Indigenous Kids and Schooling in the Northern Territory

An introductory overview and brief history of Aboriginal Education in the Northern Territory

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Before we start . . .

This book provides an overview and brief history of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. Its specific focus is schooling in remote Indigenous communities. We hope it will provide readers, including teachers, principals, teacher educators, government administrators and non-government organisations who work with Indigenous people in these communities, whether new to the Northern Territory or more experienced, with further insight into their work in Indigenous education. It explains some of the reasons for the current state of remote Indigenous education today. To do full justice to the complex issues associated with this topic would require a much larger volume.

Readers will not find direct hyperlinks to internet sources in this book because in our experience they often don't work because they keep getting changed, particularly links to government websites. To enable the reader to find original sources we have included a list of references at the end of the book and, for some sources, suggested how to locate the original material on the internet by using a search engine such as Google.

This publication comes at a time of renewed Australian interest and conscience around the urgent need to address the issue of unacceptably low learning outcomes of Indigenous children and young people in the Northern Territory. However, the ways this awareness is expressed, for example through a whole of government focus on closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage and the near hit and miss targeting of Indigenous education as a pivotal arena for improving Indigenous outcomes in general, has, as yet, produced little improvement.

The bipartisan federal intervention of 2007, the Northern Territory Emergency Response, (the NTER, now *Stronger Futures*) is generally agreed to have been a flawed problem-solving measure but it has, nevertheless, drawn national and local attention and significant funding to Indigenous education and questions of equity. But, in the search for solutions, history tells us that the best are most likely to come from close, respectful consultations with communities themselves. This book encourages all stakeholders to take history into account in their work to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous children. We hope both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will find that thinking about what happened in the past helps them to improve the way they work today for better Indigenous outcomes.

Clearly, as we show in Chapter One, the Northern Territory is unique in its demography and developmental trajectory, which has resulted in unique educational conditions and opportunities for remote Indigenous people that are not replicated elsewhere in Australia. This book makes a start at describing these conditions and opportunities, within the limits of the data and resources currently available. There would be very few classrooms in the Northern Territory without an Indigenous child in attendance and a significant number of Northern Territory schools have an entirely indigenous enrolment (85 of the 188 NT schools). While the current National Assessment — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing program results show some improvement in Indigenous children's outcomes, there is still a very long way to go to match those achieved by non-Indigenous children, many of whom attend the same schools. Equally apparent is the fact that significant numbers of Indigenous children do not come to school at all, or attend only intermittently. Any long-term improvement to Indigenous education in the Northern Territory must address this situation as both the Australian and Northern Territory Governments are aware.

Chapter Two provides an overview of some of the more significant developments in the provision (and non-provision) of education for Indigenous children in the Northern Territory since the arrival of Europeans. Of particular interest in the current climate of concern about *Closing the Gap* between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, are the advances made with Bilingual Education and Indigenous Teacher Education in the exciting years after Indigenous people won recognition as citizens of their own country in 1967. Serious efforts were made in the following years to prepare local Indigenous people to teach in their own communities, using their own languages and working alongside non-Indigenous teachers as equals in team teaching situations. These developments were part of an international movement, based on research into the language development and learning of bilingual children dating back to the 1960s. The research confirmed that children are not disadvantaged by knowing more than one language and that, on the contrary, cognitive and social benefits are generally experienced by bilingual learners in situations where their home and school languages are equally respected.

We also document the emergence of the *Two Way*, later to become *Both Ways*, philosophy developed simultaneously in several places in the Northern Territory and Western Australia by Indigenous elders in widely different traditionally-oriented communities. We explore some of the reasons why

what is now referred to internationally as *Dual Language Education* floundered in this country, while it continued to mature and develop both theoretically and in terms of educational practice in other countries.

At the heart of that failure of bilingual education in the Northern Territory, we believe, lie twin facts. Firstly, too few Indigenous teachers and language workers were trained to levels of professional competence and status equal to that of non-Indigenous teachers and linguists and, secondly, the need for principled, specialised and strategic attention to developing the English language proficiency levels of Indigenous children and young people in the Territory was not, and still is not, adequately recognised, funded or monitored.

Specifically, specialist teachers qualified to teach children and young people who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) or English as an Additional Dialect (EAD) have not been routinely recruited or appointed to schools where the children come to school speaking traditional Australian languages, including newly emerged Indigenous languages such as Kriol, or Aboriginal English (AE).

The language learning needs of Indigenous children are recognised at both national and Northern Territory levels as equivalent to those of immigrant and refugee children who, at least in metropolitan Australia, often receive systematic, principled instruction and support, designed to help them catch up with their native English-speaking peers within a few years of enrolling in Australian schools. It is therefore valid to ask why the Intensive English Language Centres available to newly arrived migrant learners in major metropolitan centres are not also routinely available to young Indigenous children who come to school for the first time in remote and very remote communities with similar profiles of English language learning needs. The fact that Intensive English language instruction and support is not provided equally to all Australian children who need it should be a matter of major concern to educators and politicians who are committed to *Closing the Gap* in Indigenous education learning outcomes.

Today, few remote schools are staffed with local Indigenous teachers. In fact we have found it difficult to obtain accurate figures about the numbers of locally trained and currently employed Indigenous education graduates in the Northern Territory. Employment and engagement of local Indigenous educators and assistants has been recommended consistently for many decades by those who have sought to improve schooling in remote communities. While this approach has

featured in the Northern Territory education story over the years, it has received only intermittent support in practical terms. Continuous, systematic and long-term commitment to the employment of Indigenous teachers, and a respectful, sustained support for an increase in Indigenous educational leadership in Northern Territory schools, could address many of the issues raised in this book, including non-attendance and the cultural and linguistic relevance of the education provided. This situation has been addressed recently, albeit slowly, with a prioritising of programs for local Indigenous teachers, education incentives, scholarships and training support but, again, it is not easy to discover how well current programs are performing in relation to some of the more extravagant projections. There are also no assurances that these programs will continue to be funded.

Similarly, it is deeply disappointing that teacher education courses and teacher recruitment initiatives do not prioritise learner needs for principled English language teaching in the Northern Territory. Teachers are routinely appointed to remote and very remote teaching situations without first ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to teach English systematically through the content material of each of the learning areas. This approach is in line with current Best Practice approaches to English language teaching and should, therefore, be a matter for national as well as local shame.

It also places an often impossible professional burden on teachers when they arrive in their new schools, one that must contribute at some level to the high turnover of staff in some locations. Although most teachers recruited to the NT teaching service can expect to teach Indigenous, immigrant, or refugee children at some stage of their career, this is not highlighted in recruitment advertising.

Educational policy development and planning in both Canberra and Darwin needs to give far more serious attention to the remarkable degree of multilingualism in the Northern Territory and the implications of this situation for educational provision, if outcomes are to improve.

Chapter Three provides an introduction to this richly diverse language situation, making it clear the majority of Indigenous learners, even in the larger towns, come from homes where the medium of communication is not the kind of English used for learning at school. Some Indigenous students do, of course, speak Standard Australian English (SAuE) as their primary language, but others speak one or more of the languages mentioned above.

The day-to-day reality of many, perhaps most, Indigenous children and young people in the Northern Territory is a multilingual reality very different from the strictly monolingual life experience of the majority of non-Indigenous teachers. Most Indigenous children in the Northern Territory are familiar with two, or even more, languages or dialects. For them, School English is an *additional* language or dialect in every sense of the word, as it is for migrant and refugee students when they first arrive in Australia and International students when they come to Darwin to study.

It follows that *all* teachers appointed to Northern Territory schools need thorough preparation in English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) teaching principles and strategies before appointment. This will enable them to structure their teaching and learning programs to ensure the children's English language skills are systematically and efficiently supported using current Best Practice language-teaching approaches.

These approaches have been developed over many decades on the basis of evidence from research into language learning in Australia and overseas. This research shows conclusively that a *Task-Based* approach to teaching has to be explicitly taught to teachers. A *Task-Based* approach involves identifying the specific aspects of classroom language that students need in order to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required in each of the subject areas. Learning a new language no longer depends on old-fashioned context-independent drilling and written exercises experienced by some older Australians.

Today, English is typically taught as an Additional Language *through* each of the curriculum areas. Modern theory and practice *makes every teacher a language teacher*, with responsibilities to identify vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and culture-specific aspects of a particular learning area, e.g. Mathematics or History, and then systematically structure teaching and learning so that all these receive focus and explicit teaching *at the same time* as the content material of that area is covered in class.

Modern language teaching methods, used skillfully and appropriately, can also maximise English language learning efficiency without undermining or destroying the Indigenous languages and cultures that have such deeply important personal significance for Indigenous Australians. This is because modern theory and practice emphasises the importance of maximising the value of the knowledge that children and young people bring with them to the learning environment from their homes and communities. Linking new learning to old is a tried and true principle of good teaching.

Inviting children and young people to make these links through all the languages they know is simply good practice. Supporting them in the classroom with Indigenous role models who use community languages and guide learners in their use can, and should, complement the modeling and teaching in SAuE provided by classroom teachers.

No one doubts the scale of the challenge for providing appropriate language-focused, age-appropriate and respectful education for Indigenous learners in the Northern Territory, especially in very remote communities. However, for all the reasons explored in this book, the Northern Territory is uniquely positioned to take a leadership role in this regard. Nowhere else in Australia do Indigenous people make up nearly 27% of the population, while Indigenous children represent nearly 41% of the school population, as was the case in the Northern Territory at the time of the last census in 2011. In a country as wealthy and progressive in so many other regards as Australia, we might expect to find Indigenous Territorians comprising at least a quarter of the teachers in Northern Territory schools. But this is not the case. Again, this should be a cause for deep soul-searching in both Canberra and Darwin.

It should not be unusual to find fully qualified Indigenous teachers who were born and educated in the Northern Territory teaching in English and/or their own community languages where communities support this option. Dual Language programs and even Dual Language elements of the school teaching and learning program can be instrumental in helping Indigenous communities sustain their cultural integrity, while at the same time giving learners the opportunity to grow up with the knowledge and skills required to participate fully in modern Australian society. Australia currently has a long way to go before the education this country offers Indigenous children and young people measures up to standards already achieved in many schools in countries like New Zealand, Canada and states like Hawaii in the USA.

Attendance patterns among Indigenous learners in the Northern Territory have often been at the centre of media attention. We explore this issue in detail in Chapter Four where enrolments and other matters relating to the school-aged population, for instance its mobility, are discussed. We highlight the importance of engaging the children themselves in any attendance strategy, rather than directing all the effort towards parents. Many remote Indigenous children are treated as autonomous by their families and, therefore, make many of their own decisions.

Indigenous children and young people, from an early age, may be urged to attend school by their families and communities but their freedom to decide when and if they will go to school tends to be respected. For attendance figures to improve, it will be critical to consult with children themselves, as well as their families, in order to convince them of the worth of schooling. We need to ask why children and young people are not attracted to the learning experiences offered in our schools, and whether or not Indigenous learners see school as a place where interesting activities perceived to have real-life relevance happen.

A more comprehensive and determined approach is needed to prepare non-Indigenous staff for the cultural, linguistic, and even physical and climatic characteristics of the remote Indigenous school communities they are appointed to or responsible for. Non-Indigenous school teachers, principals, administrators and departmental staff clearly need better preparation to work with/in the intercultural worlds in which they will find themselves given the persistent non-attendance of large numbers of Indigenous children, together with unacceptably high turnover rates of staff in many remote schools. This is in addition to properly equipping them with the skills and understandings required to accommodate learners who are still in the process of acquiring school English.

Chapter Five takes a look at the contentious issue of NAPLAN testing in the Northern Territory. The introduction of nationwide assessments in 2008 highlighted the gulf in achievement levels between Indigenous students in the Northern Territory and students in the rest of Australia, including Indigenous learners who live in other parts of Australia. There are many reasons why Northern Territory student achievement levels as assessed by NAPLAN compare so poorly with those of other states and territories.

Even non-Indigenous students in the Northern Territory achieve lower average scores than their counterparts elsewhere. High levels of commitment will need to be consistently sustained over an extended period of time by governments, teachers, communities, and the learners themselves before Northern Territory learning outcomes are brought into line with the rest of the country. And yet, as we were finalising the writing of this book there were media reports of further cutbacks in education, including EAL/D support, in the Northern Territory.

The central problem, the *Elephant in the Room* with regard to Indigenous education in Northern Territory and, in fact, in Australia as a whole, is that 40% of learners in Northern Territory schools

are multilingual learners (NTDoE webpage) A very large proportion of these learners are, of course, Indigenous students living, not only in the remote communities, but also in the heart of Darwin, regional centres and larger towns.

In spite of this implicit acknowledgement by NTDoE that the majority of Indigenous students are EAL/D students another webpage dealing explicitly with Indigenous Learners fails to highlight their multilingual heritage. And yet, surely, on the grounds of equality of opportunity, all Australian children and young people who need specialised English language instruction and support should have access to it. Instead, there is a strange and incomprehensible blindness on the part of administrators, politicians, and even school-based staff in many situations, to the fact that Indigenous students would have more chance of achieving educational outcomes commensurate with their non-Indigenous counterparts around Australia if they received the kind of teaching and educational support that governments at all levels say is available to multilingual learners.

NAPLAN assessments have been developed for, and normed on, native speakers of English. They cannot reliably or validly assess the English language Literacy and Numeracy competencies of students who are learners of English, whether those students are Indigenous or from immigrant backgrounds. The reason for this is that so many other factors are involved in how well English language learners cope with written tests. We might ask, for instance, whether the student is already familiar with test-taking procedures in another language, whether, in the case of Mathematics, the student is already completely familiar with the kinds of diagrams and symbols used in the NAPLAN assessments. Multilingual students in these situations will achieve much better outcomes on average than students with similarly low levels of English language proficiency who have had little or no previous schooling. Developmental factors are involved too; some children become confident in a new language much more quickly than others.

When it comes to Year 3 children and the challenges they face with respect to their first NAPLAN assessments, there is an even more serious injustice, especially in remote communities where the children may enroll at school in their first year unable to speak English at all. These young children are expected to learn to read and write for the first time in a language they cannot speak. To ask them to do this successfully is against all the principles of Early Literacy instruction. The situation is made even more problematic if newly graduated teachers from metropolitan universities are expected to accomplish miracles in remote communities without any training in teaching methods suitable for young non-English-speaking learners. Outside the classroom, immigrant children in

larger towns and cities are at least exposed to extensive use of the English language. This is not the case for very many Indigenous children in remote Australia. It is not unusual for Indigenous Year 3 students to be unable to complete any part of the NAPLAN tests successfully. Many are still not literate in English at this stage, nor have they had the opportunity to acquire initial literacy in their own languages.

NAPLAN assessments can have no diagnostic potential where none of the test items have been attempted or where they have been attempted purely at random because the students did not understand what they were required to do. And yet, during the course of this study we did not discover any research in the Northern Territory involving systematic collection of data that would relate phases and levels of English language learning to ability to achieve National Minimum Standards (NMS) on NAPLAN tests.

While many politicians, administrators and teachers are deeply sincere in their desire to assist in *Closing the Gap* in Indigenous education outcomes there remain some deep conceptual gaps in the way many of them think about Indigenous Australians. Multitudes of research questions are asked and millions of dollars are spent on well-meaning and often important investigations. Answers to research questions are obtained, often at enormous expense using money that might otherwise have gone to schools. Sometimes serious efforts are made to use those answers as an evidence-base for improving educational strategies and realigning focus in strategy development and planning. At other times the research seems so strangely divorced from the realities of day-to-day life on the ground that even administrators and politicians ignore the outcomes when they're published. Numerous research reports disappear without a trace, leaving no impact whatsoever on the practice of teaching and learning in remote Indigenous schools.

In Chapter Six we raise the possibility that some key research questions are often not being asked. When *Closing the Gap* priorities are listed, the English language learning needs of many, perhaps even the majority, of Indigenous children and young people in remote Australia are rarely highlighted, or even mentioned. Even when advice is given to teachers about how to analyse NAPLAN results, that advice may fail to mention that at least some of the students' errors are predictable and reasonable from a linguistic point of view.

In Chapter Six we offer suggestions about how research might be refocused and redirected by a shift of attention to students' language learning needs. Instead of leaving language-related issues as the invisible elephant stumbling around the room, we suggest that language be placed front and centre in research, policy-making, strategy development and classroom teaching.

This book also discusses the precious heritage embodied in the traditional and modern Australian languages still spoken in the Northern Territory. Loss of so many of the world's languages in the last 50 years parallels the tragic loss of diversity in the natural world over the same period of time. Loss of linguistic diversity worldwide is as serious an issue for human beings as loss of natural diversity.

When languages die, highly specialised knowledge about the medicinal values of plants, the life patterns of native animals, weather patterns, ocean currents and fish species, and so on, not to mention understandings about human nature and human relationships, can be lost to the whole human species. For the speakers of those languages, language loss can reach deep into personal and social life. The Northern Territory still has the highest concentration of proficient speakers of traditional Australian languages and yet, in the world of education, these languages are often sidelined and their value misunderstood or, worse, construed as a problem.

Final words come from educator Gurrumin (Yalmay) Yunupingu (2010), a former Batchelor Institute teacher education student, as she reflects on the *English Only* policy introduced in remote schools in 2010. This policy continues today, although in modified form with largely tokenistic acceptance of the need for linguistic and cultural programs in the children's home languages. Gurrumin summarises the key issue for many Indigenous educators, one that has been reiterated throughout this volume but which still receives minimal attention in education practice in the Northern Territory.

> We have now been told we are not to use our students' first language, only English. Well, I already know that the children won't understand what I'm saying, they will laugh at me, and they may even misbehave because they'll be bored and won't know what the lessons are about. So perhaps I will cheat and use some Yolŋu matha—what will happen then? Will I have my mouth washed out with soap like in the mission times? Or will I have to stand on one leg outside the classroom? Or perhaps I will lose my job?
>
> Well, I will of course use good ESL teaching strategies as I do in my English lessons already. But I know that the children will miss out on a lot of meaning and that makes me very upset. I am wondering why I

studied all those years through Batchelor College (now BIITE), and why all the teaching experience I have in bilingual programs is being put down. What a strange role model I will be, a bilingual Yolŋu teacher, using only one of my languages! (Yunupingu 2010, p. 25)

Acknowledgements

Chapter One: The Northern Territory today

Introduction

A series of major changes to the way Indigenous communities are managed and run have occurred in very recent times. In this chapter we describe some of these changes to enable understanding of the current context of education in Indigenous communities.

In the middle of 2007, the Australian Government passed the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) legislation which allowed it to play a much greater role than before in the way the Northern Territory manages services for Indigenous Australians. There were many sudden changes of policy, mostly made without adequate consultation with local people, and many different opinions in the media and among ordinary people about whether the NTER would be helpful in the long run or not. Many people were confused and upset. Other people thought that things had become so bad in some Indigenous communities that a shakeup was needed.

Over the next few years there were more policy changes. But both major political parties support the idea that the Australian Government should continue to be involved at a high level in trying to improve the situation of Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory. This bilateral support in Canberra shows our political leaders recognise that, with regard to health, education, employment, housing, and most other criteria used to assess human wellbeing, Indigenous people, especially in the remote and very remote regions of the Northern Territory, are seriously disadvantaged compared with most other Australian citizens.

Today the Australian Government program is called *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory*. NTER legislation is still in place, although redesigned in 2009. It supports the Stronger Futures approach which started in 2012. The Australian Government now tries to involve more Indigenous people in decision making about their own lives than they did in 2007. The central aim of the Stronger Futures program is to make sure 'communities, families and children are safe and healthy' and children can grow up to live 'strong independent lives' (FaHCSIA 2013a, p. 6). The Stronger Futures program is part of a larger national integrated *Closing the Gap* strategy all state and territory governments have agreed to follow (FaHCSIA 2013b). The aim of *Closing the Gap* is to improve all aspects of the lives of Indigenous people in all parts of Australia, not just the Northern Territory.

Why a big picture view can be difficult to develop and share

It is natural for people to disagree about what governments are trying to do in the Northern Territory. Different opinions come from different experiences and knowledge. Sometimes it is hard to develop a big picture understanding of the situation in the Northern Territory as a whole.

Many people have a special understanding of a particular community or language group. Some people who live and work in the Centre know very little about Arnhem Land, and some who work in the North know very little about life in the Centre.

Some people were personally involved with an aspect of the NTER that was not managed well, or did not produce the expected results. Others believe that something had to be done and done straight away. Some of us are new to the Northern Territory and our opinions were originally based on what we read or heard in other states or countries.

Many of us were born and bred in the Northern Territory, or have lived here most of our lives. We've seen it all before. We feel frustrated and sad when we watch newcomers 'reinvent the wheel' over and over again. They are so enthusiastic it makes us feel tired. Most of the new people leave so quickly, often after just a few months. Yet for the short time they're in the Northern Territory they want us to do everything their way. Some people stay for years but it's hard to tell in advance which ones are going to go and which ones are going to stay. Some of the people from 'down south' think they will stay forever but they're often gone before the end of the year. Some last for two years but two years is a short time for people who have lived here all their life.

Some of us are so familiar with life in the Northern Territory that we take for granted things that shock outsiders. We even forget sometimes that most other Australians can expect to live longer than most Indigenous people. It's easy to forget that most other Australians have much better health, suffer less tragedy and heartache, and finish school with a good chance of finding a decent job, unlike the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who grow up here.

This chapter provides a brief history of the NTER, with facts and figures relating to the current situation in the Northern Territory. A closer look is taken at the population of the Northern Territory, comparing it with the population of Australia as a whole and focusing especially on Indigenous people.

Background to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER)

When the Australian Government intervened in the administration of the Northern Territory in 2007 it was not the first time this kind of thing had happened.

Between 1863 and 1911, the administration of the Northern Territory was under the control of the South Australian colonial government. Prior to that, the Northern Territory had been part of the colony of New South Wales. According to Rowley (1970), it was obvious that the South Australian Government would not respond to concerns about extreme levels of violence between the white colonists and the traditional owners of the country. Aboriginal people were being exploited in the regions under South Australian control. In 1911, responsibility for the Northern Territory passed to the Australian Government of that time.

Rowley's book tells how colonial governments failed to protect Indigenous people throughout Australia. With respect to the Northern Territory, Rowley explains that 'the land was settled at the point of the gun or against the background of Aboriginal knowledge of what the gun can do' (Rowley 1970, p. 214). He agreed with the idea that some of the worst problems faced by the Australian Government back in 1911 were directly due to the complete lack of respect for the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous people by the colonial governments that had been responsible for protecting the people who lived in Central and Northern Australia.

During the first part of the 20th century, the Australian Government set up schools for non-Indigenous children. Teachers were brought from Queensland and South Australia until 1945. In 1945, the responsibility for what was called *General Education* in the Northern Territory was given back to South Australia. Indigenous children were not routinely offered schooling at this time.

From 1956, Indigenous children's schooling became the responsibility of the Northern Territory Administration's Welfare Branch, which also looked after housing and health. This branch set up what they called 'special' schools and preschools for Indigenous children, mainly on 'government settlements, church missions and on some pastoral properties', according to a summary of information about NT in the National Archives (National Archives of Australia n.d.). Many Indigenous children continued to miss out on schooling completely during these years.

The educational needs of Indigenous children were not given serious attention until 1960 when a *Committee to Enquire into the Educational Needs of the People of the Northern Territory* was set up in Canberra. It was followed by an inquiry commissioned by the Northern Territory administration discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. In 1968, control returned to the newly formed Commonwealth Department of Education and Science in Canberra.

More changes began to be made to schooling in the Northern Territory during the 1960s and 1970s. In July 1978, the Northern Territory was granted self-government, returning all schools and other state-level services to its jurisdiction. Indigenous communities, families and individuals were, once again, under the control of the Northern Territory administration.

Over the next 30 years concern was often expressed about the effectiveness of some of those services. It seemed increasingly clear that health, education, employment, housing and the general welfare of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory was not improving as the years went by. In fact, in some places the situation seemed to be getting much worse. People's levels of health decreased, children were not coming to school every day, alcohol was more widely available to Indigenous people and violence was very high in some communities, compared with other parts of Australia.

People started to become especially worried about violence and abuse of children in some communities. A report compiled by the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into *The Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse*, known as the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle: 'Little children are sacred'* (Wild & Anderson 2007) report was published. The information in this report led to so much anger and discussion the Australian Government used it to justify the NTER in June 2007.

What was the NTER?

According to the Australian Government, the NTER was 'a set of government initiatives designed to protect children, to make communities safe and to build a better future for people living in Indigenous communities and town camps in the Northern Territory' (NTER 2011, p. 53). It applied to the majority of Indigenous communities in the NT. These were known as 'prescribed communities' for the purposes of Intervention. More than 41,000 people live in these areas where nearly nine out of ten (87%) are Indigenous according to an Australian Government website (FaHCSIA 2012). The legislation to set up the NTER is still in place and certain communities are

still prescribed communities, although the term is not used much in official documents these days. This Australian Government program to improve life for Indigenous people in the NT is now called *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory*.

Unfortunately, the socio-political dynamic of the day, enabled the then Howard Government to use the high levels of emotional reaction to the *Little Children are Sacred* report to implement the NTER in an extremely short space of time, with no prior consultation at any level of the Australian community. This haste led to justified resentment, anger and misunderstanding. Four years later, in 2011, the Australian Government asked for an evaluation of the NTER. When the report was published it explained some of the reasons for the anger. The evaluation team said that:

> The initial implementation was rapid, bypassing existing engagement mechanisms and requiring the setting aside of normal management disciplines and legislative protections and the overriding of locally developed and owned management practices. The rapidity of rollout did not allow for adequate consultation, customisation to local circumstances or integration with mainstream and Northern Territory Government services.
>
> Communities were concerned and angered by the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act, changes to the permit system, the new leasing arrangements, signage relating to alcohol and pornography restrictions, compulsory income management, the abolition of CDEP, and [they] were confused and inconvenienced by the Basics Card (NTER 2011, p. 68).

In fact, the report writers commented that: 'The rushed imposition broke trust and shamed people.' (NTER 2011, p. 68)

The Basics Card and income management

The Basics Card is an income management tool designed to make sure that at least a part of a person's Centrelink payment is spent on basic needs such as food, clothing and household necessities. The Basics Card can also be used to buy such things as refrigerators, children's toys and many other things that families need. It cannot be used to buy alcohol, tobacco or pornography. Nor can it be used for gambling. These things must be paid for with other money, including that part of the Centrelink allowance that is still transferred to people's bank accounts as cash.

Basics Cards can only be used in registered shops. A list of these shops is available on the Centrelink website. Because the card was initially only for Indigenous people, it was racially discriminatory. From July 1, 2010, income management was extended to non-Indigenous people. Many

non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous people now have their income managed by Centrelink in the Northern Territory. In July 2012, income management was also introduced into five locations in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. The Australian Government also works with the Western Australian government to help many people in that state manage their money. People can opt out of income management if they can prove they can manage their own money without getting into serious financial trouble.

Income management can be used to help people pay their rent, bills and education expenses as well as buy food and clothes and other necessities. People who receive Centrelink payments and have difficulty managing their finances can ask to be put on income management. For instance, the *Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council* in Central Australia asked for help for women in their communities. In October 2012, income management was made available to families in this area. Full details about income management can be found on the Centrelink website.

Local Government changes in the Northern Territory

During the same period that the Intervention was starting, the Northern Territory Government began to put new policies for local government into action. Although local government policies were introduced in 2006 prior to implementation of the NTER, they were still getting under way in 2007. Many of the Territory's communities and small towns had been growing rapidly, with more and more people wanting to live in them. Some of the towns were still more like frontier stations, missions or government settlements. The new policies were supposed to fast track the development of these places into modern towns with modern facilities.

In 2008, 21 *Growth Towns* were identified under the *Working Future* plan. These were Ali Curung, Angurugu, Borroloola, Daguragu/Kalkarindji, Elliott, Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Gunbalanya, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Milingimbi, Ngukurr, Ntaria (Hermannsburg), Numbulwar, Papunya, Ramingining, Umbakumba, Wadeye, Wurrumiyanga (Nguiu), Yirrkala and Yuendumu. The aim was to run these towns in the same manner as towns in other states and territories, with improvements to roads and overall infrastructure, communications, access to a range of human services, provision of better education facilities, etc.

It was intended that people would be able to own their own homes as they do in other parts of Australia. Private companies were to be encouraged to set up businesses in the way they already did

in the larger established towns such as Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy and the Australian Government would help to upgrade fifteen of these towns. The Growth Towns would also be used as service centres for smaller communities in their vicinity in the same way larger towns provide services to smaller surrounding towns and villages in other states. Eight new Local Government Areas (often referred as Super Shires) were set up to take the place of the Community Councils which had previously managed each community.

The new Super Shires and Growth Towns created a great deal of confusion and worry for community managers and for the people who lived in them. There was a great deal of controversy about whether it was too big a jump to go from small local community councils to huge shires, often located four or more hours drive away from some communities. Experience is now showing that it is a slow process to modernise some of these towns. For instance, some towns are still developing proper systems for managing household waste.

In 2013, discussions were held around the notion of Regional Councils replacing the shires. It has been proposed that the Regional Councils (smaller than super shires but larger than the original community councils) would be better able to meet the particular needs of the communities. At the time of writing there had been no final decision on this proposed change to community management structure.

CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects)

Between the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, too many changes were made all at once over the 2007-2010 period. Even the administrators and bureaucrats were confused. Most people could not understand what was happening in their communities and had little time to grasp the implications for their personal lives.

Immediately on implementation of the NTER, it was announced that the *Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)* would be phased out. CDEP was a program providing work for people in receipt of Centrelink allowances in remote communities. Originally, it was a kind of *work for the dole* system. Participants did not have to work full time because CDEP wages were not high enough to cover a full time wage. CDEP workers were also supposed to receive training to help them get ordinary jobs and become independent of Centrelink.

Under the NTER, it was stated that Indigenous people should have 'real jobs' instead of CDEP payments. Their local Centrelink offices would tell them to look for jobs in the normal way. The main problem was that there were nowhere near enough jobs in the communities for the number of people on CDEP. Many people also did not have the right kinds of skills to apply for the jobs that were available.

