coordinator and project officer were appointed. Several primary schools were selected to take part in the project on the basis that a LAP already existed and Indigenous students attended the school.

At each site, the concept was introduced at a meeting of the ASSPA Committee and individuals were approached to ask them to consider becoming volunteers. The LAP Coordinator followed up this approach.
Volunteers worked with students on an informal basis, participating in a range of activities with students. The results were reviewed.

**Project performance**
Performance targets and results
— Number of Indigenous parents and grandparents involved in the LAP in the three primary schools.
Baseline: 0 parents/grandparents.
Target: 3 parents/grandparents.
**Result:** 3 parents/grandparents (in two schools).

— Attendance rates of Indigenous students.
Baseline: 58 days absent
Target: 50 days
**Result:** 48 days
(Further work is required to validate this outcome.)

**Analysis of project performance**
‘The project raised the question of the importance of increasing the level of Indigenous staffing in this agency’s schools. It is obvious that there need to be Indigenous people employed in our schools if they are going to be seen as places of welcome for Indigenous people.’

**Success factors**
• The commitment of the volunteers, bringing benefits both to students and to the volunteers themselves.
• An active ASSPA Committee, strong support from the school administration and, especially, a full-time Indigenous Education Worker.
• A collaborative team approach.
• ‘The grandparents became involved in the program because their own children had received support through the LAP and because of their strong belief in supporting their families. They believe it is very important for their grandchildren to know about their involvement in the school and they were proud to take up this role. They see their involvement as a means of encouraging their own families and other members of the Indigenous community to take a more active role in school.’

**Less successful factors**
• Failure to recruit volunteers in two schools.
• The project officer was unable to complete some planned work due to unforeseen circumstances.
What works?

- Funding crossed the school holiday period when a number of families who might have been involved in the project moved.

Sustainability

“The schools will continue to actively encourage Indigenous members of its community to participate in the LAP. The volunteers will continue their work.”

Project SS7

**Sector:** Secondary

**Topic:** Secondary Pathways Project

**Location:** urban (10 sites)

**Number of students involved:** 40

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

This project focused on issues of attendance, retention and completion rates of Indigenous students in Years 9–12. It set out to:

- identify the Indigenous students in the secondary schools in this state sector;
- establish which students were at risk and would benefit from intervention; and
- learn what outcomes were possible from differing forms of intervention strategies.

The absence of a cohesive and comprehensive approach to issues confronting Indigenous students in the schools in this sector had been a concern. A number of schools had not established their response to these issues, did not have the opportunity to share information and details about programs with other schools and were seeking direction on where and how to begin in this area of enormous responsibility and sensitivity.

**Activity**

Two key background questions were established and explored.

- What do we know about Aboriginal students in the schools in this sector (who and where are they)?
- What are the facts about their attendance, retention and completion rates?

The answers to these questions included the following information.

- They are isolated; a few students in many schools (62 students in 19 metropolitan schools).
• Indigenous boys in Years 9–11 have poor attendance and retention rates compared to Indigenous girls and non-Indigenous students at those year levels.

• There is good success with Year 12 completion once that level is gained, especially among girls. Most students then enter tertiary study.

• Boarding students have excellent attendance rates. It is unknown how this impacts on academic success.

• Some students are not comfortable about publicly identifying as Aboriginal, but this is a changing situation.

• Critical incidents outside the control of the school impact on attendance, retention and completion rates.

• At secondary level, numeracy is a greater issue than literacy. About half are below satisfactory literacy levels; about three-quarters are below satisfactory numeracy levels.

• Attendance increases dramatically in individual cases where VET options have been made available.

The project drew on this and other information to:

• provide professional development for teachers so that they understand the critical issues for Aboriginal students in our schools;

• support the maintenance of a student network through ASSPA, camps and social events;

• provide funding to schools for the support of school-based programs;

• maintain a ‘Focus Teacher Network’ which helps key teachers in schools to provide a mentoring role to their students and for the teachers to become informed about significant issues, such as the Stolen Generation, land rights and reconciliation; and

• establish good links with parents to create a communication channel and to assist schools in doing this where requested.

Intervention strategies were initiated by groups involved (eg, support with development of VET options, subject choice and assessment advice); appropriate curriculum materials developed; alternative teaching and assessment strategies trialed.

Forty students in 10 schools, and 34 teachers were involved directly in the project. An additional 13 teachers took part in the professional development activities and 27 other students were involved in some activities.
**What works?**

**Project performance**
Performance targets and results
— Proportion of Indigenous students receiving special literacy support
Baseline: 55%
Target: 74%
**Result:** 77% (87% of Indigenous students requiring support)
— Proportion of schools offering Aboriginal studies
Baseline: 60%
Target: 90%
**Result:** 100%
— Number of Indigenous people involved in designing Indigenous curriculum
Baseline: 0
Target: 2
**Result:** 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improve attendance rates</th>
<th>YEAR 9</th>
<th>YEAR 10</th>
<th>YEAR 11</th>
<th>YEAR 12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>90.4%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
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<th>Increase completion rates (student numbers)</th>
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<th>YEAR 11</th>
<th>YEAR 12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline:</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>3/3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target:</td>
<td>7/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Results:</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>3/4</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Improve progression rates (student numbers)</th>
<th>BASELINE</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULTS</th>
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<td>Year 9 to Year 10:</td>
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<td>9/9</td>
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<td>Year 11 to Year 12:</td>
<td>4/6</td>
<td>6/9</td>
<td>4/7 (and TAFE: 2/7)</td>
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</table>

**Analysis of project performance**
Factors in success
- The Focus Teacher Network which enabled teachers to become catalysts for change in their schools as well as to be able to support students sensitively and confidently. Developed understanding of the issues.
- Shifts in teacher attitudes support success. Involving Indigenous people and parents helps to make this happen. Change is achieved at classroom level.
Teaching teachers how to teach more effectively produces significant results in a short period. (This can only happen when teachers can access time to learn and professionally renew their energies and focus.)

Treating cases on an individual basis, creatively and flexibly, is of fundamental importance.

Providing mentoring support for students is of high value.

The development of the student network reduced students’ sense of isolation and produced many new friendships and a sense of mutual support.

Direct intervention in individual cases, especially in establishing course pathways.

Ownership issues exist. Things succeed when the teachers, not just the administration ‘own’ the project.

Less successful factors

- ‘Attendance and participation involve a multiplicity of issues, a number of which cannot be resolved by schools.
- ‘The strategy of personal intervention is very time-consuming. It works, that is beyond doubt, but it has high costs.
- ‘Some schools were slow to respond and remain uncommitted.
- ‘Problematic attitudes demonstrated by non-Indigenous peers are one of the things focus teachers face and have to deal with.
- ‘It seems harder to make changes in secondary schools than it is in primary schools because of the structural rigidities and the absence of close and consistent teacher-student relationships.’

Sustainability

‘Different aspects of the program can be sustained through a variety of funding sources, and schools, too, have earmarked funding to support and in some cases extend initiatives which have begun as a result of the project. The Focus Teacher Network continues to meet, and to add new members as teachers signal a willingness to become involved.

‘However without a significant source of funding, the cohesiveness of the strategy will be lacking, and that is what gave it its great strength.’

Project SS8

Sector: Middle years

Topic: Secondary School Entry

Location: rural centres, 9 schools

Number of students involved: 64 in 1998
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project intentions were as follows.

- To assess all Indigenous students entering high schools in the Diocese so that those ‘at risk’ could be identified and provided with appropriate individual programs of support to meet their educational needs.
- To improve retention.
- To identify, analyse, catalogue and advise on the purchase of software which teachers could use with Indigenous students, and to provide teachers with the professional development needed to do so.
- To provide Indigenous students with access to information literacy skills and respond to a belief that it is ‘culturally appropriate and age appropriate for a student to sit at a computer to work’.
- To ensure that targeted intervention occurs in a way that does not ‘do further damage’ to students’ self esteem.

Activity

Years 8 and 9 Indigenous students in the nine schools were screened using the Secondary Screening Profile which covers three areas — reasoning, reading and mathematics. Years 10–12 students were tested using the Differential Aptitude Test which, somewhat similarly, focuses on the dimensions of abstract reasoning, verbal reasoning and numerical ability.

Students at risk were identified and individual support programs developed for them.

Staff in the schools were provided with professional development primarily aimed at encouraging them to adjust their curriculum delivery to take more account of different learning styles. In addition, a number of teachers were trained in the use of the ‘Successmaker’ software program. (A range of software programs were researched and generally found to be of mixed value, with the exception of ‘Successmaker’, which appears to provide for individual improvement in literacy and numeracy and monitors individual student progress.)

Two part-time teachers were employed: one to assess the students, identify those at risk and design and teach programs, and the other to examine and review the software and increase student exposure to technology.

Project performance

Performance targets and results

— Proportion of Indigenous students in 1998, identified as ‘at risk’, with individual development plans

Result: 65% (34/61) had individual plans by the end of July, 1999.
— Proportion of Indigenous students in 1998, identified as ‘at risk’, who satisfactorily complete their year

**Result:** 74%

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

The Secondary Screening Profile, which is a test used in Scotland to assess students’ readiness for secondary school, and the Differential Aptitude Test were used to identify ‘at risk’ students.

**Analysis of project performance**

The pre-testing of students has acted as a wake-up call to schools and principals that there are students with needs that have to be addressed. Previously students were untested on entry and hence there was a lack of awareness of their needs.

The review of software indicated that the items evaluated were only suitable in parts for use with students in schools, and none (with the exception of ‘Successmaker’, which is being trialed in one secondary school and is expensive) was found suitable for students to use independently.

**Factors in success**

- The actual screening of the students and raising of teacher awareness of the needs of Indigenous students ‘at risk’. While ‘at risk’ students were the prime focus, the testing also identified a number of students capable of being extended for whom Individual Development Plans were prepared.
- The provision of professional development related to such areas as Gardner’s ‘multiple intelligences’ and Information Literacy, which has assisted in the adoption of more flexible approaches to the teaching of Indigenous students.
- The screening/Individual Development Plan approach can result in improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students, which in turn translates into improved teacher expectations.

**Sustainability**

It is anticipated that the impact of the project will be sustained because the screening and subsequent monitoring of students will become part of each school’s on-going operations. Professional development will be provided by the Diocese for those teachers who did not receive it in 1998. In addition, a range of resources were purchased which will continue to be available for student use.
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to develop a systematic focus on literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students ‘at risk who attended the centre.

This course of action was chosen to respond to local uncertainty about the capacity of the centre to cater fully for Indigenous students with culturally-specific programs within the overall program, and also to build on a highly successful series of annual culture camps by offering a more substantial Indigenous component to the overall program.

Activity

The project initially employed a recently-graduated Indigenous secondary teacher. When that person found on-going employment, he was replaced with two Indigenous school support officers who worked as teacher aides and community liaison officers.

The work of these Indigenous staff was part of a broader strategy to improve literacy and numeracy for all students by:

- improving the staff/student ratio in the classroom, with particular emphasis on more intensive help for Indigenous students;
- employing a special education teacher and providing four other staff with targeted professional development in literacy;
- employing an additional person to work with other staff on developing a more practical, hands-on approach to literacy and numeracy teaching; and
- tightening up the program through an increased focus on learning outcomes linked to personal goals for each student.

Beyond this the Indigenous staff have contributed to a Culture Studies program, developed further links with Indigenous community groups, provided support to individual students and provided holiday programs for Indigenous students.
Project performance

Performance targets and results

— Proportion of Indigenous students with a personal plan and goals in regards to numeracy and literacy.

Target: 100%

Result: 100%

— Proportion of Indigenous students with numeracy skills comparable to non-Indigenous students of similar age.

Target: 80%

Result: 91%

— Proportion of Indigenous students with literacy skills comparable to non-Indigenous students of similar age.

Target: 80%

Result: 81% (50% of Indigenous students attained satisfactory skills, as against 62% of non-Indigenous students; a comparative proportion of 81%).

Note: since the total student intake is fluid and characterised by high need and educational disadvantage, the relative performance of Indigenous to non-Indigenous students is likely to change consistently.

Beyond this, the anecdotal view of staff is that the project has resulted in students ‘working harder’, and that ‘they are experiencing more success in what they do’.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Students were tested using three instruments: the St Lucia Graded Word Reading Test, South Australian Spelling materials and the Kauffmann Mathematics Test.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

‘The employment of Indigenous staff has been critical to improving the overall effectiveness of the program, and its capacity to meet the needs of Indigenous students. This is evident in a range of specific incidents involving students where the staff have developed culturally-appropriate approaches to dealing with issues that otherwise may have seen the students dropping out altogether. Employing Indigenous personnel is the key, not only because they work well with the students, but also because they contribute to the learning of staff.’
What works?

Less successful factors
‘There is a small group of “floating students” who are on the edge of committing to the program. It appears that the more focused program adopted may have resulted in some male Indigenous students finding it even harder to commit, with the result they leave sooner than otherwise might be the case.

‘It takes times and there are no quick gains. In particular, it takes time to get some students to attend school on a regular basis, and then to turn around their literacy and numeracy performance.’

Sustainability
Indications are that the employment of Indigenous staff will continue.

Project SS10
Sector: upper primary and secondary age (ex-juvenile offenders)
Topic: Off-Campus Student Support Services and Juvenile Justice Program
Location: eight urban, rural and remote sites
Number of students involved: exact figures are not available, but in excess of 150

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project was designed to:

• explore new delivery practices including: curriculum/syllabus development to develop literacy and numeracy skills and, where applicable, accredited VET options; alternative teaching and learning practices; assessment and reporting procedures; and administrative practices and student support services including health and juvenile justice;

• increase levels of participation and attendance, with a sensitivity to community ceremonial requirements;

• provide an accurate assessment of students’ educational, social and cultural readiness to move from one educational stage to the next;

• recognise and accredit Indigenous cultural knowledge;

• successfully manage mobility issues; and

• produce better articulation between community goals for self-determination, mainstream education and individual student’s goals, especially in places with low numbers of Indigenous students.
Activity

Eight sites were established, five directly linked to schools while the other three were partnership arrangements with private providers. The school-based programs generally have had a focus on the provision of appropriate transition programs, while the private provider programs have had a diversionary/juvenile justice orientation and were linked to corrective or social welfare agencies.

The topics project programs have dealt with include: identity and place, relationships, motivation, attendance, employment and careers, shelter, and drug education.

Project performance

Performance targets

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (9–15 years of age) in target group who regularly attend off-campus program

Target: equivalence with rate for non-Indigenous students in similar programs

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (9–15 years of age) in target group who re-enter education or training within three months of project completion

Target: equivalence with rate for non-Indigenous students in similar programs

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (9–15 years of age) in target group with reading and writing skills at an appropriate age level for their age at the end of the project compared with their level at its beginning

Target: Improvement on baseline

Results: not yet available. One site has achieved a 90% return rate to mainstream schooling. Good and increasing attendance levels are reported from three of the sites.

Analysis of project performance

In general the sites conducting these alternative programs reported positive outcomes in terms of rates of suspensions and other school disciplinary absences. While these programs are viewed as effective forms of intervention and support for students at risk, several of the sites indicated difficulties in the transition phase back to mainstream schooling.

Factors in success

• The establishment of partnerships across the whole range of stakeholders.
• Intensive levels of individual support.
What works?

Less successful factors

- There are questions about the most appropriate exit points from such programs which still need to be resolved.
- Comments from a number of sites indicated a need for greater involvement of other relevant agencies or external organisations. The complexity of factors impacting on the young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged in programs of this type require an effective interagency approach to address non-educational issues.

Sustainability

The activities of the project will not be sustainable without additional funding. Investigation of possible sources is proceeding.
Re-entry: Adult and further education

Project R1

Sector: Adult and further education

Topic: Making a difference through Adult and Community Education

Location: rural and remote; 2 sites

Number of students involved: 46

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

This project was intended to run at two sites.

At the first site the underlying intention was to try to make significant differences to the participation and retention levels of the ‘most at risk’ young people who have dropped out of school with low level academic skills, many with court-recorded convictions, by providing intensive local support arrangements while they completed Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses.

At the second site, the relevant College had previously delivered Certificate Level II in Occupational Studies (Horticulture) to this community. During the delivery of this program a need for additional tutorial support was identified. It was believed that the outcomes from that program could have been improved with this support. The SRP project was intended to meet this need.

Activity

The ‘Youth at Risk’ program at site 1 provided two accredited VET courses along with extra tuition, and support with nutrition, health and travel. Two Indigenous trainees and tutors were employed to run a drop-in centre and to provide literacy and numeracy support. Travel expenses for work experience and materials and equipment were provided.

The courses identified as potentially useful to the target group of participants were the Certificate in Community Maintenance (CCM) and the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA). The CCM assists participants to develop the skills needed for general maintenance in the areas of plumbing, carpentry, window fitting and glazing, lawn mowing, small engines and concreting. The CGEA provides the literacy and numeracy modules necessary to complete the Certificate in Community Maintenance. Both courses were progressing well at the time of reporting.

At the second site, in 1998 the community need shifted from horticulture training to training for people working in the aged care industry as a result of the Community Services and Health Training Advisory body implementing new standards for training in community services and health. Certificate Level III in Assistant in Nursing was identified as an appropriate course to offer.
An accredited tutor was selected but in August the tutor had to move away from the area for personal reasons. Replacing this tutor was difficult because of the necessity of finding a person with the requisite qualifications who was known and accepted within the community. Additional problems intervened.

During March 1999 the College met with several key community people in an alternative location. There was general agreement about the need for the development of living skills, and especially an understanding of nutrition for parents of small children. A revised proposal was developed to use modules from the Certificate Level II in Koori Education and Training. This course has just recently commenced.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students who successfully complete course or exit course to articulate to further education, other forms of employment or training within 3 months of leaving course.

Baseline: 12 students (1997)

**Result:** (to date, one site)

At the time of reporting, there were 46 students enrolled in the program. Three have become candidates for the Higher School Certificate, and four will be eligible for the School Certificate.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement Attendance, retention and course articulation rates.

**Analysis of project performance**

The targets will be achieved due to the additional support provided to increasing numbers of students and the flexibility of the tutors and host institution.

The program has gained respect in the local area and has attracted many visitors which has helped increase the self esteem of the young people and improved their image in the wider community.

Notable reductions in risk taking behaviour, health and nutrition have assisted the young people to achieve in education. Improved self esteem has contributed to the young people considering options outside the community.

**Factors in success (all related to the work at Site 1)**

- Employment of Indigenous trainees who have been excellent role models as well as effective support for other students. This has provided a real employment situation which reinforces the concept of pathways for Aboriginal young people and the rest of the community. The community acknowledges that the traineeships are a direct result of the program.
• ‘The high quality work done by the literacy and numeracy support workers. This support has been used by the majority of students as well as other community members who wish to increase their levels of education.’
• Excursions held under the project have been highly successful, including one which produced some paid employment.
• The attitude and support of the principal of ACE North Coast has been invaluable. The flexibility granted to ‘work the hours around the program’ has generated stability, consistency and has unquestionably contributed to its success.
• The option for itinerant young people visiting from other communities to join the program for the duration of their stay has proven very successful in encouraging them to stay engaged in education.
• ‘The curriculum chosen for the young people has been aligned to their interests and learning styles — co-operative learning from and with their peers in a non-threatening environment. The CCM is specifically designed to encourage self-reliance within an Indigenous community. It has been designed for Aboriginal people and aims to provide learners with the skills to gain employment in their communities. Participants will also be better prepared for finding employment in the broader community. The CGE, with four entry and three exit levels, has assisted students who have moved onto other programs to receive recognition of the work they have done.
• ‘The encouragement of students to identify with their heritage as they strive to master functional coping strategies for both cultures has created new links with the culture of their community and the Elders. The increasing participation of the Elders and the increased respect from the community in general has contributed to the growth in attendance. The Elders of the Community are proud of their young people and have offered to teach them Language and traditional songs next year.
• ‘The use of an approach that incorporates the multi-lingual nature of the young people has been a successful component of the program. They speak Standard English and Aboriginal English, and will learn Bungjalung next year.’

Sustainability

The sustainability of the program is tentative. It is essential to provide stable alternatives to the environment that the young people have withdrawn from. This requires continued funding.
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to provide VET-accredited training for Koorie people wishing to gain training in a field relevant to their community, and to develop skills for accessing further training, education or employment.

The background purposes were to meet the specific needs of Indigenous 15 to 24 year olds by ensuring that the training was culturally inclusive and provided a pathway into further education and training and/or employment, and to engage young people identified by the community as being ‘at risk’ in relation to the juvenile justice system, substance abuse and unemployment.

Activity
The course was delivered to students in three locations between July and December 1998. Seven modules were developed, each amenable to local adaptation and having individual measurable outcomes contributing overall to the award of the certificate. Literacy and numeracy development are integrated with VET entry level training and the development of career pathways for each individual student.

A learning profile was developed for each participant (including a literacy evaluation), and students were provided with intensive mentoring and other support such as camps to reinforce self esteem and cultural identity, while also developing appropriate career/education pathways. In the first half of the course participants made several visits to local industries/businesses, and in the second they took part in employment and/or further education placements.

Teachers were supported through professional development and cultural awareness programs to help ensure the learning environment met the needs of the program participants.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who receive credentials in an accredited VET course/modules

Target: 34 of 45 (75%)
Results: 16 of the 41 participants completed the course; 5 students completed modules 1 and 2; a further 8 students completed modules 1, 2 and 3; and 7 students did not complete any modules. Results varied across locations (completion rates: 13%, 41% and 64%).

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who articulate into further accredited education and training and/or employment within 3 months of program completion

Target: 11 of 12 (92%)

Result: Articulation to further accredited education, courses at TAFE or traineeships: rates at each site: 58%, 71% and 73%.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Records of completion and articulation rates.

The project evaluation suggests that these do not provide ‘an accurate picture of the true value of education to Koorie individuals and communities’ because success in terms of actual students’ intentions and the particular types of outcomes actually valued by communities are ignored. Also, the way the performance indicators have been framed neglected to credit the fact that only three of the ‘at risk’ participants have become involved in the juvenile justice system, a major focus of the program.

Analysis of project performance

The project did productively engage Koorie youth at risk and succeed in ‘getting the kids off the street’.

The course has improved the knowledge, skills and confidence of the students involved to the point where, even though only around 40% completed the course, 73% are, or intend to be, undertaking further accredited training.

Factors in success

• The flexibility of the course was a critical factor as it enabled communities to ‘put their own mark on the program’.

• The level of community involvement in, and ownership of the course throughout planning and delivery, while at the same time ensuring that the program meets the training needs identified by the Adult Community and Further Education Board and the Aboriginal Education Association Inc., were essential conditions for success.

• The existence of flexible entry and exit points which enable students to achieve a Statement of Attainment for the completion of individual modules has attracted students who are reluctant learners and resistant to formally-structured education and training settings.
What works?

• Actively involving students, in consultation with their mentors, in determining the direction of their own learning through individual learning contracts aimed at meeting their specific needs has been important.
• The right staff, more flexible generalists, who can focus on individuals and their needs.

Less successful factors
‘There was lack of lead time which made planning and implementation difficult for all involved. This was true in relation, especially, to arranging staffing, accessing suitable locations, selecting students, developing or customising materials and establishing the necessary administrative procedures.’

Juvenile justice workers in the areas were either unaware of the project or had no involvement in the selection and recruitment of participants.

Sustainability
The relevant State Minister for Tertiary Education and Training announced in late June 1999 that $114,000 would be provided to deliver the course in six locations across the state, and foreshadowed a further expansion of the program in 2000.

Project R3
Sector: post secondary
Topic: Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP)
Location: provincial city
Number of students involved: 25

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
A course for Indigenous students which would enable them to access tertiary study was developed and delivered through this project. The course aimed to:
• attract students aged between 16–19 years of age who had recently dropped out of the mainstream education system;
• make students aware of the commitment needed for successful tertiary study;
• provide students with the study skills necessary to successfully complete tertiary study;
• develop students confidence to undertake tertiary study;
• enable students to meet the admission requirements for tertiary institutions;
• have students participate in cultural maintenance and revival; and
• have students become conversant with contemporary Indigenous issues.
The central reason for mounting the project was the low number of Indigenous students completing their final years of senior secondary school. For example, in 1997: ‘There were 10 Indigenous students [of 100 enrolments] and 413 non-Indigenous students who qualified for a University entry level score.’ (Indigenous Education Outcomes Report 1997. NTDE, 1998: 20.) With such low rates of success in attaining university entrance it is only reasonable to conclude that mainstream curriculum has failed in enabling Indigenous students to access tertiary studies.

Activity
Care was taken to develop a curriculum which was both innovative and culturally relevant to Indigenous students’ needs and interests. The essential premise in its development was that successful outcomes for Indigenous students could be achieved through the incorporation of Indigenous language and culture within the curriculum.

The course consisted of modules in written and oral communication, Indigenous studies in history, art and language (Pertame), environmental science and managing personal change.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who qualify for entry into post-secondary education.

Target: 50% of enrolment

Result: 5 prospective tertiary entrants from an initial enrolment of 25

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
Course and post-course enrolment and completion data.

Analysis of project performance
The students who were originally targeted in the 16–19 year old age group comprised 40% of those who successfully completed the course. The remaining 60% of graduates were in their mid- to late-twenties.

Twenty-five students enrolled in the course over the year. However, there was a high attrition rate, with 20 students withdrawing from the course and only five actually graduating. Ten (of the 25) students withdrew within the first two weeks of the course. The reasons cited for these withdrawals were as follows.

• The student was unclear or uncertain of his/her educational goals, and after counselling they did not consider themselves ready for full-time study.
• The student felt and/or teaching staff recommended that they needed to improve general literacy skills prior to commencing the TPP.
• Male students did not feel comfortable in a predominantly female class.
Absence of adequate financial support.

Younger students often left the class to seek out their peers in other courses or elsewhere, perhaps feeling intimidated by the older students.

The absence of the accreditation of the course until the latter part of the year raised questions of its credibility.

The remaining ten withdrawals occurred between two and eight months. These students withdrew due to personal difficulties or family problems which made it impossible to make the necessary commitment required for the successful completion of the program. The significant impact of “sorry business” on overall student attendance should also be acknowledged as the community suffered a higher than usual number of deaths over the year.

However, the students who did graduate demonstrated a very high level of commitment to completing the program successfully. Attendance was regular and motivation maintained through setting personal goals, receiving support for study from family members and others, a stable lifestyle and receiving financial support.

Of the five graduates, one has commenced law at NTU, one is doing a business management course at Batchelor College, one is doing a Bachelor of Arts Degree through LaTrobe University, one is considering a Bachelor of Arts Degree, while the fifth student is working full-time.

Recruitment for 1999 commenced in mid-January and, at the time of writing, the program has 11 students. It is expected that this number will increase over time. Of the ten students who withdrew from the course, four of have requested to return to the course. Three have actually commenced the TPP, while the other has commenced a Diploma course in Fine Art.

Factors in success

Students who did not consider themselves candidates for university level study realised their potential to pursue further study.

Indigenous students became active participants in cultural revival and maintenance through the cultural emphases of the curriculum.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators developed curriculum and team teaching in a collaborative way.

Careful selection of subject material that was of cultural relevance in all subject areas.

Field trips to enhance experiential learning, eg, Heritage Week, Sorry Day, visit to Ewaninga, Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, Desert Park, Kalkaringi Constitutional Conference, trip to Canberra where students had the opportunity of meeting numerous Indigenous role models in both academic and professional settings.
4: Individual Project Summaries

- Students were actively encouraged to participate in the public arena presenting their views and ideas in a public forum. For example, students participated in the production of a local community radio program during the Sorry Day Week.
- Presentations by national and local figures such as Wenton Rubuntja, Charles Perkins, Alexis Wright, Bessie Liddle, Doug Abbott, Mick Dodson, Mick Rangiari, Moira Raynor, John Muk Muk Burke, Magda Szubanski, Professor Robert Proudfoot.
- Integration of local issues into curriculum to facilitate experiential learning.
- Use of visual materials (videos, overheads and photographs) to enhance learning and understanding. Oral presentations by students were videotaped for self-evaluation purposes.
- Emphasis on oral language and group discussion to enhance students’ understanding of materials in all subject areas.
- A collaborative approach to research tasks.
- Role plays to enhance students’ understanding of value systems and the processes of negotiation.

Less successful factors

- Late commencement of the course (first week of April) meant that some of the original targeted student group of 16–19 year olds had already committed themselves to training programs and employment for 1998.
- Student attendance and retention rates were not particularly high. In particular, irregular attendance, although usually for legitimate reasons, caused difficulties in terms of continuity and, inevitably, students suffered learning gaps. Many of the absences were the result of the community being subject to much trauma in 1998. In particular, a number of youth suicides took their toll on the community.
- The issue of accreditation was of ongoing concern and resulted in some students withdrawing from the course.

Sustainability

‘The course has continued into 1999 and has generated much community interest. This year’s students appear highly motivated to pursue higher education. The project has been a great opportunity to make a difference to these students’ lives in an area of education that has been sorely neglected.’
What works?

In Motion: Dealing with student mobility

Project M1

Sector: Primary/secondary

Topic: Tracking the mobility rates of Indigenous students to target and assist with literacy and numeracy support. (‘Mobility’ in this project refers to students changing schools for any reasons and includes those in transition from primary to secondary school.)

Location: a range of sites

Number of students involved: 750+

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

This project set out to develop:

• an effective tracking system and information exchange between schools re transient Indigenous students; and

• a literacy support program for targeted transient Indigenous students.

Participants in the developmental workshops discussing this issue felt that it was important to recognise that mobility is a fact of life for many Indigenous students and must be accepted as such. A number of problems could be addressed if schools had relevant and prompt information about student transferees.

Activity

Student mobility: Issues of student mobility were discussed in workshops which included principals, Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs), Aboriginal Education Consultants and teachers. A pro forma to provide basic details about students was designed by this group and agreed by the various communities. A tracking system and database were designed and established.

Each time a student enrols in or exits from a school the pro forma is completed and sent to the database. The details are then entered, and the ‘new’ school receives information (including the name of a contact person from the exit school) which helps with the student’s transition into the school. Student details remain confidential. The system offers an efficient and sensitive way of transferring positive, helpful information.

Data entered by the 76 participating schools indicates that in the period 10 October 1998 to 29 June, 1999, 854 pro formas were completed and returned; 739 students were registered, and 967 movements (551 enrolments and 416 exits) were recorded.

Literacy support: A network of five Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs), four mobility teachers and 12 targeted classroom teachers has been involved
in designing, implementing and evaluating strategies and resources in literacy support for mobile Indigenous students.