CDEP had been established for many years in the Northern Territory. Where the scheme has worked well, CDEP workers were seen by their communities as making valuable contributions. Many of the normal local government services had been provided by CDEP workers. Many local education and social welfare workers were employed under CDEP. Although government representatives talked about 'real jobs' in 2007, there was not a proper understanding in Canberra of the value CDEP had for Indigenous communities.

When the local community councils were closed down things became even worse. Decisions were now made by shire administrators instead of in the local communities. This, together with the loss of CDEP employment, created great distress and confusion. The Australian Government realised the situation was impossible and agreed in April 2008 to keep the CDEP program operational in the interim.

As the writers of the NTER Evaluation Report in 2011 explained:

> The intention was to improve and expand the delivery of services to towns and communities across the Territory by establishing new shire councils in larger regional areas. Many existing local councils had a poor history of service provision, accountability and staff retention, and many were not financially viable. However, many were also local Aboriginal community councils that were perceived to be responsive and representative of their communities; their abolition left a gap in local governance arrangements (NTER 2011, p. 65).

> Approximately 8,000 individuals were receiving CDEP prior to its progressive withdrawal throughout the Northern Territory. As well as the loss of employment, the uncertain status of CDEP and replacement programs made it difficult for some service delivery agencies and organisations to plan workforce needs. For example, outstation service delivery was underpinned by the CDEP (NTER 2011, p. 67).

The NTER Evaluation team highlighted how important CDEP was for employment when they pointed out that:

> The employment rate for Indigenous people of working age (15–64) in the Northern Territory in 2008 was 50.8 percent. However, the employment rate decreases from 50.8 percent to 33.3 percent if Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) participants are not counted as employed (NTER 2011, p. 59).

To get a sense of how these rates compare with the situation for non-Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, we can look at the two unemployment rates in 2008. At that time, nearly 17 out of every 100 working age Indigenous people (16.8%) had no paid work at all. Only about two non-Indigenous people (2.2%) of working age in the Northern Territory had no paid work.

Many Indigenous people do want so-called 'real jobs'. However, the more flexible arrangements associated with CDEP were helpful to many families. On CDEP, people are paid when they work, but when family commitments (for instance illness or funeral arrangements) have priority, it can be easier to attend to those obligations under CDEP than when a person has a fulltime 'real job'. This will continue to be a problem in the future, in terms of Indigenous people taking up fulltime employment in the same manner as other Australians.

Most Indigenous families go to more funerals and have more serious illnesses to worry about than most non-Indigenous families. Cultural obligations are also different and often difficult for non-Indigenous people to understand. For instance, someone who does not seem to be a close relative from a non-Indigenous point of view may be one of the people who are directly responsible for the ceremonial arrangements connected with a funeral.

People who do not speak English confidently, or have poor eyesight, or cannot walk without help, etc. often need to take someone along with them when they go for medical appointments or other activities. They need a confident, competent person to go with them, but that person is often someone who is employed in a regular job. Indigenous people often find themselves in impossible situations because of cultural conflicts between what employers expect and what their families and communities expect. Sometimes the conflict is impossible to manage and employed people leave their jobs unexpectedly for reasons that non-Indigenous people, especially if they are new to the Northern Territory, cannot understand.

Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) and new CDEP arrangements

In July 2013, the Australian Government introduced the *Remote Jobs and Communities Program* (RJCP). It will operate for three years in 60 remote regions around Australia. This program is not just for Indigenous people or just implemented in the Northern Territory.

CDEP wages will continue to be paid by the Australian Government until June 2017. Full details of the RJCP and the arrangements for the CDEP over the next three years can be found on the website of the Australian Government *Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs* (FaHCSIA 2013c). To find this information, put the name of the program into Google and follow the links on the website.

The RJCP program is managed by FaHCSIA in partnership with the Australian Government *Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).* In the past, CDEP was managed by FaHCSIA, which is also responsible for Centrelink. By bringing social services and education together to run the RJCP, the new arrangements highlight the importance of education and training for unemployed people and for people in receipt of CDEP wages.

The goal is to have as many people as possible moving off Centrelink payments and into ordinary jobs by 2017. For this to happen, training is essential, as is the availability or creation of appropriate positions of employment. Some of this training involves basic literacy and numeracy as well as helping people to learn how to align their home lives with their work lives. This is a significant challenge for people who have never had a formal job before and who perhaps live in a place where hardly anyone has ever had the kind of work that required a specific start time and the expectation they will work for a specific number of hours. Many non-Indigenous people forget that they themselves learned how to be employed by watching how their own parents managed their working lives. It is not something you can learn by watching TV. Employment patterns are cultural patterns, and they are learnt in mainstream cultural contexts.

As well as CDEP, three other existing programs relevant to finding jobs are being phased out in remote areas as the RJCP is introduced. These are *Job Services Australia*, *Disability Employment Services* and the *Indigenous Employment Program*. In each of the 60 remote regions where the RJCP operates, there is one Lead Provider. There are two RJCP regions in the far west of New

South Wales, 23 in the Northern Territory (including Darwin and the large towns), 15 in Western Australia, four in South Australia and 16 in Queensland. This list reminds us again that most of Australia's remote regions are in the Northern Territory.

In regions where there were previously several CDEP providers, some have been phased out and some will continue their work by subcontracting to the Lead Provider. It is interesting to learn that eight CDEP providers who are not in the RJCP remote regions will also be phased out by 2017, while the other three programs mentioned in the previous paragraph are to continue.

Looking back on the NTER

Looking back, we can see that concerns around community safety underpinned the Intervention. Today, community safety remains an important focus but there is now more emphasis on engagement with communities, families and individuals to ensure they are involved in decisions about their futures.

The 2011 NTER Evaluation Report made it clear that the biggest challenge non-Indigenous people employed under NTER programs faced when they came to the Northern Territory was to learn how to communicate effectively with Indigenous people in remote areas. Clearly this also applies to teachers and education administrators. Learning how to communicate effectively with people from a culture different from your own can take years, not days or weeks or months. It is important for both sides to be patient and respectful, especially if a person is not likely to stay in the Northern Territory for a long period of time.

Even when government administrators, other officials, teachers, health workers and non-government employees try to consult properly, they often find there is a serious lack of coordination between different government departments, at both national and local levels. It seems everyone is trying to do their own job without seeing the bigger picture, resulting in replication of the same activity across a number of different organisations. The NTER Evaluation team commented in 2011 that:

> Engagement was not always fit-for-purpose. Communities argue that they are over-consulted on some things, but also report that they are not sufficiently engaged on other matters. This suggests that better strategic planning of consultation and engagement is required (NTER 2011, p. 5).

In an attempt to improve service coordination and consultation processes, the Australian Government worked with the states and the Northern Territory Government through the *Council of Australian Governments (COAG)* to set up an office for remote service delivery. This office, under the Coordinator General for Remote Service Delivery, reports to the Australian Government every six months. This is a good development. However, it is still not clear at this stage whether coordination has noticeably improved at the community level. As noted above, the same or similar services are being delivered by different organisations in the same place, leaving Indigenous people confused and frustrated if they are asked the same questions by different people with nothing productive to show for it. Most people just hope that something good will come out of it all.

According to the NTER Evaluation team, most people had begun to feel that their communities were safer by 2011 (NTER 2011, p. 21). The team said that: 'Outcomes for health, education, employment, housing and safety [also] showed some improvement but were still well below those for non-Indigenous people' (p. 8).

The Closing the Gap program

From July 2009, the NTER was extended as part of a nationwide three year *Closing the Gap* program of reforms that all the states and territories agreed to. It was agreed that Australia as a nation needed to work harder to close the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in health, welfare and education. According to the FaHCSIA website, the agreements:

> ...commit governments to a common framework of outcomes, progress measures and policy directions to guide Indigenous reform. The agreements build on current initiatives, address shortfalls and in many cases provide significant additional funds (FaHCSIA 2013b).

The *Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement* (NTNPA) formalised the arrangements for the period July 2009 until 2012, when it was replaced by new agreements under the ten year *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Agreement*. The Stronger Futures agreement commits the Australian Government to working with Aboriginal people to improve health; education; community safety and justice; tackling alcohol abuse; child, youth and community wellbeing; housing and land reform; municipal and essential services; the Alice Springs transformation; remote engagement and coordination; and a jobs package (FaHCSIA 2013a).

A range of measures dealing with income management and welfare reform, law and order, family support, early childhood, child and family health, education, and improvements to remote service delivery arrangements have been associated with the program. Progress towards specified goals is monitored, and six monthly reports are available to the public on the FaHCSIA site.

Population patterns in the Northern Territory

In the *Before we start* section at the beginning of this book, we mentioned several important ways in which the Northern Territory is different to other parts of Australia. We drew attention to population patterns in the Northern Territory, including remoteness, the relative youth of the population and the proportion of Indigenous Australians as compared to other states and territories in Australia.

Remoteness

Five categories of remoteness are used by the Australian Government when describing where people live. Remoteness Areas (RAs) include: Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, Very Remote. A complicated mathematical formula based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) is used after each census to re-calculate the different regions. New information about population density, births, deaths, migration, accessibility by road and also changes to census collection area boundaries is taken into account when working out the category of a particular area.

An Australian census is taken every five years to find out how many people there are in Australian and where they live. This helps government authorities to plan services such as education and health. The most recent census was in 2011. Much more care was taken in 2011 than in previous years to get accurate figures about how many Indigenous people were living in remote and very remote regions. This included special efforts to count families and individuals who move from place to place each year.

From the point of view of the Australian Government, no parts of the NT fit into the Major City or Inner Regional categories, not even Darwin or Alice Springs. The whole Territory is regarded as Outer Regional, Remote or Very Remote. No other Australian state has this pattern. An important reason for this is the length of time it takes to get to anywhere in the Territory by road.

Most Australians live quite close to the coast. This is the case also in the Northern Territory, even in the very remote areas. Generally speaking, more people live around the coast, including on the islands in the Top End, than in the Centre although Alice Springs is similar to Darwin in terms of how many people live in a relatively small area (ABS 2013b).

As we will see in more detail in Chapter Two, the history of education in the Northern Territory is mostly a history of failure to arrange adequate schooling for all children. The fact that such a large number of Territorians live in remote and very remote areas has always made it difficult to provide education and employment opportunities for Indigenous people. But in the 21st century, these difficulties have to be overcome if every Australian child is to get a proper, good quality education suitable for modern life. By looking more closely at population patterns in the Northern Territory, we can appreciate there are potential opportunities as well as challenges for delivering effective education services.

Population

The Northern Territory is the third largest state or territory in Australia with a land area (counting the islands) of 1,348,200 square kilometers. But, as we already know, it has the smallest population of any Australian state or territory. At the end of 2012, the Northern Territory population was thought to be only about 236,900 people, based on the 2011 Australian Census (ABS 2013a). With the total Australian population reaching 23 million people in April 2013, this means that about 1 in every 100 Australians lives in the Northern Territory.

Between June 2011 and June 2012, the population of all Australian states and territories increased. Western Australia grew the fastest. In the Northern Territory, the population grew more slowly, at about half the rate of Western Australia. There was a strong tendency everywhere in Australia for people to move away from rural and remote areas into the cities and towns. This was also noticeable in the Northern Territory. People moved into Darwin City, Darwin Suburbs, Litchfield and Palmerston. About half the people in the Northern Territory live in Darwin and the surrounding areas. In Australia as a whole, more than two out of three people live in one of the capital cities (ABS 2013b).

There are two ways in which the population changes, either through births and deaths or migration. An increase or decrease due to migration is calculated by comparing the number of people who leave with the number who arrive. The difference is called the *net* figure. Similarly, the rate of *natural*

increase or decrease is the difference between the number of people who die and the number of people who are born each year. If more people die than are born, the population is said to decrease from *natural causes*. If more people are born than die we say there is a *net natural increase*. From June 2011 to June 2012, the Northern Territory population grew by 3,500 people. This was a slightly slower rate of growth (1.5%) than of Australia as a whole (1.6%). Western Australia grew at the fastest rate (3.3%). Tasmania was the slowest growing state (ABS 2013b).

During the five year period 2004 to 2009, the Northern Territory was the third fastest growing state or territory (ABS 2011a) and had the fastest population turnover with more people coming and going than in other states. However, the number coming tended to balance out the number going resulting in very little difference to the size of the population overall.

The Northern Territory has a young population compared with other states and territories. The median age (the half way mark, where there are as many people above a certain age as below it) was 31 for the Northern Territory in 2011. By contrast, Australia as a whole has a rapidly aging population. The median age for all of Australia is 37. In the Northern Territory in 2011, children under the age of 15 made up 32.2% of the population while people aged more than 65 were only 5.7% of the population. In Australia as a whole, older people were a much greater proportion of the population with 14% aged 65 or older (ABS 2013c).

Between 2006 and 2011, natural increase was the main reason for population growth in the Northern Territory although the *rate* of increase was the slowest in Australia at only 5.4% compared with Western Australia, for instance, where the rate of increase in births over deaths was 23.2% (ABS 2013a).

Although the average number of babies women of child-bearing age have is currently rising across Australia, the average number in the Northern Territory is higher than the other states and territories. Using census figures, it has been estimated that Northern Territory women have, on average, a little more than two babies each (2.11), while in Victoria (the lowest average) women have less than two babies each (1.75) (ABS 2011b). These averages take into account the fact that some women have large families, while other women have no children at all.

Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory

The overall *number* of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory is not as large as the numbers in New South Wales, Queensland or Western Australia. What is different is the higher *proportion* of Indigenous to non-Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

More than half a million (548,370) Australians identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, or both, in the 2011 census. New South Wales had the highest number of Indigenous residents, with 172,624 people, followed by Queensland with 155,825 and Western Australia with 69,665. The Northern Territory had the fourth largest Indigenous population, with 56,779 people in 2011. Nearly one third of all the Indigenous people in Australia live in New South Wales (31.5%), while Queensland has 28.4% of the Indigenous population and Western Australia has 12.7%.
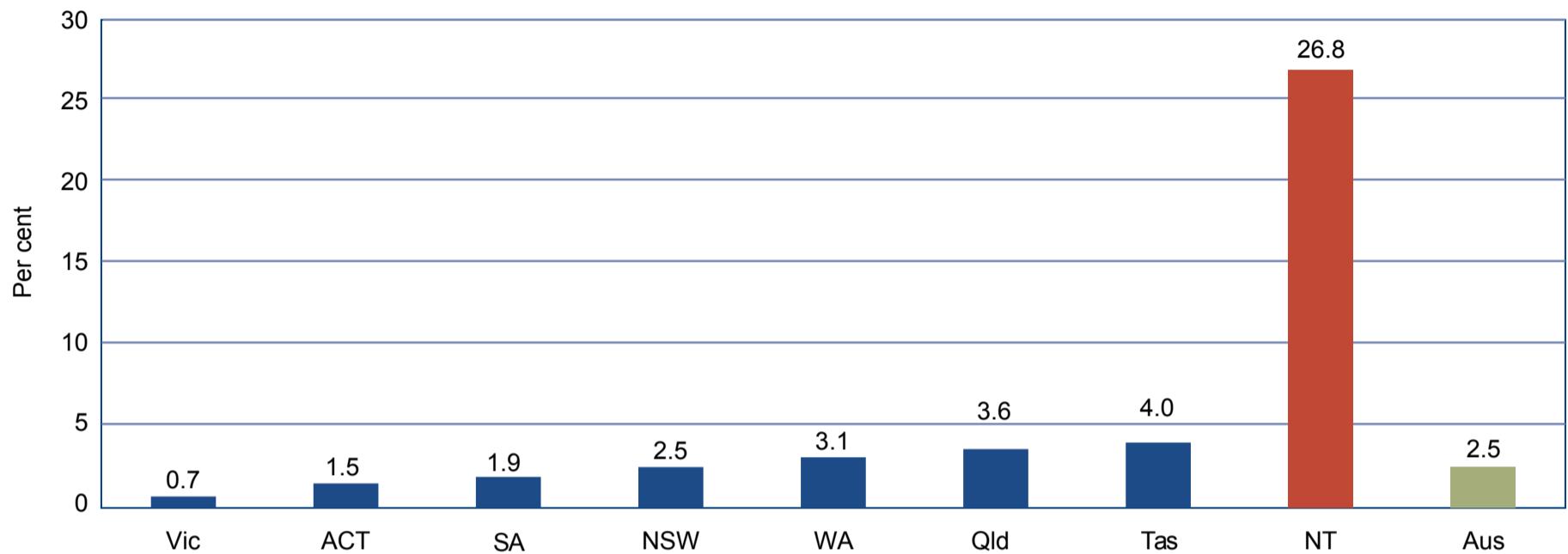
Only about one in ten Indigenous Australians live in the Northern Territory but Indigenous people make up nearly 27% of the Northern Territory population. Compare New South Wales, where three times as many Indigenous people live although they represent only 2.5% of the population. In Queensland Indigenous people are only 3.6% of the population and only 2.5% of the total population in Australia as a whole. (ABS 2012a)

We can understand how different the Northern Territory is, compared with other states and territories, by looking at the graph in Figure 1 taken from the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NTDET) Annual Report (June 2011 to June 2012). Here we can see clearly that the proportion of Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory is far greater than in the

other states. Since we also know that half the Indigenous people in the Northern Territory live in the remote and very remote regions, we can begin to understand why providing services to the same standard as in other parts of Australia has often not occurred in the past.

Figure 1. Indigenous population as a proportion in each state and territory 2011

Source: 2011 Census Quickstats
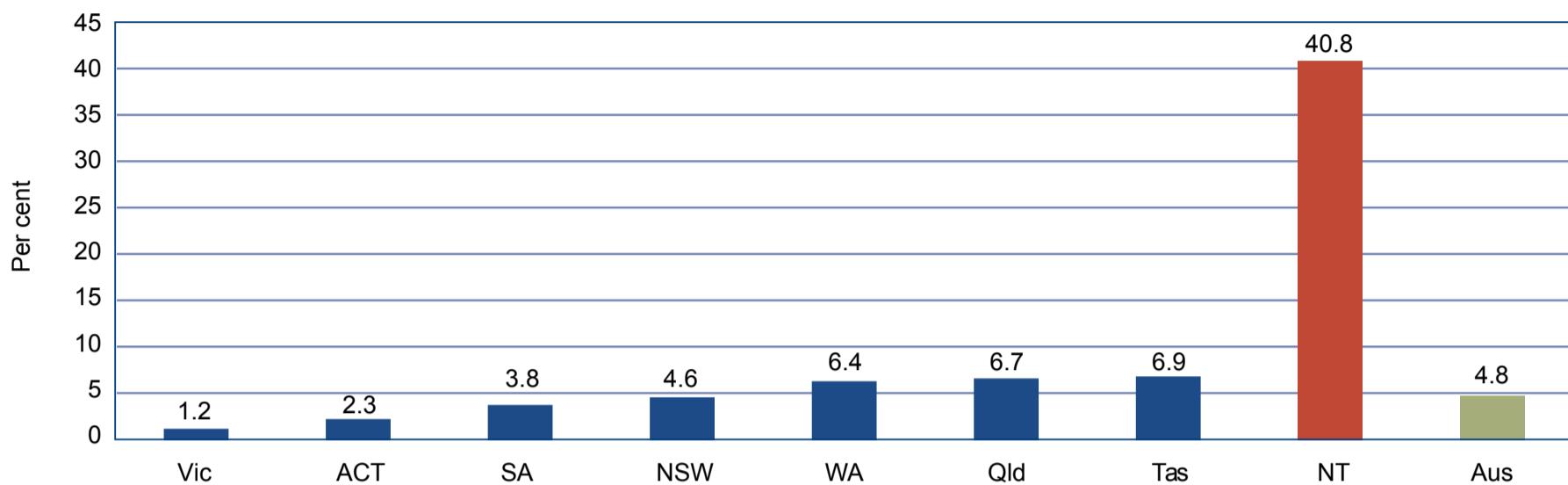
[2] Based on usual resident population.

(From: NT Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2011-2012*, p.23, Figure 6: Indigenous population as a proportion in each state and territory 2011.)*

When we look at Figure 2, we can see how the proportion of school aged children in the Northern Territory is even higher than the proportion of all Indigenous to non-Indigenous people. This, as we said previously, is because of the young population. It is possible that the proportion is even slightly higher than shown in Figure 2 if there are still some Indigenous children not enrolled in any school. The Australian and Territory Governments have been trying to make sure that every child in the Territory is enrolled and attends school regularly, but it's possible some children who move around a lot with their families are not enrolled in any school and are not counted in these statistics.

Figure 2: Indigenous students as proportion of total student population by state and territory, 2011

Source: ABS 4221.0 Schools, Australia -NSSC table 43a - Full-time equivalent students - by state and territories, affiliation, sex, age, Indigenous status

(From: NT Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2011-2012, *p.24, Figure 7: Indigenous students as proportion of total student population by state and territory, 2011.)*

A closer look at why the Northern Territory has a young population

As we have already suggested, one reason why there is a higher proportion of young people in the Northern Territory than elsewhere is, of course, that there are more young than old Indigenous people. In fact, the third biggest age group in the Northern Territory consists of preschoolers. There were 17,119 children aged 0-4 years in 2011, comprising 8.1% of the whole Northern Territory population, compared with 6.6% in Australia as a whole.

The non-Indigenous population is also relatively young, compared with the rest of Australia. The biggest age group in the Northern Territory in 2011 (19,213 people) were the 25-29 year olds (9.1% compared with 7.1% across Australia), with 30-34 year olds being the next largest group at 8.2%. Only 6.8% of the whole Australian population is this age. These young adults include many non-Indigenous people who have come to the Northern Territory to work. Although many of these people settle down and stay for the rest of their lives, others return to their families down south after a few years and new, younger workers come to take their place.

The proportion of each age group, up to and including people aged 40-44 years, is bigger in the Northern Territory than in Australia as a whole. But the Northern Territory has the same proportion
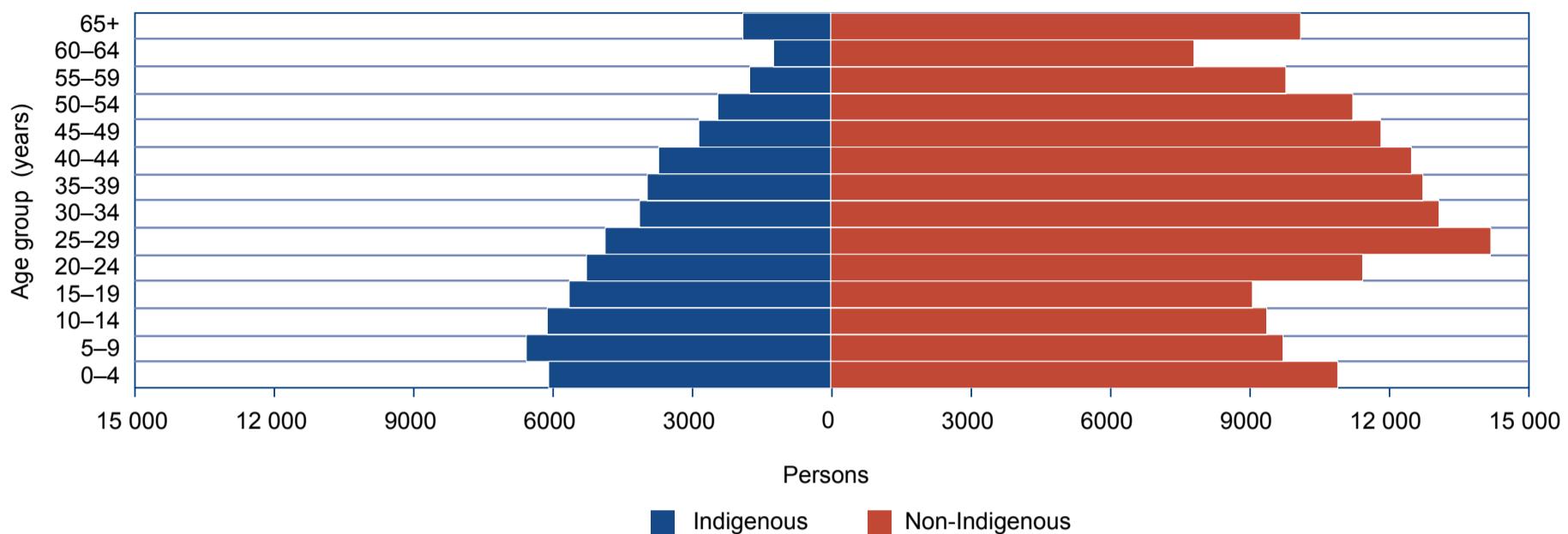
(7%) aged 45-49 years as the whole of Australia and, after that, the proportion of older people gets smaller in the Territory compared with the rest of Australia. For instance, the proportion aged 65-69 is only 2.5% compared with 4.3% in the whole of Australia.

Thinking again about preschoolers, the proportion of children aged 0-4 in Australia as a whole is quite similar to the proportion of people aged 75 years or more (6.6%) compared with 6.4%). But in the Northern Territory, the proportion of 0-4 year olds is much bigger than the proportion of people older than 75 (8.1% compared with 1.6%). As we saw above, there are more than 17,000 preschoolers but there are only about 3,500 people older than 75 years in the Northern Territory. Figure 3 shows very clearly the reason for this is so many Indigenous people die young in the NT.

The data used by NTDET in Figure 3 are slightly different from the ones quoted above because they are based on different calculations. The important point to note, however, is that the number of people aged 65 or more in the *non-Indigenous* population is very similar to the number of children aged 0-4, the same as for the Australian population as a whole. But the number of *Indigenous* children aged 0-4 is very much larger than the number of Indigenous people aged 65 or more. This is because of very high levels of serious ill health among older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Northern Territory.

Figure 3: Indigenous and non-Indigenous age groups in the Northern Territory

Source: ABS 2001.0 Basic Community Profile, NT 2011

[1] ABS 3101.0 Australian Demographic Statistics, December 2011 (unrebased ERP 2006 Census).
[2] ABS 2001.0 Basic Community Profile, NT 2011
[3] Based on usual place of residence
[4] Non-Indigenous includes people who have not stated their Indigenous status

(From: NT Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2011-2012, p.21, Figure 2: Northern Territory age distribution by Indigenous status, 2011.)

We also see in Figure 3 that there are just over twice as many non-Indigenous people as Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

Why are the numbers of young children so high in the Northern Territory? In 2011, the census found that Australian women were giving birth to less than two babies each on average (1.88 babies), not enough to replace the parents. Of course migration helps to keep the population up when the birth rate falls like this. By contrast, Indigenous women were having nearly three babies each at 2.74 babies on average. Indigenous women were tending to have their babies when they were younger as well (ABS 2012b).

It is interesting to think about the *median* age of a population group. This is the age where the number of people who are older than that age is the same as the number who are younger. In Queensland, the median age of Indigenous people is 20, meaning that there are as many people younger than 20 as there are older than 20 in that state. This is an extremely young median age. The median age is older in the Northern Territory where it is 23. But even here, we can say that

half of all Indigenous people are the age where they should be receiving education or training of some kind. We also know that many of these young people are parents as well, which means that they have family responsibilities that schools and colleges need to take into account.

The Indigenous population in Australia has been growing faster than the rest of the population during the last few decades. It has been difficult at times to be sure how many Indigenous people were in Australia in the past. One reason is that people today are more likely to identify themselves as being of Indigenous origin than they were 30 or 40 years ago. According to Taylor (2012) this may be happening much more in other states than in the Territory. Taylor also points out that more and more mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnering now occurs.

If a father is non-Indigenous and a mother Indigenous, it's likely the children will be listed on the census paper as Indigenous, like their mother. The increase in the Indigenous population from this source will be picked up in statistics relating to Indigenous birth rates (Biddle 2013). When a non-Indigenous mother partners with an Indigenous father, Biddle (2012, p. 4) states that: 'a large minority' of children from this type of union are 'also likely to be identified as being Indigenous' on the census form. In Darwin in 2011, both mother and father were Indigenous in only about three out of ten couples. But, outside Darwin, both partners were Indigenous in eight out of ten couples (Taylor 2012, p 4).
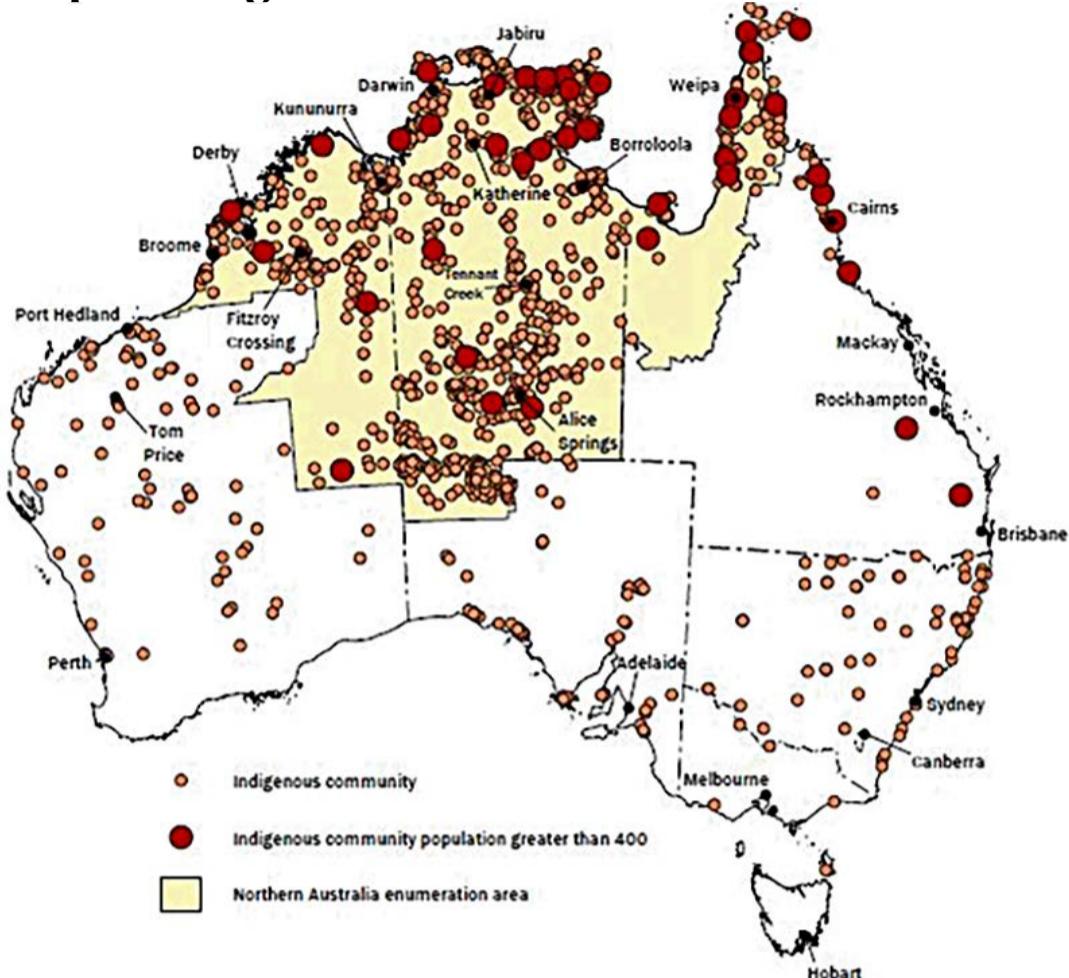
Methods of collecting census information in remote and very remote areas have improved. More people are being counted on census night than in the past. These facts may make the increase in the Indigenous population seem larger than it really has been, although natural increase is a real and important factor just the same, with important implications for schooling and child health provisions.

Remote and very remote communities

Map 1 shows all the communities identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for the 2011 census. It reminds us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are mostly in the north and centre of Australia and in the remote and very remote areas of the country. The majority are also in the Northern Territory.

Map 1: Indigenous communities[1] in remote and very remote parts of Australia

From: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the 2011 census. In 2071.0 – Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, July 2011: 2011 Census: Northern Australia Enumeration Strategy Region and Discrete Indigenous Communities *(ABS 2011d)*

Looking at this map, we can understand why the NTER Evaluation Report emphasised that:

> The distance from metropolitan centres creates problems in accessing employment markets, government services and even basics such as fresh food for far more Indigenous people in the Northern Territory than for Indigenous people in other states (NTER 2011, p. 57).

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1 Note: A discrete Indigenous community is a geographic location, bounded by physical or cadastral (legal) boundaries and inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander residents (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents), with housing or infrastructure that is managed on a community basis.

The report also explained that some communities are growing very fast as people continue to move into the more highly populated parts of the Northern Territory. They said that:

> Only three Aboriginal towns had a population of over 1,000 people 20 years ago. Barely 12 percent of the Territory's remote area Aboriginal population lived in these three towns. Now there are 10 such towns, which are home to more than one-quarter of the prescribed area population, and four more settlements will soon reach that size (NTER 2011, p. 57).

Growth Towns and Homelands

Andrew Taylor (2012) has looked at the populations of Territory Growth Towns as shown in census counts of people who said they were living at their usual residence on the night the counting was done. He found that more non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous people were living in the Growth towns in 2011 than previously. But many people in the Northern Territory were in some other location for work or family reasons on the night of the census. This makes it difficult to know for sure just how many people really call one of the towns home.

Between 2006 and 2011, however, the combined population of all the towns as measured by the two censuses grew from more than 16,000 to more than 18,000. The number of non-Indigenous people in those towns almost doubled in that time. A large number of these people were aged 20-35 (p.3). This was no doubt due to the NTER and other government programs bringing workers into the Northern Territory.

The Growth Towns, as we saw earlier in this chapter, are administrative centres. Some people move to these towns to get access to better services, for instance health services, than they can get in their Homelands. Other people move to be with relatives or just because they want to live in a place with more people. Some move for work or study reasons. However, everywhere in Australia, where people from different language groups have come together to live crowded together, tensions and conflicts have also happened.

Children often lose their traditional languages when they live in towns. For instance, they might start talking Kriol instead of a traditional Aboriginal language or they might feel more comfortable talking Aboriginal English. In an increasing number of families where only one parent is Indigenous, the children speak English most of the time. While this means they might manage better at school, it also means their links to their traditional cultures become weaker.

There are many wise elders who worry about the way people are leaving their homelands and moving to the towns. The Northern Territory Government has made it clear that funds will be limited for maintaining homelands compared with the Growth Towns.

In the foreword of a booklet called *The Land Still Holds Us*, Rosalie Kunoth-Monks an Alywarr and Amnatyerr elder from Utopia homelands, had this to say:

I can look back over 70 years on this part of the land. There was a richness of the relationships between people so you felt never alone. You felt secure, you felt you belonged.

We always said *pmerel atnyenem*, we never said *pmer nhenh tha atnyenem*. That means, country owns or holds you, not you holding the country and becoming master of the land.

From time immemorial there had been an order where nobody queried who was who, who had the right to speak, who had the right to be a ceremonial leader and everything was orderly, yet inclusive.

We still felt the strength and the security of our law and order, even as late as the 1990s. The 1990s saw us living on established homelands that we still live on now. We still felt that carrying out our laws was holding us together and the community was still cohesive and strong.

Fast forward to 2007, we had the visit from departmental staff, the army and the police, who told us we were now under the Intervention. Suddenly there was a policy in the Northern Territory that took away our rights. It was assault. It traumatised all of us, so we looked around to see what made sense. What made sense was at all costs to hang onto the land.

As we go into 2012, we see that there are certain Aboriginal communities earmarked as growth towns. Let me assure anybody who cares for the Aboriginal people of Australia that once we are moved from our place of origin, we will not only lose our identity, we will die a traumatised, tragic end.

We cannot have identity if we are put into these reservations that are now called growth towns, we will become third-class, non-existent human beings.

This is a tragedy that is unfolding through the policies of an uncaring government. It seems sentimental and – I can't find the other word in English – about attachment to the land. It's not attachment to the land, it's survival of a cultural practice that is still alive in spite of what has been thrown at it.

We need to stop the destruction of the oldest living culture in the world (Kunoth-Monks 2011, p.2).

The challenges facing providers of education are many when it comes to population patterns. It is essential to know how many people there are, where they live, and who they are if schooling and training opportunities are to be provided in an effective way. Yet obtaining accurate estimates of Northern Territory population distribution is still very difficult. The fact that many people still move around as they did before Europeans arrived also makes Western style schooling problematic. It also gives rise to questions about when, where and how traditional teaching and learning practices take place. Children and young people have the right to learn their languages and cultural obligations in their traditional country, as Rosalie Kunoth-Monks says. We will come back to these issues again in later chapters.

Centrelink keeps details about people's addresses and the census every five years provides some more detail. The NTER Review Board of 2008 mentioned: 'short-term circular movement in the overall context of total mobility' and 'considerable churn, but no net relocation' (NTER 2008, p.98). By this they meant that the total population of an area tends to stay more or less the same even though people keep moving.

This becomes a problem for town planners who need to know about population to plan for provision of essential services. Schools need to know where particular children are at any given time. They need to make sure that those children are getting the best opportunities possible to keep up their learning at school as well as their cultural learning in their own country. Education departments also need to know how many teachers to send and where to send them each year.

Families and children want to keep their languages and cultures strong. Many families and young people also want to participate fully in mainstream Australian life, even if only for some parts of their lives. To live safely and competently in the towns and cities of Australia, people need all the skills and knowledge they can get. Schools and teachers are responsible for making sure all Australian children learn what they need for modern life. Families and communities are responsible for keeping languages strong and helping young people grow up confident and strong in their cultural traditions.

Families and schools can work together to make sure Indigenous children get the chance to develop as strong, confident young people, able to live in two worlds if they want to.

In Chapter Two, we look back over the history of schooling in the Northern Territory since Europeans first came to the North. It is a sad history in many ways, but there were also some important achievements we can build on today, if we know about them.

Chapter Two: A brief history of Indigenous schooling in the Northern Territory

Mission schools

The first permanent European settlement in the Northern Territory–Palmerston–was established nearly 150 years ago in 1867. Only later was the town given the name of Darwin. The first school for non-Indigenous children was set up in Palmerston in 1877.

In that same year, Lutheran missionaries established the first school for Indigenous children at their Hermannsburg mission in Central Australia. Hermannsburg is now called Ntaria. Here the missionaries taught the children to speak, read and write their *Western Arrarnta* mother tongue. (This is the preferred spelling at Ntaria today. Alternative spellings are *Arrente* and, in the past, *Aranda*). They also taught English and several other European languages. It seems these early Lutherans took for granted the children at Ntaria were capable of learning all the things that non-Indigenous children normally learnt at school at that time.

Over the next 60 years, missionaries from several different churches moved into remote parts of the Northern Territory and set up missions to convert Indigenous people to Christianity. They also wanted to protect Indigenous people from Europeans who had moved in to look for minerals or set up cattle stations. As we saw in Chapter One, these people were often violent and cruel. The missionaries also said that they wanted to stop fighting between the different clan groups, and received backing from the Northern Territory police on this issue.

Some missions created problems between different clan groups by making people from different country live too close together. Usually only one of the clan groups belonged to the land the mission was built on. Other groups felt uncomfortable living in someone else's country, so it was not surprising that conflicts continued from time to time.

Some missionaries took the trouble to learn about Indigenous culture, law, languages and clan organisation, but other missionaries did not think this was part of their job. Some missionaries understood and respected Indigenous people and learned a great deal from them. Others could not see any value in the knowledge and traditions that had evolved in this country over many thousands of years before people from other countries came and took the land.

The missionaries provided schooling, a health clinic and food rations to encourage people to stay with them. Often the food was little more than the 'flour, sugar and tea' that old people still talk about. Sometimes meals such as stews were cooked in a community kitchen and served out to all the residents who had to line up with their bowls or plates. Sometimes the meals were only for school children. The missionaries also taught the people how to build houses, churches, and other community buildings. Dormitories or boarding schools were also built on most missions and the children were made to live in them, away from their families. The children were generally expected to speak English after school, as well as during school hours. They were often punished for speaking their own language/s.

Light skinned children in particular were often forcibly removed from their families. They were generally locked into their dormitories at night so they could not escape and go back to their mothers. This caused enormous agony and heartache for families and for the children themselves. Many children naturally felt a great sense of loss and uncertainty about who they were. These terrible experiences of children all over Australia are told in detail in the *Bringing Them Home* report (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families 1997). Children who were taken away by force and brought up in boarding schools or children's homes are often referred to as 'the Stolen Generations'.

Many Indigenous people have written about their personal experiences as members of the Stolen Generations. Claire Henty-Gebert, an Alyawarra woman, has written a moving story about her life (Henty-Gerbert 2005). She was taken from her mother at the age of three or four and never saw her again. Her mother had done her best to hide her light skinned child from the police and government officials by rubbing soot and fat into her skin. Henty-Gerbert describes her early life at The Bungalow in Alice Springs (a government home for mixed heritage children). Later she was taken to Croker Island Methodist Mission where, during the Second World War, non-Indigenous women and children on Croker were taken to safety in the southern states. The mission children were left behind, directly under the flight path of enemy bombers. The idea was to leave them to manage their safety in whatever way they could. Fortunately, some of the missionaries who looked after them disagreed with this decision and stayed behind to later take the children south away from danger.

After the war, the children returned to Croker Island. Henty-Gebert's writing tells the story of her life on the mission and in Darwin as an adult, and includes 44 photographs. When we see all her

granddaughters and great-granddaughters have Claire or Clara as part of their names, it suggests to us this remarkable woman was very much loved by her family. She overcame experiences which destroyed many other people who had been dragged away from their mothers by police or welfare workers.

Claire Henty-Gebert writes in her book: 'I know we had a better life on Croker than most other children in institutions in the Northern Territory'. But when talking about punishment, she simply comments that 'not all the missionaries were bad' (Henty-Gerbert 2005, p.16). We are left to imagine what she does not describe. In fact some missionaries were very cruel at Croker, at least to the boys, as Petchkovsky et al have reported (2004).

Many missionaries tried to convince people that their traditional cultural responsibilities were old fashioned and 'heathen', or evil. Although some Indigenous adults were physically safer on the missions than in their own country, they were often treated like children. Their right to make their own decisions as adults was taken away. Many people worried that their traditional knowledge and ceremonies would be forgotten if they lived too long on the missions. They could see that young people would not be able to learn how to find their own food in the traditional way or how to carry out their obligations to their relatives and to the land if they were not allowed to live or travel with their families. They were afraid important aspects of culture would be lost.

Colin Tatz explains the very wide range of powers given to missionaries by governments at that time. As he says:

> The missionaries ... became active agents of various governmental policies, such as protection-segregation, assimilation, so-called integration and some of the latter-day notions like self-determination and self-management. More than agents, they were delegated an astonishing array of unchallengeable powers. Uniquely — in terms of modern missionary activity in colonized societies — mission boards became the sole civil authority in their domains. They ran schools, infirmaries [places for sick people], farms and gardens, provided water, sewerage and similar public utility services, established dormitories, built jails, prosecuted 'wrongdoers', jailed them, counselled them, controlled their incomes, forbade their customs and acted as sole legal guardians of every adult and every child. Almost incidentally, they also tried to Christianize the inmates according to their varying dogmas and doctrines, with little success (Tatz 1999, p. 18-19).

Table 1 is a list of missions in the Northern Territory between 1877 and the Second World War.

Table 1: Northern Territory Church missions 1877-1942

Year	Location	Denomination
1877	Finke River (Hermannsburg/Ntaria)	Lutheran
1886	Daly River	Roman Catholic
1908	Roper River (Ngukurr)	Church Mission Society
1911	Bathurst Island	Roman Catholic
1916	Goulburn Island	Methodist
1921	Groote Eylandt	Church Mission Society
1925	Oenpelli (Gunbalanya)	Church Mission Society
1933	Milingimbi	Methodist
1935	Yirrkala	Methodist
1934	Port Keats/Wadeye	Roman Catholic
1937	Santa Teresa (Ltyentye Apurte)	Roman Catholic
1940	Melville Island	Roman Catholic
1942	Elcho Island	Methodist

In most missions there were people who were able to manage both worlds. They learnt how to live according to the White Man's rules and kept up their own traditional knowledge and responsibilities as well. Often they provided leadership for others in their communities. Many mission children grew up able to read and write, some at levels equal to those of non-Indigenous children. Some older people who were educated on missions have better literacy levels today than some of their grandchildren, while others never understood why they were supposed to go to school, or how it would help them.

Government schooling for Indigenous children

As we saw in Chapter One, the New South Wales, South Australian and Australian Governments had control over the Northern Territory at different times during the early years. After 1937, government settlements began to be built. Similar to the missions, they provided food rations and medical help. Two early government settlements established in 1939 were at Bagot in Darwin and Amoonguna in Alice Springs, with another established at Borroloola in 1949. People were often moved forcibly into these settlements so that they would not try to fight the Europeans who now owned or leased Aboriginal land and wanted to have complete control over it.

Most government schools in the Northern Territory in the first part of the 20th century were only for non-Indigenous children, however children with non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous parents were accepted into some government schools, for instance Alice Springs Primary School, from as early as 1914.

By the 1950s, most non-Indigenous Australians believed settlements and missions were necessary to make Indigenous people assimilate into a European way of life. Indigenous men and women were taught European skills such as carpentry, motor maintenance, sewing and cleaning. They were also taught how to give basic medical assistance and Western ideas about child care. Some helped in the schools. Some had jobs on cattle stations, but this work was often seasonal and paid for with food, clothing and tobacco, rather than money. Many of the people who worked on the stations at least continued to live in their own country. During the wet season when they were not working for the station manager they would visit different parts of their country and keep their culture alive by attending to ceremonial business. They often encouraged young people to use their languages and develop their traditional knowledge.

Aboriginal Special Schools

When the government took control of education, mission schools became less important. In 1950, under the Australian Government's plan to provide education for all Indigenous students, the Commonwealth Office of Education established four *Aboriginal Special Schools*. The initial enrolment was 160 students. English was the language of instruction in these schools and in 1953 the first Aboriginal Teaching Assistants were employed, although they had no formal training at this time.

The term *special* referred to the fact that the curriculum was 'specially designed for Aborigines and as a vehicle of assimilation … it was always regarded as essentially an interim measure to bring Aboriginal children to a stage where they would be able to attend' regular schools (Urvet et al 1980, p.15). A detailed history of public educational services in the Northern Territory over 100 years (1876-1979) is provided by Urvet (1982). Table 2 gives the numbers of special schools between 1950 and 1975.

Table 2: Aboriginal Special Schools 1950-1975

Year	Special Schools	Student Enrolment	Teachers
1950	4	160	Not known
1955	11	544	Not known
1958	29	1937	53
1972	63	6181	306
1975	75	5900	350

T. Harris (1990) wrote a comprehensive report on Indigenous Special Schools, including data on enrolments and attendances. The following school profile (Table 3) is one example from his report:

Table 3: Borroloola Community School
(Language groups: Mara, Garawa, Yanyuwa)
Two outstations. Staff: Teachers = 10; Assistant teachers = 6; Adult Educator = 1.

Level	Enrolment	Attendance (4 week average)
Pre-school	6	3
Primary	118	84
Post-Primary	15	7

(From: Harris (1990, p. 54) Talking is not enough: A review of the education of traditionally oriented Aboriginal people in the NT*)*

Self Determination and Human Rights for all Australians

During the 1960s, Indigenous people began to insist more strongly on the right to manage their own lives, a move towards self-determination. In 1962 it was formally recognised that Indigenous Australians have the right to vote in Australian Government elections and at the 1967 Australian Referendum they were granted full citizenship rights. However, it is of note that as late as 1967, Indigenous people still did not have the right to vote in state elections in Western Australia or Queensland, according to the website *What citizenship rights existed in Australia by 1967?* (National Museum of Australia & Ryebuck Media)

The only state in which award wages were paid to Indigenous people was New South Wales, the same and only state in which Indigenous people could move around freely or own property. Indigenous people could still not marry freely in many parts of Australia. The only states in which they had control of their own children were New South Wales and Victoria, and no Indigenous Australian could drink alcohol freely in any part of Australia unless they were granted a special permit.

This was the situation only a little more than 50 years ago, and well remembered by those who grew up during this period. Many non-Indigenous Australians were unaware of the amount of discrimination against Indigenous Australians. Even if they were, it was generally accepted as normal. They did not think about how it would feel to not be allowed to make your own decisions or live your own life without constantly having to please the Welfare Officers who had control over you.

It seems shocking today to think that Indigenous people were not legal citizens of their own country until 1967. They were also not counted in the national census at that time. This tells us that Indigenous people were not regarded as equal to other human beings in Australia.

Before 1967, an Indigenous person had to apply for citizenship. If the applicant was successful, the person had to carry a *Certificate of Exemption* which was often referred to as a *dog tag*. The National Museum has an interesting website with stories about this unjust and humiliating system. It is called *From little things big things grow 1920-1970: Programmed to be white*. It includes the following information:

> From the 1940s, in most parts of Australia, the state governments issued thousands of these certificates. The granting of a certificate gave its Indigenous recipient citizenship rights that they otherwise did not possess, yet which were enjoyed by the non-Indigenous majority of Australian society. They included 'privileges' such as being allowed to vote, attend school, go into hotels, and be exempted from the restrictions of state protection laws. However, while many Indigenous Australians were able to apply for and obtain such a certificate, they were not easily granted, had to be carried at all times, be produced on demand, and in some states could be revoked at any time without any rights of appeal.
>
> The conditions and requirements placed on applicants for certificates were also not easily satisfied. Applicants had to agree to abandon association with the Indigenous community, give up their traditional culture, including connections with Country, and to break off contact with their Indigenous kinship [network], except for their closest family.
>
> If any of these culturally and personally alienating conditions were ever broken, the certificate could usually be revoked without warning. In addition to these requirements, applicants also had to demonstrate that they kept their home clean and in good repair, that they were of a 'sober disposition', that they were law-abiding individuals that stayed out of trouble — the list goes on.
>
> Seeing the certificate as their only chance to obtain a level of freedom and a more comfortable life, some Indigenous Australians nonetheless decided to apply for a certificate, despite all the sacrifices that it required.
>
> Others, without their knowledge, had received them as children after being forcefully removed from their families and placed in institutions; while still others decided that the injustice of it all outweighed the benefits and never applied (National Museum Australia website, no date).

In 1969, there was another human rights victory for Indigenous people when the policies which had (since 1887 in the rest of Australia and since 1911 in the Northern Territory) allowed mixed heritage

Indigenous Australian children to be taken from their families by force were finally abolished. These policies had also made all Indigenous children, whether they lived with their parents or not, wards of the state until they were 18 years old. As the *Bringing Them Home* report explains:

> By 1911 the Northern Territory and every State except Tasmania had 'protectionist legislation' giving the Chief Protector or Protection Board extensive power to control Indigenous people. In some States and in the Northern Territory the Chief Protector was made the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children, displacing the rights of parents. The management of the reserves was delegated to government appointed managers or missionaries in receipt of government subsidies. Enforcement of the protectionist legislation at the local level was the responsibility of 'protectors' who were usually police officers.
>
> In the name of protection Indigenous people were subject to near-total control. Their entry to and exit from reserves was regulated as was their everyday life on the reserves, their right to marry and their employment (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families 1997, p. 23).

It was not until 2008 that the Prime Minister apologised to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Australian Government for the harm done to Indigenous Australians in the name of assimilation.

Reforming Indigenous schooling in the NT: 1960s to 1980s

In 1960, the Australian Government had, as we saw in Chapter One, already set up *a Committee to Inquire into the Educational Needs of the People of the Northern Territory*. This was followed in 1964 by the Northern Territory Administration commissioning a major review of teaching methods and curriculum used in Aboriginal Special Schools. By this time there were special schools in 13 settlements and 14 missions.

This important Inquiry was conducted by Betty Watts, Professor of Education at the University of Queensland. Watts has been an influential person for many years in Aboriginal Education in Australia. She was assisted by Jim Gallacher who worked for the Commonwealth Aboriginal Education department and later joined the Northern Territory Department of Education. Their comprehensive report was used to guide Indigenous education in Northern Territory schools between 1964 and 1974, the same period in which Indigenous people won equal rights as citizens of their own country.

The Watts/Gallacher team investigated curricula from pre-school to adult education. Their recommendations included using English as the medium of instruction in all schools, training Aboriginal Teaching Assistants, establishing residential schools, establishing preschools in all communities and setting up parent-teacher committees in all Aboriginal schools.

Government boarding schools for secondary students

Three residential colleges for Indigenous secondary students were set up soon afterwards by the Australian Government: Kormilda College in Darwin, Yirara College in Alice Springs and Dhupuma College near Yirrkala and the mining town of Nhulunbuy in North East Arnhem Land. These boarding schools aimed to teach teenagers from remote communities how to cope with European expectations of life and mainstream education requirements. Some of the leading women and men in remote communities today gained valuable knowledge and confidence through the education they received at these three colleges.

Dhupuma College opened in 1972 and unexpectedly closed in 1980. Kormilda College opened in 1968 with 121 students from 27 communities. Management was transferred from the Australian Government when the Northern Territory became self-governing in 1978. In 1989, the Anglican and Uniting Churches took over joint management and the school continues today with non-residential students from the wider community as well as students from remote communities. There were 980 students in 2013, according to the Kormilda College website. Yirara College was opened in 1973 but was transferred in 1992 by the Northern Territory Government to the Finke River Mission seven kilometers south of Alice Springs. Today it is a boarding school run by the Lutheran Church in Central Australia primarily for young people from remote communities in that region. It also receives support from Top End communities.

The first Aboriginal Teacher Assistants

Aboriginal Teacher Assistants (TAs) were first employed in the Northern Territory schools in the 1950s because the government realised an English only program delivered by non-Indigenous teachers would be almost impossible without assistants who could speak the children's languages. TAs were expected to translate what the non-Indigenous teachers were trying to tell the children.

Formal training of TAs started in the late 1960s, as recommended by the Watts/Gallacher review. The *Aboriginal Teacher Education College* (ATEC) was initially set up as an annex of Kormilda College in Darwin. Later it also became a residential school providing 'short programs for Aboriginal

teacher aides and assistants in community schools' (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education website). In 1972 ATEC was relocated to Batchelor about 100 km south of Darwin. Ten years later, it was renamed Batchelor College, at which time new buildings were added to the campus.

The Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATE)

During the 1970s there was a strong move back to country in what was called the *Homelands Movement*. Bilingual schools were also set up in some communities. Both of these developments will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

With so many people wanting to live in their Homelands, ATEC (the Aboriginal Teacher Education College) realised more teachers would need to be trained for community schools. The *Remote Area Teacher Education Program* (RATE) program commenced with lecturers being sent out to the larger communities in remote and very remote areas to train local teachers onsite. The first of these onsite courses was established in 1976 at Yirrkala in North East Arnhem Land.

In 1978 the Northern Territory Education Act was passed. All Aboriginal special schools and mission schools and the 7,000 Indigenous Australian students enrolled in these schools were now back under the control of the Northern Territory Government once more. By 1983, the teacher education program at Batchelor College included an Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools) and the RATE program was expanded to several other communities.

RATE played a crucial role in training Indigenous Australians to become qualified classroom teachers, with most of these teachers working in the Bilingual Education programs (Dickson 2009). By 1998, when bilingual programs were being wound down, 75% of Batchelor College's teaching graduates had worked in bilingual schools (Greatorex 2008).

The Deakin-Batchelor Teacher Education Program (D-BATE)

Some Indigenous teachers also graduated from Batchelor College with a bachelor level degree which the college taught in partnership with Deakin University in Victoria. Henry & McTaggart explain how the D-BATE began:

> The Deakin-Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (D-BATE) began in 1986 because Aboriginal students in the third year of the Associate Diploma of Teaching at Batchelor College in the Northern Territory sought an alternative way of upgrading their qualifications to Diploma of Teaching

equivalence. Several institutions were approached about developing a program ... which would help Aboriginal teachers to work more closely with their own traditional communities to develop Aboriginal education. For the Aboriginal students and teachers who had graduated from Batchelor College, the key idea ... was that of 'both ways' education. They wanted a course that was respectful of Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination, and which explored the possibilities of the co-option of Western knowledge for Aboriginal purposes. ...

Batchelor College graduates were admitted to the Deakin University three year Bachelor of Arts in Education ... with two years of advanced standing for their previous studies at Batchelor (Henry & McTaggart 1991b, p. 7-8).

The D-BATE program ran for three years to the end of 1988. The course was delivered in periods of intensive study at Batchelor or, on one occasion, at Deakin. These two to three week sessions alternated with 'school and community based study and action research work usually in the student's own community' (Henry & McTaggart 1991b, p. 11). Deakin staff members taught during intensive phases and also visited communities from time to time.

The students worked in an ongoing way with tutors in their own communities and also spent 'about two days per week in the school, teaching their prepared lessons and studying curriculum and other documents' (Henry & McTaggart 1991b, p. 11). In 1989, a Batchelor fourth year began, on the action research model of the Deakin course. Henry & McTaggart (1991a) edited a collection of articles by D-BATE students. In these articles the students reported on their work as teacher-researchers during the course. An important aim of the course was that students would develop new Indigenous pedagogies that were appropriate for their communities. Some of the ideas that were explored at that time are still important to Indigenous educators in the Territory today, as we will see in the section on Two Way or Both Ways thinking later in this chapter.

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

In 1989, the Australian Government recognised Batchelor College as a Higher Education Institution. A second campus was established in Alice Springs in 1990 in response to the desire of Indigenous people in Central Australia for locally based teacher and language worker training. Later that year 'annexes were also opened in Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Tennant Creek' (Batchelor Institute website).

In 1999 the *Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education Act 1999* was passed. Batchelor College became the *Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.* At the same time, entry level literacy and numeracy requirements were raised, making it more difficult for many students who had been able to attend courses previously. Preparatory courses were needed to help students reach an appropriate level of proficiency to handle the new courses. While this was a good thing, in that it aimed to raise the standard of Indigenous teacher education in the Territory, it had a negative effect. Fewer Northern Territory students enrolled. The Institute also started degree courses in other subject areas and no longer focused mainly on education. Indigenous students from other parts of Australia were encouraged to enroll.

According to the Batchelor Institute website, in 1985 there were only about 100 trainee teachers at Batchelor. By 2003, there were 3,100 students from all over Australia studying about 80 courses of various kinds and at various levels. The problem is that not enough of these students were training to become teachers in the Northern Territory.

For readers who would like to know more about Indigenous teacher education in the Northern Territory, former Batchelor Institute Director, Veronica Arbon's 2006 PhD thesis provides a description of the issues that impacted on and fundamentally changed the focus of teacher education as Batchelor Institute moved from being a College to an Institute. See also Martha Kamara's 2009 PhD thesis which includes a timeline of events in the development of Batchelor Institute from 1953, when it was first decided to employ Indigenous Teaching Assistants, to 2007 (Appendix H, p. 316-323). Appendix G (p. 311-315) in the thesis is a table showing dates and events relevant to the history of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory from 1877 to 2009.

We can see how important the movement for self-determination was in the history of Batchelor Institute when we look at the two principles at the heart of their policies:

> Two principles underpin all aspects of the Institute's life. First, cultural interaction and cross-cultural learning follow a 'both-ways' philosophy which enables exploration of Indigenous Australian traditions of knowledge and Western academic disciplinary positions and cultural contexts. Second, through its work and its courses, Batchelor Institute affirms the aspiration to self-determination and employment held by Indigenous Australians (Batchelor Institute website).

The both-ways philosophy now followed at Batchelor Institute originally developed from calls from Indigenous leaders for *Two Way, not One Way* education in the period from the 1970s to the 1990s. We will take a closer look at this philosophy soon, but first, let's look at what has been happening with regard to Indigenous teacher training in recent years.

Indigenous Teacher Education in the NT in recent years

The low numbers of Indigenous teachers graduating from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education has affected Indigenous education in the Northern Territory in a serious way. Brian Devlin explains:

> By 2008 a number of factors were constraining the successful operation of all remote schools, including the eight with bilingual programs. Unsatisfactory student attendance rates were an obvious worry, but another unpublicized factor affecting the operation of the bilingual schools in particular was the diminishing supply of trained Aboriginal teachers graduating from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (Devlin 2011, p. 262).