An intensive reading support program has been developed for targeted students. The program follows the principles of Reading Recovery, Literacy Plus & the NSW Literacy Strategy framework. The program includes the use of e.Mate computers and a variety of other resources including texts and software. (‘Kidpix Deluxe’ has been found helpful and popular.) Targeted students from neighbouring districts came together for a series of workshops where they worked with AEAs and teachers.

Electronic Student Portfolios are in development that will provide immediate and meaningful information to classroom teachers about (and by) their new students. The portfolios will be a key strategy for helping students settle into their new schools.

‘The portfolios hold a collection of up-to-date samples of student work. They can include scanned or digital photos, video and sound clips, animations, recordings of students, text, traditional writings and drawings and other samples of their achievements. The template includes:

— a photo of the student, with his or her name, year level and the date;
— an example of his or her best handwriting;
— a sample of his or her most creative artwork;
— a piece of work that demonstrates his or her writing ability; and
— an audio recording of his or her best reading from their favourite text.’

Transferring the portfolios between schools can be done electronically or through mailing by the student or the school (with student consent).

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of Indigenous compulsory school-aged students at specific sites identified as ‘mobile’ and who regularly attend school.
— Number and proportion of Indigenous compulsory school-aged students at specific sites identified as ‘mobile’ and with reading skills comparable to other Indigenous students.

**Results:** not yet available

The effects of the intensive reading support program on students’ interest in and enthusiasm for school were evident from an early stage. From all districts we have received reports suggesting that the scaffolding the AEAs and mobility teachers are providing not only improve literacy levels but the levels of student confidence and participation as well.
What works?

Measures to establish baselines and improvement
Shifts in literacy levels of targeted students in targeted classrooms and, for purposes of comparison, non-targeted students in targeted classrooms and non-targeted students in non-targeted classrooms.

The DART test has been used to measure shifts in reading skills. The pre-tests occurred in February and the post-tests will occur in September. Basic Skills Test results at Years 3 and 5, the ELLA test at Year 7 and the Burt and Woodcock tests are also being used, as well as regular reading records.

Analysis of project performance
The data is raising awareness about the degree of mobility and the needs of mobile students, their teachers and their schools.

The literacy support program is proving that intervention can work not only with the students’ academic levels but with their confidence, self esteem and school attendance as well.

Factors in success
The professionalism, enthusiasm and dedication of the four mobility teachers and the Aboriginal Education Assistants employed in the project.

Less successful factors
The DART test materials were not as suitable as hoped.

Some targeted classroom teachers have not participated to the degree we would have liked. This has partly been due to the level of support from principals and other commitments or priorities. In fact, the situation may well be that teachers generally do not understand the specific issues for Indigenous students and mobile students, let alone mobile Indigenous students.

Sustainability
The statistical analysis of data has been widely publicised within the Department and has raised awareness about the extent of student mobility. It is hoped this will encourage further work in this area.

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Project M2

Sector: primary/secondary
Topic: Student Tracking System
Location: two state Education Districts
Number of students involved: 16,000
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
In conjunction with students, parents, schools and local communities, the project set out to establish mechanisms to:

- identify transient students’ movement across schools; and
- ensure continuity of curriculum programs between schools.

The Student Tracking System is being trialed in two Education Districts, based on regional centres which have a mixture of urban, rural and remote schools in their profiles. Anecdotal records show both districts as having a highly transient population.

Activity
A central database was established to identify and monitor transient and absentee students across the government and non-government education sectors. Transient students have been identified and patterns of transience plotted to target the provision of educational programs at the point of need.

Schools in these Districts have been encouraged to include improved attendance as part of their School Development Plan. This is universal in one of the targeted Districts and widespread in the other.

An Aboriginal Education Centre in conjunction with personnel from a regional office have worked with the Student Tracking System Project Coordinator to help schools to develop Attendance Plans to target the attendance of all students. This Centre is also conducting a survey of parents, students and teachers in the two trial Districts in an effort to identify trial and publish best practice in methods of improving attendance.

The design and construction of a software system capable of handling all 360,000 students in the state, their demographic information and their school transfer history has commenced. This package is being designed to be compatible with the new School Information System. The system will be ready for testing in November with statewide implementation in January 2000 provided approval is forthcoming.

There have been wide consultations with parent and other relevant groups. The other two main government agencies that deal with youth have been very cooperative in their dealings with the Student Tracking System. This has resulted in better inter-agency links and indications are that future protocols will be signed with these agencies to provide a better service to our mutual clients.
What works?

Project performance
Performance targets:
— Improve the attendance rate of Indigenous students.
— Re-engage 25% of regular non-attenders or chronic absentees in education.

Results to date:
Since March 1999 the project has successfully tracked 83% of the students referred to it. Of the remaining 17%, the majority are understood to have moved interstate. There has been insufficient information to track the remainder.
The data relating to chronic absentees however have been available through District Offices and the results to the end of Term 1 indicate a 40% improvement in their re-engagement with school.
The Education Department has, for the last 25 years, published a list of students whose whereabouts were unknown. They have left their last school without notifying the school of their intentions. Through the work of this project, this list has been reduced by 65% since the end of 1998 with 85% of those students located in other schools.

Analysis of project performance
Factors in success
• Making schools accountable through the School Development Planning process has contributed to the success of the project.
• Raising the profile of the issue through public promotion and awareness campaigns has also contributed to early successes.

Less successful factors
‘Some of the information technology equipment in schools is getting very old and can’t handle the workload, while phone lines in country areas do not have the capacity to carry the information effectively. In addition, some people are loath to use the technology and/or lack the training to do so effectively.’

Sustainability
The trial will run for the duration of 1999 with the expectation of renewed funding allowing it to expand to encompass all 16 Education Districts in 2000.

Project M3
Sector: primary/early secondary
Topic: Numeracy and literacy for itinerant students
Location: remote
Number of students involved: 10
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to increase learning outcomes for itinerant students attending the school for a portion of the school year through intensive numeracy and literacy tuition.

‘Residential patterns affecting student attendance are a way of life for some students and only become a problem when providers and teachers do not accept this ‘way of life’ and/or do not have appropriate mechanisms in place to increase access, participation and achievement in identified learning areas (Language, Mathematics, Social Science) for these students.’

Activity
An expert in each field was to be engaged to be on-site for four weeks to provide intensive tuition to identified students and intensive in-servicing to all staff. Due to delay in contract negotiations, the school could not secure the preferred literacy consultant and therefore this section of the project did not occur.

The consultant’s work program during the first two weeks included: individual work with students 40 mins/day for eight days; small group tuition 40 mins/day (identified students in their general classroom maths groups); individual pre-program assessment of identified students plus sample of other students; teacher in-service program (approximately two hours/day for eight days) with a focus on numeration strand of maths curriculum and associated teaching strategies; review of provider’s scope and sequence which reflects provider’s expectations and student progression rates.

The school had projected that eight identified students would be involved for this period, but the actual figure turned out to be 11. Seven students worked directly with the consultant.

In Term 2 1999, the consultant was again on-site for two weeks. There were six identified students who worked with the consultant. The consultant’s work program was similar with the addition of an assessment program of students, five of whom were the same as in Term 4, as well as a sample of other students.

Project performance

Performance target
— Number and proportion of Category 2 students in Years 1–7 who satisfy provider’s numeracy expectations.

Target: 40% (from a baseline of 20%)

Result: 40% (4/10)
What works?

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
School-based numeration assessment checklists (Donaldson, 1996) were administered at the beginning and end of the project.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

- A very high level of school attendance among students while on-site.
- ‘All people who worked with identified students were “known”, whether “family” who teach in the school or non-family members who the students have worked and played with prior to the project. The consultant engaged was well qualified in the content area; experienced in issues relating to the language of maths, and the delivery of maths using English as the language of instruction in an environment where English is a foreign language; and experienced in working in remote areas.

‘The flexibility of timetabling arrangements, sensitive to daily family and economic commitments of both students and staff, but still enabled the consultant to engage with students and staff for an appropriate amount of time during each visit.

‘The in-service education for the teachers proved to be most beneficial, generating new strategies which are now being implemented in the classroom.’

Sustainability

The residential patterns of the families and students will continue and therefore this school will continue to implement this work program as a matter of course.
Building Skills

Getting a Good Start: Early childhood education

Project EC1

Sector: Early childhood

Topic: Partnerships in early childhood support for Aboriginal children learning for literacy (birth–6 years)

Location: one urban and one rural site

Number of students involved: 20

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to find answers to the research question: What changes to early childhood teaching and support services delivery practices will result in improved early literacy learning outcomes for Indigenous children within a relatively short period of time? By focusing on what children are learning and how, and by making some changes based on this information, it was intended to support and supplement available programs and make children’s learning more visible.

Although a number of initiatives have been implemented for Aboriginal students in schools, there are still major concerns around literacy, attendance and retention. In 1997 the Basic Skills test identified that 74% of Aboriginal children in Year 3 required special literacy intervention.

Activity

Five Aboriginal and five non-Aboriginal children at each site were selected by the teaching teams to provide a representative sample of age and gender at various transition points. Continuous observations of 45 minutes duration were made of each of the ten children at four intervals over seven months at one site, and at three intervals over five months at the other, and the results recorded, analysed and used as a basis for planning.

The initial data were presented to the reference group to identify what purposes the targeted children had for using or accessing literacy, and for the teaching team and principal researcher to collaboratively plan intervention strategies. On the basis of these observations Individual Learning Plans were developed for each child. In addition changed practices were tested for their effectiveness. At one site these included the following.

- Developing literacy kits to take home which included items such as books, puppets, songs on cards and tapes. Their contents were changed regularly.
What works?

- Enhancing the reading corner.
- Increasing community liaison via the work of a member of the local community.
- Changing the program so the one for three year-olds is not the same as the one for five year-olds. The latter is more structured with higher expectations.

At the other site practices included the following.
- Work on oral language was conducted: practising greetings; listening post with resources; production of some Ngarrindjeri resources; production of language experience resources via the use of a digital camera for large inexpensive photos.
- Lots of directed learning games were tried.
- Strategies to increase ‘engaged’ learning time were trialed.

At both sites home parent surveys concerning literacy experiences and factors considered critical to successful transition were conducted through Aboriginal Community Workers. Both ‘sending’ preschool teachers and ‘receiving’ reception teachers also completed surveys on factors considered critical to successful transition, and the results tabulated.

Both sites also were supported to emphasise scaffolding by explicit teaching of the elements to achieve success in targeted activities and mapping across three curriculum areas; self-concept, social development and communication.

Project performance

Performance targets
- The spread of English literacy development (literate behaviours) in a targeted group of Aboriginal children at two preschools is commensurate to the spread for a targeted group of non-Aboriginal children
- The distance travelled in individual Aboriginal children’s learning, as identified by curriculum progress maps, matches the gains made by their non-Aboriginal peers
- The implementation of alternate delivery modes of teaching and learning practices by teachers in preschool and/or in reception for young Aboriginal children

Results

At site 1:
The cohort of Aboriginal children presented in the baseline data as having higher child/adult interactions than child/child interactions, within the free play environment. Eighty per cent of the cohort of non-Aboriginal children presented in the baseline as having higher child/child interactions.
All children in both cohorts demonstrated an increase in child/adult interactions. All children in both cohorts demonstrated an increase in child/child interactions. At the third observation point, when staff were dedicating the maximum time to their action research, the spread of sociocultural indicators was higher for the Aboriginal children. While the indicators continued to increase steadily for non-Aboriginal children, progress for their Aboriginal peers showed more sensitivity to the concerted effort of staff and decreased as staff focus decreased.

There was minimal change in either cohort for the indicators measuring concentration for 10 minutes without adult supervision.

Baseline data for literate behaviour indicators showed that the non-Aboriginal children were achieving a higher average in the four areas of literate behaviours measured. All children in both cohorts increased both speaking and listening over the period of measurement; 75% of Aboriginal children recorded their highest achievement at the third observation point, while 100% of non-Aboriginal peers recorded their highest achievement at the fourth observation point. This again reinforces the need to sustain intervention strategies for Aboriginal children.

The indicator for viewing and reading demonstrated at baseline that non-Aboriginal children were engaging at twice the level of their Aboriginal peers. At the final measuring point, this indicator was twice as high for the Aboriginal cohort who had increased their total average by 3.3 times. This was the focus of the centre-based action research and clearly demonstrated that adapting the environment to make text-based literacy more inviting, had a far greater impact on the Aboriginal children. The non-Aboriginal children maintained a similar level of engagement or motivation to view and read despite changes to the environment or the presence of an adult.

At site 2:

Eighty per cent of the Aboriginal children recorded a higher level of child/child interaction than child/adult interaction at the baseline; 40% of non-Aboriginal children recorded a higher level of child/child interaction than child/adult.

All children from both cohorts increased the child/child interactions over the three observation points, and all children from both cohorts increased the child/adult interactions over the period. These increases were significant — up to 5.5 times greater.

Baseline data for literate behaviours indicated that the two cohorts were very similar. All children from both cohorts increased their achievement against these total literate behaviours. The focus Aboriginal children started from a lower average baseline and finished with a higher average indicating the spread of achievement was not just commensurate, but greater for the Aboriginal children following intervention.
What works?

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
The following indicators from the Baseline Assessment Scales (1997) were used:
• child/child interaction;
• child/adult interaction;
• active participation in a group; and
• concentration without adult intervention for 10 minutes.
Literate behaviours were those defined in the Eclipse document (SA DETE, 1998) and include: speaking; listening; reading and viewing; scribbling, writing, drawing and/or painting.

Analysis of project performance
A play-based curriculum needs to incorporate explicit teaching and modelling strategies based on planned and structured learning to ensure that the learning needs of Aboriginal children are met. ‘A focus on explicit teaching does not preclude activity-based, problem-solving activities, but rather emphasises scaffolding by explicit teaching of the features and procedures required to complete the activities’ (Early Literacy: Practices And Possibilities SA DETE).

Parental knowledge and understanding of children was crucial in helping teachers understand the cultural contexts of Aboriginal children.

A range of strategies is required to address the negative impact of otitis media in the preschool environment. At one site, the use of a sound-field amplification system made a marked difference in the engagement of several of the Aboriginal children during group activities.

Factors in success
• The enthusiasm of staff teams and their willingness to review current literacy practices.
• Literacy learning taking place within a social context.
• The close focus possible through the observation sessions gave some depth and sometimes surprising insights into children’s engagement patterns and literacy skills.
• Access to expert personnel.
• Modelling of explicit teaching skills by a speech pathologist, special educator and Hearing Impairment Services consultant.

Less successful factors
‘Changing models and methodologies is a very ambitious task in short space of time. While we have been able to explore some models of transition and program delivery and a number of the ideas from our findings have been adopted, staff teams have not yet been able to fully implement the range of suggestions.’
Sustainability
A range of factors indicate that the impact of the project will have sustained outcomes.

• The teaching teams themselves stated ‘our involvement in the project has made us more reflective practitioners’, and ‘in a small amount of time we have seen children meet the objectives’.

• The principal researcher is the substantive Special educator and will continue to work in partnership and in a culture of permanent research.

• The strategic relationships established through the reference group is continuing to explore and implement models for transition.

• Opportunities for the development and delivery of training and development based on the project findings are being sought.

• The number of Aboriginal staff employed in the Early Learning Programs (home-based visiting literacy/ early learning staff ) in this group of districts has increased from one to four during the implementation of the project to focus on younger children and partnerships between home/community and preschool.

Project EC2
Sector: Early childhood
Topic: Perceptual motor/occupational therapy
Location: rural town
Number of students involved: approx. 25

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project set out to demonstrate that the ability of Aboriginal children to succeed in a formal school environment can be improved by teaching them school readiness skills through a perceptual motor program and aspects of an occupational therapy program.

Observation suggested that many Aboriginal children do not satisfy the expectations for beginning school. The project also responded to a belief that preschools too often rely on teaching models that are static and not compatible with Aboriginal children’s abilities and strengths.

Activity
The class of about 25 children was divided into three groups of about eight. Each group of eight had a 45 minute session each day in the ‘Play and Learning Room’. This left a smaller class of about 16 in the main room and allowed for more individual attention in both rooms.
What works?

The Play and Learning sessions were divided into five sections.

- Activities designed to alleviate hearing problems.
- Kinaesthetic exercises.
- Occupational therapy exercises to help children integrate and organise their thought processes more efficiently. A Bolster Swing, Flexor Swing, scooter board and ramp and large spin disks and barrels were used. Through these activities it was possible to identify children who were having difficulty with movement and balance.
- Cognitive motor games that focused on a learning area such as colour, number, shape, etc. Children learnt new concepts by experiencing three-dimensional examples of it. For example, to learn about circles and quantity a game called ‘Balloon Bundles’ was played. Children kick balloons around the room and then two individuals pick up as many as they can in 10 seconds, counted out by teacher and students. Other children then estimate who has the most balloons. This game teaches concepts such as estimating, one-to-one correspondence, how to follow instructions and take turns as well as the language component that the teacher uses to reinforce the ‘round balloons’ and ‘circles’.
- Cool down to calm the children down before rejoining the main class.

Project performance

Performance targets

The performance targets were to increase the number of Indigenous students who satisfied literacy and numeracy expectations (of schools) to 80% by 20 June 1999. This was based on an estimate that 60–70% of Indigenous students satisfied the expectations before the project began.

Results

After five months, 50% of Indigenous children passed the cognitive test and 69% passed the gross motor test. Progress was good, but initial expectations were unrealistic. It is expected that the targets can be met by the end of the year. The first half of the year is designed to teach children basic skills and concepts associated with school readiness.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

The standard baseline test was redesigned so that it included a gross motor and cognitive component as well as other aspects of beginning literacy and numeracy skills. It was found that no Indigenous student passed the initial cognitive test and only 18% passed the gross motor test. Initial expectations had been unrealistically high.
Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

- Smaller group sizes allowed Indigenous students (who were often quiet and shy) the time and space to get to know the teachers and the teachers to get to know them on a personal level.
- The contribution of the occupational therapy component is hard to quantify but very important. Anecdotal reports from parents indicate that children may be more ready to attempt challenging tasks. It also seems to have improved their ability to concentrate and process information more efficiently.
- The cognitive games helped children learn about numbers, shapes and colours in a way that was active and fun.
- Maintaining the same small groups each week was a positive influence.
- The preschool teacher having professional development in a range of innovative techniques.
- The use of hands-on activities to promote the learning of concepts in ways that are fun.

Less successful factors

Being away from the main classroom at times meant that the teacher was missing some aspects of children’s whole experience.

Sustainability

‘The Play and Learning Room has been established and equipped and will continue to be used. A way will have to be found to ensure that the teacher has more time in the general classroom.

‘The enjoyment of the children and the success of the project in such a short period of time means that much will be repeated next year.’

Project EC3

Sector: Early childhood
Topic: Music program
Location: rural city

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to enhance the overall educational development of Aboriginal students, focusing on literacy, numeracy and attendance rates. This was to be achieved by the establishment of an intensive music program which would help to integrate and reinforce music and movement capabilities,
develop new teaching strategies that could be used on an on-going basis and generate a higher level of parent involvement.

Activity
An early childhood music specialist was engaged and appropriate musical instruments purchased. The program then ran on a weekly sessional basis for four terms. The music activities were designed to develop concentration, rhythm, coordinated body movement and balance.

A program was then developed, modelled on what had been learnt from the music specialist and will be continued. The project as a whole was promoted in the local media.

**Project performance**
Performance targets and results
— Develop in students a greater appreciation of Aboriginal culture emphasising music, improving their pleasure in this art form and their cultural knowledge
**Result:** Anecdotal evidence suggests these have been achieved.
— Increase attendance, participation and community involvement
**Result:** Attendance, already at a high level, improved. Participation of members of the local Aboriginal community has increased.
— Enhance public relations
**Result:** Excellent feedback from parents, community members and a specialist evaluator.

**Analysis of project performance**
Factors in success
Hands-on music provided a concrete learning experience that Indigenous preschool children were able to relate to effectively. Motivation and participation levels improved markedly; a very high level of anticipation and enthusiasm were obvious.

The input from the specialist was most important, not just for the running of the program but the professional development of staff as well.

Less successful factors
‘We did not allow for funds to cover the costs of extra administration and consumables.’

Sustainability
Every effort will be made to sustain the positive impact of the program. Staff are keen to further develop the integrated approach and to seek additional funding for staff development and extension of the program.
School Language: Literacy in English

Project L1

Sector: mostly secondary but some primary

Topic: Advancing Indigenous literacy through intervention for hearing disabilities

Location: five urban sites, many with some students from remote areas; 1 remote site

Number of students involved: 1032

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to provide the intervention required to reverse or remediate the consequences of ear disease and hearing loss among the target group of Indigenous students and improve their literacy. More specifically, it was intended to demonstrate the link between otitis media with effusion (OME), conductive hearing loss (CHL: a preventable type of hearing loss caused by ear disease) and levels of English literacy.

Research has established that Indigenous Australians have a very high prevalence of respiratory problems and related diseases, including OME. During the critical years for speech and language development, as well as for growth and elaboration of the nerve pathways between the inner ear and the temporal cortex of the brain, the great majority of Indigenous children are experiencing fluctuating hearing loss. Such sensory deprivation during the developmental period subsequently makes it much more difficult for these children to learn English as a school language.

Note: OME in advantaged populations around the world is approximately 5% in childhood, falling to <1% after age 12. The prevalence of OME among Indigenous Australian children living in remote communities has been found to range from 40–70%, with younger children experiencing more frequent infectious episodes. Eardrum ruptures typically begin within the first three months of life. With repeated ruptures, healing, and re-ruptures, the eardrums become scarred and thickened. In many cases the ruptures become too large to heal and require reconstructive surgery to repair. In rare cases, reconstructive surgery is not possible, but bone-conduction hearing aids can be provided with excellent speech perception results. The middle ear disease that causes CHL is medically treatable, and in appropriately managed cases there should be no persisting hearing loss.

Activity

A two-day workshop was held at each school, for teachers and assistant teachers, community liaison officers and other staff. This covered topics such as: ear disease, auditory deprivation and language development; implications
for schools and support services for students with hearing disabilities; phonological awareness (PA) intervention program for Indigenous language-users who are speakers of English as a foreign language; classroom acoustics, and FM classroom hearing aids and speaker systems; structuring learning environments to promote inclusion of students with hearing disabilities. The in-service program concluded with a negotiated plan for how each school would be involved.

FM sound field amplification systems were provided to all schools, except one which already had the equipment and one which had design issues likely to make the equipment of doubtful benefit.

Ear examination and hearing testing was provided for all 1032 students, although the initial expectation was for only 700. (This situation arose because of student mobility.) Those students found to have active ear disease were provided with medical treatment, in cooperation with families, schools and community clinics.

In summary, 79% of this group of Indigenous students were found to have an educationally-significant hearing disability. Findings in more detail were as follows.

- Forty per cent would conventionally require physician services to treat active middle ear disease and/or provide reconstructive ear surgery — 16% had persistent and significant conductive hearing loss in both ears; 24% had conductive hearing impairment that would cause major difficulties for students learning English as a foreign language.
- Less than 1% had sensorineural hearing loss due to abnormality of the inner ear or ascending auditory pathways in the brain.
- In addition to those above, 38% had indication of a Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAP-D) displayed by poor speech discrimination scores and intolerance of background noise. These students have a genuinely ‘hidden’ disability, since they can hear, yet not completely understand running speech against a background of noise and competing messages. They appear to hear different words to those actually spoken (mis-perceive), miss out on parts of what is said, fail to keep pace with rapid speech and shifts in topics, and suffer fatigue and ‘tune out’. They are unaware that they have CAP-D, so don’t know when they should ask for repetition, clarification or a reduction in background noise. Students with CAP-D attempt to compensate by looking around and following the actions of other students, calling out ‘What?’ repeatedly, giving up and/or acting out. ‘We believe that adolescent male students with CAP-D are especially at risk of being expelled from school and are later over-represented in prison populations.’

Students’ literacy and phonological awareness levels were tested at the beginning and end of the project to measure the impact of the school-based intervention program.
Project performance
Performance targets and results

Note: The scores reported are those of students who attended at least 75% of school days in 1998 and were available for both pre- and post-testing. Across all six schools, 21% of students (n = 212) met these criteria, but none of the students in the Primary (5-11 year-olds) category did. Thus, this became an analysis of the literacy progress of secondary-aged students. Ear disease and hearing loss are much more prevalent in younger children and can be associated with their generally poor health and poor school attendance.

Of the students tested:
— 36% had middle ear abnormalities;
— 15% met referral criteria for ENT and AH services; and
— 8%, in addition to those above, had symptoms of CAP-D.

Spelling Age Scores (years):

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Reading Age Scores (years):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test:</th>
<th>Post-test:</th>
<th>Progress: 0.99 yr. (12 mos.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>6.08–10.67</td>
<td>6.67–11.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phonological Awareness Scores (percent):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test:</th>
<th>Post-test:</th>
<th>Progress: 17% (18 mos.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>0%–97%</td>
<td>10%–100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data also exist for the six schools separately. These indicate that the cohort of students in the school with predominantly older Indigenous students (who are therefore more likely to have stayed in school longer) is more likely to achieve above Intensive English Level. This is evidence that students’ persistence in returning to school from year to year, in addition to their daily attendance during each year, is related to their ear health, hearing status, achievement level and literacy progress.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
The Waddington Diagnostic Reading and Spelling mean age scores (converted into decimal scores from year-month scores), ranges, and standard deviations.
Phonological awareness with an instrument and process designed for students of English as a foreign language: mean percentage scores, ranges, and standard deviations.

**Analysis of project performance**

Factors in success

After proximity to kin, the next most important factor in student achievement may be consistency of teachers, support staff, classmates, scheduling, and living arrangements. Indigenous students, especially those coming from remote, traditional communities, may have difficulty learning the ‘culture of the classroom’; that is, the expectations, behaviour modification strategies, classroom discourse characteristics and interaction tactics of each teacher in response to each unique configuration of students. New students are also coping with new school (and residence) rules, loss of their emotional support system, and generally experiencing the culture shock inherent in such a major change in life circumstances.

It appears that integrated settings may offer Indigenous students the opportunity to communicate and otherwise interact with majority culture students. This may give them choices about how and how much they wish to be influenced by majority culture thinking.

Less successful factors

The teachers varied greatly in their responsiveness to the teacher-delivered phonological awareness program. In general, they apparently do not feel well-prepared to integrate a systematic phonics program into the curriculum they are delivering to their Indigenous students. Several of the teachers of adult-aged Indigenous students (15 years and older) believed the students would feel patronised even by having the alphabet displayed in the classroom.

Findings

The Indigenous students in this project had a very high prevalence of ear disease and persistent hearing disability compared to non-Indigenous children. Hearing support services at school are especially important for Indigenous students learning English as a foreign language.

High-attending Indigenous students are those who

— have less ear disease;
— are less likely to have hearing loss;
— are more likely to stay in school until they are older; and
— are more likely to achieve above Intensive English.

A phonological awareness program (or other adequate and consistent phonics-based program) can provide the framework for criterion-referenced assessment
of student achievement, as well as contribute to EFL program evaluation. This is more culturally sensitive than using standardised reading and spelling tests that were not developed or normed for Indigenous students and compares them with younger non-Indigenous children. An added benefit of the PA-EFL program is that it enables Indigenous speakers to ‘code switch’ better. They learn to hear and speak mainstream Australian English more accurately and can sound more like majority culture members when they wish to.

Classroom acoustics vary, but are generally very poor listening environments for students with hearing disability and/or are learning English as a foreign language. The next logical step is to establish standards for classroom acoustics for students with hearing disabilities and for all Indigenous students learning EFL.

There is little advantage in attempting to ability-group or ‘stream’ students until they have reached a Year 4 equivalent literacy level (‘reading to learn’ vs. ‘learning to read’). Prior to that, it is more likely that Indigenous students would be most available for learning in the least stressful social environment for them.

Seating arrangements within classrooms have to be informed by cultural considerations as well as students’ visual and hearing needs. It would be instructive to learn from Indigenous male and female students how best to orchestrate their learning environments, including use of physical spaces, as well as non-verbal (signs and gestures) and non-linguistic (eye contact, proxemics, pausing, ‘body language’, etc.) communication.

In remote communities, deafness is not necessarily a handicapping condition. Reticence is socially acceptable. Speech patterns are often loud and repetitive. There are many different non-verbal and non-linguistic communication strategies. Sound systems of Indigenous languages incorporate fewer phonemes, no voicing differences for phonemic discrimination, almost all open syllables, and few consonant blends.

It was observed that Indigenous people in remote communities could be described as ‘obligatory visual attenders’. The authors of the report state: ‘They seem remarkably visually vigilant, and are not available for auditory (spoken) language processing while their attention was focused on incoming visual information. If you bring a group of traditional Indigenous students into a stimulus-rich classroom, and later ask them to describe what was there, they would be able to report on the visual materials in remarkable detail and even draw a sketch of the room’s layout. A comparison group of non-Indigenous students would not recall such visual detail. They would be far more aware of spoken information or instructions.’

‘There is reason to believe that non-Indigenous Australian students have more dominant left-hemisphere, sequential, spoken language-mediated information
What works?

processing. Indigenous students, on the other hand, may have far more
dominant right-hemisphere, visually-mediated simultaneous processing.
Learning environments and teaching strategies may well be informed by
investigation of these possible differences in learner characteristics.’

Project L2
Sector: Primary/secondary
Topic: Literacy through libraries in non-urban schools
Location: remote, 18 sites

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project was devoted to upgrading library resources in schools in remote
settings because of the absence of teachers with requisite training and
experience and the need for adequate resources to support literacy learning.

Activity
Eighteen schools in need of assistance were identified by project coordinators
in consultation with regional supervisors and other advisers.

Books, shelving, computer and barcode scanning supplies were purchased.
Field trips were conducted to assess resources, layout, shelving and computer
access. Collections were weeded, improved layout devised, and shelving
ordered as necessary. New layouts were installed, and staff trained to use and
manage the central data base and resources to support educational programs
effectively.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
Targeted schools have:
— libraries with sufficient, appropriate resources to strongly support the
  school’s literacy programs and suitably shelved to increase usage.
Result: fully achieved in 15 schools, partly achieved in 3. (Two schools have
  small libraries; one school lost all its resources in a flood.)
— appropriate technology in libraries giving easy access to resources and staff
  trained to effectively exploit the technology and resources
Result: fully achieved in 18 schools.
— increased use of libraries and resources towards improved literacy levels
Result: fully achieved in 17 schools, partly achieved in 1.
Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
National school library benchmarks, and responses from school personnel.

**Analysis of project performance**
Typical comments from the schools’ evaluations:
Since our library was created, the children have made constant use of it. The children’s interest in books has increased dramatically.