According to Batchelor Institute statistics, only 51 early childhood and primary teachers have graduated from the Institute since 2003. Nineteen of these graduated in 2011. There were no graduates in 2004 and six or fewer in all the other years. Not all of the graduates were from the Northern Territory so it is quite likely that not all of these qualified teachers went to work in Northern Territory schools.

Changes to the Indigenous teacher education delivery model in the Northern Territory, through a partnership between Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University, has disrupted local Indigenous student recruitment although it is hoped that this will improve in the future. Batchelor Institute academic Janine Oldfield reported to the inquiry into language learning, *Our Land, Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*, that the reduced enrolment numbers from remote Indigenous applicants in the Northern Territory may also have been a consequence of the new and unfamiliar online enrolment procedures as well as insufficient marketing of courses (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

Batchelor Institute academic and linguist, Margaret Carew, in a submission to the same inquiry, stated that Northern Territory Indigenous teachers who were qualified had studied through the RATE program and were now growing old. Younger recruits were not taking their places. She indicated that many current students and skilled linguists, who might once have been recruited

into the RATE program to become teachers, were now training to be Indigenous education support workers. Indigenous Education Support Worker courses are offered through the Vocation Education and Training sector at certificate levels, rather than though a higher education pathway where teachers receive their training. As graduates in education support, they receive lower pay levels and have less say in how the school operates (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

The NTER brought the Indigenous schooling situation to national attention. It became obvious that the people most likely to understand the cultural contexts of Northern Territory schools were no longer being trained in sufficient numbers to make a real difference. The fact that most teachers are still coming from other states and countries to teach for a short time also means the Northern Territory still has not built up a large group of experienced teaches to mentor the new, inexperienced teachers. All other states in Australia have large groups of experienced local teachers, who having worked in those states for many years know the local system well and can help new teachers settle into schools.

The Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDoE, formerly NTDET) currently has the goal of training 200 Indigenous Territorians to the level of Bachelor of Teaching and Learning. NTDoE wants to see '5000 school students being taught by a quality Indigenous teacher from 2018' (NTDET 2011, p. 14). As we finish this book in 2013, this target is only five years away. To reach the target, Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Batchelor Institute are working together in the new *Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Education* (ACIKE) which they jointly set up in 2011.

Under the heading *Growing our Own* in the 2011-12 NTDET Annual Report we see the following statement:

> We will continue to expand investment in Indigenous staff development through Growing Our Own Indigenous Teachers (including the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education program), Early Childhood practitioners, Indigenous leadership and workforce development opportunities.

> DET is supporting over 130 Territorians on a pathway to teaching focusing on having 200 more Indigenous teachers by 2018 (NTDET 2012, p. 16).

ACIKE offers a *Preparation for Tertiary Success* course for students who are not ready to start a diploma or degree course. A Bachelor of Education in Primary Teaching and a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood are also offered, along with graduate study opportunities for

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students interested in careers in Indigenous Education. A Bachelor of Indigenous Languages and Linguistics is also available for people who want a career in language maintenance or revitalisation.

Some important differences between Indigenous teacher education in Australia and other countries

When what was generally called 'teacher training' at the time commenced in the Northern Territory, the Australian Government took a different path from that followed in other Commonwealth countries in the 1950s and 1960s. In British colonies like Fiji, for instance, full teacher training was provided to local teachers. Qualified local teachers were employed to teach lower primary classes in their own languages. Formal English language instruction was also started alongside vernacular teaching in early primary, with a transition to English in upper primary. Secondary education was generally taught entirely in English, sometimes by teachers from other countries, but also by locally qualified teachers. Secondary students could all read and write their own languages as well as English by the time they finished primary school. They were bilingual and biliterate, although they were stronger in their home languages. A great deal of written information in local official languages was put out by colonial governments and, in countries like Fiji in the 1940s and 1950s, most young adults could read this information. People also wrote letters to each other in their own languages and read religious literature like the Bible and hymn books.

If this was the case in other countries colonised by the British, we have to ask why the Australian Government didn't train Indigenous teachers to teach young children to read and write in their own languages before expecting them to become literate in English?

One reason was that writing systems (also called *orthographies*) had been developed in other British Commonwealth countries before the teacher education programs were set up. Trainee teachers knew how to write their own languages so they had no difficulty teaching literacy in the official version of their first language.

Orthographies had only been developed for a few Australian languages by the 1960s and 1970s. As we saw in Chapter One, missionaries in some places like Hermannsburg had developed orthographies for local languages and were teaching adults as well as children literacy in their language, however in other communities no one could read or write their own languages. Most Indigenous teachers had only learned to write in English at school. This is probably the main reason

why children (even in early childhood) were taught in English in many mission schools and in all the government schools. Also, as mentioned above, instead of teaching the children on their own, the Teacher Assistants had to translate the lessons given by the non-Indigenous teachers. This was supposed to change when Bilingual Education was introduced a few years later. Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers were supposed to be equal and work as a team, but this rarely happened.

The demand for Bilingual Education was partly a result of the Homelands movement which we will now discuss, before moving on to the important topic of *Two Way* or *Both-Ways* schooling.

The Homelands Movement in the Northern Territory

When the Labor Party won the 1972 election, it promised to follow up on human rights reforms of the 1960s by looking into the land rights issue. The Woodward Royal Commission, also known as the *Aboriginal Land Rights Commission*, was set up in 1973 to work out how land rights could be recognised in Australian law.

In 1976, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* was passed. Indigenous people could now lodge legal claims for their own traditional country. These claims were not required in all parts of the Northern Territory because some areas were already legally registered as Aboriginal Land.

We saw earlier in this book how Indigenous people had been forcibly removed from their land and made to live in missions or government settlements. Many people now started to return to their own country. They lived in what were called *Homelands* or *Outstations*. The Homelands Movement is described in a small booklet by Coombs et al (1980). The Australian Government provided money to help set up homelands in many parts of the Northern Territory.

By 1979, 95 homelands had been established. By 1990, there were 600 registered in the Northern Territory. Not all these places have buildings or other facilities, but they provide essential links to country, as described in the Amnesty International leaflet mentioned at the end of Chapter One. Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, in her foreword to that booklet, makes the point firmly that Homelands are about 'survival of a cultural practice that is still alive in spite of what has been thrown at it' (Kunoth-Monks 2011, p. 2).

When people live in the Homelands, they are more likely to speak their precious traditional languages. Many people, including diet-controlled diabetics, live healthier lives out in the bush because they eat more traditional food, get more exercise, and experience less violence caused by alcohol and other drugs. Children often have happier, healthier lives living in their own country with more chances to learn traditional ways from community elders.

But these children still need to keep up their schooling if they wish to have the choice to live in two worlds when they grow up. Their families value traditional learning and culture so strongly that most communities want some form of Two Way Schooling to ensure Indigenous culture and learning is valued equally with non-Indigenous culture and learning.

Two Way Schooling was first developed by Indigenous elders living in their own country during the 1970s.

Two Way, not One Way Schooling — Both-Ways Education

Graham McKay describes how Maningrida elders from six language groups were asked in 1972 what they wanted in the way of schooling for their children. They said they knew literacy in English was important, but they also wanted their children to be able to read and write their own languages, with vernacular literacy having the following benefits for Indigenous communities:

- Pride in and identity with language, culture and the land, including the links of specific languages with specific places

- Maintenance of language and traditional culture

- Greater ease of understanding and expression in the vernacular than in a foreign language, especially for older Aborigines (McKay 1982, p. 105-114).

Patrick McConvell (1982) reported that he first heard the term *two way school* used in 1974 when he was working with the Gurindji at Wattie Creek. They said their school was a 'one-way school' … only *kartiya* (European) way'. A 'two-way' school would be 'both *kartiya* way (basically, the three Rs) and *ngumpit* (Aboriginal) way' (McConvell (1982, p. 61-2).

McConvell said Gurindji leader, Pincher Nyurrmiyarri 'perhaps went furthest in working out the concept of the two-way school' because he took it beyond the teaching of 'both European and

Aboriginal language and culture' to deepen the idea to include 'a two-way flow in reciprocity and exchange between groups' (p.62). He wanted policies and programs to be discussed and negotiated rather than being 'imposed only from the white side' (p.63).

Two Way schooling, based on give and take and mutual obligation, would cover curriculum, knowledge, policies and power. In doing so, the elders hoped it would help to heal some of the damage school interference had already caused in the passing on of traditional knowledge to younger generations (McConvell 1982).

The term *two way learning* was also used by the Arrernte people who established Yipirinya Independent School in Alice Springs in the late 1970s (Hoogenraad 2001, p. 134). Hoogenraad says that this way of thinking fits into well-established Indigenous ways of looking at the world. The two way philosophy draws on an old idea. This idea of two way teaching and learning was already in Indigenous cultures well before Europeans started talking about it in connection with Northern Territory schooling.

In fact, Indigenous people have been talking about the relationship they want between traditional culture and Law, and the culture and law imposed by European Australia for a long time. Hoogenraad says:

> This is an issue that is widely discussed by senior traditional Aboriginal people under the rubric 'two-way', but also 'two-idea', two-law' etc. This not only recognises that Aboriginal people now live under two laws, in two cultures, but strives to reconcile them and give them equal status (Hoogenraad 2001, p. 134).

This desire for balance between the two cultures was also observed by Lee (1993) in the two Kimberley schools she studied. Here the term *level* was used; the languages should be level in the school, with sharing and receiving equal on both sides, the Indigenous side and the non-Indigenous side.

In the 1980s, Yolgnu leader, and now Northern Land Council (NLC) Chairperson, Wäli Wunungmurra from the Dhalwangu clan in North East Arnhem Land, insisted that his people had to control the education process and decide what would be taught:

> To live in both worlds we need to achieve a high standard in education but to keep our own identity. The mission school gave us only one side of this. They did teach us to read and write, whereas the following

generation did not have the same level of skills. The present leaders of my people are the products of the mission system and are thankful for their skills. But we were told what to learn and punished for using our own languages.

What we need now is education which can teach a high level of skills but without the destruction to culture … Yolngu must own the school program. Without this we will feel crushed and lose our self respect and self-identity — we will be living other people's programs like it was in the past, in the mission days (Wunungmurra 1988, p. 69).

Wunungmurra said that for Yolngu society to adapt to change, Yolngu had to find common ground with mainstream society by an exchange of meanings. Through that exchange, a Two Way or both-ways school curriculum could be developed which would help the children become flexible enough to live confidently and competently in their two worlds: *Yolgnu* and *Balanda* (European). Wunungmurra emphasised again that:

The two way idea of negotiating meanings is not new to Yolngu culture, there is a Yolngu way of planned learning and the same principles that apply to it can be applied to the negotiation of meaning between Yolngu and Balanda. In Yolngu society there is negotiation of meanings between the two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja, which can be applied to negotiation between Yolngu and Balanda cultures to find the common ground that makes up the two way curriculum (Wunungmurra 1988, p. 5).

Moiety systems divide all human beings and, indeed, the whole world, into two parts, working together in every way to make a whole. As the Northern Land Council (NLC) website explains:

Everything in the world, the countryside, nature and society is known to be of one, or the other (never both). A man and his offspring are in one of these, his wife and her siblings and their father are in the other (Northern Land Council website: Kinship).

It is common in Indigenous societies in the Northern Territory to divide the world in this Two Way manner, although each society does it differently, using different concepts in each culturally specific system, and different words for the divisions that make up the structure of their particular societies.

Yolngu chose several important traditional concepts with different layers of meaning to talk about what they termed both-ways education in the 1980s. The first layer is the actual, literal every day

meaning. The other deeper *inside* layers of meaning can be used to talk about ideas that are more theoretical or difficult. Two important concepts in the Yolngu way of thinking about education are *ganma* and *galtha*:

- *ganma*: The former Yothu Yindi lead singer from the Gumätj clan in North East Arnhem Land explained that *ganma* is where the sea water and fresh water meet. This is 'something that is real and meaningful in the outside view and the inside view … It is the taste of the water and the process of mixing and the place in which both waters meet.' It can also provide a 'conceptual framework … to begin exploring that area where Balanda and Yolngu meet. This is where our children live … the Ganma curriculum emphasises interface of children's situation in moving from one world to another' (Yunupingu 1991, p. 101).

  The former Yolngu leader and educator from the Rirratjingu nation, Raymattja Marika, and her colleagues further explained *ganma* like this: In real life, 'a river of water from the sea (in this case Balanda knowledge) and a river of water from the land (Yolngu knowledge) mutually engulf each other as they flow into a common lagoon and [become] one (Marika et al 1992 [1990], p. 158).

- *galtha*: The literal meaning of this word is 'to pierce the ground with a spear'. It can also mean 'the place and the moment marking the transition from the negotiations preceding a ceremony to the ceremony performance'.

  With regard to mental activity, *galtha* means the gathering together of ideas as a starting point for negotiating something, for instance new ways of thinking about education. It is where planning and taking action meet.

  Galtha can also refer to a 'negotiated plan' (Marika-Mununggiritj 1991b, p. 33-34; Marika-Mununggiritj & Christie 1995, p. 59-62; Christie 2000; Christie 2007, p. 73-74).

- Galtha workshops have been held since 1989 as part of the *Living knowledge: Indigenous knowledge in science education program* at Yirrkala Community Education Centre. Elders come in from the community to teach children traditional concepts about the complicated kinship networks that structure Yolngu society. Teachers then teach children concepts relating to European mathematics (*Living Knowledge website, Galtha workshops*). This website also includes a timeline showing developments in both-ways schooling at Yirrkala from 1972 to 1989.

Some other Indigenous concepts that Yolngu used for thinking about learning include *milngurr, bala/lili*, and *garma.*

Milngurr refers to freshwater springs and also the water in a baby's head (Christie 2007). It also refers to feelings and emotions and knowledge. As Marika explains in a taped recording: *Milngurr* 'grows in us, in our heads, our thinking grows and develops in our heads … what we would call *cognitive development.* … when we are learning new things, new ways, hard things, it's our *milngurr* water in our heads which will help us' (Marika 2005).

Bala/lili (away from/towards) is about give and take. It expresses 'an explicit understanding of reciprocity'. It means "giving' and then also 'getting something back'' (Marika et al 1992, p. 152). In developing an appropriate educational philosophy and program, *bala/lili* means fulfilling obligations to the *Ngalapal* who are 'our thinking people, our intellectuals who guide our life according to our law which they understand' (p. 151). 'These obligations require us to do the things that they expect us to do, particularly by being good role models for the children of our community and to be seen to use the learning that they organise for us' (p. 151). *Bala/lili* can also refer to relationships between teachers and learners (Marika-Mununggiritj 1990, p. 49).

Garma is the flat, open, sandy site of ceremonies for where the community celebrates and produces history and knowledge. It also relates to negotiation between the two moieties, coming to agreement about what will happen in teaching and learning (Marika-Mununggiritj 1990). Marika-Mununggiritj et al (1990) trace the historical development of *garma* at Yirrkala Community School since the formation of the Yolngu Community School Action Group in 1984. In 1988, the NT government granted the Yolngu School Council control of Yirrkala Community School and by 1990 the existing bilingual school was under community control, run by community elders who represented all the clans in the area. Their aims for 'self determination, self reliance and self sufficiency' (Marika-Mununggiritj et al 1990) were being realised.

Indigenous elders who want Two Way or both-ways schooling understand that many children are losing their traditional languages. When languages are lost, a great deal of traditional knowledge gets forgotten too. This is because Aboriginal knowledge is embodied in ways of talking and thinking that are different from European ways. It's not just a matter of special words that might be hard to

translate into English. Whole ways of thinking are deeply part of special ways of using language. Language and Country and who you are in the world are all part of each other in Indigenous ways of thinking. This is difficult to explain properly in a non-Indigenous language.

As we will see in more detail in Chapter Three, Indigenous languages everywhere in the world are important because they hold precious scientific knowledge that speakers of European languages do not know about. Keeping small Indigenous languages strong is not just important for the people who speak those languages.

Most importantly, keeping Indigenous languages strong and developing English as an additional language helps speakers of Australian Indigenous languages know who they are. As Milingimbi elder Djiniyini Gondarra says:

> When I was growing up, I was hungry for education and I wanted to learn. I knew English could open up a world for me. But for me to understand English, I had to go back to my own language, to really understand the intellectual language.
>
> … We cannot ignore our own language. It's our foundation. … There's no problem with learning English. But don't tell us it's the only way to learn the world. … I'm saying that English is an extra language we can learn. It's not a super language.
>
> There is a balanced way of education. I run my own business. How did I learn? I learned because my forefathers traded with the Macassans, not with the English. A lot of the words that I need to understand, I find them in my own language. The word *rakuny*, for example; it means mortgage. We were speaking our language before the invasion. We had language, tribes, law, everything (Gondarra reported in Toohey 2009)

Both-ways thinking today

The Both-ways philosophy is an important guiding principle today at Batchelor Institute. It is well expressed by Indigenous educator and former director, Veronica Arbon, in her foreword to the *'Both Ways' children's services* report (Fasoli et al 2004):

> The 'Both Ways' concept is a contested idea. It has grown out of work in remote schools in the sixties and seventies (I have personal experience of engagement in such processes in my own childhood). In the eighties, the concept began to surface in Western literature, becoming increasingly complex in meaning over the years. At Batchelor Institute, staff and students use the concept to step outside the known, to

question from different ways of viewing, sensing, feeling and engaging in the world, never a simplistic interpretation of 'Both Ways'. All are learners in this environment. The concept has been challenged, but more importantly, has had the capacity to challenge in return, to push thinking to new levels, to demand alternative interpretations of basic aspects of life and to accept a fundamental quality at one level and negotiate meaning at others. This concept has been a signpost to do things differently (Arbon 2004, p. 6).

Robyn Ober describes both-ways education from her personal experience of having been an undergraduate at Batchelor College in the 1980s. She emphasises that strengthening and engaging with Indigenous identity helps to create a base for new knowledge.

Both-ways education is about drawing on and acknowledging skills, language, knowledge, concepts and understandings from both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. It's about everything that makes up an Indigenous person's identity, and then finding a bridge from this knowledge to link into new Western academic knowledges that are important to student's chosen field of profession. It is our way of telling our stories, it's about our way of making meaning in our world, both-ways is about going from the known to the unknown, using current knowledge as a springboard to gain new conceptual academic understandings, both-ways teaching and learning is being open-minded enough to see that there are alternative methods of reaching a goal, than following a strictly mainstream approach (Ober, 2009, p. 39).

An essential part of the both-ways approach to teaching and learning is respect. Respect is shown through listening and paying attention. In an inspirational reflection entitled *Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness* written by well-known Indigenous Daly River educator, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann (2002), we read:

Our people are used to the struggle and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves have spent many years learning about the white man's ways; we have learnt to speak the white man's language; we have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people in Australia to take time and listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for, respect and understanding (Ungunmerr-Baumann 2002 [1989]).

As Farmer & Fasoli (2011, p. 67) remind us, this wisdom has come out of long experience of communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. Both-ways thinking about schooling is so much more than a slogan. It requires hard work. Indigenous people have been forced by colonisation to learn how to do this hard work. Many non-Indigenous people are still learning. They need to learn how to hold back and really listen before jumping in with lots of new ideas about what they think needs to happen next.

Both-ways is not just about modifying the curriculum to supposedly make it more culturally appropriate. It is more about trying to understand in an honest way who really has the power when it comes to making decisions. Non-Indigenous people need to be particularly careful and supportive to enable Indigenous people to document and plan the delivery of their part of the curriculum in their own ways

Indigenous people have spent an overwhelmingly long period of time being 'consulted'. After sitting in meeting after meeting, trying to explain what they really want, to government or welfare people or to colleagues, Indigenous people often find that nothing changes. Or if something does change, it's not what they asked for. Meetings are often wasted because the non-Indigenous people leave the Territory soon afterwards or because they just really didn't listen properly. Too many non-Indigenous people think they know better than the local people.

Sometimes non-Indigenous people truly believe that what they know, believe and want to do will be in the best interests of Indigenous people. In this kind of situation, they have to explain clearly why they think that way and offer their views respectfully, as a proposition, to be accepted or not by Indigenous people. It is disrespectful to pretend that effective consultation happened just because you sat down with some people for a few hours. Both-ways negotiation is about really trying to understand what the other people want and why they want it. Sometimes a middle path has to be taken. Both sides have to give and take equally until they can work out a plan that respects what both sides want.

Two Way or both-ways thinking, an important and exciting concept introduced in some Northern Territory schools in the 1970s and 1980s, is still essential if children are to learn properly today.

Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory

The idea behind bilingual schooling was that teaching and learning would happen through two languages in the school: the children's home languages and English. Indigenous teachers would not just translate what the non-Indigenous teachers said; they would actually teach their part of the curriculum. Bilingual education was about team teaching. Each teacher would plan the learning program and together they would teach it, each focusing on that part of the curriculum that they knew best.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time when bilingual education was popular in many countries, especially Canada. Research showed that bilingual children often seemed to have cognitive advantages over children who spoke only one language (e.g. Cummins 1979; Ben-Zeev 1977). There were also critics of this research who drew attention to problems in the way some of the research was done (e.g. MacNab 1979). A great deal more research has been done in the last 30 years and it is now well accepted that bilingual education works when it is done well. But it has to be done well. Teaching through two equal languages is hard work. It takes a lot of careful planning to make it work well. When it does work well, students have the chance to grow up confident to live in two worlds. These days, bilingual programs are generally called *Dual Language Programs*.

The early years of Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory

The early period of bilingual education in the 70s and 80s was an exciting time for non-Indigenous educators as well as for the Indigenous communities where bilingual schools were set up. It seemed that the goal of self-determination in education might be achieved, especially if enough Indigenous teachers could be trained to have the same professional status as non-Indigenous teachers. It seemed that communities could, at last, have a controlling say in how their schools were run.

Young teachers who came to work in the Territory were often caught up in the excitement. Some learned one of the languages spoken in their school. Many went away with precious memories of what they had learned from team teaching with Indigenous people. Several stayed in the NT for the rest of their professional lives, working hard to make things better in Indigenous education.

When the Australian Government set up the bilingual program in the 1970s, the primary goal related to language and culture. Aims related to learning English learning were listed third and fifth in the 1970s (McKay 1996, p. 113). The first aim was:

> To help each child to believe in himself and be proud of his heritage by the regular use of his Aboriginal language in school and by learning about Aboriginal culture (Australia Department of Education 1975, p. 1).

By 1980, the Northern Territory Department of Education had changed the order of these goals to put English language skills before Indigenous language skills. The first aim was now:

> To DEVELOP competency in reading and writing in English and in number to the level required on leaving school to function without disadvantage in the wider Australian community (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, p. 2).

This shift of the main focus to English language skills has continued and become stronger over time, but both-ways schooling would make the aims for English and Indigenous languages equal. This would mean each side would get the same respect, funding, and other resources in a level or balanced way.

It is interesting to learn that 'Aboriginal people continued to see indigenous language maintenance as the principal reason for a bilingual program' (McKay 1996, p. 114), even after 1980 when the NT Government changed its aims. McConvell (1994) also emphasised this point. According to McKay: 'Many factors, including staffing levels, staff creativity and confidence, fluctuating support from school principals and changing priority trends in educational innovation have had effects on the ability of individual programs to fulfill their potential for language maintenance and development, leading to varying success in different places and at different times' (McKay 1996, p. 114).

Brian Devlin, one of those young teachers who came to the Northern Territory and stayed, explains the period from 1973 to 1978, before self-government in the Northern Territory. He saw this period as the establishment phase of bilingual education: 'Bilingual programs then entered a consolidation phase (1978-1986), though staff reductions and a decline in funding support for programs began to affect operations from about 1984 onwards.' He pointed out that: ' "Consolidation" was essentially understood to mean that there was no money available to establish new programs' (Devlin 2009b, p. 6).

An 'adaptation phase' followed between 1987 and 1998. During this time: 'Some bilingual programs also began to evolve in new directions in response to assertions of Aboriginal leadership, a reduction in head office staff positions as well as the influence of Batchelor College's both-ways philosophy and its community-based education programs' (Devlin 2009b, p. 6).

This book cannot give a full and detailed history of Northern Territory bilingual programs. Readers who would like to do more research in this area can find a wealth of information in Devlin (2009a;

2011), Simpson et al (2009), Wilkins (2008) and Nicholls (2005). Hoogenraad (2001) focuses on the history of bilingual programs in Central Australia. McConvell (1994) and Urvet et al (1980) are useful earlier studies. McKay (1996) brought together information from before the mid 1990s in his report on the health and maintenance of Australian languages.

Attempts to close down bilingual programs in the NT

Many people were surprised and shocked when the NT Department of Education tried to close down bilingual programs in 1998. The Department said that English as a Second Language (ESL) programs were to be brought in over a five year period instead.

In contemporary discussions references to 'ESL' have been widely replaced by references to *EAL/D (English as an Additional Language or Dialect)*. This newer term is used in other countries like England, Canada and South Africa. It is also used by the Australian Government and, increasingly, Australian states and territories to emphasise that students who speak Aboriginal English as their home dialect are also eligible for support from specialist English language teachers.

The reason for this name change is that many people in the world, including children and young people, already know two languages when they learn English. English may be a third or even a fourth language for many people. It is also an *extra* or *additional* language for many business people throughout the world. The old idea that English was a foreign language if it was not used in a particular country is now mostly outdated because some people in all countries now use English to surf the web, do business or study.

In 1998, the Northern Territory Government claimed that Indigenous people themselves wanted the programs stopped, but, as Devlin pointed out, there was 'a strong community backlash' which showed that at least some communities definitely wanted two languages to be used and taught in their schools. The government also said that students in bilingual schools 'were not performing as well as their peers' in non-bilingual schools (Devlin 2009b, p. 6). When asked to prove this, the government could not do so. The truth is that learning outcomes were lower in all Northern Territory schools, including among non-Indigenous students, than in other states of Australia.

Confusion about the need for EAL/D in remote communities

Since 1998, there has been ongoing confusion about what the Northern Territory Government really believes is needed to improve students' learning outcomes, especially in remote communities.

No serious attempt was made in the five years after 1998 to appoint qualified English language specialists to all schools where children had Indigenous languages as their primary languages. No serious effort, in other words, was made to focus in a structured, professional way on teaching Standard Australian English.

Most children in remote communities, whether or not they are in a Dual Language program, need specialist teachers because they don't speak standard English at home. Some do, but most don't.

In 2005, the NT Government said that they supported Dual Language education. In 2006 the new Indigenous Education Strategic Plan included the following statements:

> Bilingual education is a formal model of dual language use where students' first language is used as a language for learning across the curriculum, while at the same time they are learning to use English as a second language for learning across the curriculum. There are 11 programs in 10 Territory Government schools that use a bilingual model. The bilingual programs are effective overseas and give an indication of positive results in the Territory. DEET will strengthen the bilingual program and improve its effectiveness and sustainability to deliver outcomes (NTDEET 2006, p. 24-25).

Unfortunately the department's promise to strengthen Dual Language Education was not carried out.

As noted previously the NTER was introduced in the Northern Territory in 2007, with a great deal of publicity across the rest of Australia about the low levels of health and education in the Northern Territory. In 2008, the *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) was introduced across Australia, with outcomes of this testing regime giving rise to even more publicity about how low the results in the NT were compared with other states and territories.

It was obvious that Northern Territory children, especially in remote communities, were not able to do the work children in other schools in Australia could do. Indigenous children in other parts of Australia, and also migrant and refugee children who do not speak English at home, could often do better on NAPLAN than children in the Northern Territory.

Migrant and refugee children generally receive specialised EAL/D teaching, or at least some level of specialised support, especially those who live in large towns or cities in Australia. This helps them to reach a similar level of proficiency as English speaking children after a few years of support.

Indigenous learners in remote areas generally do not get the same kind of specialised help as migrant and refugee children, even though their language learning needs are the same.

Again, we have to ask why Indigenous children in the Northern Territory don't get appropriate help to learn standard English? One of the reasons is that NTDoE was still not insisting that the teachers they hire have EAL/D qualifications, and as late as 2013, even reduced the numbers of EAL/D support by 71 staff, according to an ABC report (James, October 28th 2013).

Information on the NTDoE website about what is required to teach in a remote school does not highlight the fact that most of the children do not speak standard English at home. This is not fair to the teachers who apply for a job in the Remote Teaching Service, nor is it fair to the children who live in remote communities. These children have the right to get the same kind of specialised help any other Australian children from homes where English is not the family language are entitled to receive.

The *Better Schools: National Plan for School Improvement* (arising from the earlier Gonski review of school funding) brought in by the Australian Government in 2013, provided extra money for schools with students in the following categories:

- Students from low-SES backgrounds

- Indigenous students

- Students with limited English skills

- Students with disability

- Students at regional, rural and remote schools

- Students at small schools (Better Schools website)

We know that many Indigenous students in remote schools fall into most of these categories, with some falling into all of them.

Independent and Catholic schools, and four states and territories (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Australian Capital Territory) signed up by mid 2013, but the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland did not. The new Liberal Government elected in September 2013 pledged before the election to continue funding schools to the same level as the previous government for several years. Some state and territory governments have, however, cut back on

school funding to save costs. In the Northern Territory, more than in most states, it would seem logical to seek increased investment in the kind of education that takes into account the children's language learning needs.

The English Only decision: The First Four Hours policy

In late 2008, the Minister for Education announced that all Northern Territory schools would follow an English Only program for the first four hours of each school day. This reversed the decision to strengthen Dual Language education. The English Only decision was one of several sudden changes resulting from the publication of NAPLAN results in 2008. When the NT Government saw that the worst results were from remote and very remote schools, the sole blame for poor outcomes was initially placed on students, with bilingual programs following closely behind, even though only one fifth of the students (20 out of every 100) were enrolled in Dual Language schools (Devlin 2009). Some people in southern states seemed to think that all remote Northern Territory schools ran bilingual programs. While incorrect, it was the impression given in the media at the time.

The situation at Yirrkala was particularly confusing. 'After years of negotiation the Government and community had signed a Remote Learning Partnership Agreement in 2008. Yambirrpa Schools Council had given specific support to 'the staircase model of bilingual education' (Devlin 2009a, p. 8). Yirrkala was listed as one of eight schools with Language Maintenance programs, so the community was shocked when the Minister for Education announced in 2009 that the first four hours of schooling were to be conducted in English each day. Yolngu language programs were to be left to the afternoons.

This decision made a mockery of the theory and practice supporting the both-ways program developed by Yolngu educators. The community challenged the validity of the edict on human rights grounds and the fact that they had recently signed their agreement with the Northern Territory Government (Devlin 2011). They and other bilingual schools received considerable support from educators and linguists around Australia who were concerned about the lack of respect for what had been achieved in Dual Language schooling in the Northern Territory.

During all the publicity about low NAPLAN results, the fact that most children in remote and very remote schools need the same kind of English language support migrant or refugee students get to improve their literacy and numeracy in English so they can at least attempt NAPLAN tests, received little or no attention by the Northern Territory Government or the media.

After a few months and a lot of noise in the media, the Minister and the department agreed it would be impossible to implement an English Only program without using Indigenous Teacher Assistants to explain to the students what their non-Indigenous teachers were talking about. It was obvious Indigenous languages would have to be used in the classroom, even during the mornings. It seemed that the Territory had stepped right back into the 1950s when the government first started using Teacher Assistants as translators. As we have seen, this is a long way from the idea of both-ways schooling.

In spite of the promise in 2006 to strengthen the bilingual program, there still seemed to be very little understanding about what a proper Dual Language program involves. As Devlin pointed out in 2009, there was 'a shift in the language of policy-making from "bilingual education" (1972-1998) and "two-way learning" (1999-2005)' to 'structured language and culture programs' conducted in the afternoon when the children were tired and ready to go home. There seemed to be no real understanding that:

> first language proficiency can be a strong platform for achievement in … English. Constant references to 'maintenance' and 'revitalisation' do not disguise the fact that there is no longer any support for the premise of bilingual education (Devlin 2009b, p. 7).

Bilingual programs have generated a great number of arguments over the last 40 years in the Northern Territory, sometimes because of the costs involved, but also because they were not always effective in helping children cope with mainstream schooling or even learn their own culture in the school environment. As Jane Simpson and her colleagues say, 'Bilingual programs of course are not magic bullets; they can be poorly serviced and poorly implemented' (Simpson et al, 2009, p. 11). If these programs are not properly set up and funded, they cannot be expected to produce the outcomes a well-organised and appropriately staffed Dual Language Program can deliver.

For bilingual programs to work properly, all the teachers working in them need to understand what is involved in teaching through two languages. Specialist training, knowledge, and skills are needed. This knowledge and these specialised teaching skills cannot be learned quickly on the job, especially by new teachers who are perhaps experiencing their first Wet Season, or scorching summer in the desert, and who cannot understand what the children want to say to them. To become a language teaching specialist, teachers have to gain additional qualifications or focus on language teaching while they are doing their education degree.

Bilingual programs in the Northern Territory have, in most cases, neither been truly bilingual, nor truly both-ways. For instance, when the first schools were set up in the era of self-determination, Yolngu Teaching Assistants at Milingimbi in 1973 noticed there was 'an increase rather than a decrease in the number of Balanda teachers employed in the school'. It seemed that their 'authority in managing the school, and in controlling the development of all programs' was even stronger than before and Indigenous staff had less autonomy (Tamisari & Milmilany 2003, p.4). As discussed previously, a both-ways program must give status and authority to both sides. Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff need to have equal authority to make decisions and both sides need to be open-eyed and honest with themselves and with each other about who really has the power, and be willing to negotiate productive both-ways practice from there.

Other problems with Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory

In spite of the very clear wishes of many Indigenous elders, parents and Indigenous educators, the department never aimed to develop the child's first language beyond initial literacy (Hoogenraad 2001, p. 135). A strong Dual Language program leads to strong language and literacy outcomes in the children's home languages as well as standard English, but we do not see that outcome for most children and young people in the Northern Territory.

All Northern Territory bilingual programs were *Transfer Programs*. After learning to read and write in their own languages, the children were supposed to transfer to literacy in English around Year 3. The amount of teaching in English was supposed to gradually increase until most of the instruction was in English by Year 6 (Wilkins 2008). Unfortunately, many children did not become fluent readers or writers in any language although a few made good progress. The children heard and were encouraged to use both languages from the earliest years of schooling. One problem might have been that there was not a clear separation of the languages in some classrooms. This is a matter we will think about again in Chapter Three.

Most of the early literacy teaching was done by Teacher Assistants who spoke the children's languages. These Teacher Assistants were generally in the process of doing teacher education courses through Batchelor College. The children heard standard English from their non-Indigenous teachers who also taught literacy in English as the children got into the higher classes. But in most cases, the non-Indigenous teachers were not trained EAL/D specialists. They did not know how

to plan a structured program which introduces a few new words and sentence patterns each day, building up the children's knowledge of English in a systematic and carefully planned way over time. EAL/D specialists know how to teach language *through* each of the learning areas, while other teachers do not generally learn how to do this during their training.

Team teaching was also difficult for many teachers and Teacher Assistants. Expected to plan and teach their lessons together, non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff often experienced difficulties arising from lack of understanding of the both-ways philosophy and practice, and the often short stay in community of many teachers. In many classrooms, the Teacher Assistants were not properly consulted about the learning program and lesson planning.

This was partly because the non-Indigenous teachers had also not been trained for a team teaching situation which requires skills in communicating effectively with Indigenous people. We can understand, therefore, why they expected the Teacher Assistants to just translate everything they said or why some of them thought that the Teacher Assistants were there to do the routine non-teaching work involved in managing a classroom. In an effective team teaching situation both teachers share all the work. They plan together and decide which lessons will be taught by which person. Both members of the team share jobs like photocopying, cleaning up, etc.

Another difficulty faced by bilingual schools was that the methods for teaching early literacy were methods that work best for children who come from homes where there are lots of books and reading is an accepted part of life. Most Indigenous languages, even today, have only a few story books for the children to use. Bookshelves full of children's books are not often found in homes in remote communities. Sometimes the number of reading books in a small remote school is smaller than the number of books in some non-Indigenous children's bedrooms.

In the past, bilingual schools had Literature Production Centres where dedicated staff worked long hours to make books in the children's languages. These centres added to the cost of running the bilingual schools. When we remember that even the adults in many communities were also learning for the first time how to write their own languages in the 1970s, we can understand why it was impossible to quickly produce a large amount of learning materials similar to that which is available in English.

In countries like Canada, where there are Dual Language programs for two strong languages like French and English, programs are easier because there is plenty of reading matter in both languages. It is more difficult in remote communities in Canada where the children's home language is an Indigenous Canadian language. Some of these communities have similar problems to the Northern Territory.

Another problem was that when Teacher Assistants went on to graduate as fully qualified teachers they found that they were not eligible for a Teacher Assistant of their own. This was probably because it was thought the main role of a Teacher Assistant was to translate or help non-Indigenous teachers. If a qualified Indigenous teacher couldn't have a Teacher Assistant, it suggested that he or she didn't really have the same status as a non-Indigenous teacher. That, in turn, sent the message that local languages and standard English were not seen as equally important in the school because speakers of local languages did not have equal professional status to speakers of English.

Hoogenraad (2001, p. 135) tells how the then department of education consistently downplayed another of its stated aims: 'to develop closer communication, involvement and mutual understanding between the school and the community it serves and promote in children and their parents a positive attitude towards education and school attendance'. There is still a profound communication gap between education officials and community elders, a gap the recent video made by Arrernte elder Veronica Dobson tries to fill. Dobson says:

> Our children should be able to learn their languages at primary, secondary and tertiary level. Our languages express our identities. ... Keeping our languages strong keeps us strong. Our languages describe our relationships to our laws and beliefs. Our relationships depend on our languages, through which our knowledge survives (Dobson & Lovell 2009).

Devlin comments that:

> The usual, non-Indigenous way of defining bilingual education is to explain that it is an approach to schooling and curriculum organisation which uses two languages as the medium of instruction in a well-planned and formally organised program. This is a perfectly acceptable and accurate, if somewhat abstract, definition. In my work with Yolngu people, however, I have come to realise that there is more to it than that. There is a deeper meaning. Bilingual, bicultural education is a tool for survival in a fast-changing, often confusing world. It can open up new, inspiring perspectives as learners from one culture come to grips with the metaphors, the core concepts, the key insights, the poetry, the art and music of the other culture (2009b, p. 3).

What people in other countries say about Dual Language Education

These multiple values of Dual Language education are well recognised internationally (e.g. Paradis et al 2011). A useful online summary of basic facts about Dual Language education is provided by Jim Cummins (2001a). His book about 'education for empowerment in diverse societies' (Cummins 2001b) is based on his own involvement in research on bilingualism over more than 30 years.

Cummins lists common arguments against bilingual education and explains how international research has proved these ideas to be wrong. One of these commonly held but wrong beliefs is that 'English can be 'picked up' rapidly by young children' or that 'One year of intensive immersion is sufficient to learn English' (Cummins 2001a). As Cummins has pointed out repeatedly over all these years, research findings show that: 'Progress to grade-appropriate academic language performance usually requires 5+ years of L2 (second language) academic learning'. It takes more than five years, in other words, to get to the same level of proficiency to do written schoolwork as a native English speaking child. This is true even if children come to school every day and receive support from specialist language teachers.

Even 'peer-appropriate conversational performance usually requires 1-2 years of exposure' to a new language (Cummins 2001a). What this means is that children can show much quicker proficiency in the kind of language they use to talk with other children or the teacher than in the kind of language required to understand and successfully complete such things as NAPLAN tests.

Teachers often think learners know more English than they really do when talking with them. It's only when a learner has to read normal classroom materials and do the written work associated with them that it becomes obvious their informal language skills are much stronger than their language-for-learning skills. The fact that children in remote communities are not mixing in most cases with native English speaking children of their own age means their only models for conversational standard English in the learning environment are teachers. It's harder for them to develop English language proficiency equivalent to that of their age peers than it is for migrant and refugee children who receive mainstream education and mix with native speakers all day long at school.

The important overall point is that if children are skillfully taught in their home languages at the same time as learning standard English, their content learning will keep up with that of mainstream children. Bilingual and multilingual children develop good academic skills in the dominant language if given enough time and appropriate teaching.

Kosonen (2009) provides an online power point presentation summarizing the issues and challenges involved in 'First language-based education for non-dominant language speakers'. The most positive outcomes for academic development have been reported in dual-language programs which promote literacy in the mother-tongue throughout the primary school years.

It sometimes seems that bilingualism is regarded as a problem in the NT. But more people in the world are probably bilingual or multilingual than monolingual. Monolingual English speakers in countries like Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom are in the minority. Even Chinese speakers frequently speak two Chinese languages and these days they often speak English as well.

The real problem is that there are many beliefs about bilingual children that are not supported by research. The authors of a recent report entitled *Early years English language acquisition and instructional approaches for Aboriginal students with home languages other than English* point out that:

> The commonly held belief that children will become confused if they are exposed to more than one language in their initial years of schooling is now challenged by accumulating evidence from a range of recent studies demonstrating that exposure to two languages from early in childhood has cognitive, social and educational benefits. Recent longitudinal and experimental linguistic studies show that bilingual and monolingual children have similar language discrimination ability and capacity for word segmentation in both languages. The emerging research consensus is that children reared bilingually from an early age adopt two language systems and have the capacity to acquire and access two grammatical systems simultaneously. This suggests that there are distinct cognitive, language and educational benefits for children to commence second language learning earlier rather than later in their schooling (Silburn et al 2011, p. 47-48).

David Wilkins (2008) reviewed international literature on bilingual education and discovered findings and themes consistent with research he had conducted himself in Northern Territory bilingual schools in the 1990s, while undertaking a comparison between a remote and urban

school learning environment. His emphasis at that time had been 'on assessing whether English was encroaching too much on the children's first language abilities'. His findings provide much to consider, in regard to the way forward for Dual Language schooling in the Northern Territory:

> First, children who were strongest in their native language were strongest in English. Second, these same children had the most consistent school attendance. Third, students with poor attendance had both poorer native language and standard Australian English language skills. Fourth, attendance appeared to have less to do with child motivation than with family mobility (that is, children weren't wagging school; they were moving around country with their family, or they were being moved around from family member to family member for their care). Fifth, children who were strongest in their native language and in English literacy had parents who were involved in the schools, and who themselves had those skills and were asked to use them in the school environment. Students in kindergarten to year 3 did much better when relatives were in the classroom as either teachers or teacher aides. Sixth, relatively speaking, both native language and standard English abilities were better at the remote school than the town school investigated. Seventh, standard Australian English was not always a reliable medium of instruction when non-Aboriginal people were teaching the English side of the curriculum, and results improved every time a local adult was there to either co-teach or to act as a teacher aide.

So, yes, attendance is important and can affect both native language and English language abilities. And no, it doesn't appear that children will necessarily gain or maintain strong native language abilities just by home exposure—the school seems to have an important role to play in validating and consolidating the first language and providing an environment in which students can identify with bilingual (and biliterate) role models. Not surprisingly, a child's family situation can significantly affect language and literacy gains in both the first and second languages—it can be an important factor in attendance, role modelling, and comprehension of curricular activities (Wilkins 2008, p. 6-7).

We need to keep all the points made by Wilkins in mind as we continue through this book.

But before going on to the other chapters, we'd like to talk about some of the other teachers who, like Brian Devlin, came to the Northern Territory as young people and stayed for many years to work for Indigenous education and, through their commitment, have made a significant contribution.

Educators who came to the Territory and stayed

Unfortunately, we are unable to do justice to the legacy of those many non-Indigenous women and men who worked so hard to try and improve educational opportunities for Indigenous people,

but we can share some insights from the work of two men whose books helped non-Indigenous teachers in other parts of Australia as well as in the Northern Territory to think more clearly about Indigenous education.

Stephen Harris and Michael Christie, who both worked in education in the 1980s and 1990s in Northern Territory remote communities, researched and wrote books that have been widely read by Australian educators.

In 1984, Stephen Harris' *Culture and Learning: tradition and education in north-East Arnhem Land* was published. Based on his doctoral research during the 1970s at Milingimbi, he described the situation at Milingimbi as he had experienced it, making a detailed report on his observations and their implications for teaching Indigenous children in Western style schools. Harris identified 'Five major traditional Aboriginal informal learning strategies':

- Learning by observation and imitation versus verbal instruction

- Learning by personal trial-and-error versus verbal instruction and demonstration

- Learning in real-life activities versus practice in contrived settings

- Context-specific learning versus generalizable principles

- Person-orientation rather than information orientation: Absence of the institutionalised office of 'teacher' (Harris 1984).

Harris' insights, and especially the five principles of informal learning were taken up enthusiastically by lecturers in Aboriginal and Multicultural Education courses that were fashionable in Australian teacher education institutions at the time. In some cases, these courses were compulsory components of teacher education diplomas and degrees. Students were encouraged to reflect on the differences between the way they had learned things at school and the way traditionally oriented Indigenous people acquired the cultural skills and understandings they needed to become competent adults in their own societies.

Now, almost 30 years later, we may feel some oversimplification was involved, particularly when Harris' ideas were so often taught in summarised forms in the universities and colleges of advanced education of the day. Today we recognise that non-Indigenous people also learn important life

skills in the way Harris describes. For instance, learning to drive a car generally involves all the principles identified by Harris, although some preliminary book-based (or computer-based) learning is required before the learner is allowed to legally take the wheel.

What was important about Harris' book was that it promoted a genuine respect for ways of learning that children and young people living in remote and very remote communities bring with them to school. It also created an interest in Indigenous people and helped young teachers look carefully at the automatic assumptions they might have about the way human beings learn. It also reminded teachers about principles of learning that are still pedagogically sound today.

The important thing is to find ways to engage learners so that they are really keen to learn more and keep learning. Conventional academic book learning is often called *context free learning* because we read about things instead of learning to do things in situations where they are useful and necessary. This type of learning suits only a few of the most academic learners. Most learners prefer to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills in contexts or situations where that knowledge and those skills make sense and are useful.

In 1990, Harris published a second book entitled *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling: education and cultural survival.* It created considerable controversy because he advocated what he called 'domain separation' in Two Way schools, involving the deliberate separation of instruction in the languages of the school into different domains, both in a physical sense (a different part of the school) and in the sense of the topics dealt with in each language.

People criticised the book, saying that the realities of modern Indigenous life meant that there are very few ordinary domains of experience that could be restricted to one or another language. Harris, however, emphasised that what he had in mind was not a simple traditional/non-traditional split, but a conscious separation of learning areas, as decided by the community itself. This separation of learning areas would be directed by communities, not outsiders.

What is important in a historical sense is that Harris came to these conclusions as a result of a great deal of thinking about why bilingual schools were not delivering the learning outcomes that had been hoped for. He was particularly concerned that the promise of bilingual schooling which

had seemed so exciting in the early 1970s and the 1980s, was failing to give parents what they had wanted most — a new generation of young people competently and confidently operated in two worlds with the respect and recognition that the self-determination movement aspired to.

The domain approach was in some ways soundly based in linguistic theory of the time about what is known as *diglossia*, where individuals and/or communities separate their languages on the basis of where they are and what they are doing at a given time. It is true that some communities, for instance the Amish in the USA, have maintained their heritage language at the same time as their English language skills by using a domain separation strategy. They can do this because their home and religious lives depend so much on their own language. When they have to deal with the monolingual English-speaking world outside their religion, they use English.

But in most 21st century multicultural and multilingual societies, more and more people mix in situations where two or more languages are in daily use. In most parts of Europe and in countries like Singapore and Malaysia, people often share several languages with their friends and workmates. People who know they're talking to someone who shares other languages with them will often *code-switch* for personal reasons that are understood by their friends or colleagues. Traditionally oriented peoples in many countries are often also multilingual and may be forced to use a dominant language as well as their own traditional languages.

Casting our minds back to Dual Language programs we can understand why Harris came up with the idea of domain separation. He noticed that trained Indigenous teachers were code-switching more often than when he first came to the Northern Territory. It was natural to assume young children might have difficulties separating the languages they heard. People worried that perhaps they might not learn standard English or their own language properly if they heard too much mixed language. This is an area of research linguists are still interested in, as we will see in the next chapter.

Harris wanted: 'Teachers in the Aboriginal domain of a two-way school' to be 'Aboriginal people who were regarded by parents as strong models of Aboriginal language and culture.' He argued that:

> The Aboriginal organisers of this learning domain would need to have the freedom to spend substantial school time in Aboriginal contexts, details of which would be defined by each local group. Such a context could be on their inherited land where the topography would act as a mnemonic device for the teaching

of history and the interrelatedness of different aspects of the culture. Physical presence on the land would allow it to work as a resource library, stimulating details of knowledge which would lie dormant away from that setting. It is important to avoid the dangers of trivialisation in culture teaching, and this would be achieved by ensuring that the school's Aboriginal domain was an authentic Aboriginal context.

Teachers in the Western domain would be expected to foster the learning of English, Western culture content, skills and behavior without ambivalence. Whether these teachers are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal will depend on the preferences of the school councils and on availability. ... Intricate knowledge of the culture is crucial because one of the requirements for success at a Western high school is the students' ability to handle so-called decontextualised thought. However, what we mean by decontextualised here is really 'Western context-taken-for-granted' or 'Western-context-imagined' (Harris 1990, p. 15).

Harris, like the parents whose concerns he had at heart, wanted learning in the Western domain to 'open real options in the Western world to high school and beyond' (Harris 1990, p. 15).

What Harris seemed to want most of all was to open his readers' eyes to the reality that bilingual schools were failing in what they had set out to achieve. Although his carefully thought out ideas were not taken up, they are an important part of the story about Dual Language education in the Northern Territory. The debate about domain separation became bitter at times. Patrick McConvell, commenting on the debate, said:

The point is here not so much whether Harris is 'right' or I am, but that both of our viewpoints are couched in terms imposed by a Western discourse about non-Western cultures. Europeans in education continually 'read back' versions of white discourse about Aborigines to Aboriginal people themselves (McConvell 1991, p. 21).

What McConvell describes must make Indigenous people despair of ever achieving the Two Way or both-ways goals they want for their children, but we can understand something about where Stephen Harris' concern was coming from through an anecdote he told about a Yolngu man who said:

If the Yolngu children are in the classroom or on an excursion they will be marked present on the roll. But if they are at a funeral learning Aboriginal things they are marked absent. How is that fair? (Harris 1990, p. 15)

We might indeed ask how that is fair in a political climate and educational context where there is talk about language maintenance and preservation of culture, but where learning activities

directed to these important objectives are left until the last part of the school day when students are tired and ready to go home, if they have not already drifted out of the classroom and into their communities.

Michael Christie's *Aboriginal Perspectives on Experience and Learning: the role of language in Aboriginal education* (1985) also made a major impact in teacher education institutions. It included contributions by Diana Eades, a leading authority today on Aboriginal ways of using English, particularly in legal contexts, Brian Gray, a pioneer in strategies for enhancing what he called 'natural language learning', in particular the 'concentrated language encounter' in the classroom, and Anna Shnukal, a linguist who explained why the creole called Torres Strait 'Broken English' at that time was not the same language as English. Christie's contribution, like Harris's, developed from his doctoral research into the language and learning needs of Indigenous children in remote communities.

Similar to Harris, Christie compared Indigenous and Western approaches to learning but his exploration was directed, through his understanding of Yolngu languages, into how traditionally oriented Indigenous people conceptualise knowledge, thinking and learning and how those understandings influence the way they approach learning in school.

Christie explained that formal schooling is a 'product of the Western mind'. He identified some of the ways in which communication breakdown occurs in the classroom. He discussed differences in the way Indigenous and non-Indigenous people conceptualise the world, difference between languages, and differences between learning styles. He also made practical suggestions about how to plan a teaching program and how to teach purposeful reading.

Christie described how for really solid learning to take place in a traditional learning environment, learners had to submit themselves to the direction of elders. They waited until other people decided whether they were ready for new learning experiences. They went through necessary rituals until other people accepted them as knowledgeable. To do this kind of learning, their own personal individual initiative was not required. Christie suggested this type of learning can be called *ritual learning*. Yolngu elder, Djiniyini Gondarra explains it this way:

> When I was educated, I didn't tell myself I would get rid of my Yolngu Matha [Yolngu language]. That was my education. With English, I sit with my teacher and ask questions. When I was at home, I didn't ask questions. I listened and I stored (Gondarra in Toohey 2009).

As Christie explained, the most successful school-based learning requires learners to have a lot of initiative and to ask questions in the way Gondarra describes. In Western-style learning, learners are supposed to actively make their own decisions about what they want to find out or follow up on. This is called *proactive learning*. We want learners to engage actively with learning experiences in a purposeful way. We also expect learners to understand from an early age that many of the things we learn as children and young people will not be immediately useful to us, but will help us find jobs eventually as adults.

Many non-Indigenous learners in mainstream schools today are also ritualistic learners, in that they think all they need to do is go to school or college because they have to, and that in the act of attending, they will learn. However, this is not proactive learning as they don't manage their own learning. The intellectual joy of learning just because what we're learning is interesting or exciting is something a lot of people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, never experience at school. Some people learn to love learning somewhere else outside school, or perhaps later in life, but love of learning can also be developed at school if teachers model it for their students and teach children and young people in their classes how to be active, purposeful learners.

Christie was right to point out how important purposeful, self-directed learning is, whether the learners are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. He was right to emphasise that an important part of every teacher's job is to explain *why* something is being taught. Children and young people who understand the purpose of each learning activity during the day are more likely to develop an intelligent interest in what they need to learn and how they can learn it best.

Christie's ideas and his understanding of traditional Yolngu culture and science deepened over the years as his award of Northern Territory Australian of the Year for 2011 recognises. When he received the award, he was praised for his collaborative work in showing that 'cross-cultural partnerships incorporating Indigenous philosophies of knowledge, language and the environment' are 'a key to preserving our nation's rich cultural heritage' (Australian of the Year Awards 2012).

These influential books by Harris and Christie were being written and discussed by non-Indigenous educators around Australia at the same time that Indigenous people in different parts of the Northern Territory were developing ideas about Two Way or both-ways learning.

Recent developments in Homelands schooling

A development which builds on earlier Yirrkala initiatives was the provision of senior secondary education to Homelands students who had previously had no onsite access to it. The Garrthalala *Secondary Homelands Education Project (SHEP)* administered from the Yirrkala Homelands School, had seventeen full time teachers and eighteen TAs in 2012 (NTDoET website). None of the full time teachers was however, resident in the homelands.

When this book was being written, visiting teachers travelled each week on Tuesday mornings, returning each Thursday, while a Senior Teacher visited once a week from Yirrkala Homelands School and liaised between the program and the Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC). There were plans in 2009 to extend teachers' time in the school by having them travel on Mondays and Fridays. Students not resident in Garrthalala were flown in each week (NTDET 2009). SHEP teachers visited the Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in outlying communities only when travelling conditions permitted. At some times of the year, these centres are not accessible by road and flights to and from Yirrkala may also be restricted during the cyclone season. The situation is complicated by the fact that many of the people in the area constantly move between Yirrkala and different Homelands.

TAs are generally resident in their Homelands Learning Centre and so carry much of the teaching load. Face-to-face teaching was being delivered in 2012 to 235 enrolled students in nine Community Learning Centres (CLCs) across multilevel classes. Individual Community Learning Centres may have 20 to 60 students taught in multilevel classes ranging from early years to senior secondary. Instruction is provided, theoretically at least, 'only in English as requested by the community'. But English is 'a minor language, a third or fourth choice for most people' (NTDECS 2012).

With all students using school English as an Additional Language, we can expect that they will have limited English language proficiency, especially in the early years. It is likely that Indigenous Teacher Assistants provide extensive translation support for the visiting teachers, just as they have always done in the Northern Territory.

While it seems logical that EAL/D specialist qualifications would be required of teachers asked to teach in CLCs, no such requirement is mentioned on the website dealing with Yirrkala Homelands

School. Again, this suggests a lack of realistic follow-through on the part of the Northern Territory Government. If NTDoE was serious about improving English language proficiency in the Homelands, qualified English language specialist teachers would be employed to teach in all curriculum areas.

Attendance rates have often been high in the SHEP program and some students have completed their secondary studies through a Homeland Learning Centre. Some students whose English is adequate enroll in NTOEC courses run by the South Australian Board of Education. From 2010, changes to the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) meant students would 'need to achieve a pass (C grade or above) in English (ESL), Mathematics and their Personal Learning Plan (PLP) in order to receive a Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE)'.

Students are clearly working at levels well below what is considered normal in other parts of Australia for their age. Stage 1 and 2 level studies were being taught in 2009, although in 2008 'ESL Stage 1 and Mathematics Stage 1 were not offered' due to students' low literacy and numeracy levels' (NTDET 2009, p. 16). This statement reflects the reality of achievement levels in very remote communities. In this context, it is useful to note that an additional 'thirty five Indigenous senior secondary aged students attending other Yirrkala Homelands Schools [were] not studying accredited senior secondary programs' in 2009 (NTDET 2009, p. 13). They were, in other words, if they were attending school at all in the various CLCs, engaging in learning experiences requiring literacy and numeracy levels characteristic of much younger learners in mainstream schools.

The support of members of Rotary International (Geelong) for SHEP has been and important and interesting development. Club members have been visiting Garrthalala annually in the dry season since 2007 to work on projects that progress the school's aims. They are supported by Nhulunbuy Rotary Club whose members assist with accommodation and other help as required. In 2009, Geelong club members built a dormitory for students who come into Garrthalala from other homeland centres each week (Rotary Club of Geelong). They had previously 'supplied and built what is now the SHEP classroom ... an extension to the existing primary school block' (NTDET 2009, p. 21).

Involvement of non-Indigenous Australians is very much in line with Peter Sutton's suggestions for practical reconciliation. Sutton tends to be skeptical about what he calls 'collective Reconciliation'. He suggests instead the kind of reconciliation that is 'primarily a personal and interpersonal journey' (Sutton 2009, p. 208). Sutton feels that formalising reconciliation 'politicises and collectivises the

very things that need to be dealt with by Australians as individuals.' He says that: 'Real reconciliation has to be a citizen's conscience vote.' It requires 'coming to terms with the feeling self held in the quiet fastness of private hours' (Sutton 2009, p. 209).

Rotary Club members who travel to the Northern Territory each year have the opportunity to see first-hand the conditions under which children live. They have an opportunity to meet Indigenous people, work with them and begin to get to know something about their interests, values and priorities, doing so in a situation where the Australian Government has declined to take primary responsibility for delivering Homelands education, aside from contributing to educational infrastructure.

An *Indigenous Boarding Facilities* (IBF) program, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and designed to cater for students in very remote regions has also been set up (Robinson & Hall 2010). Part of another program, the *Indigenous Boarding Hostels Partnerships* (IBHP) program, is administered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), and aims 'to provide Indigenous secondary school students from remote areas with the opportunity to live at boarding facilities in major regional centres in order to access educational opportunities not otherwise available to them and to provide safe environments that support Indigenous students to fulfil their educational and personal potential.' In 2012, both projects were well behind schedule according to the Australian National Audit Office.

In 2010, the Garrthalala project (SHEP) came in for heavy criticism in an article in *The Australian* newspaper. The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) fellow Helen Hughes was quoted as saying that: 'she was stunned that … the outstation of Garrthalala, 134km from Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land, would be the site of a 72-bed boarding house for remote secondary students.' She pointed out that the Yirrkala Homelands School 'ranked among the bottom 150 schools in Australia' according to a CIS analysis paper, which analysed NAPLAN data reported on the My School website. She emphasised that: 'There are no permanent qualified teachers based on-site at Garrthalala, with visiting teachers travelling to the community three days each week' and boarding students only attending 'the school three days a week' (Robinson & Hall 2010).

The Northern Territory Government argues that SHEP 'breaks new ground in the provision of accredited senior secondary education to very remote Indigenous secondary aged students.' They

also emphasise that: 'This model of secondary education delivery demonstrates a responsiveness to building upon cohesive language, kin and affiliation networks of the student population and the incorporation for close family support and gender-separated classes where needed' (NTDET 2009, p. 4). This is an important point if students' Indigenous identity is to be protected during the sensitive years of adolescence.