Re-newed vigour in our reading program. … A marked change in the attitudes to books and reading.

The overall literacy levels of the children who attend regularly are improving. The library with its enhanced and attractive appearance provides a stimulating environment which is encouraging the children to choose books and read.

**Sustainability**
Material and procedures are in place. Training will need to be renewed to accommodate staff turnover.

**Project L3**
**Sector:** Upper primary and secondary to Year 8
**Topic:** As I Remember

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**
The project set out to develop and publish curriculum materials of relevance to Aboriginal students in Years 5–8: a collection of audio recordings of interviews with eleven Tasmanian Aboriginal people, capturing their lived experiences, in order to support improved literacy among Aboriginal students.

‘The impetus was the suggestion in *Bringing Them Home* that there are important stories about Indigenous people that have not been told and could soon be lost. In the historical context of Tasmania, it has seemed particularly important that Aboriginal students have culturally relevant learning materials that affirm their identity, respect their past and verify the lineage of their people. Furthermore, the assumptions and prejudices of some non-Aboriginal people need to be challenged and refuted.’

**Activity**
A reference group was established, with representatives of the Department of Education, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the Elders’ Association and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.
Interviewees were selected, representing the main family groups in Tasmania. An interviewer, a researcher (both Aboriginal people) and a photographer were employed to conduct the interviews. Several common themes emerged from these: educational opportunities, schooling, family life and work. The Reference Group agreed that some issues-based recordings would also be of value to teachers and students and the final package includes edited interviews and thematic presentations.

Three schools with comparatively high populations of Indigenous students trialed the package in early 1999. It is due for publication in late 1999.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Proportion of Year 7 Indigenous students in target schools who write at an appropriate level for their age at the end of the project compared with their level at its beginning.

— Proportion of Year 7 Indigenous students in target schools whose speaking skills are at an appropriate level for their age at the end of the project compared with their level at its beginning.

**Results:** there was an upward move by all Year 5–8 students involved in the trialing in both speaking and writing. In speaking there was a shift mainly from Level 3 and Level 3/4 to Level 4 and above. Similar shifts occurred in writing. Indigenous students tended to perform better in ‘content’ (quality of thought and sense of context and purpose) than in ‘language’ (control of the elements of language).

The DART English testing program (listening skills) and the Year 5 Statewide Literacy Monitoring Program (writing skills) provided baseline data.

**Analysis of project performance**

Careful, time-consuming negotiation is necessary if community trust and acceptance are to be achieved.

As a result of their participation, some students have been encouraged to identify their Aboriginality and many have taken more pride in their heritage.

**Factors in success**

- The multiplicity of ways teachers have found to use the materials.
- The generalisability of the human experiences captured.
- Recognition and accreditation of cultural knowledge and experience has a powerful effect on the sense of identity and self-esteem of Indigenous students, as well as their school performance.
Less successful factors
The breakdown of communication with one school, leading to delay of the trial and some data being unavailable.

Sustainability
The impact of the project is likely to be sustained for these reasons.

- It complements the Visiting Speakers Program conducted throughout the Aboriginal Education Unit of the Department of Education.
- Aboriginal Studies in Tasmanian schools has, until recently, been under-resourced. As a result, many teachers felt unable confidently to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum. The addition of *As I Remember* to those resources will enhance teacher confidence. Every government school and college in Tasmania will have a copy of the package.
- Curriculum Officers from the Aboriginal Education Unit are assisting teachers in using *As I Remember*.

Project L4
**Sector:** early childhood and primary  
**Topic:** Kimberley Literacy Project  
**Location:** over the project period, nine remote sites

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**
The project set out ‘to provide a solid foundation for school learning for young Aboriginal children’ in a remote region of Australia. To do this it aimed to give extra support to young students in two areas:

- by documenting the learning experiences that these students bring from their own homes and to use these as a scaffolding for the commencement of school literacy and numeracy; and
- by improving the Standard Australian English (SAE) of young children who speak Indigenous Australian languages, including Kriol.

‘Teachers’ role in young children’s learning is complex. They need an understanding of what the children “know” in order to facilitate further learning. In cross-cultural classrooms the role of the teacher is even more complex. The complexity lies in the recognition of prior knowledge in a culture that is mostly unfamiliar non-Indigenous teachers.’

The project emphasised the need for teachers to find, value and make explicit the links between home literacy, in its broadest sense, and school literacy. ‘Teachers, generally, uphold the need to construct classroom learning that
allows students to work from the known to the unknown. Recognising what young Kukatja, Jaru or Kija children already “know”, and how they learnt it, is however, a difficult task. They must be wary of stereotypes about the other culture and be careful observers of modern community lifestyles.

Activity

The program provided extra support at each site in the form of an additional experienced teacher for one term. The seconded teachers’ experience was in the area of early childhood and in some cases, English as a second language. This teacher became part of a three-person team with the classroom teacher and an Aboriginal Teaching Assistant (ATA). The three members of this teaching team were asked to work together to allocate tasks and share responsibilities and all undertook the professional development which commenced and finished the project.

Before the teachers arrived in the school community, two consultants from the Catholic Education Office in the Kimberley region visited the communities to explain the aims of the project and seek support for the placement of the extra teacher. Placing and selecting the seconded teachers was also dependent on practical issues such as availability of accommodation, teacher qualifications and numbers of students.

The teaching teams were given two sets of professional development: a three-day workshop dealing with the topics such as: Aboriginal communities and lifestyles in the region, team teaching, literacy, outcomes-based education, pidgin and creole languages, teaching English as a second language, assessment and program planning; and a one- or two-day session primarily devoted to feedback from the teaching teams.

The outcomes sought related initially to the use of oral language in familiar settings, and subsequently had an emphasis on questions, simple requests and directions. The students learnt the conventions of SAE use in the classroom through such activities as practising greetings, news-telling procedures and roll-call.

The ATAs collected examples of home learning experiences and knowledge. The teachers and teaching assistants also made observations of behaviours that reflected home learning experiences. The teaching teams used this information to set up classroom environments and plan learning activities that were relevant to, and built on, the students’ previous experiences. All teachers emphasised the need for students to use their first language to interpret new concepts introduced in the classroom.

Some adjustments were made in the second year of the project (which was supported from two sources allowing a longer period of operation). One of these was in the area of community consultation to assist parents and other community members to understand the intentions of the project. In 1999
two Aboriginal people were asked to visit the towns and communities to speak with school boards, community councils and parents. Notes from these visits give a clear indication of the Aboriginal parents’ keen interest in their children’s education and in the desire for them to learn SAE.

All schools will contribute to and receive copies of a resource book for early childhood classrooms produced as a result of the project.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Improve the Standard Australian English (SAE) of young children who speak an Indigenous Australian language, including Kriol, and thus increase the students’ participation in the classroom

**Results:** final results not yet available.

All teams reported that the students made significant progress in two areas.

• Increased confidence. The extra teacher in the classroom meant that the students received more individual attention. Many of the students became increasingly eager to join in group activities, to answer questions at math periods and to participate in drama.

• Skills in SAE in the following areas:
  — classroom routines such as greetings, answers to roll call, requests to go to the toilet, simple instructions;
  — joining in repetitive language from favourite books, repetitive parts in drama activities, simple chants and songs;
  — playing structured games and using the correct SAE sentence such as ‘Who’s got this one?’ and answering ‘I’ve got that one’;
  — traditional language-speaking students began to use simple SAE sentences rather than gestures or single words; and
  — using more descriptive words in games. For example, ‘Who’s got the blue ball?’, ‘I’ve got the blue ball.’

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

ESL Scales and/or the First Steps Literacy Net. The teachers generally found the Literacy Net more practical and easier to use than the ESL Scales. Use of both tools was time-consuming in classrooms where attendance was erratic.

Observation and monitoring processes, such as: observations, running records and anecdotal records, team meeting discussions, checklists and student work samples. These were found to be the most practical and efficient strategies and, therefore, were most widely used. Some teachers also used photographs, tape recordings and videos.
**Analysis of project performance**

‘Many of these students speak Kriol as their first language. The difference between this language and English is not readily apparent to many adults and even less so to many children. Young Kriol-speaking students have several steps to take to acquire SAE. Firstly they must realise that the language of the school is different from their own. Secondly, they must have the desire to use that language. (In some communities of this region there is no social or economic need for young children to use SAE.) Thirdly, they must learn the structures of the new language.

‘Standard Australian English is the means of instruction in almost all Kimberley classrooms. This means that the students are learning in Standard Australian English at the same time as they are learning to speak it. One teacher commented: “I think it is very important to remember that we are teaching children of a very young age who are still experimenting with their first language. The children at this school are in fact learning three languages — Kriol, Standard Australian English and Jaru. This is a formidable challenge and they appear to be embracing it.”

‘There is no doubt that most parents in this region want their children to be able to read and write SAE. This project has increased the amount of SAE spoken by young Aboriginal students in the Kimberley. It has helped them to begin learning a second language in enjoyable, yet meaningful ways. However, only a small minority of Aboriginal people in this region use SAE as their main form of communication in their everyday lives. All the important issues of their lives are discussed in one or more of their Indigenous languages. The project has not only raised teachers’ awareness of how young Kimberley students learn SAE but also their awareness of the students’ need to learn in their first language.

‘The question of how teachers make sound observations when working in another culture remains perplexing and unanswered. It may be that teachers without long years of experience in another culture have difficulty really “knowing” their students, or it may be that some teachers are much more perceptive than others. The project may have had more specific results if one or two specialist teachers had been employed to make the observations and then teachers had adapted the information for their classrooms.’

**Factors in success**

‘Two procedures that seem apparently straightforward contributed most to the teachers’ knowledge of their students and community.

- ‘A successful teaching team consisting of an Aboriginal teaching assistant and a non-Aboriginal teacher, with equal contribution of their respective knowledge is probably the most valuable asset in classrooms in this region. Ongoing discussion with, and support from, ATAs was highly valued by
the teachers. When the ATAs were regular members of the teaching team, the teacher constantly sought their knowledge and advice. This is not a new concept in Aboriginal education but it is reiterated here for emphasis. Unfortunately, this was not available at all of the schools.

- ‘Bush trips enabled non-Aboriginal teachers, ATAs, Aboriginal parents and students to learn about each other in a relaxed environment. In this environment the teachers were able to observe most clearly the extent of students’ knowledge and the language they used to express it. In this environment, also, the teachers were more obviously learners themselves. The value of these excursions as an important educational resource needs to be more widely promoted.’

The most successful factors in developing skills in SAE appear to have been the following.

- ‘The teachers emphasised that the most valuable learning took place incidentally when the students actually used Standard Australian English to communicate their needs in the classroom. The students were encouraged to use SAE to ask for items of equipment, to greet the teachers, to ask to take turns in games and to request drinks and fruit for morning tea and so on.

- ‘The students’ learning of the new language was based on existing knowledge as far as possible. The teachers were asked to become involved in local communities, to observe student behaviour and to use the ATAs’ knowledge to set up situations that were familiar to students. Class books were a valuable way of using SAE in familiar contexts. During second term a circus visited many communities in the region and this provided a familiar and interesting topic for literacy. Class books were also made about bush trips, excursions to local enterprises and family activities. In the more remote communities the teachers were able to involve community adults in classroom activities.

‘The high value of bush trips has been mentioned. These experiences were used in various classroom activities, for example, art and craft activities with materials collected on the trip, production of class books, adaptation of favourite stories to include some local foods or animals and composition of class songs.’

- ‘The project schools set up learning centres that reflected aspects of the local community, for example, a cafe, a community office and a community store. Students were able to use their first language to build on their previous knowledge and interpret new concepts such as multiple number, categorisation and the use of technology for communication, information recording and storage. At the same time they were alerted to the need to use SAE in situations such as ordering goods from the city, speaking to the waiter in a cafe or speaking to a government official in a community office.'
What works?

‘The students modelled being speakers of SAE, such as shopkeepers, waiters in a cafe, nurses and office workers and were supported in their attempts to speak SAE and encouraged to experiment even if mistakes were made.

- ‘The teachers and Aboriginal teaching assistants planned numerous activities for students to listen to SAE. The model of two speakers of SAE interacting in the classroom was greatly valued by the teachers. Some classrooms had listening posts at which the students listened to songs and stories in SAE.

- ‘The teachers supplemented the students’ learning of SAE with activities that focused on particular aspects of SAE grammar or discourse. These activities were particularly important for the Kriol-speaking students where the distinction between SAE and their first language is not clearly apparent to them. Teachers observed certain aspects of Kriol grammar that differed markedly from SAE and planned group activities that focused on the SAE forms. The forms that were consistently observed were third person singular pronouns, descriptive words, prepositions and question structures.’

Less successful factors

- ‘The project design stressed the need for equal input from teachers, and ATAs. However there was a wide difference in how this was carried out in practice. This broke down at some schools and during the professional development process. In some schools there was continuous input from community adults as well as ATAs. In other schools the teaching assistant rarely attended. Obviously the aim for this project is to have high input in all schools. Attempts are being made to achieve greater consultation and participation by Aboriginal consultants and teaching assistants.

- ‘The success of the project was greatly affected by erratic student attendance in several schools. This is a constant and real problem in schools in this region. The students in most need of improvement in literacy and numeracy are the lowest attenders. The low student attendance at schools is an issue that must be taken up with parents and the Aboriginal community as a whole.

- ‘The extent to which teachers observed and used the students’ home experiences also varied greatly. The Resource Book will make this a priority and examples from experienced teachers will perhaps clarify the notion and motivate others.’

Sustainability

The work of the project will continue, if not in this specific form.

An aspect of the project that has had and will continue to have impact is the collation and dissemination of the Resource Book. Two aspects of the booklet have been important.
— The ATAs’ collection of early childhood experiences has generated much discussion about what young children already know. It has also meant that ATAs in some schools have had a great deal of input into the project.

— The teaching ideas suggested by the teachers and Aboriginal teaching assistants will be trialed and modified on a continuing basis. The emphasis in this document will be on the use of students’ home experiences as a basis for school learning.

**Project L5**

**Sector:** Primary (Years 3–5)

**Topic:** Intensive literacy project

**Location:** 11 sites in rural towns

**Number of students involved:** 142

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to address the literacy needs of two groups of Indigenous students in Years 3–5 so that students were better prepared for transition to secondary school (and for later life). One group had missed learning necessary decoding skills and the other group had decoding skills but low levels of reading comprehension.

**Activity**

The project used the principles and practices of Reading Recovery in a series of one-to-one lessons of 45 minutes every day for ten weeks for the lowest achieving Indigenous students. Components included: familiar reading; re-reading of previous day’s material; shared reading to model use of meaning, structure and visual information; guided reading of new books at instructional level; reciprocal questioning, summarising or retelling; writing short texts with word analysis.

The other group had low comprehension skills and were taught in groups of five using Reciprocal Teaching and other strategies. Two groups of students were targeted each term and received a 25-minute Reciprocal Teaching session each day.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Accelerate the reading skills of 60 Indigenous students identified as poor ‘code breakers’ in Years 3–5 and 300 Indigenous students identified as poor ‘text analysts’ in the same years.
**What works?**

**Results:**
First group: Of 37 targeted students, 34 of these obtained proficient levels of decoding skills. Some made as much as 12 months progress in word knowledge. Improvement ranged from two to 13 Reading Recovery Levels, with the average being five Levels.

Second group: 64% of 105 targeted participants were accelerated in their reading comprehension compared with 53% in the control group. Almost all students improved their scores on the Metacomprehension Strategy Index.

**Measures used to establish baselines and improvement**
- Poor ‘code breakers’ were assessed by a trained Reading Recovery teacher using the following components of the Reading Recovery Observation Survey: letter identification test; Burt Word Test; concepts about print; writing vocabulary; hearing sounds in words; running records; analysis of writing.
- Poor ‘text analysts’ were assessed by classroom teachers using the Progressive Achievement Test of Reading Comprehension, the TORCH Test of Reading Comprehension; Schmitt’s Metacomprehension Skills Index and placement of students using the Benchmark Kit.

**Analysis of project performance**
Results for those participating were satisfactory but the total number of participants was disappointing. Factors accounting for the lower than expected rate of participation included the fact that seven of the 11 schools were staffed by a majority of teachers in their first two years of teaching. This situation required a high level of support which was difficult to provide, especially when:
- the region was experiencing a period of record rainfall and consequent flooding;
- six of the schools had difficulty staffing the extra components due to a lack of available casuals;
- staff turnover took place in all but one of the schools and led to some lack of consistency; and
- change in project facilitators halfway through the project resulted in a six-week delay.

**Factors in success**
- Having a trained Reading Recovery teacher led to the greatest gains for poor ‘code breakers’.
- Reciprocal Teaching provided a defined focus for students, promoted ownership and bolstered the confidence of reluctant learners.
- Cooperative learning structures and strategies can improve the learning outcomes of Indigenous students.
• Extra staffing allowed for intensive assistance, leading to success and improved self image.
• Intensive training for staff had a positive influence on teacher expectations and performance.
• The project raised awareness in schools of the importance of close student monitoring.
• Schools have identified the need for good planning, resourcing and continued professional development to secure a balanced and effective approach to literacy.

Less successful factors
• Poor attendance of some students proved detrimental to their success.
• PAT and TORCH tests had questionable validity for the targeted group and are time-consuming to administer. The Metacomprehension Strategic Index and analysis of miscues from running records would provide sufficient data to drive good teaching practice.

Sustainability
In schools where classroom teachers have taken on the methodology used the program will be maintained. (Staff turnover is always likely to be a problem.)

Some project schools have suggested they might adapt the individual teaching strategies to allow greater numbers of students access to the program.

Project L6
Sector: secondary
Topic: Intensive English language tuition
Location: urban with students from remote areas
Number of students involved: 43

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project set out to provide intensive English literacy support for NESB students from remote areas.

This College enrols approximately 40 Indigenous students aged 12–18 who have limited experience of English. Typically the students come from remote communities, speak the language of their country and have little experience of school. Our priority for these students has been to teach English — reading, writing and speaking. Our ability to do this well has been minimal due to the following problems:
What works?

- ‘normal’ class sizes (1 teacher to 25–30 students);
- teachers who did not have formal qualifications in teaching English as a Second Language;
- limited ESL teaching resources for this age group;
- limited orientation programs to support transition from community life to mainstream residential schooling;
- poor retention;
- lack of appropriate curriculum; and
- limited assessment tools which appropriately assess English literacy/numeracy.

Activity

Two Intensive English Centres (classes) were created. Each class had 18 students as its maximum size and was taught by an ESL-trained specialist. The classes catered for two identified groups: younger and older, a grouping based on past experience. The younger students (aged 12–14) are considered ‘children’. The older students (aged 15–18) include the initiated and are considered adult.

The teachers’ tasks were to:
- orient the students to the ‘culture’ of schooling;
- improve the level of English literacy and numeracy;
- support the students culturally and pastorally;
- actively maintain retention through ongoing dialogue with students’ families;
- explore appropriate curriculum;
- explore appropriate resources; and
- assess, record, and report on literacy/numeracy development.

Younger class: At the beginning of the year the original student literacy levels ranged from Consolidating Beginning Level 1 to Achieving Beginning Level 3 on the ESL Outcomes Profile. At this level of literacy students have very limited literacy skills which would assist them in reading and writing independently in English.

Two Intensive English Modules were used throughout Term 1 and the beginning of Term 2. In addition to the Modules, a reading and writing program based on improving grapho-phonic, reading for meaning and spelling skills was introduced. By mid-Term 2 it became obvious that the Intensive English Modules were not challenging enough for the majority of the students whose literacy levels had advanced.

Older class: Four different modules were trialed. The Certificate One in Preliminary Education was by far the most appropriate. Following a regular two-hour period of intensive literacy instruction, one-on-one work occurred
with each student, during various times in a day. The smaller class helped because of the possibility of building relationships with each individual student. That provided a better developed understanding of their cultural and school backgrounds. One example of a very successful strategy has been to make explicit the sounds of letters in their own language compared with the sounds in the English language.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— 50% of the students would progress at least 1 Level of the NT ESL Outcomes Profile

**Results:** Younger class

During the year, 23 students were placed in this class. Of the original 16 students, 13 completed. Of the seven students enrolled during the year, six are still enrolled. Of those 13 students who have been enrolled for the whole year: six students have progressed at least two Levels of the NT ESL Outcomes Profile; four students, three Levels; and three students have progressed at least four Levels. All ‘original’ students completed two units of Foundation Studies Maths, two units of English, one unit of Social Education and one unit in Science.

**Results:** Older class

During the year, 20 students were placed in this class. Of the original students, 10 remain enrolled. Of the 10 who have been enrolled for the whole year: five students have progressed at least one Level of the NT ESL Outcomes Profile; three students, two Levels; two students at least three Levels.

**Measures used to establish baselines and improvement**

Students were assessed using the Lost Test and placed according to their initial score (10 or lower). The NT ESL Outcomes Profile was used as the reference point for pre-and post-testing.

**Analysis of project performance**

Factors in success

Aspects of the project that had the most impact were:

- smaller class size which encourages individualised programs for students both in orientation to the College and in development of appropriate academic programs;
- guaranteed funding allowed the maintenance of classes for the whole year regardless of student movement;
What works?

- ESL/Aboriginal teachers who have developed skills and understandings about effective teaching/learning with Indigenous ESL students with high teacher expectations of students’ ability to achieve;
- specific teaching/learning targets for project teachers which give clear outcomes objectives;
- clearly established pathways with requirements explained and understood; and
- appropriate curriculum which is relevant (in terms of literacy/numeracy development) to these students.

Other factors included:

- a consistent timetable and routine: including a daily grapho-phonic program beginning with consonants, short and long vowels, blends and word endings; explicit teaching of the metalanguage of reading and writing (consonants, vowels, sentences, titles, headings, paragraphs etc.); and the use of individual reading logs; and
- choosing current affairs topics as discussion starters for oral English exercises and later as reading and writing exercises.

Less successful factors

‘The younger class of students were the most difficult to orient to life at the College. We needed to put more support into specific orientation into learning and living at the College. What tended to happen were ad hoc responses to inappropriate behaviour as opposed to planned, informed and collaborative orientation. To improve this in the future we need to involve the students’ parents (eg, in an orientation program for parents and students at the beginning of the year and a follow-up range of sessions to build a partnership). We also need to focus additional resources into teaching/learning how to live and learn within this kind of environment.

‘We did not ‘buy’ the appropriate time for setting up the program within established structures, for exploring resources, for monitoring progress and supporting the teachers who were employed in the program.

‘This project only focused on our two least literate/numerate groups. We have 10 other Indigenous classes that could equally benefit from the kind of focus and resourcing this project allowed us to provide. (This is particularly relevant with relation to maintaining classes/programs throughout the year).’

Sustainability

‘The school has agreed to sustain two small classes for our least English-literate students for 1999. The sustainability of these two classes and all IESIP programs are based on retention of predicted enrolments throughout the year.’
Project L7

**Sector:** primary/secondary  
**Topic:** Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Students in School  
**Location:** urban and remote, 2 sites  
**Number of students involved:** 110

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to accelerate literacy learning for students involved in the project by training a cohort of teachers, Aboriginal Education Workers and tutors to deliver and promote the strategies and by producing a series of teaching resource packages that can be applied in Indigenous school programs across Australia. It occurred at the request of the two communities involved.

**Activity**

At each site students’ reading and writing development was assessed.

Workshops, modelled lessons and continuing advice and support about effective classroom programming were provided for teachers at each site. This work focused on issues such as:

- curriculum sequencing to reach literacy goals over the term and the year;
- programming to enable sufficient time each week for literacy work;
- how to pick up the groups of weaker students in each class;
- class organisation and teachers’ roles to work effectively with all students in the class; and
- how to balance the demands of effective teaching and behaviour management.

Teaching resources were produced. To date these have included:

- general teachers’ notes on book selection, book orientation, transformation of written text, scaffolding transitional spellers, scaffolded writing, prompting strategies for use when listening to oral reading;
- illustrated teachers’ notes on stages in the scaffolding sequence;
- teaching notes for specific texts for early literacy, English, Science and Society and the Environment; and
- colour transparencies and audio tapes of reading books.

The production of papers and a video to introduce Scaffolding methodology to teachers and others is in train at the time of writing.
Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Progress targeted students one or more Levels of the National English Profile within project timeline.

Results: (to date) Overall average improvement has been from 1.5 to more than 2 Profile Levels over two-three school terms.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
Pre-testing of reading and writing Levels using the National English Profile and running records. Continuous monitoring of student progress.

Analysis of project performance
Some of the central issues in the design and execution of the project were as follows.

‘Low expectations: at the start of the project expectations of students expressed through teaching programs, and by individual teachers and the students themselves were very low. We believe these to be self-fulfilling, since they resulted in low levels of academic activity in the classroom.

‘Behaviour management: a focus on this issue was frequently the determining factor in school activities. The most common solution has been to lower the challenge to a level students can cope with without support. This results in most class time being taken up with low level busy work. The project has shown that it is not necessary to lower the level of educational activities, that behavioural issues arising from challenging work settle down once students become familiar with scaffolding routines and are able to participate actively, and that a certain level of activity in the classroom is a sign of active learning taking place rather than a behavioural problem.

‘Common mainstream teaching practices: reproduction of standard practices of mainstream schooling has been an issue. These include literacy activities which assume culturally-embedded literacy understandings and do not adequately support Indigenous students to become effective readers and writers. On the one hand, individual reading programs are used whereby students chose books and read to themselves. Most students chose basal picture readers from remedial programs that do not advance their literacy skills significantly, if at all. These have now been dropped from all classrooms in which the project has worked. On the other hand, individual writing tasks were given which did not give students adequate support to use literate language in their writing. Instead, students recycled simple recounts of personal experiences week after week. These individual activities have now been replaced by the explicit modelling and joint negotiation of writing activities.

‘Varying “ability” levels: the problem of varying ability levels in each class has been another cause of low level educational activities in Indigenous classrooms.
as teachers try to include weaker students in activities. Since scaffolding enables all students to participate at some level in activities around an age appropriate text, and all students are becoming literate enough to read, this problem is being overcome. In addition the project has given teachers the skills necessary to work intensively in groups and with weaker students individually to bring their skills up to the class average.

‘Irregular attendance: the problem of irregular attendance by some Indigenous students is widely attributed as a cause for low literacy achievement. It is another reason for the low level of educational activities in Indigenous classrooms, as teachers find it difficult to plan a consistent teaching sequence. Teachers involved in the project report that:

— it is now much easier to include these students in classroom activities as they know the scaffolding literacy routines well enough to participate, even if they have missed work on the particular text; and
— students are now attending more regularly since they realised that they could now achieve something in class as a result of their improved literacy skills.

‘Dependence on one-to-one support: dependence of students on continuous one-to-one support from teachers for difficult learning activities is a problem in all classes. This was a particular problem at one site, where classroom support teachers and homework tutors were forced to work with each of their students in this way in order for them to complete class and homework activities without being able to read the textbooks or follow their class teacher. Teachers in the project report that students have become much more independent learners and are willing to take risks.

‘Students’ perceptions of school learning: Many Indigenous students perceive reading, writing and other educational activities as ‘ritual’ school practices. At the start of the project it was apparent that no students were reading for pleasure or meaning. Most were reading meaningless remedial readers. Those who could read harder texts were doing so with little comprehension, simply skipping words in every sentence they didn’t know, making the texts meaningless. All students are now showing an interest in the texts they are reading, and are encouraged by their increasing powers to read more widely. Teachers report that students’ attitude to learning is changing, towards a positive and critical perception of school learning.’

Sustainability

The project is currently established at three key sites which are firmly committed to continuing and expanding the work. These key sites have formed a base for movement into four more secondary sites during 1999. There is potential for considerably wider dissemination in the future. Development of teaching and training materials for this purpose has commenced.
What works?

Project L8

Sector: primary

Topic: Deadly Writin’, Readin’ and Talkin’

Location: urban

Number of students involved: 65

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

This project set out to improve the oracy and literacy outcomes of targeted Aboriginal students from Reception to Year 7 through an action research project focusing on changed teaching and learning practices.

Literacy levels among Aboriginal students are significantly lower than the general population on all measures. There is little classroom-based research on effective literacy pedagogy, particularly in urban schools, nor on how urban Aboriginal children take up the curriculum offered.

Activity

Volunteers for the project were recruited from within existing staff. It operated in four classes: Reception/1, 2/3, 4/5 and a 5/6/7.

‘An intensive and on-going process of in-service education was instituted, focused on a wide range of issues, but including the role of literacy in Indigenous students’ lives, the social and cultural nature of literacy, and the idea of Scaffolded Literacy and how it might work in each research classroom. Further theoretical input has occurred each term and there has been a regular process of reflection on our practice.

‘Project staff have been involved with the school’s regular co-planning sessions (involving School Service Officers, Aboriginal Education Workers, Special Education Teachers as well as teachers). In addition, many hours have been committed to detailed planning of classroom practice. Because Scaffolded Literacy is so new, there has been a strong need to look at the curriculum in great detail, particularly developing teachers’ understandings of functional grammar. Because the talk and questioning used in Scaffolded Literacy is new and different, we have also spent a significant amount of time rehearsing and recording exactly what to say in the classroom in order to successfully scaffold students’ literacy learning.

‘Each project class had a 50-minute Scaffolded Literacy lesson for four days a week. In addition, the functional grammar teacher gave a focused grammar lesson on Fridays to the three older classes. The Scaffolded Literacy lessons were team taught in various ways. There were always at least two teachers in each classroom, sometimes more, depending on the level of support available.
Teacher collaboration took a range of forms: withdrawal and subsequent integration; the project teacher and the classroom teacher working together with the whole class; demonstration lessons; and small group work in the classroom.

Functional grammar has been implicitly and explicitly taught as a way of understanding text.

A Reading Support Program staffed by Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers was introduced in order to establish ways that Aboriginal parents could have a recognised and valued role in the school, at the same time supporting their children’s literacy learning. The Reading Support Program evolved from a series of workshops for parents on language issues, particularly dialect and register. A training program was developed to teach parents a useful way of listening to children read. Parents attended a series of five workshops, and two follow-up sessions after they had been working for a time. Two parents, who work for a total of four days per week, are currently employed to support the reading of all Aboriginal children R-3. Each child has a 25-minute session twice per week.

Case studies were conducted of children deemed to be most at risk in the research classrooms. (See pp. 71–76.) Data was collected in the form of notes following lessons, work samples, test results, tape recording of reading, and an interview.

**Project performance**

Performance target and results

— The spread of English Profile Levels of Aboriginal students in this sample would reflect the spread of Profile Levels for the non-Aboriginal school population (later adjusted to comparison with overall national results).

Because of the need to show distance travelled, the results of children not present for both data collection periods were excluded.