In the words of Nalwarri Ngurruwutthun, Yolngu elder, and Senior Cultural Education Adviser with Yirrkala Homelands School:

> We were asking for this for a long time. It's a positive program suitable for Homelands kids. It's away from the bigger communities — away from Nhulunbuy and Yirrkala. Homelands is an environment where kids can enjoy themselves and learn about the environment. It's easier for them to learn out there rather than here (Yirrkala). It's important that students can see where they're heading and know what is the purpose of learning at Garrthalala. The students are really enjoying themselves — they are growing up with strong Yolngu knowledge and can see the two world views. They identify as Yolngu and are interested in the wider society— the *ngapaki* world. I really want SHEP to continue because it is successful. We hope one day the students will take up leadership roles in their own community (SHEP 2009, p. 5-6).

Although it is evident that the SHEP model is still a long way from delivering secondary education equivalent to that available in urban, or even major regional centres at this stage, its success in delivering outcomes valued by its community is significant. It builds on 20 years of Yolngu reflective innovation, practical support for schooling and dogged determination to retain control of their own schools.

As we have seen from examples given in this chapter, constant changes in educational policy at both national and Northern Territory levels have been a significant factor in frequent failures to bring new initiatives to maturity and in failures to consistently evaluate policies that were put into practice and then abandoned.

Over the years, there have been innumerable reviews of Indigenous education, particularly in the Northern Territory by both levels of government, aimed at developing effective policies for Indigenous schooling, all with little effect. Some reviews have identified the need for extensive redevelopment and maintenance programs to upgrade infrastructure in school facilities, while others have focused on the effectiveness of program delivery. A critical overview of seven different program delivery models (social justice model, community development model, enhanced
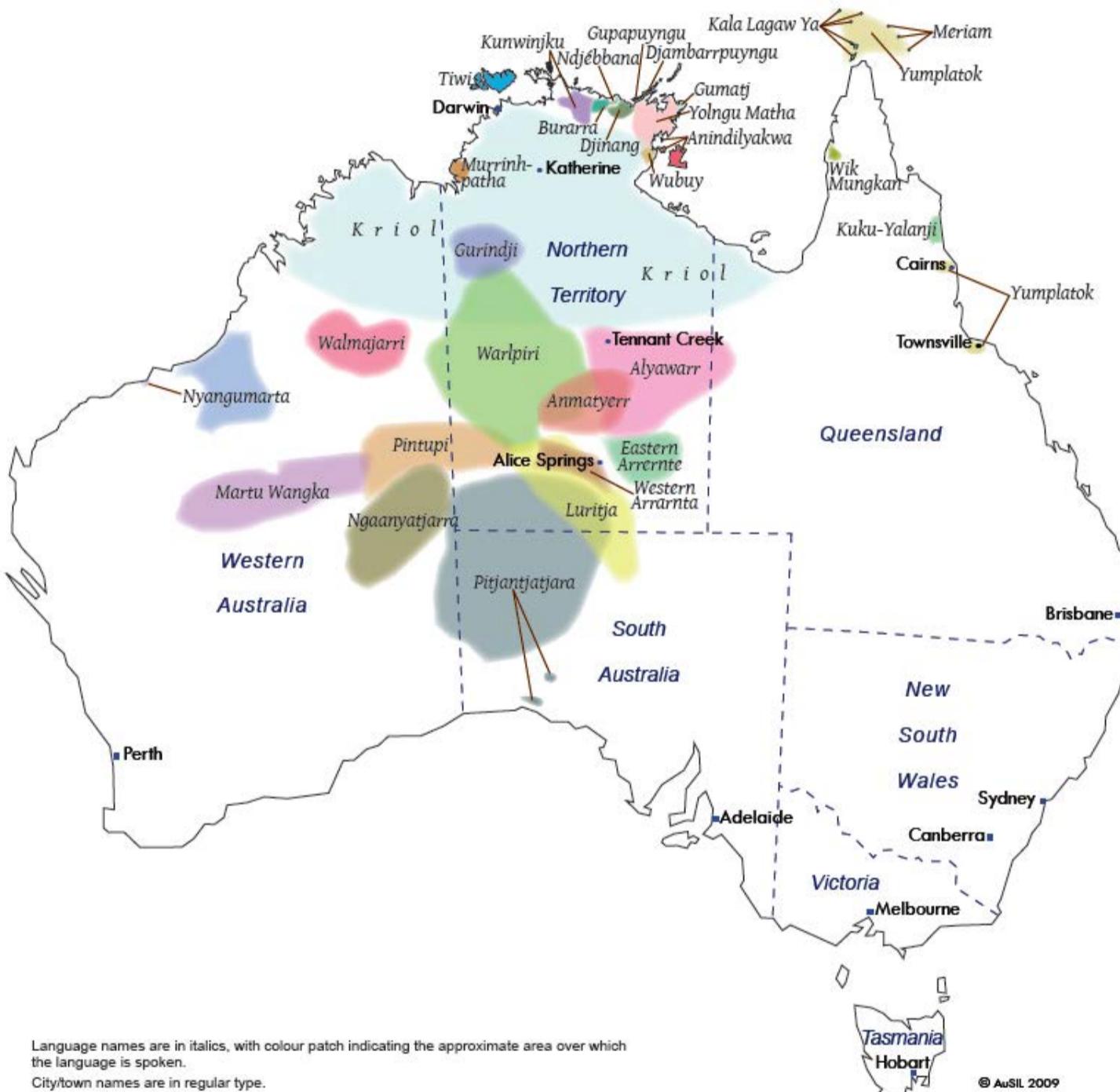
coordination model, elitist model, cultural recognition model, school responsiveness model, and compensatory skills model) is provided by Beresford & Gray (2006). An up-to-date review of policies relating to Indigenous Australian languages is provided by McKay (2011).

In Chapter Three, we take a closer look at the opportunities and challenges presented by the remarkable language complexity of the Northern Territory. Indigenous languages are a precious asset for Australia, but are dying out fast in many places. In the rest of this book we continue to think about how languages can be protected while, at the same time, better learning outcomes are achieved across the curriculum in our schools.

Chapter Three: Language diversity in the Northern Territory

Map 2: Major Australian languages
(From: Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL). Copyright and permission for use: AuSIL. AuSIL, in making the maps available, acknowledges that each map is a work in progress and there remain several aspects of the maps that need further research to ensure accuracy.)

Language names are in italics, with colour patch indicating the approximate area over which the language is spoken.
City/town names are in regular type.

© AuSIL 2009
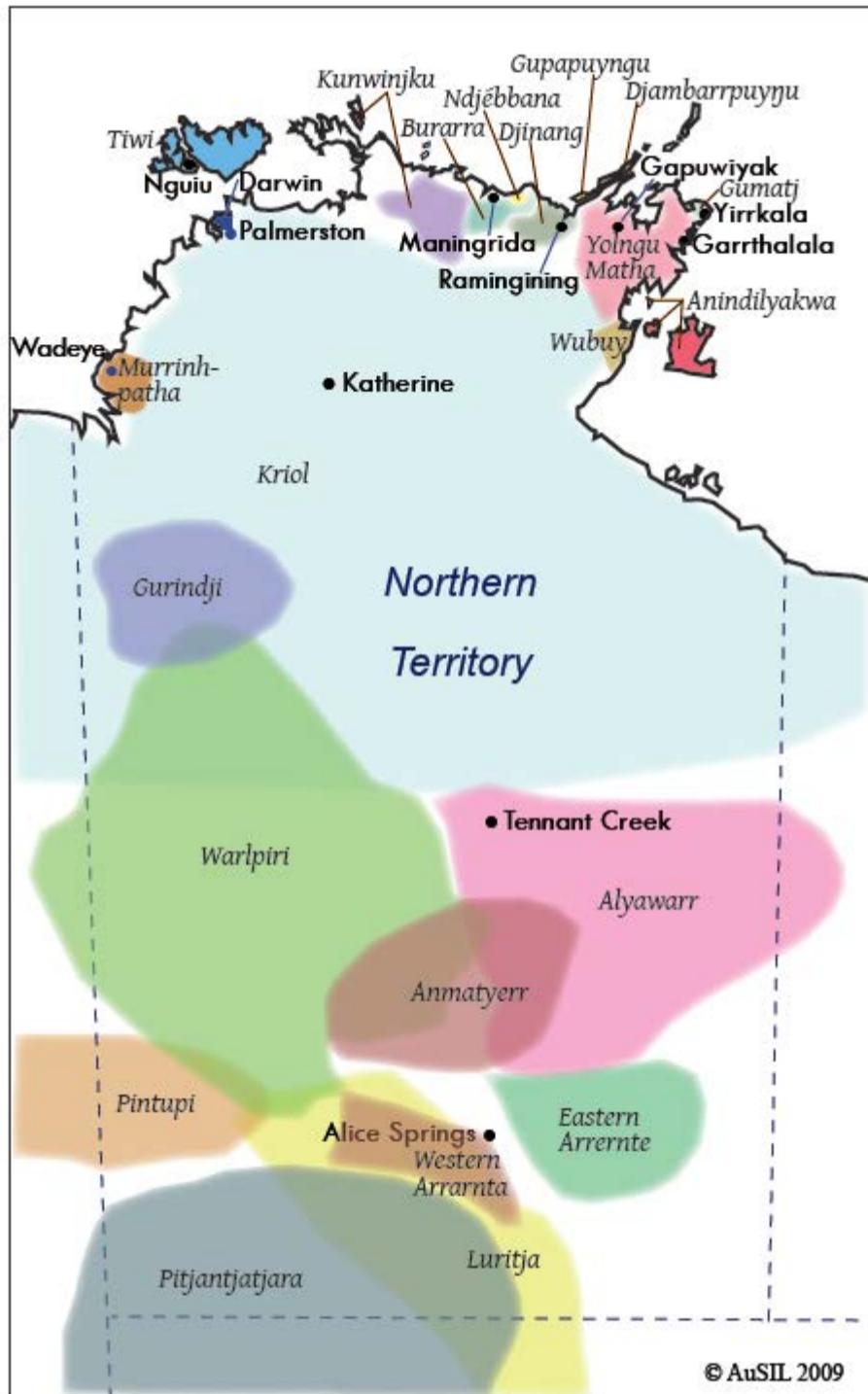
Indigenous languages in the Northern Territory

Scientific linguists generally agree that when Europeans arrived in 1788 there were approximately 250 separate languages in this country we now call Australia (Walsh 1993, p. 1). Map 2 shows the Australian languages still spoken by large groups today.

Map 3. Major Australian languages spoken in the Northern Territory

Language names are in italics, with colour patch indicating the approximate area over which the language is spoken.
Town names are in regular type.

(From: AuSIL, with same permission details as Map 2.)
Map 3 (opposite) shows the languages in more detail. Readers will notice the name Kriol on these maps. Kriol is the official name of a modern Australian language, as explained in more detail in Chapter Three. Yolngu Matha (meaning 'Yolngu language') is the cover name for a group of languages, including Gumatj and Gupapuyngu, spoken in North East Arnhem Land.

How many people speak Indigenous Australian languages?

The exact number of people who speak Australian languages is always difficult to find out. People respond to questions about which language they speak depending on how they are asked, and how they think of themselves in relation to their languages. When someone says they know a language, it can be difficult to find out how well that language is known and whether or not it is used regularly.

Many Indigenous people no longer know the languages of their ancestors. It is interesting to learn that the proportion of Indigenous people who reported in the 2011 census that they spoke only English at home (83%) was actually slightly higher than the proportion of non-Indigenous people (80%) throughout Australia.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides the following details about people who spoke an Indigenous language at home in 2011:

> About one in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (11%) reported speaking an Australian Indigenous language at home. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25 to 44 years were most likely to speak an Indigenous language at home (13%), followed closely by those aged 15 to 24 years and those aged 45 years and over (both 11%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 14 years and under were least likely to speak an Indigenous language (10%) and most likely to speak only English at home (85%) (ABS 2012c).

These figures show us very clearly that Indigenous communities are losing their traditional languages. Any language will begin to die out if a generation of children does not use it. Languages are dying along with the older generation. In 2001, 16% of people aged 45 and over said they spoke an Indigenous language at home. In 2006, the proportion in this group had dropped to 13%. Now it is only 11% across Australia as a whole. With the passing of older speakers and the fact that fewer young children are learning their ancestral languages, the proportion of people who know an Australian Indigenous language falls every year.

If parents, communities and the Australian people want to preserve these precious languages into the future, we need to be proactive. We need to show children and young people that we value their parents' and grandparents' languages, and find ways to encourage young children to use those languages confidently and competently alongside English.

As we will see later in this chapter, several important policy documents bear witness to the commitment of the Australian Government and the states to protect Australian heritage languages.
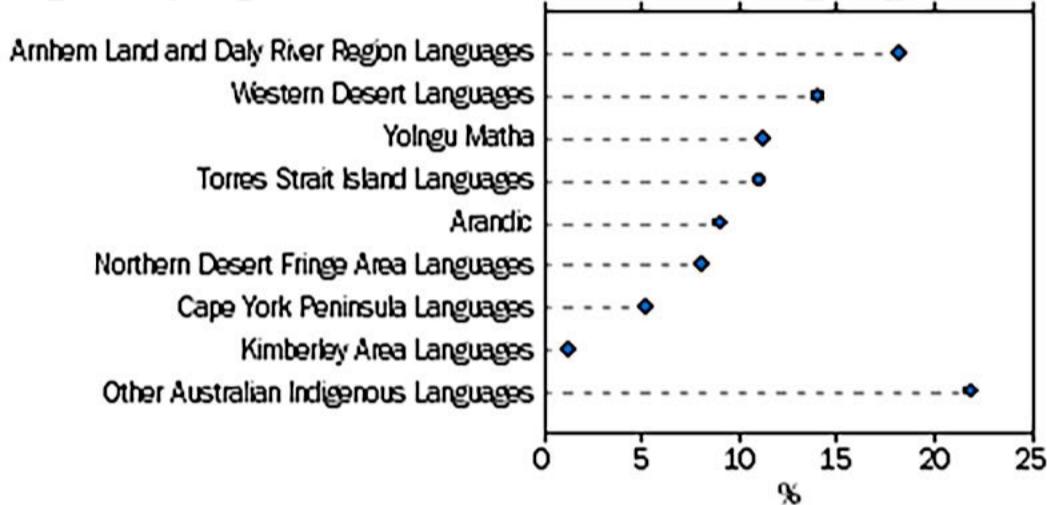
However, this commitment needs practical action if it is to have any real and lasting impact. For children in remote communities in particular, incorporating their home languages as well as standard English into teaching and learning in schools can help demonstrate respect for their heritage and our sincerity as a nation.

It is encouraging to learn that the strongest Australian languages are almost all located in the Northern Territory, as the next quote and also Figure 4 show:

> Of the Australian Indigenous languages spoken at home, languages in the Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages and Western Desert Languages groups were the most widely spoken (18% and 14% respectively). The next most prominent language groups spoken at home were Yolngu Matha and Torres Strait Island Languages (11% each) (ABS 2012c).

Figure 4: Speakers of Australian Languages

(a) Calculated as proportion of total number of Indigenous language speakers.
(b) Usual residence Census counts. Excludes overseas visitors. Includes Other Territories.

(From: ABS (2012c) AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE SPEAKERS BY LANGUAGE GROUP(a), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people(b). Note: the percentages do not add up to 100, probably because not everyone answered this question on census night.)

Table 4 shows that nearly 63% of people in the Northern Territory said they only spoke English only at home in 2011. Most of the rest of the population said that they spoke other languages at home. Table 4 shows us that the biggest non-Indigenous language other than English spoken at home in the NT is *Greek*.

We also learn from Table 4 that nearly one quarter of all Territorians (24.4%) said they lived in households where two or more languages were spoken in 2011. This is a higher proportion than in 2006 in the Northern Territory, or in Australia as a whole in 2011.

Table 4: Languages other than English spoken at home in the Northern Territory in 2011

Language	NT 2011	%	NT 2006	%	Australia 2011	%
Kriol	3,993	1.9	2,452	1.3	6,780	0.0
Djambarrpuyngu	2,970	1.4	2,733	1.4	2,974	0.0
Greek	2,855	1.3	2,485	1.3	252,217	1.2
Warlpiri	2,409	1.1	2,396	1.2	2,554	0.0
Murrinh Patha	2,373	1.1	1,822	0.9	2,411	0.0
English only spoken at home	133,014	62.8	127,283	66.0	16,509,291	76.8
Households:	14,870	24.4	11,359	19.8	1,579,949	20.4
Two or more languages spoken						

(Table adapted from ABS (2013d))

This table only shows the largest groups of speakers. As we saw in the maps at the beginning of the chapter, many more languages than these are still spoken at home in the Northern Territory. Indeed, some languages not included on the maps are also still spoken by a few people.

According to the 2011 census, Kriol is now the biggest Indigenous Australian language spoken in the NT. Nearly six out of ten Kriol speakers live in the Northern Territory. As shown in the above maps, most of the other speakers live in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. We see from Table 4 that Kriol is also the biggest Indigenous language in Australia. The population of Kriol speakers is growing all the time because so many young children speak this modern Australian language.

The actual numbers of people using the four biggest Australian Indigenous language groups rose between 2006 and 2011. We know from Chapter One that children and young people under 23 make up half the Indigenous population in the Northern Territory, so these figures suggest that, in these particular language groups at least, young children are speaking the Indigenous languages of their communities. The numbers may also tell us that more people understand these days, compared with the past, that Kriol is a separate language and not a form of English. This point will be explained further below.

While Figure 4 shows us that Yolngu languages together make up the third biggest Australian Indigenous language group in the Northern Territory, Table 4 tells us that *Djambarrpuyngu*

(one of the Yolngu languages) is spoken by more people than Greek, *Warlpiri*, or *Murrinh Patha*. Murrinh Patha is also known sometimes as *Garama* and is spoken around Wadeye. Warlpiri is spoken in the northern desert regions.

As explained in Chapter One, the Australian Government took more care in 2011 than in the past to collect accurate statistics in remote and very remote areas. This was partly because the NTER revealed that important information necessary for improving health and welfare conditions for Indigenous Territorians was not accurate. Some of the changes in collection methods may partly explain why the proportion of people who said they spoke more than one language at home rose and why the proportion who said they spoke only English at home fell.

Another fact that needs to be taken into account when thinking about language use in the Northern Territory is that many Indigenous people speak a dialect of English known as *Aboriginal English* (AE). As we will see in more detail later in this chapter, Aboriginal English is a distinct dialect of English in the same way that dialects like Canadian, Singaporean, Australian, or Scots English are all dialects of World English. Some Indigenous people speak Aboriginal English in addition to Standard Australian English (SAuE). Some speak AE instead of SAuE, and some speak AE in addition to Kriol and/or traditional Australian languages.

The total number of Australians who reported in the 2011 census that they spoke AE at home was only 1,037 (Biddle 2012, p. 12). We know, however, that many more thousands of Indigenous people throughout Australian do speak AE with their families and friends, even if they don't write it on the census form. Speakers of SAuE also tend not to write *Australian English* on the form, although that is the correct name of the dialect of English most widely spoken in Australia.

It is interesting to notice that of all the Indigenous Australian languages with more than 100 speakers identified in the 2011 census, AE was the language that showed the largest increase between 2006 and 2011. In 2006, only 471 people in the whole of Australia wrote on the census form that they spoke AE (Biddle 2012, p. 12). Many of these people live on the east coast of Australia.

The other Australian languages showing increased usage between 2006 and 2011 were *Nunggubuyu* in the Northern Territory, *Manyjilyjarra* in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, and *Ngarrindjeri* in South Australia (Biddle 2012, p. 12).

How endangered are Indigenous Australian languages?

In 2005, a *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report* (NILS) was presented to the Australian Government. Information was collected through meetings, telephone interviews and a voluntary online survey of individuals and institutions that collect information about Australian languages.

The report is an important document which has influenced the development of new national policies. A major finding was that 'the situation of Australia's languages is very grave and requires urgent action' ... with 'only about 145 Indigenous languages ... still spoken and the vast majority of these, about 110 ... in the severely and critically endangered categories' (AIATSIS & FATSIL 2005, p. 67).

A critically endangered language is defined as one that is 'spoken only by small groups of people, mostly over 40 years old.' The NILS survey team discovered that only 'eighteen languages are strong in the sense of being spoken by all age groups' and three or four of these showed 'some signs of moving into endangerment' (AIATSIS & FATSIL 2005, p. 67).

The team also found that: 'Many other languages are not fully spoken by anybody, but words and phrases are used, and there is great community support in many parts of the country for reclamation and heritage learning programs for such languages (AIATSIS & FATSIL 2005, p.67). This is particularly so in southern states of Australia where historical documents are being used to support, revive or even reconstruct languages that have faded or almost faded from daily use. A successful pioneering example of reconstruction is *Kaurna* in South Australia (*Kaurna Warra Pityandi* website). There are many other examples around Australia.

When Europeans arrived in this country, each language had several dialects, bringing the total number of distinctively different language varieties to many hundreds. Austin (1991) estimates that there were at least 600 different languages, including dialects, at that time.

Dialects and languages

Speakers of different dialects of a language can generally understand each other. For instance, speakers of Australian English can usually understand speakers of the various dialects of English spoken in America once they get used to the different accents and ways of speaking.

Sometimes it can be difficult to decide what should be called a *language* and what should be regarded as a *dialect*. Michael Walsh (1993, p. 1) gives the example of Jamaican English and Scots English. These two dialects developed separately in countries very far apart from each other. Their speakers might not always understand each other. Should we therefore regard the dialects as two separate languages? Questions like this are sometimes also asked by linguists about Australian languages.

In Map 3, Figure 4 and Table 4 above, we see both language and dialect names. *Yolngu Matha* is a cover name for the language group that includes dialects like *Djambarrpuyngu*, *Gumatj* and *Gupapuyngu*. As we saw, *matha* means language. *Yolngu* means *human being* in North East Arnhem Land. The word is often extended to refer to all dark skinned people. People of European descent are called *Balanda* in this region. Yolngu learned this word from visiting South East Asian people known today as Macassans. It is derived from the word *Hollander* and refers to the Europeans the Macassans were most familiar with.

Eastern and *Western Arrente* are two dialects in the *Arrente* (also referred to as *Arandic*) language group. We often find that what linguists call *dialects* are usually regarded as languages by the people who speak them.

What is important about any way of speaking is that it lets other people know who you are and where you come from. Most Australians feel a sense of solidarity with someone when they hear their Australian accent. Using your language or dialect to reveal who you are is especially important to Indigenous Australians because traditional languages are thought of as being grounded in a very real sense in very specific parts of the country.

Veronica Dobson, a highly respected Eastern Arrernte elder from Ltentye Pwerte (Santa Teresa), has made a video (Dobson & Lovell 2009) which is freely available on the web. In it she explains in her own language the importance of children knowing their traditional languages. Dobson, who has worked tirelessly for her language and culture over 30 years was awarded the Order of Australia in 2011 for services to the indigenous community as a linguist, naturalist and ecologist (Richards 2011).

Multilingualism in Indigenous Australia

The figures collected at census time tell only part of the story because so many Indigenous people speak several languages. That is why the term *multilingual* is often more accurate than *bilingual* in remote areas. The degree of multilingualism in Indigenous Australia, even among children, can be difficult for people who only speak one language to appreciate. As Michael Walsh explains:

> Particularly in parts of northern Australia many Indigenous people are multilingual and the survey instruments need to take account of such matters as what a person regards as their primary linguistic affiliation. In some instances this may be their 'father tongue' rather than the mother tongue we tend to think of in that part of the wider Australian population which is monolingual. Often enough in these areas of northern Australia an individual's parents will each have a multilingual repertoire. Such individuals will build up their own multilingual repertoire with inputs from the parents and other members of the community as they are growing up and later from their spouses, employment and travels (Walsh 2007, p. 80).

Monolingual Australians can be surprised to learn that Indigenous Australians often use different languages in the same family. It's interesting to read about Dhalulu Ganambarr-Stubb's experiences. She lists 16 Yolngu languages spoken in and around Yirrkala and explains how she heard her own language, <u>Dätiwuy</u>, as a child, although she didn't speak it:

> *Dätiwuy* is a language I heard all through my childhood but didn't speak until I was in my mid twenties. I started speaking it because I was too old to talk in *dhuwaya*, which is the children's language of this area. To begin with, I knew in my mind what to say, but I couldn't speak. When I finally did, I made mistakes. My mother and father, uncles and aunties corrected me and taught me to speak properly (Ganambar 1994, p. 237).

Ganambarr-Stubbs said that she continued to learn 'new words every day' as she grew older. She also explained how: 'You have to get used to hearing yourself speaking your own language'. It is difficult to have to 'think about everything before you speak' so 'some people give up' (p.237). They never become full adult speakers of their own clan language.

This is the same reason why many immigrants and Indigenous people never become full speakers of standard English. It is also the reason why so many non-Indigenous people give up when they find trying to learn an Indigenous Australian language takes a lot of time and effort, and yet Indigenous

people in the Northern Territory have to learn another language (SAuE) just to be able to talk to the teachers at their children's schools, participate fully in their workplaces, and confidently and competently negotiate the wider world outside their communities.

We saw in Chapter Two that moieties are a basic fact of many clans. Ganambarr-Stubbs also explained why the parents of children in her region always have different traditional languages.

> There are two moieties ... in our Yolngu world, which we call *Yirritja* and *Dhuwa*. Everything (including plants, land, animals, even directions, etc.) is either *Yirritja* or *Dhuwa*. It's a bit like Yin and Yang. So if I'm *Dhuwa* then my father is also *Dhuwa* and therefore so are my sisters and my brothers, whereas my mother is always the opposite moiety, which is of course *Yirritja* (Ganambar 1994, p. 236).

Yolngu languages are also *Yirritja* or *Dhuwa*. For instance, *Gumatj* is *Yirritja* and *Djambarrpuygu* is *Dhuwa*. Since people must marry someone from the opposite moiety, Yolngu always marry someone who comes from a different language group.

Even in parts of the Northern Territory where the Yolngu moiety system does not apply, people often marry someone who speaks a different language. Multilingualism, especially with regard to ability to understand other languages if not always to speak them, was the normal situation before colonisation.

Thirty years ago, Elwell (1982) observed in the remote Northern Territory community of Maningrida, that eleven different Aboriginal languages were spoken, although only the three most widely spoken were commonly used in the local store. This high level of multilingualism continues today in many communities. Commenting on the way people add extra languages to their repertoire as they get older, McKay reminds us that:

> Each of these languages has important social and religious associations connected with land, ceremony and family and the responsibilities which attach to these. Even in cases where a different language has been adopted, many of these associations and responsibilities continue, mediated by the new language, but not severing links with the old (McKay 1996, p. 5-6).

Unfortunately, linguists are often asked whether anyone still speaks 'The Aboriginal language', as if there were only one original Australian language. Some people also believe Australian languages are not as sophisticated as European or Asian languages. From a scientific point of view, this is nonsense. In many respects the grammar, sound patterns and concepts of Australian languages are

more complicated than those of English. There are also other ways in which the grammar, sound patterns and concepts of English provide real challenges for learners from Indigenous language backgrounds. For readers who want to learn more, a useful general introduction to Australian languages is *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia* edited by Walsh & Yallop (1993/2005).

All languages are capable of meeting their speakers' communication needs

All languages evolve to meet the full range of communication needs of their speakers such as social, interpersonal, intellectual and organisational needs, and more. All languages have the potential to be used for high level intellectual reasoning and have unlimited aesthetic possibilities. Every language has its own traditions of sophisticated, artistic language use, whether in oral poetry, written literature, or other culturally-specific artistic or literary forms.

The multilayered complexity of metaphor in Australian Indigenous languages is, for instance, rarely appreciated by non-Indigenous people. Christie (2007) writes about the 'striking metaphysics' of Yolngu understandings about the way 'the shapes of the world' and 'the shapes of its languages' are 'coextensive and co-constitutive.' By contrast, 'a view of language as representing an objective pre-existing reality, which generally underpins ... European philosophy of language' is very different (Christie 2007, p. 58-59). Christie offers glimpses into a world rich with imagery, although this imagery and ideas are patterned in very different ways from the ones that speakers of SAuE are used to.

Cultural schemas

Other researchers have investigated cultural schemas embodied in different languages. According to Nishida (1999, p. 755) 'Schemas are generalised collections of knowledge of past experiences which are organised into related knowledge groups; they guide our behaviors in familiar situations'. Schemas are mental networks of connected ideas that work together to help us understand what's going on in a given situation.

For instance, when we walk into a supermarket, we bring with us a large number of unconscious expectations about what happens in such a place. These expectations are built up over time through personal experience, including what we hear other people say about particular situations. We don't

need to watch other people to find out what to do if we have a well-developed schema for negotiating a situation, and we are also not usually aware that what we say and do in a supermarket depends on our cultural expectations.

We don't normally appreciate how much our behavior consists of cultural habits we take for granted until we see someone behaving in an unexpectedly different way, for instance settling down for a sleep in a corner inside the supermarket, or taking out a packed lunch to eat while inspecting the shelves. Supermarket schemas are cultural schemas shared by members of cultures that have supermarkets.

Cultural schemas are made up of language patterns, mental images and patterns of culturally appropriate behaviours learned from being situated in our home community and our own cultural group. Ford (2009) and Marett, Barwick & Ford (2012) identify cultural schemas in languages of the Darwin-Daly region, while Sharifian (e.g. 2002) explores cultural schemas in Aboriginal English. Sharifian et al (2012) is a report on research into differences in cultural schemas of Years 4 and 5 Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in Western Australia. Knowing that we unconsciously use cultural schemas in every part of our day-to-day lives is useful. Sometimes we think we know what someone is doing and how they're thinking because some of the things they do fit in with schemas from our own culture. Embarrassing mistakes can be made, however, if we take too much for granted based on our own cultural experiences. It's quite possible the other person has a totally different set of ideas and expectations in their mind.

Do we think differently in different languages?

Bilingual and multilingual people sometimes notice that they think or feel differently when using their different languages. This is because each language trains its speakers from babyhood to pay attention differently to what happens around them (Lee 1997). This happens partly because the grammars of our languages organise our minds in subtly different ways (Bowerman & Levinson 2001; Slobin 2003; Brown & Levinson 2009). It is also partly because each language has specific words and breaks concepts and experiences up in different ways. Some languages may require several words for what in others may only require one word.

An example of the way English grammar organises how we pay attention is plural marking. Speakers of English need to pay attention to whether something is single or multiple, e.g. *car/cars*. They also need to show in their words whether something has already happened or hasn't happened yet, e.g. *run/ran/jump/jumped*.

The form of the words changes in English, but in many languages (e.g. Chinese) the word stays the same. Extra words are used if speakers want to be specific, e.g. a speaker of Chinese will say the equivalent of *four car/many car*, and so on, or *play yesterday/play now/play tomorrow*, etc. There are no additional endings or changes of form.

It is not compulsory in many languages to indicate grammatically when something happened or whether there was more than one of something. It doesn't bother people who speak those languages if you're not precise about these things. Listeners (and readers) can generally work out what is meant from the overall context of a conversation.

Speakers of English also use context to work out what something means. For instance, if someone says: 'I'll go tomorrow', the person they're talking to might know they intend to go shopping, because they were talking about the shops just before that comment was made. They don't need to mention shopping a second time. Similarly, if someone has been talking about several cars in a language like Chinese, they don't need to add the grammatical element *'s'* at the end in the way English speakers do, because the people they're talking to already know they mean several cars. English is a very meaning-redundant language because it uses grammar and number words, etc., as well as context. The meaning of plural (multiple) is often indicated twice e.g. *five cars*.

Languages differ widely in the way they give specific names to different aspects of experience. Ganambarr-Stubbs gives some interesting examples of single words in her language that can only be translated into English by using several words. Her examples include:

barrwarryun, to twist and turn (while sleeping, crying, or laughing);
marrnggatthun, to look about from a sitting position, moving only the upper body;
watthun, to look back over your shoulder;
watjarryun, to try and stop people from hurting each other (Ganambarr 1994, p. 254-255).

Words like *stoop, stumble, hesitate, supervise* or *calculate* may require more than one word to translate into another language. It can be a surprise to find that some words are easy to translate into another language and some are not. Body parts are often named differently in different languages. For instance not all languages divide up and name the parts of the arm and hand in the same way.

When we ask: 'What's the word for —?' we assume there will be one word because because English has one word. It is better to ask: 'How would you say this in your language?' 'How can this idea be explained in your language (or dialect)?' We always need to be careful in situations where someone is translating meaning across languages. Sometimes it might be very difficult to express what they're saying in an exact way in English. The same applies when someone is translating from English to another language. Some of the meaning might be left out or changed during the translation process, because the two languages don't match up completely.

A person who only knows one language may find it difficult to appreciate that languages vary so much in how they communicate meaning. This is because the language you grew up with seems to have the only possible relationship to human experience. It's difficult to imagine words working differently in other languages, unless you've studied grammar or learnt an additional language yourself.

Of course many words do have one-to-one correspondences in other languages. Many grammatical patterns also have parallels in other languages. But the overall effect of the whole grammar, or the whole meaning system of a language, can be very different from another language.

Australian Indigenous languages are very different from English. Charles Darwin University (CDU) offers courses in Yolngu language and culture for people who want to study a Northern Territory language at tertiary level. Several units at different levels are available, providing an introduction to the life and languages of the Yolngu in North East Arnhem Land.

Many Indigenous communities also have informal workshops and classes for newcomers. Attending these courses is always worthwhile, even if only to get some beginning ideas about how people communicate in that community.

Language diversity in towns and rural areas

While multilingualism is normal in very remote communities, a high level of language diversity is also often found in towns and rural areas, as Brandl and Walsh point out:

> To be Aboriginal is to be multilingual. This is as true of Aborigines who live in towns and cities as in remote communities, where many distinct Aboriginal languages may be spoken in one place. Kriol is spoken, with regional variations, across wide areas of northern and central Australia (Sandefur & Sandefur 1979). A form of Aboriginal English is spoken around Australia with regional variations that are mutually intelligible … and Aborigines also speak Standard Australian English, with particular variations of vocabulary and style … The decision to speak one or other variety or style on any particular occasion is determined largely by social context (Brandl & Walsh 1982, p. 76).

In the sections below we will look more closely at the very great changes that are occurring in the Northern Territory in terms of language use, including the use of Kriol and Aboriginal English.

Language death and language evolution

As we saw in the statistics at the beginning of this chapter, languages begin to die when children do not learn their parents' languages. Indigenous languages are dying out at a rapid rate across the world and the situation is no different in Australia.

The death of small languages is a tragedy for all human beings in a global sense. This is because ancient wisdom and artistic productions handed down from generation to generation in stories and songs and poetical dramas or dances die out. Old, specialised languages of small indigenous groups also have great scientific value. For instance, from a medical point of view, the names and uses of medicinal plants may be lost when old people who speak those languages die. These languages provide understandings about climate, food sources, animal migration and reproduction patterns and other forms of information about the world around us.

From a scientific point of view, small languages can also teach us what is possible in the world. Learning about different languages helps us to understand the range of ideas people have about the world. We also need to remember that when languages die, a central part of a group's identity changes forever and it may take generations for new core elements of identity to evolve.

In 1993, the United Nations set up an *Endangered Languages Project* to help save languages no longer being spoken by children (Crystal 2000), and in 1995, the University of Tokyo set up the *International Clearing House for Endangered Languages. The Endangered Language Fund*, created in 1999 in the USA, states that:

> Languages have died off throughout history, but never have we faced the massive extinction that is threatening the world right now. ... The cultural heritage of many peoples is crumbling while we look on. Are we willing to shoulder the blame for having stood by and done nothing? (cited in Crystal 2000, p. vii)

Crystal's book on the death of languages was important in helping people understand why they are dying and why it is important to help speakers of Indigenous languages protect them before it is too late. The best kind of protection is when a language remains in full use. Indigenous peoples around the world are increasingly using powerful world languages such as English, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese, but many groups are also fighting to keep their own heritage languages strong as well.

Two recent books explain the remarkable riches that can be lost when languages die. *When Languages Die: the extinction of the world's languages and the erosion of human knowledge* was written by K. David Harrison (2010) and Dying Words: endangered languages and what they have to tell us by Nicholas Evans (2010). Harrison emphasises that it is *ideas* that die when languages die. He tells us, in a very readable way, about knowledge of species, traditional calendars and time reckoning systems, methods of orienting oneself in the environment, endangered number systems, knowledge about specialised food crops, and the complex and interesting features of some unusual grammatical systems in dying languages. He explains that:

> The extinction of ideas we now face has no parallel in human history. Since most of the world's languages remain undescribed by scientists, we do not even know what it is that we stand to lose. This book explores only a tiny fraction of the vast knowledge that will soon be lost, an accretion of many centuries of human thinking about time, seasons, sea creatures, reindeer, flowers, mathematics, landscapes, myths, music, infinity, cyclicity, the unknown, and the everyday (Harrison 201, p. viii).

Although Harrison mostly describes languages in other parts of the world, these kinds of knowledge are also being lost, right now, in the Northern Territory.

We are losing precious languages in the Northern Territory

Evans (2010) gives a range of reasons why it is so important to record languages that only have a few speakers left. Although his book also deals mostly with languages in other countries, he writes with great feeling about his work with old people who are, or were, the last speakers of small Northern Territory languages such as *Dalabon* spoken in Arnhem Land.

The old people told Evans about *Warramurrungunji* who came out of the sea near Croker Island and as she travelled through north-western Arnhem Land, put her children down in different areas, telling them the language they should speak for each place (Evans 2010, p. 5). Other language groups in the Northern Territory have similar stories to explain the intimate connections between people, their languages and particular places. An interesting recent article called 'Speaking Up' (Burdon 2013) shares more about this story and describes how 'sleeping tongues' are being awakened across Australia in an important language revival movement.

Hearing stories like these makes it easier to understand the great sadness and sense of loss people have when they realise their languages and cultures are slipping away. While unbreakable links to the land of their ancestors remain, the deepest links are embodied in the languages of the places those people belong to. Indigenous people may find that it becomes more difficult to think about and explain those links in a new language. Also, as Walsh explains:

> In Aboriginal Australia, at least some small portion of an Indigenous language is seen as necessary for access to places (Walsh 1997). Particularly for places of special significance it is felt that access to such a place can be gained only when there is someone who can speak to the spirits that inhabit that place. And the 'place' will understand only the language of the land-owning group in whose territory that place resides. So there is a fear that language loss may lead to powerful places being effectively closed down. This is a strong incentive to retain enough of the language belonging to a place to gain access to that place (Walsh 2005, p. 307).

A recent Commonwealth of Australia report *Our Land, Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities* (2012) provides strong support for maintenance of Indigenous languages for closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage:

> Central to the idea of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages is that it will strengthen Indigenous culture and identity which will lead to improvements in Standard Australian English competency and socio-economic factors including improved measurements of wellbeing (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, p.13).

The Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL), in the same report, commented:

> Decades of research and experience show that meaningful recognition of indigenous languages, along with their deliberate and systematic incorporation into programs in the education, health, justice, and job training sectors, along with reasonable cross-cultural training and orientation of service providers are critical to Closing the Gap. The evidence consistently indicates that doing so gives significantly better outcomes in:
>
> - literacy
>
> - standard English proficiency
>
> - school retention rates
>
> - learning in all subjects
>
> - reduction in antisocial behaviour, and
>
> - as well as progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals
>
>   (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, p. 22).

The degree of language loss occurring in Australia is significant and has been investigated by a number of people. The best known are reports by Schmidt (1990), McKay (1996) and the AIATSIS & FASTSIS (2005) NILS report mentioned earlier in this chapter.

As languages die, new languages evolve and this is the way it has always been throughout human history. Our concern is not that new languages keep evolving, but that languages are dying at a faster rate than ever before. The number of new languages evolving is much smaller than the number being lost.

A new language spoken by large groups of people does not necessarily retain the finely detailed traditional knowledge of small languages intimately linked to a specific region in the knowledge they carry. In many countries a new or introduced overarching language may take the place of many smaller languages. This is happening in places like Brazil where Portuguese is dominant and many traditional Brazilian languages are being lost.

As we saw in the maps at the beginning of this chapter, a new language now widely used in the Northern Territory is Kriol. Kriol may seem in some ways to be a form of English but its sound patterns, much of its grammar, and a surprising number of its word meanings, are more like those of traditional Australian Indigenous languages than English.

Pidgins, creoles and Kriol

Kriol is the official spelling and name of a *creole* that started evolving in northern Australia when people from different language groups were forced to leave their traditional lands and live together in missions and government settlements.

To understand what a creole is, it is useful to know what the term *pidgin* means. A pidgin is a type of language that develops when groups of people who do not share a common language need to communicate in a limited way with each other, for instance for the purpose of trading goods. A pidgin is never a person's primary language because everyone has their own fully functional language which they use for other communication purposes.

Harris (2007) tells how pidgins and creoles developed in Australia. A pidgin was was first used to communicate with the Macassan trepangers who came to fish for sea cucumbers in Northern Territory coastal waters. The first pidgin spoken on the Eastern seaboard was in New South Wales soon after the first convict ships arrived. Elements of it spread as far as the Northern Territory when Indigenous people travelled with explorers and drovers from the east coast into this region.

Creoles differ from pidgins because, although they also develop in language contact situations, they very quickly grow into full languages able to meet all the communication needs of their speakers. They generally develop in situations where normal multilingual social relationships are seriously disrupted. In fact, creoles are quite common in parts of the world which have been colonised by European countries. Kriol and *Yumplatok* (formerly known as *Torres Strait Creole*) are English-based creoles, but there are French-based creoles, as well as others based on a range of other dominant languages.

Kriol first developed in the Northern Territory at a time when several different pidgins were in use. Sandefur talks about interactions between these pidgins, 'primarily through the movement of the pastoral industry'. He then goes on to explain how *creolisation* occurred:

> A ... significant and impactful event took place just after the turn of [the twentieth] century, namely creolization. The Anglican Church Missionary Society established a mission station on Roper River towards the end of a period of particularly severe and planned decimation of the tribes in the district by a large cattle syndicate. As a result, right from its inception, a relatively large multi-tribal population flocked

to the mission station as a haven of safety. And the children growing up as peers in that situation, taking all the linguistic materials available to them, in essence turned the pidgin of the district into a full-fledged language — their own mother tongue (Sandefur 1991, p. 118).

Harris explains the complex language environment (or habitat) of this situation:

The Roper River language habitat was highly complex with many overlapping speech communities. The eight groups of refugees spoke distinct languages. The multilingual adults had no significant communication problem in the new mission community. Had there been time, one of their languages might have become modified as a dominant community language … But here, 70 children in the mission school suddenly found themselves thrust together with other children whose languages they had not yet had the opportunity to learn. They were the new community and they needed a primary language. Whereas their parents could communicate with people whose speech communities used to overlap their own, the children could not. What they had in common was the Northern Territory Pidgin English used between Aboriginal and European people and the Standard Australian English they were hearing in school. With this input, it was this younger generation on the mission who, in the course of their lifetime, created a creole, manipulating the lexical resources available to them and drawing on linguistic universals to create Kriol, or Roper Pidgin as it was then called, a language which catered for all their communicative needs (Harris 2007, p. 144).

During the Second World War compounds were established by the Australian Army to prevent the local people from moving around in the normal manner, giving rise to further development of creoles. After the war, more missions and settlements were set up under the Australian Government's assimilation policy. Indigenous people were encouraged to learn English, and to send their children to schools where this was the dominant language. Speaking an Australian Indigenous language and/or pidgin was discouraged, sometimes with beatings (Sandefur 1991; Harris 2007). By the 1970s, the work of linguist Robert Hall helped people realise that fully developed creoles had evolved in northern Australia to the point where they had become the first languages of many Indigenous children and young people. *Yumplatok* was identified as a new Australian Indigenous language in the north of Queensland and, in 1986, the name *Kriol* was given to the creole being used in the Barunga school in the Katherine region of the Northern Territory (Sandefur 1991, p. 119-120). As we saw in maps 2 and 3, Kriol is now widely spoken in the Northern Territory and right across into the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

More about Kriol

From the point of view of Indigenous Territorians, and also from a scientific point of view, there are actually several *varieties* or mini-dialects of Kriol in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. They differ from each other in small but significant ways which are easily noticed by people who use them. The name *Kriol* is used to cover all the varieties simply for convenience, and because many features of the different versions of Kriol are shared by the different groups of speakers.

Non-Indigenous people who are new to an area might find it helpful to listen to how local people describe their own way of speaking. For instance, Wigglesworth & Simpson (2008, p.20) point out that many people refer to the language they speak as *English*, even though standard English speakers may not understand what they are saying. *Camp English* and *Pidgin English* are other names used in different places for the local version of Kriol. At Tennant Creek, people may refer to their language as *Wurrpurrarni English*. 'Speakers may also firmly say that they do not speak 'Kriol', because they identify 'Kriol' as being the way of talking around the Roper River, and thus as different from their own ways of talking' (Wigglesworth & Simpson 2008, p.20-21). Some people may even say that they talk *rubbish English*, or similar, which may be because they are embarrassed about the way they talk. These people may have taken on the values of those non-Indigenous people who can't accept, or don't know, that Kriol is a proper language.

Because Kriol is an English-based creole, people sometimes think it is more like English than it really is. Sandefur's (1991) article is entitled: 'The problem of transparency in Kriol'. He says that:

> Because of the transparency of Kriol, many English speakers think they can understand Kriol. And in fact they can understand much of Kriol. But therein lies a problem. Because they understand some Kriol, they think they fully understand all of it — and hence there is often miscommunication (Sandefur 1991, p. 121).

Useful examples of such misunderstandings are found in the resource book for teachers entitled *Making the Jump*, by Rosalind Berry and Joyce Hudson (1997). As they explain: 'A teacher might be offended when a child says *Liar miss* because that teacher has heard only the standard English meaning of *liar* whereas the child's comment was a light hearted one. It meant something like *You're pretending/telling a good joke/tricking me*.'

Misunderstandings can also 'come from words like *bin, gotta, for, alla,* which are all part of grammatical structures' explained in *Making the Jump*. A good example is the sentence: '*Det pitja*

bin stat fran en wi bin kam biyain' which means 'The film started before we arrived.' Although *fran* comes from English *front*, it can be used to mean *before*. Similarly, '*biyain* (from *behind*) can be used to mean *after* or *later*' (Berry & Hudson 1997, p. 154).

Words like these are what language teachers call *false friends*, because they seem to have the same meaning when they do not. People who have learned French or Spanish will know there are many words in those languages which look similar to certain English words, but have different meanings. These are also false friends and some of them can involve embarrassing misunderstandings. *Shame* is an Aboriginal English false friend that can cause misunderstandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as will be explained further below.

Another example causing widespread intercultural misunderstanding is the way requests might be made in Kriol. For instance: *Yu garra gibit me lif?* To English speakers this sounds like a demand (*You've got to give me a lift.*) The problem is that in Kriol *garra* simply marks future tense. It could just mean *Will you give me a lift?* In English we also use different word order (*Will you* for a request and *You will* to give an order or make a demand), however, Kriol uses the same word order in both cases, another reason there might be misunderstandings. A third complication is that the voice does not rise as obviously at the end of a question in Kriol as it does in English (Examples extracted from Sandefur 1991, p. 123).

With these three differences of meaning, grammar and intonation, it's easy to see why English speakers may think Kriol speakers are perhaps being rather abrupt or rude when they ask for something. It's also useful to remember that traditional Australian languages do not have words which directly translate words such as *please* or *thank you*. This is because traditional Indigenous cultural protocols designated who could be asked for assistance and who could not. Asking for something and receiving it fit in a natural way in the social world of Indigenous Australian languages and do not require extra politeness in the same way English does.

Non-standard dialects of English

Speakers of creoles are often able to switch between different versions of their languages. Most creoles have high and low forms (*acrolect* and *basilect* forms). The acrolect is more like the dominant colonial language and the basilect is more like the languages of the people who were colonised. At the high end of the continuum, creoles may merge into what are called *non-standard dialects* of the dominant language.

Non-standard dialects of English are as useful for meeting their speakers' communication needs as standard forms, but they are often associated (rightly or wrongly) with lack of education or low income. For instance, someone is said to be using non-standard or *vernacular English* if, when talking with friends and family, they use expressions like: *They done it, youse lot,* or *I been there.* Most people who normally and naturally speak in this way can also use standard forms if they want to. For instance, in a job interview the same person might say: *They did it, you people* or *I went there.* Many Indigenous people can shift through several different styles of speech, depending on where they are and who they're talking to.

People who can switch confidently between different dialects are *bidialectal.* Children who don't realise there are different versions of English however, can be very disadvantaged at school, especially if their teachers criticise them for the way they speak, or tell them it's wrong. Many teachers don't realise that competent, confident bidialectalism is not only possible but acceptable, even though they themselves probably use different speech styles when talking with different groups of people in different situations.

In the Northern Territory, the form of Kriol closest to English overlaps with vernacular or everyday English and also with Aboriginal English. Standard English is the version we use when writing and talking in more formal situations. It is the variety of English often described as 'correct' or 'proper' English.

However, it must be noted that even so-called 'standard' forms of a language change over time. Forms of language regarded as correct at one time in history can become non-standard at another time and many teachers have been guilty of making a fuss about what they think is 'correct English' when, in fact, there is no hard and fast ruling on this. It is a matter of what is most common or most prestigious at any given time.

A good example of this is the use of the terms *would of* and *would have.* For nearly 100 years correct usage of either one or the other has been argued for. Both patterns are common in English. *Would have* is considered to be correct in what we call a *prescriptive* sense but *would of* is the most common form. Many people who think they always say *would have* are wrong about their own speech. What they actually say is *woulduv.* Is this short for *would have* or *would of,* that is the question! Making a fuss about speech patterns only discourages, or even shames learners who may not have noticed they speak differently to the teacher, or to other children in their class.

Learners who speak vernacular English or Aboriginal English at home and with their friends may feel uncomfortable and embarrassed when teachers are judgmental about speech styles. A much better approach is to encourage all students to express themselves freely in speech and writing. Later, when they are more confident in the classroom, is the time to begin to show them ways of talking and writing for different situations. Each way of talking has its own social and personal uses.

Most Australians are sufficiently *sociolinguistically* competent to shift speech styles when they need to. The problem is that we tend to switch unconsciously and we might be unaware of the extent to which we do this, all the time, in different situations and with different people.

Aboriginal English (AE)

Distinctively Aboriginal ways of using English are found all over Australia. In the southern states, it appears Aboriginal English mostly evolved in language contact situations without a creole stage. In the Northern Territory, many people speak AE as well as Kriol and/or their traditional languages, adding both to the multilingual mix in their communities and households. McKay has emphasised that:

Both creoles and Aboriginal English varieties are forms of language which can be and are treated by at least some of their users as distinctively indigenous forms of speech (and even of writing). Such differences range from distinctive uses of vocabulary and grammar to 'ways of speaking' or unwritten rules of conversation (McKay 1996, p. 8).

McKay mentions Diana Eades' work in this context. With regard to the issue of making and refusing requests, Eades explains that:

> Aboriginal people rarely make direct requests. A question frequently serves to make an indirect request, as well as to seek orientation information. For instance, a typical Aboriginal way of asking for a ride is to ask a car owner an orientation question, such as 'You going to town?' or 'What time are you leaving?' Questions such as these are multifunctional, structurally ambiguous, and of course, depending on the relationship between speakers, communicatively ambiguous. That is, such questions can be interpreted as information seeking of a kind common in Aboriginal conversations, but they can also be interpreted as a request for a ride (Eades 1991, p. 88).

This doesn't mean that Indigenous people never make direct requests, only that there may be many situations where they would not feel comfortable doing so.

Eades has written widely on the very real disadvantages speakers of Aboriginal English can experience in court. A recent article (Eades 2008a) on questions and assumptions in intercultural legal situations is available on the web. Eades' 1992 book entitled *Aboriginal English and the Law* was an important early contribution to attempts to try to make the legal system fairer for Indigenous people throughout Australia. Unfortunately, there are still situations where Indigenous people are cross-examined by lawyers who do not understand how AE differs from SAuE. Eades (2007) summarises some significant cases where appeals against wrongful conviction succeeded when Aboriginal English speech patterns were taken into account. She also, sadly, points out that some prosecutors have used their knowledge about AE to intimidate witnesses and prevent them from telling their story in court. Eades (2013) is a collection of some of her major articles.

In 1994, Jean Harkins published a detailed linguistic study of the ways English is used by Aboriginal people in Alice Springs. She called her book *Bridging two worlds* and explained how she hoped it would be useful for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Harkins 1994, p. 3). Her particular hope was that it would help readers appreciate Aboriginal English as a fully functional dialect of English, as capable of meeting all communication needs as any other dialect of English. She wanted speakers of AE to accept and respect their own dialect. Although, as we mentioned earlier in this chapter, most people would not think of putting AE down on the census paper as their major language, it is, in fact, the major dialect spoken at home by very large numbers of Indigenous people.

Harkins (1990) had already written an article on the important concept of *shame* or *big shame* in AE. She emphasised 'The word SHAME is used by Aboriginal speakers in circumstances where non-Aboriginal speakers would not speak of being ashamed' (Harkins 1990, p. 293). The word clearly has a different set of meanings and some of these seem to have come from traditional Australian Indigenous languages. Harkins shares some stories by Indigenous high school students in Broome in 1975 about how they felt when they used this word. Some of their explanations may

seem to fit in with standard English uses of the word *ashamed*, but others reveal quite different feelings which teachers need to understand if they want to avoid embarrassing their students. Here are some of the things the students said:

> Big shame is when people get embarrassed and feel uptight. e.g. When they are called up on stage, when they get picked out of a crowd. I think big shame is when I get ribbed about something in front of my friends. … Big shame is when you go to a big city really well dressed and all the white people look at you. Loretta Helwend. …

> When we are introduced to somebody we've just met we always get shy to be introduced so we just put our heads down and say 'Big shame' in pig latin, like we always talk pig latin [Geraldine's name at that time for Aboriginal English]. It is not only 'Big shame' we also use 'Shame job'. Geraldine George. …

> I think big shame is when we are near important people, white people and people we don't know, but then you get introduced, and you feel funny then big shame comes out. Don't know what to do, hide behind another person and say 'Big shame', you don't have to think to say it like anyone else would, it just comes out automatically. Then you feel shy because you said it. We get shame because we think the other people are greater than us, they know more than us, scared that we might say something wrong. Tessa McKenna. …

> I notice that the girls, when amongst a group of white people, whisper 'big shame' to each other and then bunch up so as they are close to each other. If they keep doing this, I wouldn't want to be around, because is only a bad habit then it would come out as, 'big shame'. Desmond Hill …

> These are types of 'Big Shame'. Sometimes 'Big Shame' is said because a person is shy or when he is ashamed of his culture. … He may be ashamed of being part aboriginal or even aboriginal. … Or being ashamed of what the white people say about the Aboriginal people. Josie Chan. …

> When a boy asks me for a date, the first word I say is 'Big Shame' but if I know him I say 'no' and if he's new in this town and good looking I say 'Big shame'. I'm very proud of my race but I just can't help using the expression 'Big shame'. Josie Corpus. …

> Big shame is shyness or we think that the white people make fun of us or the black people might say we think ourselves white. We might make a mistake, they make fun of us black people. … All the black are shame because they are not used to white people. Monica Gregory (Helwend et al 1975, p. 10-12).

Harkins comments that standard English speakers 'can be 'embarrassed and pleased' by praise' but an Indigenous person would not feel both 'SHAME and pleased' at the same time. Although outside the scope of this work, we also note that Harkins analyses many other words that have

come from English but have 'altered semantic scope' in Aboriginal English. These include: *fire, rock, grass, tree, meat, kill, hear, finish, learn, nothing, camp, business,* and others. Harkins also explains the main grammatical differences between the two dialects (1994, p. 148 and following pages).

Resources for teachers of Kriol and Aboriginal English-speaking learners

The Catholic Education Office in the Kimberley region has committed resources over many years to developing and trialing materials and strategies for use in the teaching of children who speak Kriol and/or Aboriginal English. These include the resource book mentioned in the previous section, *Making the Jump* (Berry & Hudson 1997), uses an approach called *Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools/FELIKS*. It focuses on teaching Standard Australian English as an additional dialect to speakers of Aboriginal English. For Kriol speakers, SAuE is an additional language.

The basic strategy is to raise teachers' and learners' awareness of the systematic differences between the children's languages and the form of English is used in school based learning. Because sound, meaning and grammatical patterns are all different, the differences are systematically taught and practiced in a planned way through activities and games.

The aim is to enable speakers of Kriol or AE to switch confidently and competently to SAuE, depending on the situation, and to be consciously aware they can shift in this way when they want to. The ideal outcome is that learners remain proud and confident to use their home languages in situations where it's natural to do so, but are also able to switch easily to SAuE when that is either called for or is more appropriate.

An earlier booklet entitled *Breaking the sound barrier* from the Kimberley Catholic Education Team (1990) shows teachers how to become aware of the systematic sound differences between the form of English their pupils speak and the SAuE of the school. It takes time for teachers who have not been trained in linguistics to learn to notice sound differences accurately. Teachers who understand how different sounds are made in the mouth are better able to use the range of practice activities provided in the book to help the children learn to separate the different versions of English they speak.

Simply telling students to 'listen more carefully' and 'keep trying' is not generally helpful because the language we learned as a baby shaped the way we listen to, and make speech sound patterns. We find it very difficult to pay attention to sound contrasts that don't make a difference to meaning in our own language. Conscious attention to the way different sounds are made can be helpful, as is practice in shaping one's mouth and using one's tongue and teeth and lips in unfamiliar ways.

The most effective teachers have themselves learned how to experience the physical differences in their own mouths. They do this by studying diagrams showing different relationships between mouth, tongue and teeth and paying attention to how they actually pronounce words.

For instance, many non-Indigenous people think they hear an *n* sound in the middle of words like *Yolngu*. The reason for this is that the *ng* sound never comes before a short *oo* sound (as in *book*) in English. And yet people who speak English can say *sing* and do not make the mistake of saying *sinner* when they mean *singer*. The middle sound in the two languages is almost the same, although it is not made in quite the same way at the top of your throat.

When the *ng* sound comes at the beginning of a word, as it can in many Australian languages or in Indonesian, some non-Indigenous people again do not seem to be able to hear the difference between it and *n*. And yet it's quite easy to learn to say *ng* at the beginning of a word. Babies do it all the time.

Another example is between *p* and *b* sounds. In standard English these sounds make a difference to meaning (e.g. between *pin* and *bin*), but they do not contrast in this way in many Indigenous Australian languages and can be interchanged without making any difference at all to meaning. Because Indigenous learners are not conditioned since babyhood to notice the difference, they often have difficulty working out how to make the contrasting sounds with their lips. The difficulty is exactly the same as when English speakers struggle with *n* and *ng* or, for that matter, *nh*, *ny*, or <u>*n*</u>. These sounds must be differentiated in speaking and listening because they make the same kind of difference to meaning as *p* and *b* do in English. A native speaker of an Australian Indigenous language with these five *n*-like sounds listens automatically and unconsciously for the contrasts, and may, without knowing it, expect to find them in English as well.

Ian Malcolm and his Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues in Western Australia have worked with teachers over many years to develop a better understanding of Aboriginal English and how it can be accommodated in school-based learning situations. In a recent presentation, Malcolm made the point that:

> Much of the educational discourse on Indigenous education, while giving lip service to Aboriginal culture and language, effectively attributes to Aboriginal students the same English that is used by other students. But to attribute standard English to students whose English is Aboriginal English has consequences. Rather than bridging gaps, it creates them. The fundamental gap we need to bridge, for many Indigenous students, is that between the English they own and the English they do not own (Malcolm 2010, p. 3).