Reception: After six months, both children are within the average or above average range for letter identification and concepts of print. Both are still ‘at risk’ in their writing vocabulary, but one child has moved from ‘at risk’ in the dictation test to ‘average’.

Year 1: All Year 1 students have moved up at least 0.3 of a Profile Level in reading, some making sense of text for the first time. Two have made major jumps. In terms of writing, dictation and writing vocabulary they have improved to average or above average.

Year 2: All students have moved at least 0.6 of a Profile Level in reading. The fact that two students are reading at Profile Level 3.3 in Year 2 is extremely encouraging. The expansiveness and complexity of written vocabulary has increased markedly.

Year 3: Significant improvement has been recorded in concepts of print, letter identification and sight word vocabulary over the six months. There has been
What works?

a remarkable improvement in the level at which children are able to read independently. Four of the five children are able to hear all sounds in a sentence. The scores in writing vocabulary again fail to reveal the richness of many of the Year 3 students’ writing.

‘Year 4: As Year 3 students, achievement in viewing was spread from Profile Level 1 to Level 4, with the median above the national median. As Year 4 students, the median has actually dropped slightly. However, the tail of ‘at risk’ students has diminished. In reading, the median has moved upwards, about level with the national Year 3 median, and the tail has shortened. The ‘at risk’ student is catching up. Under test conditions, the writing skills of this group do not seem to have changed to any great extent. The median has risen, but not a great deal, and it is still below the national Year 3 results to a worrying degree. Only one of the four children is working at Profile Level 3 and the tail is still the same distance below the middle 50% of students. Three of the four students are considered to be still at risk.

‘Year 5: In viewing skills, the median has also moved from well below the national Year 5 median to slightly above it. In reading, the most highly skilled student is in solid Level 5, and the ‘at risk’ tail has caught up to solid Level 2, almost beginning Level 3. Unfortunately, the median has fallen slightly, and is still below the national Year 3 median. In writing, the median has moved upwards about half a Profile Level in six months. It is still well below the national Year 5 scores. The most ‘at risk’ students have moved from Profile Level 1 to Level 2.

‘Year 6: In viewing, the student who performed best in the test is at Profile Level 5, the median has moved to Level 4, and although there is a tail, that student is not far behind the others, and has still improved almost a whole Profile Level in six months. As Year 5’s, the median of this cohort was well below the national Year 3 median, with a tail of ‘at risk’ students well below that again. This year the student who scored the highest is almost at beginning Profile Level 5, and the tail has moved from low Level 2 to solid Level 3. Most encouragingly, the median has moved to become level with the national Year 5 median. As Year 5’s, all students in this group were below the national Year 5 median in writing. As Year 6’s, their median has moved to level with that national Year 5 median, with one student at beginning Profile Level 4.

‘Year 7: In viewing the whole group has all moved at least half a Profile Level. In reading, their median has moved to above the Year 5 median, and all students have improved. In writing, the group has jumped a whole Profile Level in six months.’

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

The DART program, Clay’s An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, and running records. All Aboriginal students in the school were reassessed using the same measurement tools after 18 weeks.
In addition to the formal tests at the beginning and end of the project, improvement has been measured through the ongoing collection of data in each classroom via audio- and video-tapes of literacy lessons, collection of student work samples and teacher journals and audio-tapes of teacher planning and evaluation sessions.

**Analysis of project performance**

**Factors in success**

“The use of the Scaffolded Literacy process, while still to be tested over time, has provided an important medium for success. The sense of being a community of learners, of joint engagement, teachers and students in discussing language and text has been rewarding. Student transfer of linguistic patterns and spelling knowledge into their own writing has been widely noted. From a teacher: “the constant repetitiveness of the use of the texts has meant that students who would normally feel inadequate have had an opportunity to feel successful in literacy.” Another teacher said: “It (the project) gave both the children and myself a sense of power and strength when dealing with text that I am sure many of us did not have before.” We have noticed a change in the power relations between student and teacher. Despite the apparently didactic nature of Scaffolded Literacy, students do challenge and question more, and not always in the context of the text. They learn to take control.

“The employment of Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers has had a positive impact in two ways.

- It has enabled Aboriginal parents to be employed in the school as skilled workers with status. There is a now a place for Aboriginal parents to work with their children, and the program has strengthened the trust between school and the Aboriginal community.
- The Reading Support Program is not just a new way of enabling parents to have a valid and productive role in the school. It has, in many cases, significantly improved the reading abilities of the Aboriginal Reception to Year 3 students. Preliminary testing suggests that although many students still have a problem with decoding new words, they are reading for meaning, rather than stabbing at print. When they read in a way that doesn’t make sense, they are now stopping to re-examine the word, rather than continuing on regardless.

“If we want parents to be involved, we have to take into account other concerns which affect their attendance from time to time. We balance our need for regular attendance with the flexibility needed for the rest of their lives. We try to negotiate and accommodate parents’ needs.

“One of the overwhelmingly positive responses from teachers has been the enthusiasm for the collaborative teaching. The classroom teachers have worked extremely hard in learning about functional grammar and changing their
teaching practice in ways which will survive the project. As one teacher said, “You can’t go back.”

“The willingness of project staff to teach, model and trial Scaffolded Literacy in classrooms alongside classroom teachers created a climate of enquiry, and learning together and willingness to take risks. Sufficient, focused, and ongoing training and development, at the beginning of the project, and throughout was fundamental to success.

“The commitment and support of the Principal was crucial.”

Less successful factors

“The following aspects are not ‘less successful’, but issues we have identified as providing direction for further research.

“We are committed to the notion that understanding literacy as a social tool is crucial to the teaching of Aboriginal students. In order to use the literacies they learn at school effectively, they need to recognise and practice their uses in the real contexts of their lives. While Scaffolded Literacy has been successful in raising student awareness of the linguistic structures and features of written text, it does not necessarily make explicit the social nature and purposes of literacy. At this stage in the project, our team is only just beginning to work out how to transfer the knowledge about written narrative texts to the study of transactional texts, written or spoken, that students need to operate successfully in their communities. This remains a nagging concern and one we feel the need to follow up.

“One of the underlying tenets of the school is that small group work with an informed adult is a very valuable context for students’ learning. Consequently our school resources are organised so that each class has one lesson per day with two or three adults in attendance. However, teaching literacy through scaffolding is highly skilled, and requires a substantial theoretical base. The School Service Officers and Parent Literacy Workers who had previously played important roles in literacy lessons were sometimes left bewildered and unsure of their roles. If this program is to be maintained, attention must be paid to their training and development.

“Organisational issues still need to be resolved. Parts of the scaffolding process can be done successfully as a whole class, while other aspects are best achieved in small groups. The process does not cycle neatly over a five day timetable.

“We are still grappling with the issue of how to deal with heterogenous groups of widely differing abilities: sometimes Scaffolded Literacy works well, sometimes the advanced students are bored or the strugglers are left behind.

“We still have a great deal to learn about what makes a text useful to study, and at this stage rely considerably on the advice of the Scaffolded Literacy team in our text choices. We are almost always reliant at this moment on text notes
supplied by the Scaffolded Literacy team, although we have done some ourselves. As materials are developed this will change, but currently resources are scant.

The question of cultural inclusivity is a challenging one. Our school works hard at helping Aboriginal students belong and feel safe in the school. It is a place where their home talk and experiences have an important place. However, Scaffolded Literacy, at this moment, is not focusing on cultural inclusivity. Currently none of the texts we have chosen is directly related to children’s home experiences. The most important criterion for choice of texts in Scaffolded Literacy is their capacity to give students access to powerful language in mainstream culture. Nonetheless, for a skilled teacher with a critical orientation, Scaffolded Literacy provides rich opportunities for making links between literary texts and children’s own worlds, for transforming children’s home experiences into well-structured, written texts. It provides a language with which we can begin to study language choices of all sorts of people in different contexts, but it also takes a great amount of time. We need more time to see where this can go.

The employment, supervision and support of parent workers is time-consuming, and could be accomplished part-time by a skilled parent.

Our data poses issues about attendance, at least in the short term. We have collected attendance and lateness statistics from the past three terms. Some of our students have improved a great deal, despite their days away and lateness. But some students who are absolutely regular attenders did not show much growth at all. Our hunch is that the relationship between participation, success, curriculum content, pedagogy and attendance is complex and needs closer inspection.

We have yet to find a pace for change which is sustainable in the long term.’

Sustainability

We have built up an Aboriginal Education team in the school of high quality. We have an assessment process established that should not be difficult to maintain and a recording system for data already established. We have strong Aboriginal community support.

We have learnt how to scaffold literacy so that Aboriginal students, at least in the short term, are successful learners. We have been able to highlight the very real strengths of Scaffolded Literacy. At the same time, we view with caution the rapidly increasing enthusiasm for Scaffolded Literacy as the next “quick fix”. If the potential of this process is to be reached, we must ensure that we know what we are doing, and make sure that those who do work with it know what they are doing.

We are determined to continue investigating Scaffolded Literacy next year. We hope that the State and Federal education personnel involved in the Strategic Results Project will support us in this regard.’
What works?

Project L9

**Sector:** primary  
**Topic:** Support a Reader/Support a Writer program for Indigenous students in Cape and Gulf areas  
**Location:** five remote sites  
**Number of students involved:** not available

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

This project was designed to increase the level of assistance in literacy intervention for Indigenous students in remote communities. A key focus was the training of Indigenous Teacher Aides in the Support a Reader/Support a Writer program.

**Activity**

The Support a Reader/Support a Writer program provides for daily observation and coaching of young students in ‘reading then writing’ with ongoing mentoring.

Each of the schools involved was responsible for developing their own way of instituting the training program, mainly with existing Teacher Aides. Similarly they were encouraged to develop the project in ways which were most appropriate for their settings. Thus a range of strategies besides Support a Reader/Support a Writer were used.

**Project performance**

**Performance targets**

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (in Years P–3) in target schools with reading and writing skills in terms of Year 2 Diagnostic Net and National Year 3 Literacy Benchmark at the end of the project compared with their levels at the beginning of the project

**Results:** not available in consolidated form. Some good but uneven results reported from two sites.

**Analysis of project performance**

Besides improvements in literacy performance, other reported outcomes included more reflective teaching practice, closer monitoring of student performance, up-skilling of Teacher Aides and community members and greater awareness of literacy issues.
All sites noted the impact of poor attendance on the level of skill development. Several sites have begun to develop community-driven attendance programs to support their literacy program.

Factors in success
A clear focus on the development of literacy in SAE as the highest school priority, with leadership and support provided on this issue.

Less successful factors
Finding and keeping appropriate personnel to maintain the programs in more remote locations is a matter of continuing concern.

Sustainability
The activities of the project will not be sustainable without additional funding. Investigation of possible sources is proceeding.

Project L10
Sector: early primary
Topic: Development and implementation of assessment and intervention strategies to support Indigenous students (Years P–2) identified as ‘at risk’ in literacy (SAE) learning
Location: 11 urban, rural and remote sites
Number of students involved: 501

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project was designed to:

• improve Years P–2 Indigenous students learning outcomes in literacy in SAE;
• determine, through school-based action research, the appropriateness of the Literacy Net as a monitoring and assessment tool for students in the target age groups;
• develop intervention processes for those Indigenous students identified as at risk of not achieving satisfactory outcomes in literacy learning;
• provide relevant professional development and resources for teachers and AIEWs in participating schools;
• disseminate information on the Literacy Net and literacy intervention processes to teachers of K–2 Indigenous students; and
• strengthen home/school relationships as a strategy to support literacy development and promote greater involvement of Indigenous parents/caregivers in the early years of schooling.
Activity
The project operated with the following key components:

- a centrally-based coordinator;
- school-based coordinators;
- time allowances at each site to facilitate collaborative planning, provide in-class support monitor project activities, collate assessment information and report to the project’s school coordinator;
- ongoing professional development for the school-based coordinator, participating teachers and AIEWs;
- teacher relief time for collaborative planning; and
- a literacy-related contingency grant.

A whole-school approach was seen as necessary to provide continuity to those students requiring ongoing support. Key project activities were included in the school development plan and opportunities have been provided for P–2 teachers and AIEWs to plan and work collaboratively to support students.

The P–3 Literacy Net was used to identify and support those Aboriginal students who require additional assistance to achieve minimum literacy standards. Assessment techniques are embedded in familiar classroom experiences across the curriculum. Teachers and Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) planned together to support identified students within the mainstream classroom. This approach reversed a common practice of withdrawing weaker Aboriginal students for ‘skill and drill’ literacy activities that have little relationship to a broader view of literacy.

Each coordinating teacher and AIEW attended project workshops together. The initiative promoted a shared view of literacy development, literacy assessment and strategies to assist Aboriginal students requiring additional assistance. The teacher and AIEW then assumed a train-the-trainer role at their school, providing ongoing professional development and support to other P–2 teachers. Additional collegial support was provided through collaborative planning meetings and district-based network meetings.

Feedback to the project highlights the strength of teacher and AIEW partnerships in contributing to successful project outcomes. A typical comment: ‘In the classes the partnerships have evolved from AIEW support to now being involved in planning — still a way to go, but now closer to a truly collaborative model.’

Schools were encouraged to value the role of parents and the home in a child’s learning. Effective home-school communication strategies were developed to reflect the profile of the community and feedback from parents. Strategies included AIEW/teacher home visits, ‘good news’ stories about literacy learning, working cooperatively with parents to assist students having
difficulties, designing literacy activities that can be introduced at home, and reporting to parents in locations other than the school.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Proportion of Indigenous students who satisfy education providers’ literacy expectations for entry into primary school compared to non-Indigenous students

— Proportion of Indigenous students with literacy skills comparable to non-Indigenous students on completing the early childhood years of schooling

**Target:** achieve a 50% improvement in the performance of Indigenous students

**Results:**

A third and final measurement will be made in October 1999, but an idea of the impact of the project can be drawn from the following two measurements.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Language Mode</th>
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<th>Proportion of non-Aboriginal students achieving the checkpoints</th>
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<td>Speaking and Listening</td>
<td>Proportion of Aboriginal students achieving the checkpoints</td>
<td>Proportion of non-Aboriginal students achieving the checkpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Proportion of Aboriginal students achieving the checkpoints</td>
<td>Proportion of non-Aboriginal students achieving the checkpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
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<td>Proportion of non-Aboriginal students achieving the checkpoints</td>
</tr>
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<td>66%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measure used to establish baselines and improvement

The Education Department’s P–3 Literacy Net, which provides evidence of literacy achievement at designated times and identifies those children who are having difficulties in comparison to other children in the same year level.

**Analysis of project performance**

Factors in success

- ‘The Literacy Net identified children’s strengths as a foundation for learning. What students can do provides the starting point for individual literacy plans and determines how teachers and AIEWs work together to support each child. Viewing the child as a learner, rather than a member of a remedial group, has raised teacher expectations, enhanced the quality of literacy programs and improved literacy outcomes for P–2 Aboriginal students.’
What works?

• ‘The project promoted an effective collaboration of AIEWs and teachers. Schools have been encouraged to review the AIEW role and promote the AIEW as a cultural expert and invaluable resource in the classroom program. This approach has helped schools to design curriculum that is relevant and meaningful to Aboriginal children.’

• ‘The Literacy Net assists teachers and AIEWs to identify individual children who require additional assistance in literacy learning. By using the Literacy Net to analyse the identified children’s strengths and the behaviours that they require in order to make further literacy progress, plans can be designed and implemented that support the children within regular classroom experiences. A teacher provided this typical reaction: “The Net makes the learning behaviours a student needs to develop and gives us a process for making small, yet achievable steps with children and this shows progression. It makes teaching rewarding!”’

• ‘The project has provided professional development and central office support to raise teacher awareness of Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal English dialects. The workshops have helped schools implement a curriculum that is responsive to Aboriginal children’s cultural experiences and language backgrounds. AIEWs are integral to this process and are encouraged to take a proactive role by working collaboratively with teachers to design appropriate learning programs for targeted students. A typical comment: “The professional development raising awareness of Aboriginal English has given me more clues in knowing how to say things and enabled me to review Aboriginal children’s literacy development in a fairer way by recognising their dialect.”’

Sustainability

The project was designed to introduce practices that would be sustained beyond the life of the project. Key components that are now part of established school practice are: professional collaboration between the AIEWs and teachers; the use of the Literacy Net; literacy assessment tasks embedded in regular classroom programs; and home-school communication strategies that reflect the context of each community.

‘Change is gradual and the project’s one-year timeline has placed constraints on the model’s design and delivery. All schools have enthusiastically embraced project activities and see the initial year as a strategy to instigate long-term change. Given the nature of the schools, there is a strong demand to provide ongoing support beyond 1999, to continue the professional networks that have been established across schools and to expand project activities to other schools with high enrolments of Aboriginal students.

‘Professional development has also been provided that enables teachers and AIEWs to review the project and build key components into school
development plans for 2000. Districts will also be informed of project activities and will provide ongoing support in 2000.

‘In many rural and remote schools, the AIEW is often the most enduring staff member. It is hoped that the project’s professional development component will enable many of these AIEWs to assume a more proactive role in sustaining the style and continuity of literacy support that many students need.’
Language

Project LA1

Sector: upper primary/secondary

Topic: Ecological Issues in Language Revival: Syllabus development and learner motivation

Location: urban and rural centres

Number of students involved: not applicable

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project had two strands. The first strand was devoted to preparation of syllabus frameworks for two specific Indigenous Australian languages—Arabana of the Eyre Basin and Adnyamathanha of the northern Flinders Ranges.

The second strand involved investigating and documenting motivational issues associated with the delivery of Indigenous languages in Departmental programs, and to discuss these in the context of an ecological view of Indigenous languages revival.

The reasons for the establishment of the project were:

- the opportunity to undertake unprecedented qualitative research into aspects of the operations of school-based Aboriginal language programs, in order to further assist their growth and development;
- the paucity of quality resources to support the school-based teaching of Indigenous languages; and, more specifically, the absence of any teaching guidelines for the two target languages;
- calls from teaching teams in Departmental Indigenous languages programs for guidelines to aid the teaching of languages that few in the trained teaching community, as in the wider community, know much about;
- the related view, expressed by those calling for guidelines, that improved teaching practices would impact positively on student learning outcomes in vernacular programs, and that the literacy and other skills and knowledge acquired are transferable to other areas of the curriculum; and
- the view that, in the context of the present nation-wide literacy push, there is a compelling need for voices to argue the importance, the place and roles of Indigenous languages and Indigenous literacies in the national ‘big picture’.

Activity

Both strands of the project began with consultation/negotiation phases with Indigenous and education stakeholders, and through these established jointly-
developed and jointly-owned operational frameworks. Strand One also engaged the services of two Australianist linguists who had close associations with each of the two languages.

Strand One developments have occurred through a series of nine writing workshops, all held in a provincial city. Through these sessions, the writing team has, in collaboration with Indigenous and school contributors and specialist linguistic support, developed a series of generic modules for the two languages. These modules will form the bulk of the syllabus frameworks.

In addition to actual teaching-learning content, the texts will offer teachers methodological, programming and assessment support. (The format is based around successful frameworks already prepared for, and currently used in, Departmental Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara second language learning language programs.) The preparation of the texts was closely monitored through the Departmental Materials Development Coordinating Group.

Strand 1 baseline data and performance indicators were set during October 1998; a one-day training and development session was held and teaching teams were led through the process of assigning (nationally developed) LOTE Statement and Profile Levels in Oral Interaction, Reading and Responding, and Writing strands. Some very limited English literacy baseline data was gathered, drawing from students’ performance in the Departmental Basic Skills Test.

Strand Two work was developing concurrently by a university research team. The linguistics research team developed survey questionnaires, interviewed groups of stakeholders connected with Aboriginal languages programs (students, parents, teaching teams, principals, etc), and began writing the four-part text. This comprises sections on ecological approaches to Indigenous languages’ revival, motivation/demotivation in Aboriginal language programs, an annotated bibliography of texts addressing motivation in languages learning, and a short account and evaluation of the conduct of the research project itself.

Local Reference Groups were established for both strands.

**Project performance**

The Strand One performance indicators were

— progression on the eight Levels of the LOTE (Statement and) Profile, and
— performance on the Basic Skills Test (literacy in English).

‘For various reasons, only one child from the full cohort of participating schools had a recorded score from the Basic Skills Test. Thus, there was no point in pursuing the latter measure.
What works?

‘Measurement of improvement was to take place through pre- and post-project testing processes, using the LOTE Profile. The “hypothesis” was that learning outcomes would be measurably enhanced through improved teaching practice, provided through the development, provision and implementation of module-based, target language specific syllabus frameworks. However, during the course of the project this state abandoned the use of the relevant curricular documentation and hence post-testing was not achievable.

‘This project has only recently completed its development phase. By all accounts, and to the extent that feedback to teaching teams has been able to take place as the topic-focused modules have been prepared and distributed, there has been a positive impact on thinking and practice. But the impact of this on student performance will remain unmeasured and anecdotal.

‘Concerns of a different kind existed from the outset in relation to outcomes measurability and the SRP timeframe. These concerns relate to the general understanding that movement between adjacent LOTE Profile Levels is of the magnitude of 18 months to two years or so, and so beyond the scope of a 12-month project.

‘The impact of the Strand Two focus can’t be categorised into measurable outcomes as it is a qualitative, research-based thread investigating motivation/demotivation, attitudes and so on in relation to Aboriginal languages’ programs.

‘This project will be a success. New ground will be broken in the LOTE field with the publication of the Strand 2 text. To our knowledge, no studies have been undertaken either within Australia or beyond that investigate motivational aspects of school-based Indigenous languages programs. Most certainly, none has been undertaken which sought to locate the findings within an ecological framework, nor which consciously sought to engage teachers with the discourse of the language ecology field. Syllabus frameworks for two threatened Indigenous languages will be published. These will aid the development of literacy skills among certain groups of Aboriginal children and enhance the survival prospects of the two languages.’

Analysis of project performance
Factors in success

‘Communication. From the outset, all of the project cards were laid on the table, from proposed aims, goals, processes and purposes; to issues of copyright and the retention of intellectual property ownership by contributors; to invitations to participate and payment levels for participants; to dates and timelines; to establishing and operating local reference groups; and so on. Additionally, all of the stakeholders were involved, from target language owners/custodians, to schools and Departmental district officers, to Yaitya
Warra Wodli, the South Australian Aboriginal language centre, to the Departmental materials development coordinating group.

‘Negotiation. It is important, the project team found, that a spirit of negotiation between empowered parties prevailed from the outset, rather than just consultation (between unequals).

‘Predictability, about project events and developments. Perhaps this is an offshoot of communication and negotiation, but Indigenous participants felt an ownership of, and identified with, the project in light of the fact that they had co-determined the pathway and the pace of events, and knew how things were going to unfold.

‘Expertise. It was important that the two project teams were, and were seen as, groups of experts operating with prior knowledge of the fields, and with prior process knowledge, and who exhibited appropriate sensitivities and understandings, rather than as “amateurs” feeling their way.

‘Increased awareness about language teaching approaches, and about issues at stake in school-based support for the revival of Indigenous languages; and increased language awareness, as a consequence of having engaged in open discussions about linguistic issues such as language change, shift and loss, orthographic choice and conventions, and so on.

‘Heightened awareness of language revival as, in part, a product of negotiation, consensus, and conscious and informed decision-making by in-group members; of an ecological view of language revival; and of the potential for productive associations between communities and schools in relation to language revival processes and goals.’

Less successful factors

‘The addition of heavy duties and responsibilities onto existing hefty workloads. This is hardly a complaint, as the project manager was the writer of the submission for funding. To have been able to implement the project independent of other work commitments would have been ideal.’

Sustainability

The impact of the project will be sustained through:

• the teaching guides which will be available early in 2000 for school-based Arabana and Adnyamathanha programs from Reception to Year 7;

• the Strand Two text, which will help schools address the issue of motivation in their Aboriginal language revival programs, and help positively influence whole-of-school operational and teaching practices in this regard; and

• heightened awareness and understanding of ecological realities akin to language revival.
Project LA2
Sector: post secondary
Topic: Vernacular and English Advanced Literacy Program
Location: provincial city with local students and others from remote areas
Number of students involved: 15

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to develop a course which would provide adult Aboriginal language speakers with the opportunity to improve their literacy skills in their own vernacular (Arandic, Western Desert or Warlpiri languages) and English.

There is a recognised need in Central Australia for a higher standard of literacy in both Aboriginal languages and English for professional Aboriginal language workers. There are known to be vocational opportunities for Aboriginal language speakers with sufficient literacy proficiency. However, a shortage of workers exists because of limited training possibilities.

The project provided a chance to develop a course which would meet this need and to trial new approaches to teaching vernacular literacy, linguistics, and English language and literature to speakers of Aboriginal languages.

Activity
The elements of the course were as follows.

• Consolidation of a higher level of English literacy so that students could analyse the structure of English, and read and write texts in a variety of genres. Students also became familiar with ‘academic’ English through reading the relevant literature on English and vernacular literacy issues and developed report writing skills.

• Comparative analysis of the linguistic structure of the Aboriginal vernaculars and English. Students drew on their underlying language knowledge and made explicit the ways in which English and the vernaculars differ, especially in relation to reading and writing.

• Consolidation or transfer of vernacular literacy skills. After developing a foundation in vernacular literacy, students developed recording, transcribing, translating and editing skills.

• Enhancement of the knowledge of vocational options for Aboriginal language workers: (teaching, interpreting/translating, language research, etc.) through focus topics, reading, discussion and observational visits.

• Participation in a four-week work placement as a language worker in a specific area of vocational interest.
A curriculum based on the project work was developed for accreditation by Northern Territory Education and Training Authority.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students who completed the Vernacular and English Literacy program in 1998

Target: 9/15 (60%)

**Result:** Of 15 initial enrolments, nine students attended regularly and completed the course.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Enrolment and completion data.

**Analysis of project performance**

The students who withdrew did so primarily for personal reasons. These students found that the pressure of personal/family problems made it impossible for them to commit themselves to full-time study. A high degree of motivation is required to sustain a full-time commitment and this motivation must be strong enough to overcome the personal difficulties that Aboriginal language speakers face in dealing with day-to-day life in this community.

The successful retention of nine students can partly be attributed to their previous experience as language workers. This experience gave these students an insight into the necessity of gaining increased literacy skills in both their own vernacular and English in order to work confidently as independent language workers. The positive responses were constantly reiterated: we were giving the students what they were looking for; we were attempting to provide them with the prerequisites in literacy and language knowledge to enable them to become more confident and capable Aboriginal language workers.

Probably the most valuable outcome is that there are now more adults with improved literacy in English and vernacular who can make literacy more integral to everyday life, both at work and at home. The other important factor is that increasing the use of literacy in Aboriginal languages may contribute to language maintenance and increasing the status of Aboriginal languages in Central Australia.

**Factors in success**

This program meets the needs of a very specific group of Indigenous students and it is in part this specificity which accounts for the success of the program.

These students are mature adults who are language speakers and come with a high level of motivation because they (preferably) have some experience in Aboriginal language work. They already have literacy in one language,
generally English, although we found that the two Warlpiri students came with a high level of literacy in both English and Warlpiri. Thus we are not teaching adult literacy \textit{per se}, as the general level of the students in English is around Level 4 in the National Reporting System.

The program was taught by four experts and a number of guest lecturers with considerable experience and interest in investigating the issues in the field. The personnel were well known to the Aboriginal community and people trusted that the course would be taught appropriately. The high level of interest in enrolments for 1999 bears testimony to the value of word of mouth in the Aboriginal community.

The students were encouraged to participate in Aboriginal language conferences which gave the students the opportunity to improve their public speaking skills and to reflect upon what they were learning and their role as Aboriginal language workers.

An awareness of the difficulty of the area and an exploratory approach to the issues has led to the development of new teaching practices appropriate to this field. This is particularly true in two main areas:

— comparative linguistics: English and vernacular, and
— literacy issues: tracing the development of reading and writing, in English as well as Aboriginal languages, and understanding the implications of literacy development in the vernacular.

The high level of commitment amongst the students has meant a significant contribution and involvement in determining the content and the direction of the lessons.

Inclusion of a practical work placement period proved to be integral to the overall success of the course. The students were able to apply their new knowledge in a very direct manner. Most importantly they saw themselves as professional workers with a valuable skill to offer. In addition the students’ confidence and self-esteem rose dramatically and they were able to make important contacts within the community. Building links within the community is of great importance as this will ensure that in the future there is a greater chance of jobs being created because they can fill them.

Less successful factors

Student attendance was in many ways the most frustrating aspect. Absences were generally for legitimate reasons and symptomatic of the difficulty of life for Aboriginal people in this community. These included the ceremonial and other social obligations that have to be incorporated into planning for a course like this. The reality is that not all students consistently attended all aspects, and continuity was difficult to maintain at times, although it must be noted that the work placement period generated a high rate of attendance and commitment.
What this course has highlighted is the extent to which vernacular literacy teaching in the past has been devoted to initial literacy skills, that is, teaching sound-to-symbol correspondence, reading simple texts and some writing of stories with a recount or narrative structure. The vernacular literacy teaching component was in many ways exploratory; we were not sure what we were doing a lot of the time and we made mistakes. The pressures of other duties meant that we did not give sufficient attention to workshopping alternative approaches to teaching vernacular reading and writing. In the future it will be of great benefit to explore our understanding of vernacular text types and the relationship between oral and written genres in Aboriginal languages.

Finding vernacular literacy tutors who are both skilled and available can be difficult. In some cases the vernacular literacy teachers were on the same level as the students. In the case of Warlpiri we did not employ a tutor as one of the students was also one of the most literate Warlpiri adults in this community and supported the other Warlpiri student.

Sustainability
The course has been accredited by NTETA and has generated a renewed interest in vernacular literacy in the Aboriginal community. A new group of students will commence in 1999. At the moment the plan is to train three of last year’s students to be the literacy tutors. In this way they will gain more of the teaching experience that they need to then teach in other situations.

Issues in vernacular literacy
(extracted from the final report from Project LA2.)

Literacy development in Aboriginal languages in Central Australia is a recent phenomenon.

- Arandic languages: Western Arrernte has been a written language since the establishment of a Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg in the late 1870s, although this orthography is now used primarily in religious texts. Other Arandic languages (Central/Eastern/Western Arrernte, Kaytetye, Anymatyerr, Alyawarre) have been written in various orthographies only since the late 1970s. Central/Eastern/Western Arrernte are taught in only two official bilingual school programs.
- Warlpiri has been written since the 1970s and is taught in bilingual schools in the Warlpiri region.
- Western Desert languages (Pitjantjatjara, Luritja): Pitjantjatjara has been written since the 1920s and it was only taught sporadically until the official bilingual education program began in the 1970s in Pitjantjatjara schools in South Australia. This program has subsequently been phased out.

These languages have been written for only around twenty years. In that period most literature has been developed for bilingual primary schools with
What works?

almost no complex texts, apart from the Western Arrernte Bible, for adult readers.

The teaching of literacy in Aboriginal languages in Central Australia is still relatively new when compared with English. Adult education in vernacular literacy has been minimal, Aboriginal teachers in bilingual primary schools have received incidental literacy training. In the 1980s the School of Australian Linguistics at Batchelor College taught vernacular literacy and Language Arts courses (still taught at the College’s Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics).

It is difficult at this stage in the development of vernacular literacy teaching to establish benchmarks to measure outcomes.

The vernacular literacy issues have been discussed in the Australian literature. Academics with experience in the field are asking why after 15–20 years of bilingual education Aboriginal languages are not being written much. Other writers have raised the issue of professional Aboriginal language workers not getting the high level skills to transfer from the vernacular to English, and vice versa, in interpreting/ translating contexts.

The situation in Central Australia is not unique. Comparisons can be made with other minority Indigenous language groups with a short history of literacy and a strong motivation to maintain the endangered languages. The international literature makes reference to similar dilemmas to those encountered in Central Australia. Some of these include determining which language it is better to begin teaching literacy in — if, in the vernacular, there are few resources and limited adult functions for literacy. In conclusion, further exploration of the form and functions for vernacular literacy is needed without assuming that they will be identical to English.

Project LA3

Sector: primary/secondary
Topic: Deadly Ways to Learn
Location: rural, remote (14 sites, reducing to nine)
Number of students involved: Teacher focused, originally teaching approx. 200 students; subsequently after withdrawals, about 150

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to collect, create and critique two-way bidialectal classroom practices in fourteen schools, culminating in publication of print resources and a video to support the implementation of such practices in schools across Australia.
The concept underlying these practices was to promote parity of esteem between the dialects of Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English.

Activity
The project started with a professional development forum which all fourteen participating teachers attended. An opportunity was provided for the teachers to learn about Aboriginal English and two-way bidialectal education, and to reflect upon issues that emerge from such an approach.

Each teacher used the ESL Bandscales to collect baseline data about the Standard Australian English development of target students with respect to reading, writing, speaking and listening. Qualitative data was collected about inclusivity practices, use of AIEWs, community participation, and general school-community contexts.

Attempts were made to develop a roster whereby participating teachers would be placed in pairs to use e-mail to discuss set topics and/or tasks. This initiative floundered, however, due to delays in getting e-mail connected to several participants, then because other more pressing commitments in the schools took precedence.

In each school, teachers and AIEWs engaged in action-research: reflecting on issues discussed during the forums and looking for ways to incorporate ideas in their schools and classrooms.

A second forum was held. Significantly, this forum involved equal numbers of AIEWs. While the first forum was characterised by listening and responding, the second forum was characterised by problem solving, collaboration, and discussion. It had a positive and profound impact on all participants.

A second round of school visits was conducted to observe, discuss and document strategies seen, ideas to try and any issues of concern. These visits also enabled a follow-up audit of inclusivity practices, the work of the AIEW and community participation, and the collection of qualitative data about code-switching and the extent to which Aboriginal English is valued and accepted in day-to-day classroom activities.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of students in each target group who satisfy education provider’s expectations of satisfactory progress in English literacy compared with non-Indigenous students.

Graduations in ESL Bandscales proved too broad to detect significant movement over two terms, so it is not useful to draw comparisons between the baseline data reported in November 1998 and the current performance of target students. Quantitative progress will be reported based on relevant data.
collected late in September 1999. It is possible, however, to report qualitative data about inclusive practices observed in participating schools, and evidence of code-switching observed among target students.

**Analysis of project performance**

“Two-way education occupies a fine line, and a good balance between “Aboriginal way” and “traditional schooling way” remains (at present) a rare and wonderful thing. Both sides of this divide continue to be evident among the project teachers. Among the target students being taught by teachers who have struck a productive and respectful two-way balance, there is evidence of good literacy progress, an awareness of two alternative dialects, and of attempts at code-switching.

‘Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been partners in participation. Every non-Aboriginal teacher participating in the project has been partnered by an Aboriginal person (normally an AIEW, but where an AIEW was not available, by an Aboriginal community member). The AIEWs involved in this action research have become more confident about their work, their relationships with teachers, and in the legitimacy of their place in the planning and delivery of educational programs for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Teacher perceptions about the role and ability of AIEWs have changed significantly. Where AIEWs were previously perceived as a valuable extra pair of hands in the school, they are now more frequently viewed as integral members of staff who provide important cultural and linguistic insights to curriculum planning and delivery.

‘There is clear evidence that teaching practices among all participating teachers have become more inclusive — that the teachers have become more committed to a critique of their school’s culture and more willing to examine pedagogical and curricular assumptions that drive many schooling practices. There is still, however, some way to go and this research project has helped with identification of issues that need to be addressed in this regard.

‘Most of the teachers have also given consideration to the purposes and uses for literacy in the lives of their students outside school and have made the literacy tasks at school more congruent with out-of-school contexts. Students have responded to this by initiating their own use of reading and writing such as letters to friends, keeping a diary, using calendars and timetables, jotting notes and lists, and reading to find out about people and topics of interest.

‘A wealth of language and literacy teaching strategies have already been documented (including EDWA’s *First Steps* materials and CEOWA’s *Making the Jump*) and are regularly used by the teachers participating in this project. Whether these strategies prove successful seems to be less to do with what the teachers do, and more to do with what they believe. Teachers’ beliefs about Aboriginal English, world view, and Aboriginal ways permeate their incidental
reactions to things students do and say in the classroom. Teachers and AIEWs participating in the project have found that where these reactions reveal a willingness to embrace and extend what students already know, positive educational outcomes follow. Where reactions reveal a deficit view — that the students need to be taught the proper way to talk and to think (albeit ‘for their own good’) — the students’ sense of identity is compromised and teachers encounter resistance to schooling.’

Less successful factors
‘Application of the ESL Bandscales in Standard Australian English as a second dialect contexts is limited. The Bandscales are not formulated to recognise continuities in home language use and proficiency. While they assume continued use of and proficiency in home language, they do not assess, for example, whether students can make language choices according to context. While they are sufficiently detailed to distinguish between languages, they lack sufficient detail to support assessment of change in dialects.

‘Five of the fourteen teachers/schools participating in the project have been forced to withdraw. Two of them were affected by unfortunate circumstances: one lost her job because the funding that paid her salary “dried up”, while the other was working at a site which was flooded in April and again in June, so clean-up and rebuilding took precedence over participation in this project. Three of the teachers relocated at the end of the 1998 school year.

‘Parent and/or community participation in the school continues to present difficulties for most participating schools. This issue has a long history which reflects the schooling experiences of many parents/family members. It is widely felt that informing the community about Aboriginal English and overtly valuing Aboriginality will help in this regard.’

Sustainability
The physical resources to do so are in place. A proposal is being prepared to provide time for teachers to become involved effectively.

**Project LA4**

**Sector:** primary/early secondary  
**Topic:** Literacy program and teaching materials based on regionally-appropriate materials  
**Location:** remote
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

‘The project set out to develop curriculum materials for a literature-based literacy program for Years 7 and 8 that would support parity of recognition and esteem between English and community languages, especially through better recognition of the range of languages (Kriol, English, Kija) spoken by Indigenous students at school and within their community.

‘In 1997 this school introduced the book *Moola Bulla* in an unstructured way to the target group. The students showed a willingness to participate in the reading process either passively (listening/talking) or actively (reading/writing). We attributed this response to the local content of the stories as well as to the ‘way of telling’.

‘The project reflects the research on bilingual education: that proficiency in mother tongue is a cultural resource and provides a pathway to proficiency in ‘academic English’. Instruction by the means of the primary language in preschool through the early grades promotes and develops the deeper cognitive and academic skills that predict future success in the mainstream. Many language minority children develop academic language (the language of the subject matter disciplines) in English as a result of academic language that has been first developed in their mother tongue.

‘As with other groups from other societies, the level of literacy achieved in the first language varies for Indigenous students. This is related to whether the language has been recorded, whether the need for a writing system to communicate is established and whether there is access to formal school programs which actively promote the development and understanding of their own language.

‘Students who have a contemporary and/or traditional Indigenous language as their first language have a right to access formal school programs in those languages for the same reasons English Language Programs are developed for students whose first language is English.’

Activity

A literature-based literacy program based on differentiated curricula theory is in development, using a recent publication, *Moola Bulla*, reflecting local Indigenous history, culture and language. The program is designed to develop students’ (Years 7–9) skills in reading, writing, talking and listening, and provide:

- a guide for sequential skill development;
- outcome indicators for programming and assessment;
- reproducible student worksheets/workbook; and
a framework which we hope would be suitable to guide teachers in development of curriculum materials from other relevant/appropriate publications.

A team consisting of a school-based ESL classroom teacher, an English language consultant and a linguist have worked on the project.

Eight stories from *Moola Bulla* were identified as focus points for language skill development. Language theories and practices which needed to be considered were identified.

Draft teaching materials and student worksheets have been trialed and completed for each of the eight stories. It is expected that the framework and teaching materials/student worksheets will be completed by October, 1999.

**Project performance**

Trial deliveries of units of work were conducted as they were developed through 1999. However, formal implementation of developed materials and evaluation of consequent student learning outcomes will occur in 2000.

**Analysis of project performance**

**Factors in success**

- Student engagement with the content of the stories and willingness to engage in learning of new language skills (because of the content).
- Teacher satisfaction in engaging all students of mixed experiences in language learning.
- Family interaction with students as they took their accounts of the story content home which enhanced further possible learning.

**Less successful factors**

‘The most frustrating element with this work is the limited amount of material available on the healthy and living contemporary Aboriginal language in this area — Kriol. If the kids are to have access to the corpus of knowledge bound within that language they need to have access to formal language programs in their first language.’

**Sustainability**

‘Kriol is the first language of the students and one of the traditional languages with which the students identify. The units of work will now remain as a resource which can be used when the school has the greatest influx of students who are not in for the full school year. There is always room for refinement of the units of work as the school continues its research and recording of Kriol in this area.

‘The interest the students show in the content of these stories demonstrates the need for more books of this nature to be published and widely used in schools in the area.’
**Screening Processes: Using information technology**

**Project IT1**

**Sector:** Primary  
**Topic:** Computer-Assisted Literacy  
**Location:** rural, three sites  
**Number of students involved:** 64

### Summary of intentions and activity

#### Intentions

The project set out to improve Indigenous students’ literacy learning outcomes through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Use of computer assistance was seen to have the potential to make significant differences. The opportunity to combine daily one-to-one teaching, assistance from an Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW), interactive software (‘WiggleWorks and ‘LiteracyPlace’) and high quality hardware appeared to have high potential.

In addition, the project would provide chances to develop technological competence, other non-standard learning experiences, a higher level of contact with care-givers and community members and to create an atmosphere in the schools which would value the abilities and efforts of Indigenous students.

#### Activity

All Indigenous students in the three schools were tested to obtain a Reading Age for each student. Their progress was monitored using First Steps continua and the NSW English K–6 Syllabus Stages.

Equipment was purchased and set up to a functioning state. Both these processes presented some difficulties which were eventually overcome. During this phase students received relevant training in the use of ICTs.

At site 1, the seven students were divided into three groups on the basis of their ability and initially withdrawn from mainstream classes three times a week for an hour each session. As their competence and interest grew the time spent working with the teacher, AEW and computers increased. The youngest had two extra half hour sessions, the middle group an extra hour, as did the two Year 6 students who spent their extra time working on the Internet and corresponding by e-mail.

At site 2, the students were included in the school’s Resource Program. During the year, 13 students took part although six left in the latter half of the year. Students were withdrawn for half an hour each day to work with the resource teacher and teacher’s aide. Extra opportunities were organised for students to
have access to the Internet and e-mail on a regular basis. Students progressed through the software programs at their own pace.

At site 3, 44 students participated, each one for half an hour a day in the computer room. Two teachers, one employed through the project and the other with additional sectoral funds, worked with an AEW to provide learning activities to infants class students. Students at this school had more limited contact with ‘school literacy’ and took time (over six months in some cases) to develop the knowledge and skills to be able to use the software. More elementary software was purchased to help with this situation. Again, students progressed at their own pace.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students with literacy levels (RA) at or above chronological age (CA) as described by various test instruments

Baseline: RA at or above CA — 29% (7/24)

Target: An individually-set increase of up to 1.5 year’s improvement in literacy skills in one year.

**Results:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Site 1</th>
<th>Site 2</th>
<th>Site 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students reaching own target</td>
<td>57% (4/7)</td>
<td>40% (2/5)</td>
<td>20% (9/44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA equal to or above CA</td>
<td>71% (5/7)</td>
<td>80% (4/5)</td>
<td>34% (15/44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Waddington Diagnostic Reading and Spelling Tests, Neale Analysis of Reading Ability. Re-test using the above, the First Steps Continua and NSW K–6 Literacy Stages. The software used, WiggleWorks and LiteracyPlace, both have internal progress-recording mechanisms.

**Analysis of project performance**

- ‘The use of ICTs by Indigenous students is essential and needs to be made available. Some aspects of the “WiggleWorks” and “LiteracyPlace” programs are terrific, especially the interactive elements, the self assessment records and the capacity to work individually.

- ‘Culturally relevant curricula, materials, and classroom/study spaces lead to increasing confidence, esteem and the desire to be at school for all Indigenous students.

- ‘That to be “special” is important for Indigenous students, especially in schools where they are heavily in the minority. They need access to the best equipment, teachers, assistants and their own space.
What works?

• ‘Parents must be given the opportunity to observe their children’s learning, to take part in the learning process and to be learning role models for their children. The more parents are involved in their children’s education, the more successful the students will be.
• ‘The fundamentals of good teaching are good for all students.’

Factors in success
• ‘Teachers who were sensitive to and cognisant of Aboriginal culture and the local community.
• ‘Reduced class sizes/ small group activities.
• ‘Expectations that all students could succeed.
• ‘Quality resources.
• ‘“Student-owned” spaces where teaching and learning occurred, implying a less formal classroom atmosphere.
• ‘Consistent and structured delivery and timetable with students knowing what is happening and what will happen.
• ‘Students treated as individuals and able to have a say in the pace and direction of their learning.
• ‘Consistent attendance.
• ‘Establishment of close personal relationships between teachers, assistants and the students.
• ‘Ability to make mistakes, fix them themselves and produce a “perfect” page/document /book.’

Less successful factors
• ‘Absenteeism: a direct correlation exists between attendance levels of students and level of achievement.
• ‘Student mobility: a significant number of students exited at least one of the schools where the program was running.
• ‘Desirability of a higher level of parent involvement.
• ‘Technical problems with software/hardware interface.
• ‘Parallel computer skills programs are required, especially for the younger students.
• ‘Software limitations: “WiggleWorks” and “LiteracyPlace” are not for students with special needs or learning difficulties and require a good working knowledge of literacy at Kindergarten stage for access. The gap between the two programs is quite large; the move from one to the other is not a direct transition. “LiteracyPlace” has a strong American flavour.’

Sustainability

‘In all three schools the project is continuing. Both the schools and the CEO have directed funds to ensure that students in these schools have the opportunity to continue the program. The schools have retained the additional teachers and AEWs and the continuation of the project remains their responsibility. The program will continue in the same format with less intensive testing.’

Project IT2

**Sector:** Years 2–8  
**Topic:** Using information and communication technologies to enhance teaching and learning  
**Location:** Urban, rural and remote districts  
**Number of students:** 199  

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project was designed to explore the motivational appeal and instructional value for literacy of the use of light-weight portable computers and e-mail communication with other students.

**Activity**

Three groups of schools were targeted representing urban, rural and remote Districts, 117 Newton e.Mate computers were distributed to the students selected to participate.

Training was conducted for all teaching staff and Aboriginal personnel connected with the study, encompassing an outline of the project and its requirements, familiarity with the computers and the specific literacy issues to be addressed.

Four to six weeks were allowed for the students to become familiar with the technology and to establish the project in the various schools. In February 1999 the project began in the identified schools with the pre-testing of students and concluded in June 1999 with the post-testing of students.

Major computer use occurred in English for writing, spelling, reading and other language activities including journal writing). Other uses indicated were for several other subject areas, homework and assignments. The types of work completed by students during free time use were: drawing, word processing, drawing and notation, story writing, graphics, assignments, homework, class notes, pictures, producing final drafts for English.
What works?

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who read and write at an appropriate level for their age at the end of the project compared with their level at the beginning of the project and progress over a similar period without support.

— Number and proportion of Indigenous primary students in target group who regularly attend school compared to all students in specific sites.

Results:
• Findings from this project indicate that use of information technology did improve the writing and spelling skills of Aboriginal students in the primary years. Analysis of the writing test for students in Years 2–6 found that students improved in text level features, vocabulary and sentence level features. Test results indicated that there was no significant improvement in reading for students as a year group outside Years 2 and 3. The Year 4 group did not significantly improve in any of the literacy areas examined. It was assumed that an uncontrollable variable existed for this group.

• Students felt that they were more confident in using computers at the end of the project and that their typing skills, spelling, drawing and layout had improved. They would like greater access to computers especially during class time and after school.

• Secondary students did not significantly improve in their literacy skills, but they felt more confident in using the computers at the end of the project and that their typing skills, spelling, drawing and layout had improved. They enjoyed working on computers and would like to have access to them for school use and after school use.

• Those schools (80% of the high schools and approximately 30% of the primary schools) which participated in e-mailing found that students were very enthusiastic about its use and that it provided a useful avenue for practice of literacy skills.

• Comments from care-givers support access to technology for their children in schools. Computers are viewed as a tool which can provide skills needed by Aboriginal students for employment, as well as assisting in their child’s education.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement
A written test was designed to assess students prior to the commencement of the project. This test assessed Aboriginal students’ level of expertise with written skills when using computers as well as their writing ability.

The testing of the students focused on narrative text. This text type was chosen because narrative is a common literacy task for students in Years 2–8, it is a text
type which encompasses a range of literacy skills common to other text types, and it is included in state-wide literacy testing processes in Years 3, 5 and 7.

Standardised reading and spelling tests were also administered at the same time as the writing test. These tests were Waddington Spelling and Reading to students in Years 2–4. South Australia Spelling was administered to students from Year 5–8. The torch reading test was administered to students from Years 5–8.

In addition:
- the class teachers involved in the project were surveyed to examine the confidence in using computers and the frequency of their use by the students involved in this project to gauge any correlation between frequency of computer usage and improved literacy skills;
- the Years 5–8 students involved in the project were surveyed to gauge their level of interest and sense of confidence in computer use; and
- a number of the targeted students’ care-givers from each of the geographical areas were interviewed individually by Aboriginal Education Assistants about their attitudes to the program and to the use of computers in schools.

Analysis of project performance

‘While many parents welcomed this project and were keen to hear of its outcomes, others expressed concern. Some parents withdrew their children from the project either at the beginning or part way through because they did not want their child singled out for “special treatment”. In their opinion, their child was doing well at school and they did not wish to have their schooling interfered with. This occurred in two schools.’

High absenteeism was an issue for 10% of the student group. This created difficulties with the level of contact students had with the program and consequent testing procedures. The combination of student movement and absenteeism, factors which increased with age, affected 25% of the total student group.

Less successful factors

All high schools indicated the difficulties they faced in integrating the project into their programs. Reasons given included: timetabling, student movement and the number of ‘contact’ staff.

The Internet component of the project posed a number of difficulties. Several schools had their computer with modem installed stolen during the Christmas vacation, others experienced difficulties with the server, while other schools did not address the Internet component of the project because the students were too young.
What works?

One third of the computers used in the project were consistently unreliable. Problems included batteries not holding charge, losing work, freezing and crashing for no apparent reason. This led to frustration on the part of the teachers and students.

Staffing was a problem in the initial stage of the year when staff transfers were occurring. In one school three staff members were transferred at the end of Term 1 leaving no one at the school familiar with the project.

Sustainability

‘Many schools involved in the project have witnessed the changes this project has made to many of their Aboriginal students in the areas of literacy development, attendance, computer confidence and approaches to their schooling. Some schools have moved to purchase additional resources to sustain the positive impact of the project. Others have used the project as a model for the teaching of literacy and technology at their school.

‘With relation to the e-mailing process, teachers believe that strong networks have been established. Schools participating have indicated that they will continue with this process.’

Project IT3
Sector: Primary
Topic: Information Literacy
Location: 3 remote sites
Number of students involved: 41

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to provide Indigenous students, as well as their families and other community members, with the information technology resources and skills to be able to access resources that are not generally available in these remote areas, and to enable Indigenous students to achieve outcomes on the Information Literacy Continuum that are equivalent to their non-Indigenous peers.

Indigenous students are entitled to equality of outcomes in such key domains as the capacity to successfully access and manipulate information, text and non-text, across all learning areas. Enhanced capacity to access and manipulate information will improve Indigenous students’ prospects when they move to boarding schools in larger centres, as well as their potential to participate in further education and/or employment.
Activity
A teacher-librarian with strong technology skills was employed to establish the project in participating schools and work with teachers (including the delivery of professional development). Two Indigenous staff were appointed in each school with skills (or the capacity to quickly acquire them) in technology and library support, to assist teachers, especially between visits from the itinerant teacher-librarian.

Each school was provided with a base level of additional technology resources, ie, four computers with Windows 95 environment, a printer, a data/video projector, connection to the Internet, and various CDs. Conventional library services and databases were established in two of the schools where these did not exist.

Students were tested using the Information Literacy Continuum as modified (see below), to assess their skill level and inform program development, and subsequent continued monitoring of progress.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Proportion (with student numbers) of Indigenous students with literacy skills in the Information Literacy continuum’s Key Competencies (Locating, Selecting, Analysing, Organising and Sharing Information) comparable to non-Indigenous students on leaving primary school.

Baseline: 50%
Target: 80% (32 of 41 students)

**Result:** Among Year 7 students, 98% of Indigenous students achieved the Key Competencies compared with 92% of the non-Indigenous students. All Indigenous students in all years improved their skills across the Information Literacy Key Competencies.

• In all three schools, with the exception of one student, Indigenous students were deemed to be performing at ‘the appropriate Level’ on the continuum by the end of the project — though students at Level 3 at one school were performing poorly on those indicators related to critical thinking and analysis.

• All students were performing with ‘considerable skill independence’ in database search and location having commenced the project with no skills at all.

• All students had progressed from Level 1 to either Level 4 or 5 in general computer operations by the end of the project.
**What works?**

**Measures used to establish baselines and improvement**

The Information Literacy Continuum was modified to meet the needs of the project. The continuum ordinarily describes indicators from Level 1 (end of Year 1) to Level 6 (end of Year 12). Since none of the three schools had preschools, and had not undertaken systematic development of skills in previous years, the continuum was adjusted.

Initial testing mapped each student, in all populations, using an assessment sheet based on the modified continuum. It also examined student competencies in relation to database searching and general computer operations. In subsequent monitoring, students were deemed to have either achieved the defined competencies or not, and to have demonstrated computer skills on one of five Levels ranging from ‘no skill or knowledge’ through to ‘independent’.

**Analysis of project performance**

**Factors in success**

- Provision of, and access to, the technology.
- Appointment of the itinerant teacher-librarian who took responsibility for the project as a whole, supported teachers without requiring them to take on unnecessary added burdens, and established effective systems in the schools.
- Appointment of two support staff in each school to ensure an ongoing focus between visits from the teacher-librarian.
- Development of cooperative working relationships between the school staff and the project staff.
- Adjustment of the key assessment instrument used to meet the specific needs of the students covered by the project.

**Less successful factors**

- While there were good relationships between school and project staff, the time available for interaction was restricted due to the other local and system demands on teachers.
- The actual appointment of support staff in two of the schools. There was difficulty finding suitable applicants in one case, and loss of personnel in the other. This delayed the development of the school-level infrastructure.
- Delays in fully engaging Indigenous parents while teachers sought to become confident about what they were doing and how they were going about it.

**Sustainability**

Employment of staff will continue, funded from other sources. The CEO will provide continued support and the infrastructure will remain with the schools.
Project IT4

Sector: secondary
Topic: Using laptop computers in the classroom
Location: urban with students from remote areas
Number of students involved: unknown

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to provide equitable access for Indigenous students to information and communication technologies and explore alternative delivery modes using ICTs.

Schools in Australia are moving towards a teaching/learning methodology which use personal computers within the classroom. This is a modern development in education practices which must be shared by Indigenous students.

Activity
Five personal notebook computers were leased and trialed in classrooms across several subject areas.

Staff provided with the notebooks were given a demonstration of their use and in-serviced on their potential application in class. Software packages were nominated and discussed and staff were encouraged to develop educational programs and applications of their own. It was stressed that, while the word-processing potential of the notebooks was an obvious asset, the main objective of the trial was to explore information access and software applications. The emphasis was on student use under teacher direction rather than the provision of a technical resource for staff use.

Applications trialed by staff were related to English, Science and Social Education, and included CD-Rom access, Internet access, simulation packages (eg Effects of Urbanisation) and teacher-directed Powerpoint presentations.

Project performance

Performance targets and results
— 50% of the students would progress at least 1 Level of the NT ESL Outcomes Profile, and
— 60% of the students would complete the maximum number of units or modules in a range of courses.

Results: Project outcomes were measured only in the context of other experiences.
What works?

Analysis of project performance

‘While there are some differences in approach and response from the staff involved, there was very clear agreement that the limited number of notebooks available was a major and compromising drawback. The fact that only one or two students at any time could use the notebook meant that the teacher was unable to direct lessons and applications to the whole class. This is in contrast to these same classes performing within our current laboratories, where significant progress can be achieved with one computer per student.

‘To overcome this problem, there were times when the notebooks were pooled, and all used by one class at the same time. There was a noted improvement in delivery on these occasions.

‘The potential for success in all these areas is significant, though it was noted that the preparation time for Powerpoint presentations was considerable and indicated a need for further staff in-service.

‘It would be fair to say that individual ownership of notebooks provides students with a useful tool both at home and at school. Assignment drafting and presentation, information access and storage of material are all enhanced. This, however, assumes private ownership. Where the educational institution ‘provides’ the notebooks as a curriculum tool, our trial suggests that multiple access is the only way to ascertain notebook effectiveness. The school will continue to encourage student ownership of notebooks, but recognises that many students will not be able to afford one. Consideration may be given to having a mobile class set of notebooks to provide access beyond the confines of the computer laboratory.’
Managing Numbers: Numeracy

Project N1
Sector: primary, junior secondary
Topic: Indigenous students achieving numeracy
Location: rural and remote (5 sites)
Number of students involved: 77

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
To explore varying teaching practices to improve levels of numeracy acquisition among Indigenous students.

Activity
The project operated at five sites.

Site 1: Two whole classes (approx. 50% of whom were Indigenous students) were taught using the theory and practice of Mathematics in Context. Administrative and other staff provided relief for project staff to undertake planning, detailed assessment and other project activities.

Site 2: The project teacher worked with small groups of (mostly) Year 7 and 8 students in a withdrawal program of two or three regular sessions per week. The focus was for students to develop underpinning numerical skills by encountering fundamental concepts in a range of contexts (‘multiple representations’).

Site 3: The project teacher had daily intensive numeracy sessions (15–30) with small groups of primary-aged students and released another teacher to work in a similar way with the secondary-aged students. There was an emphasis on underpinning place value knowledge through games, physical activity, repetition and computer use.

Site 4: A teacher aide worked with small groups of students in a withdrawal program of two or three regular sessions per week. Students were drawn from K–3, middle primary and secondary aged classes, with appropriate programs of activity planned by the teacher aide in collaboration with the local project teacher. Additional language support was provided for the youngest students through an AIEW working with the groups.

Site 5: In-class support of the learning of some Year 3 students by the project teacher was supplemented by occasional withdrawal of individuals or pairs requiring particular attention. Initially a small group of Year 4 students was withdrawn from daily mathematics sessions for intensive work with the project teacher and AIEW, and the Year 3 model being successfully adopted in second semester. Teaching approaches were built from the Education Department of
What works?

WA’s *First Steps in Mathematics* trial materials, with an emphasis on developing base ten understanding and associated number sense.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

Site 1 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students who move one or more Levels in terms of the National Mathematics Statement and Profile

Target: 80% of students move one or more Levels

**Result:** 8/11 (72%)

Site 2 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who satisfy providers’ expectations of basic numeracy skills in terms of the National Mathematics Profile (number, measurement, working mathematically)

Target: 90% of students at Level 3

**Result:** 7/8 (88%)

Site 3 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who satisfy providers’ expectations in number in terms of the National Mathematics Profile

Target: 90% progress 1 or more Levels

**Result:** 12/22 (55%)

Site 4 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who move one or more Stages in the number strand (in terms of the WA Learning Mathematics Curriculum)

Target: 80% of students progress one or more Stages

**Result:** 15/18 (83%)

Site 5 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students who satisfy providers’ expectations for progress to the following year, in terms of the WA Student Outcome Statements in number

Target: 50% Yr 3 students and 80% Yr 4 students achieve Level 2

**Result:** 7/10 Yr 3 students (70%) and 6/8 Yr 4 students (75%)

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

The procedures used in each site varied. Commonly used instruments were formal and informal written tests, oral tests, observation and collection of work samples. These processes were replicated in the final summative assessment. A common model for summarising each student’s progress was agreed and used in all schools.
Analysis of project performance

‘The targets adopted represent at least the common expectation of progress in a full year for mainstream students. The effective length of the project varied according to different set-up times in the different schools, but was, on average, only three terms. Hence the targets would be demanding in most educational contexts.

‘All schools, except site 3, either met their targets or were within one student of doing so. In a number of cases, some of those students who did not reach the standard did make substantial progress. High levels of absenteeism were evident in all but a very few cases of students not achieving the standard.

‘The situation at site 3 appears related to chronological age even though the target was expressed in terms of movement rather than setting an absolute level. For students over 10 years of age only one failed to advance at least one Level, and a number went well beyond this; little progress was evident for a number of students aged under 10.’

Factors in success

A set of factors was developed and discussed by project personnel as having had some significance. Each project officer then estimated their relevance to his/her particular project. ‘They are not presented as a definitive set: they are the ones which emerged from this project.’

— Higher frequency
  • Collaboration between all elements of the school community.
  • Attention to the development of students’ understanding and use of the language of maths in English.
  • Work with small groups in a withdrawal program. (with one exception)
  • Person(s) established and resourced to attend to students’ numeracy development as a special responsibility.
  • Revised teaching strategies.

— Medium frequency
  • Explicit involvement of para-professionals.

— Lower frequency
  • Community involvement/ ownership of teaching strategies. (In one case this was deemed to be of high significance.)
  • Community-generated teaching strategies. (The same comment applies.)
  • New teaching materials/resources.
  • Focus on ensuring understanding of appropriate concepts in Aboriginal language.
What works?

These were good teachers who knew their communities and worked well as part of those communities. They were well resourced and supported and had the time to focus on individual’s learning. They set high expectations of the students. Most importantly, the local control of the projects meant that they were connected to the local context with a level of community understanding and support.

Less successful factors

The correlation between achievement and attendance which was evident in the project is not unexpected in the light of previous findings. The schools’ project designs were not effective in dealing with this issue.

The overall project design allowed schools to access consultant expertise as they required. This was to be at the school’s initiation. Given the extensive networks available, it would have been possible to access almost any kind of expertise they needed. Whether it was due to the self-sufficiency of teachers in remote locations or to nervousness about dealing with those perceived as ‘experts’, some of the schools did not take up this option.

Sustainability

Each of the schools has general intentions and strategies for continuing the work of the project; three have specific actions under way to consolidate and extend the work.
Media for Improving Outcomes: Arts education

Project A1

**Sector:** Secondary  
**Topic:** Improving learning outcomes for Indigenous students through the Arts  
**Location:** four school sites, one remote, three urban  
**Number of students involved:** 70 students

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to investigate the extent to which student involvement in arts education could facilitate attainment of the Key Competencies. This involved the trialing of teaching and learning practices in arts-centred programs aimed at enhancing literacy and numeracy skills, and improving career pathways for Indigenous students.

The project was also mounted to:

- build on existing student interest in, and enthusiasm, for the arts, and hence to use the arts as a vehicle for improving learning outcomes for Indigenous students;
- create arts-related pathways into vocational education, further study and other post-school options; and
- use the arts as ‘a gateway’ into learning in other areas and to develop the Key Competencies.

**Activity**

Each school site adopted a different focus embodied in a local strategic plan and set of performance indicators.

Site 1 focused on improving oral literacy skills for remote students through arts modules that had ESL strategies built into them. Daily sessions focused on arts concepts and English language development and were supplemented by hands-on activities with local community artists.

Site 2 sought to build language skills and career options in a college setting by developing an artists-in-residence program which, amongst other things, would support students in acknowledging their Aboriginality.

At site 3, students ‘at risk’ developed career pathways through arts programs that contribute directly to the Year 11 SACE certificate.

Site 4 used the arts to build community links through an artists-in-residence program which complements the existing performing arts courses in the school.
In all cases actual performance was an important component of the program and students produced arts-related cultural activities or artefacts for various audiences.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

Each site adopted its own specific set of performance indicators.

Site 1 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students with generic skills in terms of Mayer Key Competency 2

**Target:** 75%

**Result:** On entry, 18 of the 37 students in the project were assessed as having the relevant generic skills. By December 1998 this number had increased to 27 (73%), though not all students were available for the assessment.

Site 2 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students eligible for entry to post-school options at university and VET

**Target:** 65%

**Result:** All seven students had earned sufficient points towards their Year 12 certificate for it to be an achievable outcome by the end of 1999.

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students with generic skills in terms of KCs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 and the ACT achievement descriptors

**Target:** 100%

**Result:** Six of the seven students (86%) satisfied the requirements in all of the nominated KCs.

Site 3 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students successfully completing current year of schooling

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students with generic skills in terms of KC 7

**Target in both cases:** 67%

**Results:** Eight of the 11 students (73%) successfully completed their year of schooling and achieved the requirements of KC 7.

Site 4 — Number and proportion of Indigenous students in target group who speak and write at an age appropriate level for their age at the end of 1998 compared with their level at the beginning of 1998

**Target:** 70%

**Result:** 93% of students involved in the program were assessed as achieving the written outcomes at a satisfactory or higher level, and 100% achieved similar results in terms of oral language outcomes.
Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

In general, the four sites used a combination of moderated assessment tasks, supplemented by data on attendance and participation in activities such as production of murals, performances, etc. Improvement was measured in terms of achievement against the assessment tasks, as is evident from the preceding results.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

• The strong links developed with the local community and the level of trust and ownership that flowed from it to the students.
• The provision of clear information to students on the range of options available to them.
• Flexibility in relation to teaching and learning approaches combined with high expectations of the students involved.
• The support of the local school principals and other administrators.

Less successful factors

• A reluctance by some teachers and school community members to recognise the value of the learning outcomes achieved.
• A lack of support amongst some members of the school communities compounded by the loss of some key supportive personnel during the project.
• A degree of rigidity within some curriculum guidelines as well as individual school structures/policies.

What has been learnt

• The importance of building individual self-esteem as well as a degree of ‘cultural esteem’ and confidence in personal capacity and achievement.
• That engagement in the arts can assist in the development of less formal relationships between teachers and students and can enable students to experience success on a regular basis; thereby encouraging increased motivation, attendance and participation.
• The focus on the arts needs to be supplemented by actual product (drama, video productions, visual displays, etc.) to make the programs tangible to the students and the community.
• That the focus on arts learning which incorporates Indigenous culture and heritage can also extend to other areas such as literacy, numeracy and employment related competencies.
What works?

Sustainability

‘Sustainability is problematic without ongoing resources and recognition for these programs. It ultimately depends on acceptance in the schools that these are valuable approaches to pursue and, apart from one school, that does not yet exist. It’s also bound up with the tenuous position of the arts in the curriculum in general and a failure to recognise how they can be a good vehicle for achieving broader outcomes than just subject-specific ones.’

Project A2

**Sector:** secondary

**Topic:** Transition to SACE Studies (TRASS)

**Location:** 5 sites, three rural, two urban

**Number of students involved:** 55

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to improve the participation of Aboriginal students in the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) by trialing VET curriculum, with specific focus on Indigenous students in the first year of their SACE studies.

The low participation and success rates of Aboriginal students in the SACE is an equity matter of serious concern to the project sponsor. Including VET curriculum for Indigenous students was seen as one strategy to increase their participation in senior secondary education. The Arts and Recreation Industry area seemed to provide advantages for investigation. Music was the focal point because of the success of teaching AUSMUSIC units in the Music Industry Skills Certificate Level II at senior secondary level.

**Activity**

The representatives of the schools involved met to introduce the concept of the project, discuss the VET modules of the AUSMUSIC Certificate, determine the interest and commitment of the school communities, and assist with the writing of the proposals.

One school delivered the unit as a two week compact course at the end of Semester 2, 1998. The remaining four schools delivered the units during Semester 1, 1999.

Between July 1998 and June 1999 there were six meetings held with the participating schools, and representatives from other interested educational and community organisations. The project officers conducted two monitoring and evaluation visits during Semester 1, 1999. Staff and students from the
Centre for Aboriginal Studies of Music (CASM) at the University of Adelaide visited schools to facilitate music workshops and to perform with students.

**Project performance**

**Performance targets and results**

Performance indicators were adapted from the original to reflect the goals of the project more accurately.

**Results:**

- Enrolment of Aboriginal students in a SACE Music unit with embedded VET modules: 55
- Retention in the unit: 42
- Completion of the unit: 38
- Completion of VET modules: 52 (in one school, students completed two modules each)
- Completion of one component of the Writing-Based Literacy Assessment: 26 (in one school no students were assessed, data is incomplete from another.)
- Community involvement: increased in each of the five schools
- Sustainability: four of the five schools will continue to provide the course in the immediate future.

**Measures used to establish baselines and improvement**

Enrolment and completion data.

A considerable amount of qualitative data was also collected from teachers, students and other community members.

**Analysis of project performance**

‘The confidence and success of Aboriginal students can be developed through SACE units that are specifically designed to increase accessibility through appropriate teaching methodology and the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives. This is especially the case in subjects that students are interested in but which they may have felt excluded from in the past. These findings have ramifications for the way in which the subjects should be designed and offered.’

**Factors in success**

‘The relationships between the teachers and students was seen as integral to success. The practical nature of the subject created more opportunities for students to be actively involved in classroom decision-making and to develop at their own rate. For some teachers this was the first opportunity to work closely with Aboriginal students. Teachers thoroughly enjoyed this experience and felt the relationships they developed with students were beneficial for both parties in the short and long term.’
What works?

‘When students, parents, and teaching/support staff were asked about what they perceived to be the benefits gained from the course, issues such as improvements in attendance, self esteem, confidence, relationships, and future directions were raised.’

Other factors include:

- the commitment of the students to learn a musical instrument;
- the enthusiasm of the Music teachers in each of the TRASS project schools;
- the student interest in each school in forming and playing in a band;
- support from community members;
- involvement of Aboriginal musicians (students from University of Adelaide’s Centre for Aboriginal Study of Music visited four of the schools); and
- school focus on the needs of Indigenous students in smaller than usual classes.

‘Two of the schools had classes with Aboriginal students only. While students at one school felt that this was important, and a contributing factor to their success, students at the other school felt it had no importance at all. The Aboriginal Education Worker commented that he thought that smaller class size was a more important factor.

‘The Arts curriculum area enabled students to experience a Stage 1 SACE unit in a very positive environment which may not have been possible in some other subject areas. These classes enabled teachers to implement changes to their teaching methodologies and to create a collaborative team approach amongst the students. Music was identified as an important curriculum area for Aboriginal students as it is highly valued by many of the communities but has not always been accessible to the students in some of the schools.

‘Besides the dual accreditation made possible by including VET modules, these modules provided a ready-made syllabus suitable for students with little or no formal background in music.

‘CASM’s involvement was an unintended but a very beneficial contribution to the success of the Project in terms of performance and introducing students to Aboriginal role models in music pathways.’

Less successful factors

‘Parents, teachers/support staff and the students themselves all felt that there could have been greater community involvement. It was clear that parents placed great significance on community involvement for the following reasons: role modelling, students making links to their cultural heritage, collaboration of an Aboriginal community member with non-Aboriginal teaching staff, and encouragement and support for the students.’

The Writing-Based Literacy Assessment component. (See p. 105.)
Sustainability

Four of the five participating schools in this project will continue to run this music unit in Semester 2, 1999. The other school is unable to continue this course because of funding and staff availability.
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to develop and implement strategies to support vocational learning for Indigenous secondary students including:

• delivery of elements of the Work Education Framework;
• development of individual school-to-work plans;
• increased access to vocational education and training; and
• increased access to mentoring support.

Activity
The Vocational Learning Unit conducted a workshop for 35 Aboriginal Department of Education and Training staff including Aboriginal Education Consultants, Aboriginal Education Assistants, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers and teachers to ensure widespread community support for, and awareness of, vocational learning initiatives for Aboriginal students.

An Aboriginal Coordinator was employed to oversee the project and a series of district briefings held in August/September for Department personnel, Aboriginal communities and stakeholders to generate interest and support for the project.

A total of 42 schools across 17 districts as well as 5 district based programs are being supported to undertake such activities as: employing locally based coordinators to promote, implement and monitor the program; developing programs initiated to introduce Aboriginal students to work education; conducting industry specific visits and vocational education camps; organising visits by Aboriginal business people who talk to the students and provide mentoring support; and linking local business enterprises with selected school communities.
**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in Years 9 and 10 who successfully complete schooling and/or who articulate to further education and training and/or employment within the project timeline as compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at the same or similar sites.

**Result:** not yet available. Baseline data on retention rates amongst Aboriginal students has been collected and the project’s impact on retention will become more evident as data comes is collected from the 42 schools after they complete the project (by the end of 1999).

**Analysis of project performance**

Factors in success

- The degree of community support gained for activities undertaken. Several municipalities have provided extensive support.
- The employment of locally based coordinators to promote and implement the project.

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**Project VS2**

**Topic:** Indigenous part-time retail traineeships

**Location:** 8 rural sites

**Number of students:** 30

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to provide modules associated with a Traineeship in Retail to ‘at risk’ Year 9 Indigenous students in order that they would complete Part A of the Traineeship and develop pathways to employment.

**Activity**

Expressions of interest were sought from schools with large Aboriginal enrolments in three school directorates.

School-based support teams, consisting of people such as Aboriginal Education Assistants and careers teachers, were formed in the schools involved.

A camp was held at the end of 1998 which introduced students to the retail industry and to audiographics (the technology combining computer graphics and teleconferencing used for delivering the course).
Work placements were arranged (one day per week; 60 hours in total). Placements are coupled with work on workplace competency manuals to give students exposure to all aspects of retail operations.

TAFE teachers delivered the course using audiographics.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in Year 9 who successfully complete schooling and/or who articulate to further education and training and/or employment within the project timeline as compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at the same or similar sites

**Result:** not yet available. However, to date:

— at site 1: three students began, one relocated, two did not return to school in 1999.
— at site 2: one student began, then left to enrol in TAFE clerical.
— at site 3: three students began, two completed the program, and both at TAFE. One left the program but is still at school.
— at site 4: two students completed phase A, both are still at school, both were offered part-time work.
— at site 5: three students started, one relocated, two left school. Both lived at a distance from the school.
— at site 6: two students started, both left the program, one stayed at school, one left.
— at site 7: two students started, both left the program but are still at school.
— at site 8: two students started and both completed the program, both are still at school and doing phase B of the retail program.

In summary, six students have completed the program to date (one more than the target) and all six have been offered part-time work at their work placement. All are committed to going on to Year 12. Three of the students who did not complete have gone on to TAFE.

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Enrolment and completion data.

**Analysis of project performance**

This program assisted students from relatively isolated locations who had learning difficulties, poor literacy and numeracy skills and some who were very reserved and withdrawn from the social aspects of school and their communities.
All students completing the retail program said that they were proud of their achievement. Students also commented that the experience of the technology they had been using had made them more confident. The environment has also provided encouragement to students to be in contact with employers and TAFE officers. Strong support has been generated from within the Aboriginal and wider communities and the schools participating in the program.

Factors in success

- ‘Learning to use audiographics was a thrill for all students and they mastered the technology very quickly. This assisted with boosting confidence and communication.
- ‘The invaluable role played by support people in the schools, who were trusted by students. Support staff have been very important to the students continuing with the program, as support staff have been either in the school or from the Aboriginal community. Students at this age need advice from adults that they can trust and the program had recognised this.
- ‘All schools that took part in the program were very supportive in organising support staff and timetables for students.
- ‘TAFE teachers have been very good with students, making allowances and being very supportive given that it has been taught across considerable distances. They have used flexible teaching styles to assist students who have run into difficulties.
- ‘The schools and TAFE working together where students have literacy and numeracy difficulties.
- ‘Most students don’t have to leave the school grounds to have the program delivered. This was also a plus for the schools as the support was within easy reach of the students.’

Less successful factors

- The program had some early delays because of the need to develop infrastructure to support the use of audiographics.
- There were some instances where the retailers didn’t differentiate work placement from school work experience.

Sustainability

‘As in most small communities, there are still many attitudes to change. But the retailers involved have been up to the challenge, hoping that the program will offer opportunities to these students and lead to better things in the town. Now that the program has been running for some time, other students want to participate.’
Project VS3
Topic: Targeting the retention of Indigenous students in Years 9 and 10
Location: 11 sites in rural areas
Number of students: 112

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to engage students in programs that involve a range of ‘hands-on’ accredited learning in a vocational setting through flexible delivery in parallel with their traditional schooling.

Activity
Targeted Year 9 students were provided with about 100 hours of vocational learning at a TAFE campus for a half a day a week to meet course and Board of Studies requirements. All students participated in a generic ‘Work Skills Module’, a course that allows for a range of vocational emphases (i.e., a TAFE module that equates to Level 1 in the Australian Qualifications Framework).

However, while there was a common framework, each campus tended to focus on a particular vocational area — e.g., one emphasised arts and culture whilst another specialised in carpentry and joinery. In addition, Indigenous people with relevant skills from the local and wider community were brought in to support the project wherever possible.

Within the TAFE environment students were provided with a range of hands-on activities, and each group had an Indigenous facilitator/ mentor.

Early in the project a Steering Committee was established to monitor the project, a project coordinator was appointed and a four-day intensive training program was conducted for campus coordinators, all of whom are Indigenous and fulfil a mentoring as well as a teaching role.

A three-day camp for all the students involved in the project was conducted at a Sport and Recreation Centre. The main theme for the camp was cultural awareness, and staff from the centre along with project facilitators conducted a series of cultural respect programs. An evaluation of this experience indicated outcomes such as:

• increased understanding of the local Aboriginal community and the aspirations of people working within their culture;
• broader local network established;
• emerging Aboriginal role models introduced; and
• further development of self esteem, and team building.
Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in Year 9 who successfully complete schooling and/or who articulate to further education and training and/or employment within the project timeline as compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at the same or similar sites

Results: not yet available. The second round of statistics has been collected from the schools on the class groups and control group retention within education, training and/or employment. Attendance and discipline referrals will be collated for the end of 1999.

Of the 112 students that started in July 1998:
— 70 are continuing with the program
— 30 (including students from a discontinued site) are no longer attending but are still at their own school, have moved to another school or have gone into other training
— eight have left school
— four have not attended either school or the project programs.

Analysis of project performance
Factors in success
• The involvement of Indigenous people in running the project, and especially the student programs in schools.
• The focus on ‘hands-on’ activity so that the learning was not just like classroom learning at school.
• The provision of an adult learning environment where there was also substantial support for the students.
• The concentrated focus on cultural awareness and self esteem in the project, including at the three day camp.
• The engagement of students in work experience programs.
• The close liaison between staff in this and other related IESIP projects.

Less successful factors
• Staff changes that occurred and their impact.
• ‘Sometimes Friday afternoon could be a headache.’

Sustainability
In May the principals and contact staff of participating schools were asked for qualitative evaluations in preparation for the final report and to indicate their support for a continuation of the program until the end of the school year 1999. The response was very positive from all schools. Proposals were submitted for
further funding to extend the project. The success of this proposal has led to further funding from VEGAS, IESIP and the TAFE Institute.

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**Project VS4**

**Topic:** Introduction to VET for Year 9 and 10 students  
**Location:** urban  
**Number of students:** 15

### Summary of intentions and activity

**Intentions**

The project set out to introduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to a range of VET opportunities and thereby assist them to prepare an individual action plan aligned to a preferred career pathway.

**Activity**

The project has provided an expansion of an existing intervention program of Open Days which target and promote opportunities for Aboriginal students in Joint Secondary Schools TAFE (JSSTAFE) courses.

Students were given a tour of College training sections combined with an opportunity to participate in a variety of hands-on workshops.

The Open Days were followed by a series of focus groups which provided an informal opportunity for students to discuss, explore, identify and share their experiences achieved through personal work, leisure and life experiences. Focus groups and individual student interviews at each target school provided data on a variety of pathways and interests. A pro forma (in the format of a standard resume) was used to document the outcomes of interviews. These were typed and distributed to students who were encouraged to update them throughout the duration of the project.

A camp was conducted where Year 10 students enrolled and participated in an amended version of the Focus on Skills course.

Places were secured for 7 out of 20 students eligible to undertake JSSTAFE studies in 1999.

### Project performance

**Performance targets and results**

- Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in target group who successfully complete schooling and/or who articulate to further education and training and/or employment within the project timeline as compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at the same or similar sites
Other performance targets set for the project were to:
- increase Koori enrolments in JSSTAFE Programs;
- increase enrolments in Aboriginal course provision; and
- increase school retention rates in South Western Sydney.

Results

The project failed to increase the number of Indigenous students enrolled in JSSTAFE programs. There were 32 Indigenous student enrolments in 1998 compared to 24 in 1999.

While 1999 Indigenous enrolments in courses for Semester 1 number 575, the project is confident of improving on the total enrolments figure for 1998 (930) given the number of Aboriginal courses to run, coupled with Indigenous mainstream enrolments for Semester 2.

Data is still to be received on school retention rates.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success
- The flexibility of teachers who organised the camp for students and modified the course content and pedagogy to suit different learning styles and to support personal development and growth.
- The location of the camp in a culturally-appropriate environment which provided an alternative setting to school.
- Work with parents and the community to raise awareness of education and the identification of an individual career pathway.
- The establishment of an Institute Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee to link to the local Indigenous community.

Less successful factors
- A lack of creativity in some modules regarding alternative and more innovative delivery methods that take account of Aboriginal teaching and learning styles.
- A lack of awareness amongst students and their parents of JSSTAFE programs.
- Disappointing attendance at some Open Days due to a range of factors.

Project VS5

**Topic:** Targeting Year 10 ‘at risk’ Aboriginal students for vocational training

**Location:** two rural high schools supported by a local TAFE Institute

**Number of students:** 15–20
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
Provision of support to Indigenous students, in the form of vocational training with local business and community work placements, to encourage continued participation in education or training.

Activity
The TAFE component was run face-to-face, one day a week for 12 weeks and focused on a range of employment related issues.

Students visited a local business to view daily operations, complete a worksheet and engage in some hands-on activity.

Students attended work placements one day a week for five weeks. Prospective host employers were contacted and provided with an information kit. Visits were made to the work placements by the Project Coordinator to monitor progress and employer reaction.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in target group who successfully complete schooling and/or who articulate to further education and training and/or employment within the project timeline as compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at the same or similar sites

Result: At the commencement of the project there were 12 students enrolled. One student obtained full-time employment shortly after the project commenced, another two left half-way through. Of the nine students that completed the project:
— five have returned to school
— two have recently left
— one is completing her studies elsewhere
— one is enrolled in a TAFE course in the trade area
— three obtained part-time employment at their work placements.

Analysis of project performance
Factors in success
• The organisation of productive and valuable work placements for all participants.
• The positive spur to the community arising from the fact that three students gained employment from their work placements (a ‘break through’).
Sustainability

The students recommended that a similar project is run on a yearly basis. Their teachers and employer participants have made a number of suggestions of relatively minor changes. These recommendations are under consideration and project personnel are hoping that the course will be offered next year.

Project VS6

**Topic:** Participation of Aboriginal students in part-time apprenticeships  
**Location:** rural  
**Number of students:** 8–10 adult trainees working with groups of 10 or more students

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project was designed to promote structured vocational training to Indigenous secondary school students through the establishment of supportive relationships between students and a group of adult trainees (in the context of a structured program), and by provision of a range of work site visits and vocational work experience opportunities.

**Activity**

Liaison occurred with the Department of Education and Training to gain approval to enter and work with students in schools. Schools were offered the opportunity to participate, and consultation occurred with local Aboriginal communities to gain their support.

A team of Aboriginal young adults, who were themselves undertaking a traineeship in tourism and marketing, was assembled to assist the project coordinator in conducting the in-school sessions for the program. They developed supportive relationships with the Indigenous students of the three secondary schools with a view to facilitating their transition from school to training and work. All students were interviewed and learning profiles established for each.

Regular timetabled sessions were held at each high school. Activities such as studying Koori culture and the life stories of successful Kooris, relevant team building games and excursions were included to develop rapport and a genuine interest among the students in the project. At least ten school students participated in each session at each of the schools.

Students were provided with access to computers and information technology. The project staff negotiated with a company undergoing an upgrade of its computing equipment and it agreed to supply the replaced computers to the
What works?

Indigenous students. Community assistance has been sought to help with installation of the computers in the students’ homes and encourage students to use them.

Work experience placements were negotiated with school careers advisers and conducted.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in target group who successfully complete schooling and/or who articulate to further education and training and/or employment within the project timeline as compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at the same or similar sites

Results: The project is not complete. However, progress to date suggests that the targets will be substantially exceeded. Approximately 34 Indigenous students will have up to two work experience placements during this phase of the project. Attendance at the sessions has been excellent, and there is evidence of positive attitudinal changes towards school in many students.

Analysis of project performance
Factors in success
• The fact that the project sought and gained local community support and delivered the project in a culturally-appropriate way.
• The positive relationships developed between project staff and employers and the close contact maintained between them.
• The support provided by the mature-age trainees to the Indigenous school students along with the individual attention these students received.

Project VS7
Topic: Local vocational education and intensive support arrangements to increase secondary retention
Location: rural
Number of students: about 50

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project set out to reduce the drop-out rate for Indigenous students, so that more would stay on to complete their Year 10 School Certificate, by engaging them in vocational activities and providing them with appropriate levels of support to keep them in the system until more options become available in Year 11 and beyond.
Activity
The project was conducted at four sites for groups of 10–15 Year 9/10 students, and in each case had the same four components:
• industry workshops and visits (completed Term 4 1998);
• vocational opportunity workshops (completed Term 4 1998);
• skill assessment (literacy and numeracy skills and career interests), and development of individual transition plans (commenced late in 1998 and concluded for most students by early Term 2 1999); and
• intensive support arrangements through mentoring (local area coordinators have been promoting the interests of students, individually and collectively, within schools and the community during 1999).

Students were placed into a range of individually appropriate vocational education and/or training opportunities during 1999, each being relevant to the student’s individual transition plan.

Work Education classes were funded at two school sites to support students not yet ready to undertake industry-specific training in order to assist students to refine their options and improve work readiness skills. A number of workshops were held for students in another site for the same purposes.

Targeted literacy and numeracy support programs were put in place for students with skill shortfalls relevant to their chosen career pathways. These were supported by school staff, local area coordinators and community members.

A number of students with potential for career development in sport were supported in improvement of their skills — through attendance at training camps and through negotiated ‘work experiences’ with Indigenous sports people in the local area.

A camp/conference for all students, local coordinators, school and department personnel and selected school support staff focused on developing and refining career choice and job seeking skills; vocational training, education and employment options; team-building and self esteem workshops and activities and an evaluation of the program by students.

Project performance
Performance targets and results
— Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in target group who successfully complete and/or articulate to further education and training and/or employment compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at same or similar sites.
Target: 80% retention, and positive comparison with control group
What works?

Results:
Of the 60 students beginning the program, 48 remain.
Of the twelve who have left the program, three have moved out of the area, one has semi-permanent employment, and one is in a full-time TAFE program. The rest (7) are in neither employment nor education/training.
This is an 80% retention rate (although this would be lower if poor attendance patterns were included in the calculation). The control group of similar non-Indigenous students started with 45 students. In total 26 out of the original 45 students remain at school (58% retention).

Analysis of project performance
Factors in success
- The partnership developed between schools, TAFE and the local VET in Schools Committee.
- The development of individual transition plans and intensive support arrangements for students during their VET experience.
- Promotion of the individual and collective interests of students by local area coordinators in schools and the community.

Sustainability
An external evaluator has been employed to undertake a full evaluation of the program following consultation with other relevant parties. The objective is to identify the extent to which the opportunities this program has provided can be delivered within current resourcing.

Project VS8
Topic: Flexible VET delivery
Location: 8 rural sites
Number of students: about 60

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project set out to provide attainable, nationally-recognised VET to Years 9 and 10 students in rural and isolated schools in a culturally-inclusive form in order to increase:
- the retention rate of Aboriginal students;
- levels of participation and attendance of Aboriginal students; and
- students’ self esteem, motivation and confidence.
Activity

The schools involved were notified of funding for VET, via their District Offices. An initial meeting of the Aboriginal Rural Training Program Coordinator and staff took place with Principals, Careers Advisers, interested school staff, community members and students to explain the program and its aims. One site was located within a juvenile justice centre.

An orientation visit to the training college was conducted, along with individual analyses of students’ needs and interests prior to enrolment. These analyses were processed and results sent to schools.

The modules offered after consultation with schools were related to: farm tractor operation, motor cycle operation, small motors, first aid, farm welding, stock horses, and sheep handling in yards. Most were undertaken at the College schools with students living on campus during one-week training blocks. Training also occurred on-site at rural properties in close proximity to the various schools.

The course has subsequently been evaluated.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students in target group who successfully complete and/or articulate to further education and training and/or employment compared with ‘at risk’ non-Indigenous students at same or similar sites.

Targets:

— 90% attendance rates during training and 90% completion rate
— Apparent increase in self esteem, motivation and confidence levels

**Results:** These data are preliminary and do not include some modules currently being provided. Indications are that these will produce success rates at least as high as those already reported.

The completion rate was 85%, and the average attendance rate was 86%. Some increase in attendance rates between 1998 and 1999 was reported by the three schools providing such data.

**Analysis of project performance**

The program provided the first opportunity for the majority of students to be involved with rural-specific VET.

Attendance and completion rates were a reflection of increased motivation and confidence levels. Other qualitative outcomes were significant.
What works?

Factors in success
• The program engendered belonging, working as a team and group learning.
• For some rural and isolated schools, training was able to be delivered at the school or a nearby site to overcome the problem of distance from the College.
• The modules lent themselves to the integration of literacy and numeracy were therefore of increased relevance to students.
• The culturally-inclusive nature of the courses.
• There were good relationships between community, school and college and the school staff and community were supportive.
• Good training methodology was applied, and trainers used flexible teaching styles and responsive strategies.
• Training environments were comfortable and functional and included good facilities.
• The modules were practical and included ‘hands-on’ activities with tractors, bikes, horses, sheep, etc.
• The wide variety of modules offered satisfied the choices of the students.
• The program engendered belonging and working as a team.

Less successful factors
• Previous negative learning experiences meant for some that ‘work’ was only done in the classroom rather than in a fun way.
• Tyranny of distance for some schools: a full day to get to the College.
• Schools will always have some Indigenous students who move to be with relations and this impacts on possible attendance and completion levels.
• In some cases peer pressure came from non-Indigenous students who wished to be involved in the program.

Sustainability
The program requires on-going funding. Extension of the program over a two to three year period would:
• allow fine tuning for more effective delivery;
• give more substantive quantitative and qualitative outcomes with regards to the programs intentions;
• meet the needs and expectations of Indigenous students, community members and school staff who have requested program availability for 2000; and
• be cost effective in terms of on-going delivery with an established and existing structure of relationships between the various stakeholders.
Project VS9

**Topic:** Strengthening teaching and learning practices (VET in schools)

**Location:** provincial city with students from remote areas

**Number of students:** 35

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**

The project set out to expand the range of VET options offered to older students.

**Activity**

Students enrolled in the following pre-vocational modules: motor mechanics, welding, office skills, art, fabric design, tourism, food production, wood technology, child care, music, media, rural training, ranger work, information technology and garment-making.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Proportion of students participating in pre-vocational courses linked to accredited vocational education.

**Target:** 70% of eligible students (from a base of 1 of 35 students)

**Result:** 100% of eligible students

**Analysis of project performance**

‘The evolution of the pre-vocational training program has had a significant impact on the future direction for some students and is seen as a valuable addition to the school’s academic program. Thirty students completed one or more accredited modules. Anecdotal evidence indicates that a number of students have gone on to employment in areas related to their study.’

**Less successful factors**

‘A high incidence of student movement in and out of the school, and an intake of new students each term, particularly at the lower academic level of the school, is characteristic of this school. This creates difficulties.’

**Sustainability**

‘It is planned to continue the pre-vocational training program and to further develop it in the future through the IESIP Supplementary Recurrent Assistance program.’
What works?

Project VS10
Sector: secondary
Topic: VET block release opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 10–12 in remote and rural communities
Location: six remote communities
Number of students: not available

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
This project was intended to provide access to vocational education and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in relatively isolated communities through block release to work placements in regional centres or by other suitable means.

Its specific aims included exploring options for:

* providing access to a nationally-recognised credential;
* increasing awareness and understanding of VET activities and training and employment opportunities;
* improving employment prospects; and
* enhancing self esteem and confidence, especially with relation to the world of work.

Activity
Modules/courses for delivery were chosen based on student interest, employment opportunities in local communities and availability of suitable providers. Some sites provided additional preparatory courses in literacy in SAE and numeracy to enable students to access the modules/courses chosen.

At site 1, 12–15 students were offered modules in horticulture, catering/hospitality, art, construction and business administration. At site 2, a program to provide Certificate Level I (rural studies, building and construction, pre-vocational engineering and basic office skills) had commenced in 1996. The IESIP SRP enabled enrolment to expand to 18 students and helped with work placement. Two students have apprenticeships as a result of their involvement and general attendance is reported to have improved markedly.

At site 3 an existing program was also expanded and now includes horticulture, home economics, band music, constriction and landscaping. At site 4 the possibility of running some VET modules through access to a locally-owned property was explored. Site 5 ran modules in manual arts, art, computing and home economics. The first two have been successful; some
difficulties have been experienced with the latter two. The sixth site has decided to offer a program of modules including hand and power tool operation, welding, childcare, office training and ranger training. There will be staged implementation of these modules and, to meet the problems associated with access to trainers, adult community members are being trained to enable them to be accredited.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (15–18 years) in target schools who compete accredited VET modules/courses

Baseline: estimated at less than 25%

Target: 60% completion rate

**Results:** most sites reported attainment of this target, with some sites reporting a completion rate of 100%.

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (15–18 years) in target schools who articulate to further accredited education and training (and/or employment) within three months of program completion

**Results:** not yet available

Measures used to establish baselines and improvement

Completion data

**Analysis of project performance**

There was a range of additional positive outcomes from this project including greatly extending the range of experiences of many of the students involved, significant improvements in levels of motivation, the encouragement of teamwork and, in some cases, these students becoming role models for younger students.

**Factors in success**

• Level of school and community support.

• Development of networks across service providers to maximise opportunities for students.

• The support received in some areas from local business and the partnerships developed between schools and these businesses.

• The definition provided by goals and targets provided a clear direction and gave the project an impetus it otherwise may not have had.
What works?

Less successful factors

- A major difficulty was finding VET modules and courses which could be accessed by students with comparatively low levels of literacy in SAE and numeracy ability.
- Length of time required to complete modules because of poor literacy and numeracy levels of those enrolled.
- Cost of work placements outside of the local community. The CDEP is the major (and in some cases the only) employer at most of the home sites of students where this project occurred. CDEP is not an accredited employer for work placements and thus, in many instances, students have to travel elsewhere for on-the-job training increasing the likelihood of them dropping out.
- Lack of qualified trainers and facilities as well as suitable work placements and role models in such isolated communities, compounded by a lack of accommodation for visiting trainers.

Sustainability

The activities of the project will not be sustainable without additional funding. Investigation of possible sources is proceeding.

Project VS11

Topic: Indigenous education and training pathways program

Location: rural (21 schools in the region serviced by the coordinating TAFE College)

Number of students: approx. 250 students

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to improve the retention rates of Indigenous students in Years 10–12 through the provision of a program that would enhance knowledge and skills appropriate to various career options. The project was designed to enable students to make informed decisions about their educational and vocational pathways, while providing relevant information about New Apprenticeships, TAFE courses and higher educational programs.

Activity

Curriculum modules aimed at improving individual planning, choice of possible career options, gathering of information related to students’ needs and interests were developed and trialed.
Project officers liaised with schools to gain their involvement and support and conducted student interviews for selection purposes and administered questionnaires to gather the information noted above.

Relevant material was posted on an Internet site for students to access.

**Project performance**

**Performance targets and results**

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (Years 10–12) in target group who successfully complete current year of schooling compared with non-Indigenous students in same or similar sites

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students (Years 10–12) in target group who articulate to further accredited education and training (and/or employment) within the project timeline compared with non-Indigenous students in same or similar sites.

**Results:** The project will not be complete until the end of this year. However, nearly 200 students have enrolled. Five of the students have already gained employment.

**Measures used to establish baselines and improvement**

Retention and articulation data.

Level of student interest recorded through enrolment and participation

Improvement was also measured in terms of achieving nominated outcomes such as getting material from the Internet, obtaining the required number of Indigenous role models, etc. Targets have been achieved in these areas.

**Analysis of project performance**

One measure of achievement is the level of student interest generated. Fourteen students were interviewed at one school, yet 22 enrolled because of word-of-mouth influence. However, at another site only 5 out of 11 students interviewed enrolled.

**Factors in success**

- The use of Indigenous role models and the development of information about them for inclusion online, plus the fact that the occupations chosen arose from the interests identified by the students themselves.
- The development of the Australian Job Guide section of the program which highlighted job vacancies throughout the nation on a daily basis, and encouraged students to consider other potential career paths.
**What works?**

Less successful factors

- The problems experienced with the timeline attached to the project and the fact that it didn’t mesh neatly with the school year and associated planning cycles.
- A range of problems experienced at the individual school level including such factors as inflexible school timetables and a lack of support amongst some staff.
- The sheer size of the project and lack of sufficient staff to operate it.

Sustainability

‘We strongly recommend that this pathways program be sustained and expanded into a broader geographical domain. There are limited sources of information available to Indigenous students and this project, which promotes powerful, identifiable and accessible pathways into employment avenues should be incorporated into school curricula nationally.’
Getting Ready for Work: VET in colleges

Project V1

Topic: College Elders
Location: rural
Number of students involved: 38

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project employed college Elders to promote Aboriginal culture through contribution to courses and modules, and through participation in decision making and future planning for the college through staff and management meetings.

Activity
Elders have been involved in accredited VET studies such as Developing an Aboriginal Perspective, Understanding Aboriginal Issues, Bush Foods, and Health and the Ageing Process. They have contributed talks on such topics as — living on a Mission, the importance of family and extended family networks, the Protection Board and its policies, the impact of assimilation policy and the generation of stolen children.

Elders also have been involved in meetings with relation to day-to-day decision making as well as future college directions, and they were the catalyst behind the planning of Cultural Study Week, involving students in first hand experience of their history through exploring art sites, artefact scatters and bora grounds.

Project performance

Performance targets and results
— Proportion of Indigenous students completing VET modules.
Baseline: 70%
Target: 75%

Results: no formal data are available. Observations suggest that students gained increased confidence and higher self esteem through this type of contact with Elders.

Analysis of project performance
A key element in the success of the project has been the demonstration by Elders of their support for and approval of the college’s activities, which assists with community support and general credibility. Students gained increased confidence and self esteem through this type of contact with Elders, as well as a raised awareness of Aboriginal history, which has supported the development of cultural pride.
In combination, these factors contributed to improvements in motivation, attendance and module and course completion rates.

Less successful factors
Coordinating the project was difficult at times because of the age and frailty of the Elders, and the need to fit into the time frames for subject areas. Greater flexibility is needed in the design and delivery of programs.

Sustainability
The Elders will continue their involvement via workshops, guest speaking on culture-based subjects and cultural awareness. Due to financial restraints, however, involvement will be dictated by the availability of funds and/or voluntary input provided by the Elders.

Project V2

**Topic:** Education Delivery Practices  
**Location:** Rockhampton  
**Number of students involved:** 14 (with a turnover of 2, thus 16 in all)

**Summary of intentions and activity**

**Intentions**
To project set out to increase the number of Indigenous students completing an accredited pre-employment VET modules in Construction Fitout and Finish while also improving literacy and numeracy levels.

The project was designed in the context of:

- a shortage of skilled construction workers in the local area;
- a need to assist students to develop basic skills and technical knowledge to access employment in the industry; and
- a belief that students would more readily acquire the skills as well as improved literacy and numeracy if the course was practically focused and linked to a site of cultural significance to the community.

**Activity**
Students were provided with pre-employment training in the nationally registered RTP – Construction (Fitout and Finish) program, as well as Literacy, Numeracy and Cultural Studies. The project developed a strong partnership with a relevant Group Training Company primarily to ensure that local council requirements could be met.
**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students who receive credentials in an accredited VET course/modules cf. non-Indigenous students in similar courses/modules

Target: 75%

**Results:**

100% of students completed at least one module of all modules undertaken, 30% of students completed all outcomes designed for them.

The majority of students who did not complete the modules found employment. By the end, 60% of students had gained some form of employment in the industry.

There were two withdrawals from the course due to students gaining employment. Their places were taken by two additional late-starters who completed the majority of learning outcomes.

Approximately 50% of students successfully completed all learning outcomes in the Literacy and Numeracy component of the course and a further 25% completed around half the learning outcomes. The remaining 25% did not complete any learning outcomes, largely due to lack of attendance in this part of the course.

**Measures to establish baselines and improvement**

Students’ progress was mapped throughout the program using a competency log book. Since the focus of attention was employability, progress was measured in terms of employment outcomes.

Students were tested at the start of the course to determine their literacy and numeracy levels and benchmarks were developed related to the achievement of specific learning outcomes. Students who achieved all outcomes attended over 70% of classes.

**Analysis of project performance**

The project has demonstrated that:

- direct on-the-job training is more effective than learning in a classroom for many Indigenous students — especially those with very low literacy and numeracy levels who experience substantial difficulty in the classroom setting;
- incorporating literacy and numeracy lessons directly in the construction outcomes helps students to realise the need for these skills in the workplace and encourages attendance; and
- involvement in a community project stimulates interest, enthusiasm and pride.
What works?

Factors in success
Critical to achievement of targets was the delivery of most of the program in an off-campus environment involving ‘real life’ activities in a place of community significance. Associated with this was the preparedness of the TAFE teachers to teach off-campus and the support of key partners involved in the project.

Less successful factors
While the literacy and numeracy outcomes exceeded initial expectations, they were seen as disappointing, especially since achievement was so directly related to attendance. It is believed that this small group of students did not see the relevance of improving their literacy and numeracy.

Sustainability
The broad approach will be used in planning similar programs through the TAFE. There is some concern, however, that the absence of funding in the future may be an impediment.

Project V3
Topic: Adult literacy for Indigenous staff in the Queensland Mining Industry
Location: 4 remote and geographically-dispersed mine sites
Number of students involved: the project is still in the phase of developing and trialing programs to train trainers

Summary of intentions and activity
Intentions
The project initially set out to provide programs to develop literacy and basic education skills for Indigenous people employed in the mining industry. This goal was refined subsequently, and the project focused on:

• developing an holistic, cultural awareness-based approach to the development of literacy, numeracy and other training programs for Indigenous peoples employed in the mining industry and the broader local community;

• promoting more positive interaction and communication between the mining industry and Indigenous communities; and

• delivery of the Certificate III Volunteer Tutoring Program to community members interested in facilitating cross-cultural awareness workshops and Indigenous mine employees who might seek to support others wanting to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
The project arose from:

- initiatives already undertaken which were aimed at meeting Indigenous needs in the mining sector, and the desire of the industry to develop a more comprehensive, industry-based adult literacy and basic education program for these workers;
- the project organisers’ commitment to building capacity in the local community through the development of a locally-based cultural awareness program and its delivery by local Indigenous people who have been appropriately trained for the task; and
- a desire to improve relations and interaction between the mining industry and Indigenous communities at operating sites.

Activity

A generic training framework was developed and tailored to meet the needs of communities and the mining company in each site. The framework consists of a four-day workshop program — two days on cultural awareness developed and delivered by the local community, and two days on literacy and numeracy teaching skills development for trainers — aligned to the relevant National Training Package.

A generic cross cultural awareness program has also been developed and trialed through workshops, and a peer tutor network is being established. A degree of training has commenced, including training of a core group of Indigenous peoples in the communities as literacy support people and/or group facilitators.

Project performance

Performance targets and results

- Number and proportion of Indigenous students who successfully complete accredited VET adult literacy and basic education program, compared with non-Indigenous students in similar course/modules

Results: not yet available. The training is currently under way.

Measures to establish baselines and improvement

A survey was developed and implemented by key Indigenous people at each of the mine sites to provide the baseline data which led the project to focus more clearly on the cultural awareness programs as the first step. Participants in the cross-cultural awareness workshops were also surveyed and responded favourably to the approach.
Analysis of project performance
The unique situation of this project has made it difficult for the targets to be met in the timeline available. The project first had to break down barriers that had become institutionalised and to deal with a highly politicised atmosphere. It was realised that any successful program would be dependent on local community development and ownership. Thus the precise nature of the program has taken some time to resolve.

Factors in success
The use of a cross-cultural awareness approach to the development of literacy amongst Indigenous people within the mining industry. This has led, among other things, to greater awareness of the sorts of changes the industry itself may need to make to increase employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

The development and delivery of the Certificate III Volunteer Tutor program, an extension of the original project design, focused on community literacy and incorporating a peer tutor network.

The willingness of Indigenous people in the industry to become involved in the project either as tutors or students, as well as the level of support and input from the communities, mining staff and management.

Less successful factors
Within the twelve-month timeline, it was difficult to take adequate account of:
• the diversity of needs across the communities and the mining industry;
• the remoteness of the localities being served;
• the time required to negotiate cultural protocols; and
• the need to train Indigenous community members to facilitate the cross-cultural awareness program.

Sustainability
The project was designed with an eye to sustainability, which is why there was so much focus on building local capacity. This has been strengthened by the subsequent delivery of the Certificate III Volunteer Tutoring Program to community members and some Indigenous mine employees.

Project V4
Topic: Accounts and payroll training
Location: rural
Number of students involved: 14
Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions
The project set out to develop and deliver an accounts and payroll skills course that would enable Aboriginal people to gain office-based employment in the mining industry (in particular) rather than in unskilled labouring jobs.

Activity
An extensive consultation process was undertaken with potential students and communities prior to the commencement of the course. Course materials were developed specifically for the Aboriginal students in the area, and transport and child care requirements of students were also taken into account.

Extensive liaison was undertaken with CDEP communities to facilitate an effective student selection process. Course requirements were carefully explained to potential students prior to enrolment. Only students who were considered to possess the prerequisite education levels were encouraged to apply; i.e., a fairly strict screening process occurred, which is believed to have contributed to the success of the program. Student ages ranged from 17 to 40 years. The gender split was 45% male and 55% female.

Modules were developed and adapted from a full-time Diploma in Business Studies course offered in Perth. A focus for the development of the course was the use of up-to-date computer and software packages required by employers.

The program was delivered at a college where Aboriginal students had had a long association and with which they identified. Interest was also expressed by potential students from another geographic area. However, it proved too difficult logistically to provide the course on-site for this group at this time. Some of those students who initially enrolled in the course withdrew because of the distance between the two towns and the related transport difficulties.

Project performance

Performance targets and results
— Proportion of students completing VET modules.
Target: 65%

Result: Proportion of students assessed as competent against the criteria of individual modules ranged from 70% to 100%.

• Six students completed between one and ten modules.
• Three students completed 10 or more modules.
What works?

- Five students completed all modules and obtained the following qualifications:
  - Certificate II of Business (Payroll Clerk)
  - Certificate II of Business (Accounts Receivable and Payable)
  - Certificate III of Business.

Of the five students who completed all of the Certificate III in Business Studies, four have employment as follows:

- Co-ordinator of an Aboriginal community who, following course completion, was accepted as a mature age student in a university program;
- administrator at an Aboriginal Language Centre;
- receptionist for an Aboriginal Corporation and lecturing part-time at a TAFE College; and
- receptionist at a health organisation.

Two other participants who completed lower level studies were also successful in gaining employment.

The fact that some participants found employment outside the mining/resources industry was considered a satisfying result.

Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

A number of different staff were involved in delivery of elements of the course. All participating staff were made familiar with the expectations of students and the objectives of the course prior to commencement of the course. Student and staff relationships remained generally very good for the duration of the course.

Less successful factors

The course was planned to run over 17 weeks. However, due to a late start, it was completed over the 13-week period from 14 September to 11 December 1998. All staff and students agreed that the timeframe was insufficient given the complexity of some of the subjects.

Sustainability

To avoid swamping the market, the course will not be delivered again immediately in the same region. However, consideration is being given to delivery of the program in other relevant centres.
Getting to the End of the Sentence: Training in the justice system

Project JS1

**Sector:** Vocational Education and Training (VET)

**Topic:** Flexible VET delivery to Indigenous Correctional Centre inmates

**Location:** remote

**Number of students involved:** around 10 at any time, a total of about 25

### Summary of intentions and activity

#### Intentions

The project set out to:

- provide flexible, culturally inclusive VET for Indigenous inmates of a large Correctional Centre, in particular, to provide the opportunity for inmates to complete nationally accredited modules from the Certificate II in Australian Land Conservation and Restoration traineeship;
- improve inmates’ literacy and numeracy skills through integration of literacy and numeracy with various modules;
- increase inmates’ chances of employment on release;
- facilitate inmates’ transition and resocialisation into the wider community;
- rehabilitate and restore Indigenous cultural sites, recognising Indigenous knowledge in the process; and
- respond to recommendations of the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.*

#### Activity

The existing Cultural Link program at the Correctional Centre provides for Indigenous inmates to spend time working at sites of significance to Indigenous people. This project added a training component so that inmates can complete nationally-accredited VET modules on-the-job. Initially, sites to be used were in a large National Park and, on arrival, inmates undertook a cultural awareness program relating to the land and local area.

The work is considered to be reparation and rehabilitation rather than punishment — an opportunity to contribute to the care of Aboriginal land and receive training at the same time.

Getting the project running involved consultation with a variety of groups including the training institution, the Correctional Centre, the National Parks Service, the Aboriginal owners of the land and local community members.

Each week, a group of about 10 inmates lives on-site in fully self-sufficient camping facilities. A Project Officer also lives on-site and is responsible for
coordination and liaison with various groups involved. He organises the training program, which includes areas such as fencing, power tool use, pathway construction, land rehabilitation, tractors and the like, and delivers some modules himself. The training institution provides other trainers who also live on site while they are providing training. Inmates travel to the College to participate in off-the-job, hands-on training modules while living nearby in a mobile camp.

**Project performance**

**Performance targets and results**

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students who successfully complete accredited VET course/modules within project timeline

Target: 85%

**Results:** Tractor Operation and Maintenance (7 enrolled) 100% completion; First Aid (12) 100% completion; Wire Fencing (15) 93% completion; Chainsaw Operation (7) 100%; Hand and Power Tools not yet complete.

Other indications of success include:

- continuing support from all agencies involved
- support from inmates themselves, in terms of the program’s contribution to their reparation and rehabilitation
- positive comment from Correction Centre and National Parks personnel, and
- the range of works undertaken at the National Park.

**Analysis of project performance**

**Factors in success**

- Embedding literacy and numeracy in VET modules rather than teaching these skills separately.
- Inmates visiting the College for one-week blocks of training, and working and socialising with College students, staff and the general public while living in the mobile camp off-campus has contributed significantly towards their resocialisation.
- Their visits to the College have included specific activities to raise the cultural awareness of College staff.
- Having trainers live on-site for the period of training. This allows for concentrated effort and learning, and compares favourably with ‘once a week’ training programs.
- The commitment and persistence of all involved.
- The fact that all activity is undertaken in consultation and collaboration with the Aboriginal owners of the land.
• The fact that inmates, although ‘confined’, are in an outdoor camp rather than a prison situation.

Less successful factors

Corrective Services rules and regulations impose unavoidable constraints on program planning and delivery.

The project was delayed due to difficulties in attracting a suitable Project Officer. There was a limited number of qualified applicants, which necessitated re-advertising. The number of applicants was limited because of the fact that the position was for twelve months only and is in an isolated location.

Sustainability

This project is extremely innovative and is addressing recommendations from the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Strong partnerships have been formed between Government Departments, Aboriginal communities, private sectors, universities and other educational institutions. An Indigenous post-graduate has been granted a scholarship to conduct research and evaluation of the program which is part of a Masters/Doctoral degree.

All stakeholders are supportive and committed to contributing to the sustainability of this project. Further funding is required to continue the program.

Project JS2

Sector: Vocational Education and Training

Topic: Flexible VET delivery to Indigenous bailed offenders

Location: an Aboriginal-owned rural property

Number of students involved: around 10 at any time, a total of about 15

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to:
• provide flexible, culturally inclusive VET for Indigenous bailed offenders. In particular, to provide the opportunity for bailed offenders to complete nationally accredited modules from the Certificate II in Rural Skills (Aboriginal Communities);
• improve bailed offenders’ literacy and numeracy skills through integration of literacy and numeracy with various modules;
• increase bailed offenders’ chances of employment on release;
What works?

- facilitate bailed offenders’ transition and resocialisation into the wider community; and
- respond to recommendations of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Activity

Bailed offenders from the Magistrate’s Court in question, in a rural town, have the opportunity to spend up to twelve months of their sentences at a Lifeskills Support Centre at an Aboriginal-owned rural station. To be able to do so, they are required to show a willingness to participate in the programs and the day-to-day work activities of a rural station.

This project added a training component so that bailed offenders could complete nationally-accredited VET modules on-the-job. Training to date has been mostly in pastoral skills but the project has extended this into ‘community engineering’ because a need for building and construction skills has been identified at the station. Several buildings are being renovated as part of the project.

The project involves collaboration between the training college, the Magistrate’s Court, the rural station and the local Aboriginal Corporation.

A group of about ten bailed offenders is on-site at any one time. A Project Officer coordinated activities, and trainers from the affiliated College live on-site while they are providing training. For some modules, bailed offenders are required to spend time at the College’s residential facility.

Project performance

Performance targets and results

— Number and proportion of Indigenous students who successfully complete accredited VET course/modules within project timeline

Target: 85%

Results: 100% completion of six VET modules from Certificate II Rural Skills (Aboriginal Communities)

Other indications of success include:

- improvement in participants’ self esteem;
- participant satisfaction;
- the contribution of funds for building materials by an Aboriginal organisation;
- positive comment from justice system and station personnel; and
- the range of work undertaken at the station.
Analysis of project performance

Factors in success

- Inmates visiting the College for one-week blocks of training, and working and socialising with College students, staff and the general public while living in the mobile camp off-campus has contributed significantly towards their resocialisation.

- Embedding literacy and numeracy in VET modules rather than teaching these skills separately.

- Having trainers live on-site for the period of training. This allows for concentrated effort and learning, and compares favourably with ‘once a week’ training programs.

- The commitment and persistence of all involved.

- The fact that bailed offenders, although ‘confined’, are in a facility owned and managed by Aboriginal people.

Sustainability

As for JS1.
What works?

Improving teacher’s level of cultural understanding

Sector: primary/secondary

Topic: Culturally-inclusive assessment of ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

Location: provincial city

Number of students involved: 52

Summary of intentions and activity

Intentions

The project set out to develop a culturally-sensitive assessment instrument of Indigenous students outside-school living skills.

‘When Indigenous students are unsuccessful in coping with the academic demands of school, there may be a tendency for their ability to be underestimated in formal assessment as a consequence of the use of culturally-inappropriate instruments, or to be underestimated informally by teachers who do not have the opportunity to observe the students coping successfully with the demands of everyday life. If teachers could be given information about the level of coping successfully outside of school that information may change their expectations and contain detail which provides ideas for helping students to achieve more in the classroom.’

Activity

An instrument similar to the Checklist of Adaptive Living Skills was developed with a focus on culturally-appropriate items. Two limitations were acknowledged: the accuracy of the information provided by the person completing the form (parents/caregivers); and developing an instrument which was long enough to give an accurate profile but short enough to be practical in terms of respondents’ willingness to participate.

Two workshops were held to discuss issues related to the task. The first came to some agreement about its nature; the second identified the broad areas of living skills which the instrument should cover and, in general terms, the content of each broad area.

A checklist was developed and trialed. The fourth draft was administered to five Indigenous parents and discussed with a different group of Indigenous parents and their high school age children. Modifications were made in response to comments received. After completion of the next draft the checklist was administered to 52 parents of students attending six high schools and two primary schools. In all cases the interview with parents was conducted by an Indigenous educator. Forty-nine of these students’ teachers provided feedback on the usefulness of the checklist information for their work with students.
The final version incorporates changes made as a result of this process, and contains 113 items related to family; cultural and spiritual understanding; daily living; communication; social skills; thinking skills; health; well being and safety; and employment.

A manual for use of the Checklist has also been prepared.

**Project performance**

Performance targets and results

— The number of Indigenous students in target schools with their outside-school living skills profile assessed in a culturally-inclusive, valid and reliable way, at the end of the project compared with at the beginning.

**Result:** 52 students or 100% of those targeted.

— The number and proportion of teachers of Indigenous students in target schools who show that information from the profile assessment is reflected in their teaching practice.

**Target:** 75%.

**Result:** Of 49 teachers who gave feedback, 31 (63%) reported changes to their work as a consequence of having received checklist information.

**Analysis of project performance**

Only nine of the teachers rejected the instrument and made it clear that they did not see any value in it. Another nine supported the instrument, but had experienced difficulties in using the information. Subsequent changes, including the development of the manual, could be expected to alleviate some of their difficulties.

**Sustainability**

Further trialing and use of the instrument has been recommended.
What works?
Appendices
What works?
Appendix One

A collection of relevant statistics

Introduction

Demographic data about the Indigenous population of Australia highlights the need for special attention to be given to Indigenous students if they are to receive opportunities for access to teaching and learning approaching those available to the vast majority of Australians, and if they are to be given the opportunity to fulfill their educational potential.

The following profile of the Indigenous population has been garnered mainly from the data collected in the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have been included in every Census since 1991. The Census provides a systematic collection of data which enable observations of changes over time. The data also enable the conditions of Indigenous people to be compared to those of the total Australian population.

Data on participation, progression and funding have been obtained from DETYA statistical reports. Attendance data have been extracted from a study by Dr Ken Rigby of the University of South Australia. Data on reading and writing standards of Year 3 and Year 5 students are from the Australian Council for Educational Research’s National School English Literacy Survey (NSELS) (1996).

The information available from these sources provides a basis for making judgements about the comparative disadvantage of Indigenous people. The data on educational participation show that the Indigenous population are still educationally disadvantaged in comparison to the remainder of the Australian population, although the trend data show improvements in both participation and education attainment in recent years.

1. Educational Attainment: Australia’s Indigenous and total population

The following table and figure indicate that, while there have been improvements in the number of Indigenous people with a qualification, there is still a significant difference between the proportion of qualified Indigenous people and the proportion of qualified non-Indigenous people.
### Table 1.1: Level of attainment, Indigenous and total persons aged 15 years and over, 1991 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher degree</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>190,840</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>190,840</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<td>Postgraduate degree (a)</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>183,087</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>183,087</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3,237</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1,076,934</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>1,076,934</td>
<td>7.7</td>
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<td>Undergraduate diploma</td>
<td>1,548</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,073</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>486,843</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>486,843</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate diploma</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2,624</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>359,701</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>359,701</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled vocational</td>
<td>5,859</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>9,605</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1,483,000</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>1,483,000</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational</td>
<td>2,842</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4,105</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>398,744</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>398,744</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total with qualification (b)</td>
<td>16,857</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>28,732</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>4,786,725</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>4,786,725</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not qualified or not stated (c)</td>
<td>142,778</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>8,887,177</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>9,129,564</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>9,129,564</td>
<td>65.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159,635</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>13,017,690</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>211,574</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>13,914,897</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ABS Census.

**Notes:**
(a) Postgraduate degree includes masters by coursework and postgraduate diplomas which are mainly vocationally orientated awards. Numbers for Indigenous persons (1991 and 1996), and Total persons (1996; ‘with qualifications’ and ‘not qualified or not stated’) have been calculated from percentages given in ABS publication (Cat. No. 2034.0). (b) Includes people whose level of qualification was inadequately described or not stated. (c) Includes people with a qualification completed in the equivalent of less than one full-time semester.

### Figure 1.1: Qualifications of people aged 15 years and over

![Graph showing qualifications of people aged 15 years and over](chart-url)
2. Participation in Education

Indigenous students attending educational institutions, as a proportion of total students attending educational institutions, increased at all levels in 1991 and again in 1996.

Table 2.1: Educational institution attended, all ages: 1986, 1991 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-school</th>
<th>Primary and infants</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>TAFE</th>
<th>University and other tertiary</th>
<th>Other educational institution</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>279,398</td>
<td>1,562,014</td>
<td>1,204,251</td>
<td>326,899</td>
<td>323,512</td>
<td>85,404</td>
<td>3,781,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous students</td>
<td>6,992</td>
<td>37,520</td>
<td>19,878</td>
<td>3,169</td>
<td>1,481</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>69,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous as a % of total students</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>271,611</td>
<td>1,619,031</td>
<td>1,171,025</td>
<td>428,248</td>
<td>539,264</td>
<td>123,411</td>
<td>4,152,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous students</td>
<td>8,073</td>
<td>40,534</td>
<td>19,721</td>
<td>5,486</td>
<td>3,308</td>
<td>1,585</td>
<td>78,707</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous as a % of total students</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>258,394</td>
<td>1,737,569</td>
<td>1,209,764</td>
<td>443,696</td>
<td>632,330</td>
<td>101,057</td>
<td>4,382,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous students</td>
<td>8,557</td>
<td>61,332</td>
<td>27,147</td>
<td>8,859</td>
<td>5,563</td>
<td>1,455</td>
<td>112,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous as a % of total students</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ABS Census and unpublished data.

Figure 2.1: Participation in full-time education, all ages
### Table 2.1a: Participation by school sector: 1986, 1991 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-school &amp; infants</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-school &amp; infants</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>6,992</td>
<td>37,520</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>279,398</td>
<td>1,562,014</td>
<td>1,204,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6,992</td>
<td>37,520</td>
<td>19,878</td>
<td>Total students (a)</td>
<td>279,398</td>
<td>1,562,014</td>
<td>1,204,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous people in age group for sector (b)</td>
<td>12,845</td>
<td>45,868</td>
<td>36,630</td>
<td>Total people in age group for sector (b)</td>
<td>466,484</td>
<td>1,854,511</td>
<td>1,581,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous participation % (c)</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>Participation % (c)</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8,073</td>
<td>40,534</td>
<td>19,721</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>271,611</td>
<td>1,619,031</td>
<td>1,171,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous students</td>
<td>8,073</td>
<td>40,534</td>
<td>19,721</td>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>271,611</td>
<td>1,619,031</td>
<td>1,171,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous people in age group for sector</td>
<td>15,259</td>
<td>54,042</td>
<td>35,250</td>
<td>Total people in age group for sector</td>
<td>483,955</td>
<td>1,946,186</td>
<td>1,497,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous participation %</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>Participation %</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>8,557</td>
<td>61,332</td>
<td>27,147</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>258,394</td>
<td>1,737,569</td>
<td>1,209,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous students</td>
<td>8,557</td>
<td>61,332</td>
<td>27,147</td>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>258,394</td>
<td>1,737,569</td>
<td>1,209,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous people in age group for sector</td>
<td>20,989</td>
<td>74,417</td>
<td>44,851</td>
<td>Total people in age group for sector</td>
<td>484,024</td>
<td>1,933,855</td>
<td>1,434,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous participation %</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>Participation %</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Indigenous student and total student numbers have been extracted from Table 2.1.

(b) The age of students has been determined from Census data. Students have been grouped on the assumption that at age 3–4 years they are eligible to attend pre-school; from age 5–12 years they are usually enrolled in K–Primary; and from age 13–18 they are usually enrolled in secondary school. (It should be borne in mind that these can only be approximations, in reality there is some overlapping of ages and sectors).

(c) The participation rate is the percentage of the population in the age groupings who are enrolled in the sector applicable to the age group.

### Figure 2.1a: Participation by school sector
Table 2.1b: Participation in tertiary education: 1986, 1991 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>TAFE Indigenous students (a)</th>
<th>TAFE Total students (a)</th>
<th>University and other tertiary Indigenous students</th>
<th>University and other tertiary Total students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986 (a)</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>38,783</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>116,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,367</td>
<td>55,584</td>
<td>1,046</td>
<td>216,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>74,231</td>
<td>1,236</td>
<td>224,799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indigenous people in age group for sector (b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>TAFE Indigenous students (a)</th>
<th>TAFE Total students (a)</th>
<th>University and other tertiary Indigenous students</th>
<th>University and other tertiary Total students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986 (a)</td>
<td>39,238</td>
<td>1,814,505</td>
<td>26,670</td>
<td>1,261,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>40,865</td>
<td>1,881,355</td>
<td>29,579</td>
<td>1,383,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>47,732</td>
<td>1,760,594</td>
<td>33,025</td>
<td>1,257,251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indigenous participation % (c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>TAFE Indigenous students (a)</th>
<th>TAFE Total students (a)</th>
<th>University and other tertiary Indigenous students</th>
<th>University and other tertiary Total students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986 (a)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Figures for University and other tertiary in 1986 include students enrolled in Colleges of Advanced Education.

(b) Indigenous student and total student numbers have been extracted from ABS Census data on students enrolled in full-time education. Indigenous students in TAFE includes all students in the 15–21 years age group. Indigenous students in University and other tertiary includes all students in the 17–21 years age group.

(c) Indigenous people and total people in age group for the sector has been determined from Census data.

(d) The participation rate is the percentage of the population in the age group who are enrolled in TAFE or University.

Figure 2.1b: Participation in tertiary education

![Graph showing participation in tertiary education from 1986 to 1996 for Indigenous TAFE, Total TAFE, Indigenous University and other tertiary, and Total University and other tertiary.]
There has been strong growth in Indigenous school enrolments since 1991. The rate of growth of Indigenous school enrolments has been much higher than the overall rate of growth of school enrolments. This may be partially explained by the age structure of the Indigenous population (see pp. 385–386), i.e. as the Indigenous population is much younger than the non-Indigenous population there is a growing proportion of Indigenous students coming of school age. Improved access for Indigenous students and improved funding for Indigenous education may also be factors in this higher rate of growth.

### Table 2.2: Indigenous Students in Schools, 1991, 1996 and 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indigenous students</th>
<th>Percentage increase in Indigenous students</th>
<th>Total enrolments</th>
<th>Percentage increase in total enrolments</th>
<th>Indigenous students as a proportion of total enrolments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>72,200</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,075,100</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>92,667</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>3,143,015</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>102,166</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>3,198,655</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ABS Census and Schools Australia.  
**Note:** Excludes part-time secondary school students.

### Figure 2.2: Increase in full-time Indigenous primary school students
The number of full-time Indigenous students, both in the primary and secondary school sectors, has grown significantly in the past three years.

**Table 2.3: Full-time Indigenous students in primary schools by level: 1996, 1997 and 1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>Yr1</th>
<th>Yr2</th>
<th>Yr3</th>
<th>Yr4</th>
<th>Yr5</th>
<th>Yr6</th>
<th>Yr7</th>
<th>Un-graded primary</th>
<th>Total primary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5,585</td>
<td>10,126</td>
<td>9,458</td>
<td>8,897</td>
<td>8,395</td>
<td>8,090</td>
<td>8,118</td>
<td>4,841</td>
<td>63,597</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>5,941</td>
<td>10,341</td>
<td>9,934</td>
<td>9,400</td>
<td>8,881</td>
<td>8,341</td>
<td>8,174</td>
<td>5,105</td>
<td>67,120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>6,067</td>
<td>10,908</td>
<td>10,431</td>
<td>10,011</td>
<td>9,497</td>
<td>8,873</td>
<td>8,390</td>
<td>5,192</td>
<td>70,539</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** National Report on Schooling in Australia, 1997, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and unpublished 1999 data.
What works?

The participation rates of Indigenous students in three key secondary school age groups (15, 16 and 17 years) are much lower than the participation rates for non-Indigenous students. At age 15 years the difference in participation is about 20% but this rises to more than 30% at age 16 and 17.

Table 2.4: Age participation rates, school students aged 15, 16 and 17 years, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Attending secondary school (,000)</th>
<th>Participation rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>214.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>183.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>187.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>143.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>146.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 2.3: Secondary school participation rates by age, 1996

Note: The age participation rate is the number of full-time students of a particular age expressed as a proportion of the estimated resident population of the same age. It indicates the proportion of the population who are still at school.
A significant number of Indigenous students do not complete the compulsory years of schooling. The Year 11 to 12 grade progression rates show that a considerably higher proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students leave school after commencing senior school studies.

**Table 2.5: Grade progression rates for Years 8–12, from 1996–97**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 8 to Year 9</th>
<th>Year 9 to Year 10</th>
<th>Year 10 to Year 11</th>
<th>Year 11 to Year 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>98.0%</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Report on Schooling in Australia, 1997 (MCEETYA).

**Figure 2.4: Grade progression rates for secondary school, Years 8–12**

**Note:** Grade progression describes the proportion of students in a grade who move on to the next grade the following year.
What works?

The Indigenous apparent retention rates to all three year levels improved between 1996 and 1997. However, the retention rates of Indigenous students to the senior years of secondary schooling are considerably lower than those for non-Indigenous students.

Table 2.6: Apparent retention rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, all schools, Years 10, 11 and 12, 1993–97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 2.5: Retention rates

Note: The apparent retention rate describes students who remain at school from the commencement of their secondary schooling through to Years 10, 11 and 12.
Indigenous student participation in VET has grown in the last 6 years, comprising 2.9% of all enrolments in 1998.

Table 2.7: Indigenous students in publicly funded VET, 1994–98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indigenous student enrolments in VET</th>
<th>% growth in Indigenous students in VET</th>
<th>Total student enrolments in VET</th>
<th>% growth in total students in VET</th>
<th>Indigenous as a proportion of total enrolments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>22,891</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1,117,939</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>32,315</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>1,354,579</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>44,400</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>1,535,200</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics, (NCVER).

Notes:

i. Although Indigenous people may be well represented in VET overall, they tend to be in lower level and shorter courses compared with non-Indigenous Australians. In 1997, about 28% of Indigenous enrolments were in AQF Certificate I and II courses, around 32% in AQF Certificate III and equivalent, and 11% in Diplomas and AQF Certificate IV and equivalent courses. By comparison, non-Indigenous enrolments were 13%, 25% and 23% respectively.

ii. A recent ACER analysis of participation of Indigenous youth in education and training suggests that the VET sector is to some extent serving different purposes for younger Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. For younger Indigenous Australians, VET is principally an alternative to schooling as a means for continuing education and training, while for younger non-Indigenous Australians it complements 12 years of schooling.

iii. There was an overall national increase in module completion rates from 64% in 1995 to 67% in 1997. This 3 percentage point increase represents an additional 10,072 modules successfully completed by Indigenous students in 1997, compared with 1995. Module completion rates for non-Indigenous students increased by 2% percentage points over the same period. Nevertheless, the proportions of Indigenous students completing VET modules remained between 13 to 15 percentage points below those of non-Indigenous students from 1995–97.
What works?

Indigenous higher education participation has improved significantly since 1981. In that year Indigenous students represented only 0.3% of all Australian higher education students; in 1998 there were 7,789 Indigenous students, comprising 1.3% of all students. Despite this increase, Indigenous people remain under-represented in higher education as they comprise approximately 1.7% of the population aged 15–64 (1996 Census).

Table 2.8: Indigenous students enrolled in higher education compared to total student enrolments, 1981–98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indigenous students</th>
<th>Five-yearly increase in Indigenous students (%)</th>
<th>Total student enrolments</th>
<th>Five-yearly increase in total student enrolments (%)</th>
<th>Indigenous students as a proportion of total enrolments (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>341,390</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1,933</td>
<td>126.3</td>
<td>393,734</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>4,807</td>
<td>148.7</td>
<td>504,880</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>6,956</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>580,906</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>7,789</td>
<td></td>
<td>599,670</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Selected Higher Education Student Statistics (DETYA).

Notes:

i. The typical level of study for Indigenous Australians in higher education is still lower than for non-Indigenous students.

ii. A comparison of participation rates for 15 to 19 year olds and 20 to 24 years olds shows that there is a greater tendency for Indigenous youth to delay entry to higher education.
## 3. Educational Outcomes and School Attendance

Approximately 70% of all students in Year 3 met the identified performance standards in reading and writing in ACER’s 1996 NSELS survey. Girls met the standards more often than boys (by 11 percentage points). Students from English language backgrounds met the standards more often than students from language backgrounds other than English. Fewer than 20% of students in the Special Indigenous Sample met the reading standards.

Table 3.1: Proportion of Year 3 students meeting national reading and writing standards, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage meeting Yr 3 reading standard</th>
<th>Percentage not meeting Yr 3 reading standard</th>
<th>Percentage meeting Yr 3 writing standard</th>
<th>Percentage not meeting Yr 3 writing standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main sample (total)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language background other than English (LBOTE)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language background</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High socio-economic status</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium socio-economic status</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low socio-economic status</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Indigenous sample</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ACER, 1966 National School English Literacy Survey.

**Figure 3.1a:** Percentage of students meeting Year 3 reading standard
What works?

Figure 3.1b: Percentage of students meeting Year 3 writing standard

![Bar chart showing percentage of students meeting Year 3 writing standard for various groups: All students, LBOTE, Low socio-economic status, Special Indigenous sample.]

Approximately 70% of all students in Year 5 met the identified performance standards in reading and writing. Only 23% of students in the Special Indigenous Sample met the standards.

Table 3.2: Proportion of Year 5 students meeting national reading and writing standards, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage meeting Yr 5 reading standard</th>
<th>Percentage not meeting Yr 5 reading standard</th>
<th>Percentage meeting Yr 5 writing standard</th>
<th>Percentage not meeting Yr 5 writing standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main sample (total)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language background other than English</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language background</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High socio-economic status</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium socio-economic status</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low socio-economic status</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Indigenous sample</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACER, 1966 National School English Literacy Survey.
Figure 3.2a: Percentage of students meeting Year 5 writing standard

Figure 3.2b: Percentage of students meeting Year 5 reading standard

Notes:

i. The reading and writing performances reported here are based on the results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey conducted in government and non-government schools in all States and Territories of Australia over a 6-week period in August–September 1996 by the Australian Council for Educational Research. A nationally representative sample of 7454 Year 3 and Year 5 students participated in the Survey. These students constituted the ‘main sample’ at each Year level. A special sample of 773 Year 3 and Year 5 Indigenous students provided additional information about the literacy achievements of a group of Indigenous students, a significant proportion of whom live in rural and remote parts of the country.

ii. Slightly more Year 3 students met the Year 3 standards than Year 5 students met the Year 5 standards. More than 30% of Year 3 students met the Year 5 performance standards. Slightly fewer than 10% of Year 5 students did not meet the Year 3 standards.
Indigenous students at both Primary and Secondary levels have a higher rate of absenteeism than non-Indigenous students.

**Figure 3.3: Estimated attendance of students from Years 1–12**

![Bar chart showing attendance rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across different sets of data.]

**Figure 3.4: Estimated secondary school students attendance**

![Bar chart showing attendance rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for secondary school data.]

**Note:** Figures 3.3 and 3.4 are derived from data on “School Attendance of Indigenous students” collected by Dr Ken Rigby. The data are from sets of students from Years 1–12 (Set A 12,032 Indigenous students and 189,236 non-Indigenous students; Set B 3,295 Indigenous students and 106,534 non-Indigenous students; Set C 1,524 Indigenous students and 31,383 non-Indigenous students) and sets of secondary school students (Set A 3,259 Indigenous students and 66,036 non-Indigenous students; Set B 751 Indigenous students and 36,667 non-Indigenous students; Set D 6,415 Indigenous students and 138,692 non-Indigenous students; Set F 146 Indigenous students and 603 non-Indigenous students).
4. Funding Indigenous Education

Commonwealth funding under specific Indigenous supplementary programs as a proportion of total Commonwealth education funding has increased.

Table 4.1: Commonwealth Indigenous supplementary programs funding as a proportion of total Commonwealth education funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Commonwealth Indigenous $million</th>
<th>Total Commonwealth education $million</th>
<th>Indigenous as % of total Commonwealth education $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977–78 actual</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>2,354.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978–79 actual</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>2,493.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979–80 actual</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>2,606.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–81 actual</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>2,930.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–82 actual</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>3,340.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982–83 actual</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>3,802.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983–84 actual</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>4,085.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984–85 actual</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>4,518.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985–86 actual</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>4,914.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986–87 actual</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>5,218.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987–88 actual</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>5,714.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988–89 actual</td>
<td>105.1</td>
<td>6,043.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989–90 actual</td>
<td>122.2</td>
<td>6,688.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990–91 actual</td>
<td>177.1</td>
<td>7,471.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–92 actual</td>
<td>194.4</td>
<td>8,359.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–93 actual</td>
<td>219.9</td>
<td>9,127.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993–94 estimate</td>
<td>235.9</td>
<td>9,705.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–95 estimate</td>
<td>245.8</td>
<td>10,182.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–96 estimate</td>
<td>263.9</td>
<td>10,644.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Federal Budget Papers.

**Note:** Figures based on ABS functional classification as reported in DoFA budget papers. From 1993–94 Budget Papers report estimated outcome rather than actual due to move to May budget.
What works?

The per capita funding of Indigenous students under Commonwealth specific Indigenous supplementary programmes and under total Commonwealth education funding has increased.

Table 4.2: Commonwealth per capita funding under supplementary Indigenous education programmes and total education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indigenous supplementary programme funding ($ million)</th>
<th>% change</th>
<th>Indigenous per capita funding under Indigenous supplementary programmes (a) $,000</th>
<th>Total education funding ($ million)</th>
<th>% change</th>
<th>Per capita funding under total education (b) ($,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,354.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>2,930.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>4,914.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>1,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>177.1</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>7471.4</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>1,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>263.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>2,337</td>
<td>10,644.2</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>2,428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DETYA, unpublished.

Notes:
(a) Indigenous per-capita funding has been calculated by dividing the total Commonwealth funding for Indigenous education from annual budget statements (Table 4.1) by the total Indigenous people participating in education all ages and all levels (Table 2.1).
(b) Total education per-capita funding has been calculated by dividing the total Commonwealth funding for education from annual budget statements (Table 4.1) by the total people participating in education all ages and all levels (Table 2.1).
Per capita funding of Indigenous education almost doubled between 1986 and 1991 rising from $1,150 to $2,250. Effects of the flow-on of improved funding are reflected in the proportion of qualified Indigenous people doubling between 1991 and 1996.

**Figure 4.1: Per capita funding ($,000), Indigenous and total students**

**Figure 4.2: Educational qualifications of Indigenous people, aged 15 years and over**

**Source:** DETYA, unpublished. Graph based on data in Tables 1.1 and 2.2.
5. Socio-economic Conditions of Indigenous People

Indigenous median personal income is less than the median personal income for all Australians. The overall average income for Indigenous adults is $14,000 per annum, almost 30% lower than the Australian average of $20,000. Low past and present household income has prevented and continues to discourage household capital accumulation and private investment.

Figure 5.1: Median weekly income of Indigenous people, aged 15 years and over

Both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people with a qualification can expect a higher level of income than people without a qualification.

Figure 5.2: Income levels of Indigenous people with post-secondary qualifications, 1996
The unemployment rate for Indigenous people is much higher than for the non-Indigenous population. The 1996 Indigenous unemployment rate was 22.7% compared to about 10% for non-Indigenous people.
What works?

The unemployment rates for Indigenous people and all people with a post-secondary qualification are about half the unemployment rates for total Indigenous people in the workforce and total people in the workforce respectively.

**Figure 5.5: Unemployment rate of people with a post-secondary qualification**

![Unemployment rate graph](image)

Indigenous households contain more people than the average Australian household.

**Figure 5.6: Average household population, 1996**

![Household population graph](image)
6. Indigenous Population, Trend Data

Australia’s Indigenous population (self-defined, through census processes) has grown from 115,953 in 1971 to 352,970 in 1996 and now comprises 2% of the total population.

Table 6.1: Australian population 1971–96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Indigenous</th>
<th>Number of non-Indigenous</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>115,953</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>160,915</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>159,897</td>
<td>14,685,215</td>
<td>14,845,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>227,593</td>
<td>15,374,511</td>
<td>15,602,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>265,371</td>
<td>16,584,875</td>
<td>16,850,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>352,970</td>
<td>17,399,859</td>
<td>17,752,829</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS Census.

Figure 6.1: Australian population, 1996

Indigenous as a percentage of total (2%)

Non-Indigenous as a percentage of total (98%)
What works?

The Indigenous growth rate has been relatively consistent over the years 1971 to 1991. It can be seen that there is a marked increase in 1991 and 1996. This is thought to be a reflection of the desire of Indigenous people to identify rather than a significant increase in the birth rate. (This feature is not unusual for data derived from Census surveys that rely on self-identification. It should not be seen as a major issue because all the performance data are based on a snapshot of the population and the performance measures are compared to the number who have identified themselves in a particular year. The trend data on these performance variables are still comparable from year to year.)

Figure 6.2: Australian population, trend data

![Graph showing trend data for Aboriginal and total population from 1976 to 2006.](image)

Over half the Indigenous population resides in NSW (28.5%) and Queensland (27.2%).

Table 6.2: Location of the Indigenous population by State/Territory, 1991 and 1996 (% of total)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>265,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>352,970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS Census.
Eight out of 10 Australians live in capital cities or other urban areas. The percentage of Indigenous people living in urban areas has increased quite markedly between 1971 and 1996 to the extent that in 1996 approximately seven out of 10 live in capital cities or other urban areas. Indigenous people are approximately twice as likely (27.4%) to live in rural areas compared to non-Indigenous people (14.8%).

Table 6.3: Urban/rural location of the Australian population, 1971–96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Indigenous</th>
<th>% Non-Indigenous</th>
<th>% total population</th>
<th>% Indigenous</th>
<th>% Non-Indigenous</th>
<th>% total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS Census.

Note: ‘Urban’ refers to people residing in urban areas of 1000 or more people. Rural includes persons living in localities of between 200 to 999 people.
Indigenous Australians aged 15 to 19 are more likely to live outside capital cities than non-Indigenous Australians of the same age.

### Table 6.4: Capital city/other urban/rural location of Australian 15–19 year olds, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Indigenous population: 15–19 yrs (.000s)</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous population: 15–19 yrs (.000s)</th>
<th>% of Indigenous population: 15–19 yrs</th>
<th>% of non-Indigenous population: 15–19 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital city</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>791.1</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other urban</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>443.8</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>1254.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Figure 6.4: Urban/rural population

[Graph showing urban/rural population trends from 1976 to 2006]
Figure 6.5: Urban/rural location of the Indigenous population by State and Territory, 1996

Source: ABS Census.

Note: In Figure 6.5 the larger figure in each State and Territory is the urban population. ‘Urban’ refers to people residing in urban areas of 1000 or more people. Rural includes persons living in localities of between 200 to 999 people.
Figure 6.6: Non-Indigenous urban/rural population by State and Territory, 1996

Source: ABS Census.

Notes: In Figure 6.6 the larger figure in each State and Territory is the urban population. 'Urban' refers to people residing in urban areas of 1000 or more people. Rural includes persons living in localities of between 200 to 999 people.
Age structure of the Australian population

The age structure of the Indigenous population is significantly different to that of the non-Indigenous population. Forty per cent of the Indigenous population is aged under 15 and only 3% over 65; 70% of Indigenous Australians are under 25 years of age, compared to about 45% of all Australians.

Figure 6.7: Indigenous population by age, 1996

Figure 6.8: Non-Indigenous population by age, 1996

Figure 6.9: Indigenous population by age, 2001

Figure 6.10: Non-Indigenous population by age, 2001
What works?

Figure 6.11: Indigenous population by age, 2006

Figure 6.12: Non-Indigenous population by age, 2006

Note: The main purpose of Figures 6.7–6.12 is to show the contrasting age distribution of the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous populations. It can be seen that the Indigenous population is comparatively young. The non-Indigenous population has an older profile with a large concentration in middle age. Projections for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population by age for 2001 and 2006 (shown in Figures 6.9, 6.10, 6.11 and 6.12) show the flow-on effect of the 1996 Census figures.
Appendix Two

A listing of IESIP non-capital SRPs and providers

Department of Education and Training, New South Wales

- Four cross-State strategies to increase the access of 200 Aboriginal students to VET and employment
- Engage Aboriginal people as patrons to provide educational, social and cultural support for Aboriginal female juvenile offenders
- Effective cross-State tracking system and information exchange between schools to target literacy/numeracy support programs
- Local intensive support arrangements for 25 Year 7 and 29 Year 9 students, addressing attendance, retention, increased attainment targets in literacy/numeracy
- Address literacy outcomes of two groups of students in Years 4, 5 and 6 leading to better preparation for transition to secondary school
- Two information technology strategies to support literacy learning of Years 2–8 students: notebook computer and Internet
- An alternative to preschool: two complementary components — transition to school program for students and parent awareness program
- Local intensive support arrangements for Year 7–10 students to achieve 100% completion of Year 10
- Range of local vocational education and intensive support arrangements to increase retention of local students as they reach the minimum school-leaving age.
- Pilot project — 25 Year 10 students in five secondary schools in New England, Western or Riverina districts to undertake retail traineeships via IT
- Year 9 ‘at risk’ students undertake a program of a range of accredited hands-on learning situations in vocational education across eleven sites
- Groups 10–12 trainees complete accredited traineeship level 2/3, including paid work placement, within Tertiary Prep course
- Expansion of current intervention program for 50 Year 9 and 10 students to include work placement
- Promote, increase participation of students in part-time Apprenticeships/Traineeships in schools through Group Training companies in Bega
- Targeting 15–20 at risk Year 9 and 10 Aboriginal students to participate in Voc Training in local business community workplaces
- Local intensive support arrangements for Indigenous youth enrolled in ACE North Coast and Western College courses
What works?

NSW Department of Agriculture and Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture

- To deliver culturally inclusive VET curricula to Indigenous Years 9 and 10 students in isolated rural areas
- To deliver flexible, culturally inclusive VET to Indigenous inmates at Broken Hill Correctional Centre
- Alternative VET program for Indigenous bailed offenders at Warrakoo Lifeskills Support Centre

NSW Department of Health

- Local Intensive speech therapy support and Standard Australian English language program for students entering school

NSW Board of Studies

- Middle school literacy project Years 5–9
- Action research project in numeracy in 10 primary schools
- Improve suitability of current school-based VET courses

Education Department, Victoria

- Link 150 students over 17 school sites via ICTs to improve literacy learning outcomes (joint Vic Ed/CEC)
- Introduction of IT-based, Ganai language teaching program from preschool to Year 10
- Learning Circles project — school/community/family based literacy exercise that assesses and addresses reading difficulties

Office of Technical and Further Education, Victoria

- Deliver alternative and intensive support program for adults and at risk secondary-aged students
- Range of initiatives to accelerate Voc Ed outcomes for youth at risk in three rural sites

Education Queensland

- VET opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Cape and Golf communities
- Off Campus Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students — Intensive support arrangements for youth at risk and juvenile ex-offenders
- Support a Reader and Writer programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Cape and Gulf areas
- Development and trialing of appropriate assessment instrument for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
Queensland Department of Training and Industrial Relations

- Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE — Pilot program to improve retention rates by providing skills and knowledge about career opportunities
- CQIT Rockhampton College — to deliver customised programs of Certificate II/Stage 3 National Building and Construction Industry modules for target group
- Adult literacy development for Indigenous staff in mining industry

SA Department of Education Training and Employment

- Community education program for Aboriginal families and early childhood staff in eastern and western country areas of SA
- Improving literacy outcomes of Aboriginal students in an urban school — Salisbury North R–7
- Provision of intensive literacy acquisition environment at Murray Bridge
- Ecological issues in language revival: syllabus development and learner motivation
- Partnerships in early childhood support for Aboriginal children learning for literacy (0–6 yrs)

Senior Secondary Assessment Board of SA

- Headstart to the SACE

Education Department of Western Australia

- Development and implementation of assessment and intervention strategies to support students (K–3) identified at risk in literacy learning
- Establish tracking system for mobile students across all educational facilities
- Deadly Ways to Learn project: research to trial two-way bi-dialectal approaches to education (joint EDWA/CEC/AISWA project)

Western Australian Department of Training

- Indigenous business course: accounts/payroll course allowing greater access to a wider range of jobs for Indigenous Australians in mining towns

Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development

- Trial of impact of curriculum resource, As I Remember, on literacy levels.

ACT Department of Education and Training, Children's Youth and Family Services Bureau

- Trial the impact of three books in east coast Aboriginal languages for students 4–12 years in two ACT schools to improve literacy levels

Department of Education, Northern Territory

- Literacy through libraries in non-urban schools
- Improved literacy through improved retention in Alice Springs
What works?

Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corp., Kempsey
• Employ College Elders to reinforce culture and support students

Catholic Education Commission of NSW Armidale and Canberra/Goulburn Dioceses
• Identification and support of gifted and talented students
• Use of literacy software programs to address Indigenous needs across three rural/remote schools

Centacare, Narromine
• Intensive support arrangements for ‘at risk’ students in rural/remote areas

Coonamble Neighbourhood Centre
• Family reading project for target group (0–5 years)

Dalaigur Preschool Kempsey
• Support arrangements to improve educational readiness to move from preschool to primary

Gilgandra Preschool
• Perceptual Motor and Occupational Therapy program

Jarjum Centre Inc Preschool, Lismore
• Maths readiness program

Kulai Preschool, Coffs Harbour
• Language and cognitive development program to improve literacy and numeracy skills

Emmanuel College, Cairns
• Intensive focus on teaching/learning practices in literacy for primary/secondary students using flexible modes of delivery
• Employ a full-time vocational education coordinator/curriculum writer to undertake consultations

Mount Carmel College, Charters Towers
• Home school liaison officer to increase attendance rates

Qld Catholic Education Commission
• Secondary students to develop individual education plans using software resources
• IT-based literacy program
• Develop systemic focus on literacy and numeracy in the ‘at risk’ Centre Education program
Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, Adelaide  
- Collaborative venture with five schools in three States, targeting primary and secondary Indigenous students in numeracy

SA Catholic Education Commission  
- Learning Assistance Program

SA Independent Schools Board and Lutheran Schools Association of SA  
- Intensive support arrangements to increase retention in secondary schools

Aboriginal Community College, Gnangara, Sydney Road, West Swan  
- Students to improve literacy through research and publish histories of Nyoongah elders

Purnululu Aboriginal Independent Community School, East Kimberley  
- Develop and trial literacy teaching materials based on local community history, culture and language  
- Provide intensive numeracy and literacy support for highly mobile students

WA Catholic Education Office  
- Appoint education consultant at St Mary's College, Broome, to review schooling model and develop curricula for Aboriginal students  
- Improving literacy/numeracy skills by building interfaces between school/home and culture

Wulungarra Community School, Fitzroy Crossing  
- Literacy skill development

Leighland Christian College, Ulverstone  
- Improve access to mini computer laboratory to deliver literacy and numeracy programs for 26 Indigenous primary and secondary students

Kormilda College, Darwin  
- Lease computer notebooks to provide access to information technology and explore alternative delivery modes  
- Establish an intervention program for secondary-aged illiterate ESL learners

NT Christian School Association, Darwin  
- Develop and trial Indigenous language program which recognises Indigenous learning styles and cultural knowledge

Yirara College, Alice Springs  
- Range of curriculum and administrative initiatives to improve grade progression
What works?

**University of Canberra, Schools and Community Centre, Faculty of Education**
- To accelerate students’ English literacy by developing and implementing effective literacy teaching strategies and resource materials

**National Affiliation of Arts Educators Inc (NAAE)**
- Use alternative teaching and learning practices in Arts programs to improve literacy and numeracy skills for students in four sites (NT, ACT, SA and Qld)

**AIS NT/Menzies School of Health, Darwin**
- Advancing Indigenous literacy through intervention for hearing services

**Batchelor College, Batchelor**
- Strategies to increase participation and attendance in mixed mode delivery of broadcasting course on remote communities

**Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs**
- Develop and deliver vernacular and English literacy program for employment
- Delivery tertiary preparation program for Year 10 and 11 ‘dropouts’ in Alice Springs
Appendix Three

SRP NCEP Reference Group (1998–99)

Peter Buckskin (Chair)
Assistant Secretary,
Indigenous Education Branch, Schools Division
Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Pam Gill
Director, Aboriginal Programs
NSW Department of Education & Training

Shane Williams
Acting Director, Student Support Services
Education QLD

Michael King (representing National Catholic Education Commission)
WA Catholic Education Office

Norman Brahim
Indigenous Education Branch
EDWA (1998)

Les Mack (representing National Council of Independent School Associations)
Association of Independent Schools, WA (1998)

Ken Wyatt
Director, Indigenous Education Branch
EDWA (1999)

John Bucknall
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