Malcolm's original groundbreaking research into the English of Indigenous children in Western Australia (Eagleson et al 1982) drew attention to the range of speech styles and language varieties used in different parts of the state. He argues more recently (Malcolm 2001) that Aboriginal English has become the 'adopted code of a surviving culture', a symbol of Indigeneity used proudly by many people, especially to signal shared values and concerns with other Indigenous people. He highlights parts of a discussion by Indigenous staff at Curtin University as follows:

> One [Indigenous staff member] observed, with respect to experience on a field trip with Aboriginal students, 'because you are around your own mob, you actually tend to bring forward this thing called Aboriginal English, it just becomes quite natural in terms of the dialogue that you have with your family, with the people whom you're around' (Collard et al 2000, p. 83). Another observed that, in Aboriginal company, she never switched into Standard English because 'you don't want to come across as a big head' (p.84). Another picked this up and commented: 'when people talk about proper English or high English, it's different, totally different to what they would speak between themselves' (p.85). 'The main problem with the Aboriginal English,' said another, 'is that it has always been viewed as lacking something, and it's not that it's lacking anything' … (p.90). The conversation concluded with one [person] saying of Aboriginal English: 'This is who we are. This is our language' (p.96). Malcolm 2001)

Nationally, it has been estimated some form of English is now the main language of 'at least three-quarters of the Aboriginal population of Australia' and 'for most of the remainder, English is part of their linguistic repertoire' (Malcolm & Grote 2007, p. 153). Aboriginal English is the language the greater majority of Aboriginal children speak at home, and in which they are socialised before they come to school (Eades 2008b, p. 1). These young children may be confused and frustrated if their teachers, who are generally native speakers of Standard Australian English, find the way they

talk difficult to follow at first. Indigenous children too can find their teachers hard to understand, both because of their speech style and different dialect, and because some of the classroom routines their non-Indigenous peers are comfortable with are new and unfamiliar to them.

Patricia Königsberg has worked with Ian Malcolm over many years to design and trial professional development materials to bridge the SAuE/AE gap in schools. As they point out, Indigenous 'people have frequently expressed their awareness of the dilemma they face in seeking an education for their children which will give them access to the benefits of European-based learning while not alienating themselves from their cultural origins' (Malcolm & Königsberg 2007, p. 271). They review educational policies since 1988 to show there is an ongoing tension between affirming the importance of supporting and maintaining Indigenous cultural identity and assessing learning outcomes on the basis of benchmarks developed for native speakers of SAuE. Their article is worth reading for the close attention it gives to the realities of what 'bridging the language gap in education' really involves in the case of learners who use varieties of Aboriginal English as their primary means of communication and an essential part of their personal identity.

As early as 1988, the Australian Government recognised the legitimacy of AE. By 1994 there was recognition that Indigenous students, including those who speak AE or one of the creoles, need to be 'provided with at least the same levels of literacy and English as a second language support and assistance provided to non-Indigenous students whose first language is not English' (DEET 1994, p. 34). It is also important to remember, as Malcolm & Königsberg (2007, p. 274) comment, that: 'This recommendation, while well-intentioned, seemed to show a lack of recognition of the positive role of the mother tongue in achieving the bicultural objectives.' Again, we note that, 25 years later Indigenous children and young people still do not routinely receive the level of support provided to other students whose first language or dialect is not Standard Australian English.

A comprehensive and practical new resource designed to address this shortcoming is the train-the-trainer kit *Tracks to Two-Way Learning* (Königsberg et al 2012) now available for free download or purchase on the web. 'Two-way' in this resource has the same meaning as 'Both Ways' in the Northern Territory. A basic premise of the kit is that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work together to both deliver and participate in the workshops provided in the kit, and that information should flow freely in both directions between the two cultures as people learn about the social, conceptual and linguistic differences between AE and SAuE.

Guidance is provided to a Two-Way Facilitator Team (an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous person working as partners in a team) on 'how to collaboratively plan and deliver short term and long term professional learning', using resources provided in the kit. 'Activities can be altered to ensure the delivery is most suited to the specific needs of a particular education or training site' (Facilitators' Guide description). The materials were developed and trialed over seven years in urban, rural, remote and very remote parts of Western Australia, in learning sites ranging from Early Childhood Centres to Senior High Schools. All the resources and workshop activities in twelve focus areas are included, together with booklets designed for additional study as required, depending on the learning needs of participants at each learning site.

The aim is to develop the capacity of staff to undertake a needs-based and place-based site evaluation. They identify a pathway or road map for developing a strategic plan for their particular learning site. This, in turn, guides them as they develop more inclusive policies and practices, improve their professional practice to cater in a more equitable way for speakers of AE, build more effective engagement with local communities, and improve learner motivation. Because Aboriginal English is widely used alongside other languages in learning sites ranging from Child Care and Transition to Tertiary Education contexts, this resource is a useful asset even in situations where staff and children are primarily speakers of Kriol or a traditional language.

Language and learning implications of hearing loss

A book on Indigenous education in remote Australian communities is not complete without mentioning the challenges and problems of hearing loss in young children. Ear infections are common among Indigenous children in the Northern Territory, interfering with normal hearing and very often damaging it permanently. Some children with chronic ear infections remain deaf into adulthood, while others suffer intermittent hearing loss. In these situations, it is good practice to know and routinely use teaching methods that work for hearing impaired children.

Damien Howard, who has worked in the Northern Territory for many years, specialises in the language and learning implications of this often unnoticed health problem. He reminds us that when Indigenous children enter school they are often affected by hearing loss and are particularly disadvantaged (1994, p. 37).

This is because their normal speech and language development may have been affected while they were still babies or toddlers. When they come to school, they're not only faced with the challenge of

learning literacy and the English of schooling, they also have to do this from a foundation of early language learning that may not be as solid as that of children whose ears have been healthy since birth.

Little children need to be able to take in everything they can from their language environments. This is difficult for them if their hearing is permanently damaged or their hearing loss changes from day to day or week to week. Sometimes their language development goes ahead normally and at other times their illness holds them back. Children with infected ears are also often in pain, even if they don't show it. For many children, recurring ear infections have become so 'normal' they may not feel that it's worth mentioning. Pain, nevertheless, makes it hard for them to concentrate and pay attention. They also get tired more quickly than children with healthy ears, because it's hard work to try and focus when something is hurting and you can't hear properly.

The extent of ear disease among Indigenous Australians is documented in detail in a *Review of educational and other approaches to hearing loss among Indigenous people* (Burrow et al 2009). The authors explain the problem as follows:

> Middle ear disease, generally referred to as otitis media (OM), is the most common cause of hearing loss among Indigenous Australians. OM is an inflammation of the middle ear that occurs in various forms. It is caused by bacterial or viral infections and is often the result of another illness (such as a cold). ... OM typically leads to conductive hearing loss that is mild to moderate in degree, and may be intermittent or persistent according to the form of OM. Evidence suggests that some forms of OM may lead also to sensorineural hearing loss. ... Without effective treatment and follow-up, OM may become severe and chronic, increasing the risk of permanent hearing loss. ... For further information about forms of OM and hearing loss, see the Ear*Info*Net (Burrow et al 2009). (References are provided in footnotes on the website.)

Burrow et al also explain that:

> The consequences of different degrees of early hearing loss on subsequent childhood and adult development are not fully understood, but current evidence suggests that the early onset of chronic or recurrent OM, particularly in the first two years of life, leads to hearing loss at a critical period of child development. ... Educational consequences of hearing loss include delays in language comprehension and production, poor listening skills, problems with attention, distraction and memory, reduced mathematical skills, and reduced scores on intelligence tests (Burrow et al 2009).

Behavioural problems and delayed development of social skills caused by hearing loss can also 'have long-term, negative social impacts including: limited employment options; increased risk of anti-social behavior, drug use, and contact with the criminal justice system' (Burrow et al 2009).

It is easy to see how children and young people with damaged hearing can have real problems managing school-based learning. Teachers expect learners to listen attentively and follow instructions. They also expect there will be confident and proficient oral communication between children during group work and with the teacher. Learners who are deaf or partly deaf will find all these things difficult.

Teachers also take for granted that children who are working at their desks or in groups in different parts of the room can still hear them, but this is often not the case if children are deaf, or suffering from chronic ear infections and/or varying degrees of hearing loss. One strategy for dealing with this is to wait until all the learners are looking at the teacher before starting to explain something. The light should be on the teacher's face, and she or he should face the children the whole time, something not at all easy to remember because we don't need to do it when people can hear us properly. Many children learn unconsciously to speech-read as a means of managing their hearing loss. They need to see the teacher's face and mouth clearly to do this.

Given the very high staff turnover rate prevalent in Northern Territory remote and very remote schools, all new teachers need initial and follow up professional in-service training to develop the knowledge and skills to support students with hearing loss (Burrows et al 2009). Lee (1993) provides a summary list of some of the signs of possible hearing impairment teachers can look for on a daily basis in their classes. For instance, learners may:

- seem to like school but get tired and irritable, disruptive, or tearful during the day and become difficult to handle;
- seem to 'hear what they want to', i.e. unconsciously tune out to save energy and reduce stress when things seem less interesting;
- watch the teacher's face a lot — speech readers/lip readers;
- confuse similar sounds and words — do they do this in their first languages?
- turn their heads to one side when listening;
- hate loud sounds, especially sudden ones — may put hands over ears;

- poke at their ears, pull or rub them, put things in them;

- have pus in their ears and a lot of nasal mucus;

- ignore comments made to them when they are more than a few feet away;

- smile or lean on the teacher and seem cooperative but not talk much.

(Lee 1993, p. 47)

Ann Galloway has written an authoritative article about the educational implications of conductive hearing loss. She identifies the speech and language skills that underlie written literacy as follows:

- phonological awareness, the ability to discriminate and manipulate the sounds of a language

- text level skills, the ability to use language at sentence level and above

- the ability to link sounds and written language

- 'world' knowledge, knowledge of the way language works, of the concepts and content being talked about, and how to use language appropriately in different contexts (Galloway 2008, p. 221).

Galloway explains each of these sets of skills, taking into account the complicating factors of language and cultural differences between home languages and the English of the classroom. In the case of phonological awareness, she discusses the issue of sounds that are not shared between English and other languages. In addition to the kinds of examples we looked at earlier, she explains that the *h* sound can also present problems. Not found in Indigenous Australian languages, it may also not be in the version of English the child uses at home. Galloway stresses the importance of explicit teaching of the kind routinely done by trained EAL/D teachers. She says:

> Aboriginal children will need explicit teaching in hearing and producing [the more unfamiliar] consonant and vowel sounds in all word positions [beginning, middle and ends of words]. Even in the case of sounds that are common to their home language and SAE, students may need explicit instruction in correct production if, due to hearing impairment, they did not learn them properly (Galloway 2009, p. 223).

With regard to text-level skills, Galloway points out that:

> These skills need to be developed first through oral language in the children's home language as well as the SAE [=SAuE] of school, so that there is a solid mental foundation on which the children can build when they come to written literacy. Aboriginal children have a rich heritage of oral language skills that can be built on to support the development of written literacy, but will also need to learn new ways of using and organising language. Typically within the classroom, these skills will be developed through activities

such as hearing and telling stories; talking about and listening to recounts of events, procedures for doing things, and explanations of what happened; and planning activities, then complementing this oral work with written (Galloway 2008, p. 224).

The vocabularies of children who experience hearing loss in their early years can be limited in any language they speak. This is because they may miss a lot of what is said and often have to concentrate on getting the general meaning without understanding all the words. These children need careful assessment followed by systematic teaching specifically designed to develop their home language skills as well as their ability to use school English.

Mainstream teachers might not be aware of the need to teach words like prepositions explicitly, but apart from the fact that little words like *on, under, among, inside* etc. are difficult to hear when people are talking, and it is also possible they do not necessarily have one-to-one correspondences with words in the children's home languages. Languages are very different in the way they indicate the information communicated with prepositions in English. Sometimes a grammatical particle is attached to another word to say what a separate preposition would say in English.

Lack of mainstream world knowledge is one of the problems learners living in very remote and remote parts of the Northern Territory face. Part of the solution is to teach new words and concepts explicitly. Some learners may pick up new words in an incidental way from hearing their teachers use them, but good practice requires that lessons be planned ahead, with the language focus for each activity decided in advance. New words and language patterns are systematically presented and practiced through the content learning. This is one of the most important things about the EAL/D approach to teaching. There is no reason why learners should miss out on any part of the curriculum other children are receiving in mainstream classrooms. In fact, an EAL/D approach is often *more* effective than many mainstream approaches when it comes to teaching content material. This is because an EAL/D approach makes sure *all* the children in the class understand and can use *all* the words and typical sentence patterns necessary for understanding the topic.

Galloway's article also includes advice about how to manage the classroom, modify the environment and organise children to maximise their learning, even when their ears are infected or when permanent damage makes it difficult for them. She stresses the importance of keeping a history of hearing assessments, and reminds us that hearing can vary from normal to very poor in a matter of days. Children's ability to hear day to day may depend on how badly blocked their ears are with

pus or mucus. She reminds teachers that their 'expertise in developing language skills' is enhanced when they 'work in partnership with Indigenous teaching assistants and community-school liaison people to ensure culturally appropriate interventions' (Galloway 2008, p. 231-2). This is good practice, as Griffiths (2011) also shows in his review of Indigenous education research in Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia.

Identifying language impairment in multilingual children

An ongoing problem with respect to any children or young people for whom standard English is an additional language or dialect, is how to determine whether their difficulties at school are related to some kind of language disability, delay, or other impairment. This is not so difficult to diagnose when the teachers and speech therapists come from the same culture and speak the same language as the children.

Paradis et al (2011, p. 199-261) provide a useful account of what is involved in assessing language or reading impairments in children who do not speak the language of the teacher or the speech therapist. In the context of the Northern Territory, it is very likely that children who need help may not be identified early enough to fully benefit from the specialist attention standard English speaking children are often able to receive. If Indigenous children are correctly identified, the help they require might have to be provided in close consultation with family or community members who speak their language or dialect.

Sometimes Indigenous children with normal language development for their age can be incorrectly diagnosed as suffering a language deficit, being at risk, or having disordered language. This has sometimes happened because teachers or speech therapists have not had the opportunity to learn about the characteristics of Aboriginal English, or the difficulties children whose first language is an Indigenous language might have in pronouncing certain sounds required when speaking standard English.

Judy Gould is a speech pathologist who studies first language and literacy development and communication disorders among Indigenous children. Her article entitled: *'Language difference or language disorder: discourse sampling in speech pathology assessments for Indigenous children'* provides several examples of incorrect assessments. Gould points out that: 'Australian Indigenous populations require language assessment methodologies which are specifically designed to meet

their needs' (Gould 2008, p. 96). She describes a number of approaches to assessing language development of Indigenous Australian children and offers a useful alternative assessment methodology developed on the basis of her research.

Other aspects of the complex language situation in the Northern Territory

Much more could be written about language knowledge and use by children and young people in the Northern Territory. A particularly interesting topic is the way children are socialised in complex multilingual contexts in remote and very remote communities. The book *Children's language and multilingualism: Indigenous language use at home and school* (Simpson & Wigglesworth 2008a) would be a valuable addition to the staff-room reading shelf in any school.

Several chapters from this book have been discussed above. Another interesting chapter deals with the issue of whether Indigenous children do, or do not, like to ask questions. Another chapter describes a study of child-adult interactions during story telling from a picture book in Tennant Creek. Two other chapters explain the social meanings of children's sand stories at Ernabella and the way knowledge in a Yolngu context is constructed collaboratively. An analysis of an unfortunately dysfunctional discourse in an otherwise happy classroom with a dedicated teacher in a one teacher school in the Centre, helps us to appreciate just how hard some children have to work to try to respond in the way the teacher wants. Another chapter reports on a study of literacy practices in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia. Robinson et al (2008) also includes useful articles relevant to language socialisation in Indigenous communities.

Three chapters in Simpson & Wigglesworth (2008a) deal with language mixing and language shift. These fascinating and dynamic processes are currently being studied in the Northern Territory by linguists. Children are developing several new languages in addition to Kriol. The way these new languages develop in multilingual communities is somewhat similar to the way creoles developed in children's dormitories during the assimilation period. Some of these children are also able to speak their heritage languages. Sometimes they understand but do not speak them, and sometimes young and old people say they speak the same language, but are not able to completely understand one another.

All languages change over time. We would not understand Shakespeare if he came into the room and spoke to us in the way the English language of 400 years ago was spoken. Readers with a good

ear for accents will have noticed the English spoken by young mainstream Australians already sounds quite different to the way it was spoken 20 or 30 years ago. Such change is normal. The mixing and merging of languages has also happened throughout history. Modern English shares common ancestry with modern German. English is also constantly adopting words from other languages, just as other languages constantly bring English words into their own ways of speaking.

Many older Indigenous people sometimes feel very unhappy about the speed with which languages are changing in the Northern Territory. The critical issue for the preservation of traditional knowledge is whether older people will continue to pass on their knowledge to young people who do not know, or do not fully know, their heritage languages. As we explained in the section on dying languages above, areas of knowledge that might not be passed on include religious knowledge (for instance, beliefs about the nature of human existence in relation to the land) and scientific knowledge (for instance, specialist knowledge about animals, plants, climate and weather, the marine environment, medicine, and so on).

It is for Indigenous people to make decisions about what is passed on to younger people and what is allowed to die when speakers of endangered languages die. Schools can support the aspirations of the young and old to learn and protect their traditional knowledge by showing a consistently respectful attitude towards Indigenous heritage. As Griffiths (2011) explains in his review of best practice Indigenous education in four countries, research has shown repeatedly that where schools show they respect Indigenous cultures, learners are generally happier to come to school and more likely to achieve good learning outcomes in Western-style education as well as in knowledge of their own cultural traditions.

Indigenous Language Researchers and other specialist support

In Chapter Two, we discussed the exciting period in the 1960s and 1970s when Indigenous people at last won the right to be recognised as citizens of their own country and the first attempts were made to truly respect Indigenous languages and cultures in schools. We learned about the important role Batchelor College played in training Indigenous teachers to teach in community schools and we briefly traced some of the history of Bilingual Education, now called Dual Language education.

In the 1970s, there were many more Australian Indigenous languages being spoken by children than there are today. There were already some written materials in some of these languages, for

instance Bible translations, hymns and transcriptions of traditional stories. The new bilingual schools needed teaching materials in local languages and some of this demand was met by Literature Production Centres attached to the schools. These centres were generally run by a non-Indigenous linguist or teacher-linguist who worked with trained and untrained local people. Literature was also created by Indigenous writers, poets and visual artists studying at the *School of Australian Linguistics* (SAL) described below.

It was also during this time that the *Institute for Aboriginal Development* (IAD) was established in Alice Springs, and several courses for training language workers to support the bilingual programs were developed in different institutions. Students who graduated from the new courses often played an important part in preserving and protecting their languages. Unfortunately there were also problems in some of these courses and being aware of them can inform our current practice, as we will see in the sections below.

The Institute for Aboriginal Development

Established in 1969 by the Uniting Church, the IAD's mission was to assist Indigenous community people and provide cross-cultural education to improve understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Under the directorship of Pitjantjatjara educator, Yami Lester, the IAD became an independent Aboriginal community-controlled Language Resource and Adult Education Centre. In the early 1970s, it developed its own publishing house for Central Australian Indigenous languages. Today, as an Aboriginal Corporation and a registered training centre, it offers a range of certificate courses for adults. IAD Press, an Indigenous publishing company, produces a range of materials 'celebrating more than 50,000 years of stories from the heart of Australia' (IAD Press website).

The School of Australian Linguistics and Language Worker training

Another development arising from the Self Determination movement and reforms of the early 1970s was the establishment of School of Australian Linguistics (SAL). Initially a part of *Darwin Community College*, it was relocated to Batchelor after Cyclone Tracy devastated the Top End of the Northern Territory in December 1974.

SAL trained Indigenous *Language Workers* to read and write their own languages. Some also learned how to analyse their languages linguistically. Language workers were mainly employed to write materials in their languages for the new bilingual programs in Northern Territory schools, while others found employment in the Language Centres set up in Tennant Creek and Katherine.

Today, Jo Caffery (2008) recommends *Indigenous Language Researcher* as a more respectful name than Language Worker because it recognises that language maintenance work is usually done by teams of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together, with each person contributing different kinds of expertise.

Caffery's study is an important investigation into what happened to the students who had taken language and linguistics courses. She reports that: 'between 1974 and 2004 there were six educational institutions in Australia that offered linguistics courses specifically designed for Indigenous Australians' (Caffery 2009, p. 36). In the Northern Territory, these institutions included SAL and also the *Summer Institute of Linguistics* (SIL) and IAD. As part of her research, Caffery interviewed many of the students who had enrolled in these courses over the years.

Caffery makes the point that, even though: 'The development and delivery of linguistics curricula specifically designed for Indigenous Australians is vital to the documentation and maintenance of Australia's endangered languages' (p.37), the programs were not effectively evaluated. As she says, 'This is surprising considering the significant financial investment by the Australian government in the linguistics training of Indigenous adults at least since 1974.' (p.37) It's interesting to note that Griffiths (2011) also found that many school programs designed specifically for Indigenous students are not properly evaluated in a rigorous way to see how well they have worked.

Caffery found one of the problems in the various language worker courses was they did not fully prepare students for the kinds of work they might be asked to do in schools and language centres. For instance, students employed in schools were often expected to help with the teaching, without having been taught how to prepare lessons or teach. It was not expected they would be used as Teaching Assistants, but the schools did not always understand this.

Many language workers also had difficulty getting recognition in their own communities when they came home. Some were considered too young to do serious language work, or community elders may have felt they were the wrong person for the job. Additionally, language worker courses did

not always take into account that many students from remote communities needed to take lower level courses first to develop their own literacy, numeracy and study skills before commencing the higher level work.

In some cases students who had enrolled with high hopes and enthusiasm decided to withdraw when they realised they didn't have the academic skills to cope. Many felt an acute sense of failure in having to do so. This situation might have been avoided if they had been put in the right course to start with. We know that Indigenous students in other college or university courses, including teacher education courses, have sometimes had similar experiences. Like the trainee language workers, they often need to do preparatory courses before tackling the more difficult courses.

Further compounding the situation, employers sometimes expected a wider range of competencies from graduates than they actually had, which was humiliating, given that on graduation students assume they have reached skill and knowledge levels expected in positions requiring the qualification gained. Again, it's obvious these students should have been told honestly when they first enrolled that they needed to do a preparatory course.

Non-Indigenous people sometimes think they're being kind by hiding the real standard of education needed, but it is actually a form of racism not to tell the truth about the standards expected. One of the reasons that educational institutions sometimes accept students into courses before they're really ready may be because government funding is needed to keep the institution running. Again, this is unfair to students.

Caffery discovered funding for the courses had been a problem. She found that lecturers had also not been properly supported to keep the courses and assessments at the right level. As she explains:

> Some of the educational institutional issues could be rectified by increased funding and by enforcing policy for lecturers to direct students with low literacy skills to bridging courses ... If these issues were rectified the lecturers could then concentrate on delivering linguistic skills to people ready for linguistics training at the literacy level the course was designed for. Increased funding would also allow lecturers to teach smaller groups, possibly one language group at a time, without fear of losing their jobs. This could also alleviate the courses from being 'dumbed down' ... and improve the course's outcomes (Caffery 2009, p. 332).

Although lecturers in teacher education courses are usually qualified teachers themselves, many of the linguists who lectured in the language worker courses did not have adequate knowledge or suitable strategies to help students develop their academic learning skills in a targeted and effective way.

These academic skills not only include the ability to read the relevant texts. Students also have to become used to reading and studying for longer periods of time than many people have done previously. Assessments also require the ability to write and display knowledge in new ways. These culturally-specific practices need to be explicitly taught over a long enough period of time for the knowledge and skills to build up gradually to the required levels of proficiency.

Qualified Indigenous Language Researchers are still needed today

Today the Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics (CALL) at Batchelor Institute continues to train Indigenous writers, linguists and interpreters. Vocational Education and Training (VET) certificate courses in literacy, numeracy and general work-ready skills are also currently offered, along with a range of certificate and diploma courses to train workers in various other fields, including education support, language work, community work and child care.

We need Indigenous Language Researchers more than ever before because, as the article by Griffiths (2011) shows, best practice Indigenous education rests on cultural recognition and respect as essential elements. Respect is shown when learners actually see and hear their cultures and languages used in schools. Respect is also shown when parents and community members have a genuine say in how the school is run. Griffiths refers to research in other countries which proves that better learning outcomes are achieved by Indigenous learners when community representatives play an active role in the school.

What English language specialist support involves

As we saw in Chapter two, Dual Language education has been shown in several countries to be the best way to show genuine respect for the children and their families. *When delivered using best practice strategies*, these programs help students achieve learning outcomes similar to those of non-Indigenous students in mainstream schools after 5-7 years of specialist support.

Current best practice in Dual Language education involves *immersion teaching* and *learning through both languages*. The languages are separated in a principled manner, for instance by subject area, and the teachers consistently model the use of only one language without mixing it with the other.

Where a Dual Language approach is not possible, or not desired by a particular community, all teaching is delivered through English, with the support of Indigenous staff to assist children to come to terms with cultural demands and expectations of mainstream schooling. If the students are not fluent native speakers of Standard Australian English, their teachers will need specialist training to help them reach the same standards as their native SAuE peers by the end of primary school. This kind of specialized EAL/D teaching and support is also necessary for any older students, including young adults, who are not yet able to use standard English confidently and competently.

Modern language teaching is *task based*. For instance, a learning topic may focus on family, or plants, or the ocean, managing our finances, or any other topic. The students learn the subject matter by carrying out carefully planned learning tasks that will build up and consolidate their content knowledge. At the *same time*, the students also systematically learn and revise specific aspects of the language that is normally used to talk and think about this topic. They learn *topic specific words and word patterns* and how to pronounce them and use them in the way native speakers do. They may also focus on general language skills like learning to ask and answer questions in the way native speakers do, learning to measure and compare quantities or distances using appropriate words and sentences, and learning to share and discuss different opinions about matters that are important to them.

Students are also guided to *focus on form*. This means they are taught to become consciously aware of how their two languages or dialects differ from each other. Learners who already know Aboriginal ways of using English are guided by their teachers to *notice the difference* between ways of talking they hear every day, and the ways of using English are preferred in schools and in many jobs. They are not told that one way of talking is good and the other bad, only that different ways of using English are useful in different situations. Standard English is particularly useful, for instance, in reading because most information is written in this dialect.

Learners who speak an Indigenous Australian language at home, like Kriol or one of the traditional Australian languages, are also encouraged to notice differences between their languages, for instance the fact that one language may need to show plural or past happenings in word endings, like English, while other languages may not.

We say that students are not only learning to *use* their new language or dialect for learning, but they are also learning *through* that language and, at the same time, learning *about* the language.

Language teachers these days do not use translation as much as in the past. This is because they carefully plan ahead to use visual and other contextual support to help learners understand the subject matter. Learning activities offer structured, sequenced opportunities to practice new words and grammatical patterns relevant to the focus content in each lesson. In this way, the students' language competence build as their proficiency and confidence to use the language develops and their subject knowledge grows.

But we must not forget the basic fact that:

> Young children learn best when taught through their mother tongue. This commonsense principle has been supported by decades of research on bilingual education for children who don't speak the dominant language. The research has also shown that there are positive effects on children's cognitive development if they are encouraged to become strong bilinguals. For Indigenous communities, bilingual education has been highly valued not only because it helps children maintain Indigenous languages, but also because it provides an honoured place for Indigenous languages in the curriculum and an honoured place for Indigenous teachers (Simpson et al 2009, p. 6).

We can learn from some of the mistakes of the past by making sure that children in multilingual schools are taught by qualified EAL/D teachers who work alongside qualified Indigenous staff to give the learners every possible chance of becoming fluent and confident bilingual or bidialectal citizens of this country. This is absolutely essential for very young children who come to school speaking a language or dialect different from the English used in Australian schools.

As research by Premier and Miller (2010) clearly shows, teachers need to have appropriate training in how to adapt mainstream programs for students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This research showed that without such training, they were generally unable to plan or deliver units of work that focused at every stage of the learning experience on the children's language development.

Although EAL/D specialists need to be employed as classroom teachers, especially in Years 1-3, mainstream teachers also need the support of EAL/D specialists to help them learn how to analyse each learning task to find out what its language requirements are. Specialist support staff can also help mainstream teachers learn how to use EAL/D learning progression charts to work out how far each student has progressed, compared with native speakers of SAuE.

Unfortunately, Northern Territory education departments since the 1970s have consistently failed to take into account that children whose mother tongue is not SAuE need professional EAL/D support. As we saw in Chapter Two, recent NTDoE policy affirms the importance of EAL/D teaching methods, but is not backed up by a recruiting policy to employ EAL/D specialists. Professional development is mentioned as important, but funds to do the job properly are not provided. Perhaps this is because, as Simpson et al (2009, p. 7) comment, some administrators have a 'belief that nothing special needs to be done to teach Indigenous children English other than to talk at them in English'.

Talking at children in a language they don't understand doesn't help migrant children and it doesn't work with Indigenous children either. Indigenous children do eventually develop a basic understanding of what the teacher is saying, but by the time they do, their school-based learning has fallen well behind that of native speakers of standard English. If we want them to have any chance of achieving at the same level as their age peers by the end of Primary School, it is essential that they are taught by teachers who have studied the English language and who understand how children learn new languages. Most children (and most adults for that matter) do not develop the same level of proficiency in a second or later language without specialised teaching.

If children's earliest learning at school is in a language they already know, it allows them to build on the knowledge and skills they bring from their homes and communities. Dual Language learning of the kind offered in countries like Canada respects home languages and dialects. These are used for building knowledge while the children go through the linguistically difficult process of adding a new language to what they already know. Dual Language education also helps to preserve, rather than undermine, the heritage languages so fundamental to the identity and wellbeing of Indigenous communities and their children. Feeling secure and confident about one's home language helps children and young people become confident learners of additional languages and dialects that

help them live competently in more than one cultural world. Respect for home languages and dialects is fundamentally important even when it's not possible to implement a Dual Language learning program.

We should not forget the desire of Indigenous elders, first highlighted in the 1970s, for balanced learning for their children. Two Way, or both-ways, education is just as relevant today.

Of course coming to school every day *does* also make a difference to learning outcomes. In Chapter Four we take a closer look at attendance patterns and discuss the probability that language-related issues may often be important factors in non-attendance.

In Chapter Five we review some of the problems relating to children's results on NAPLAN tests and explore some of the ways in which language issues may be at the heart of unacceptably low tests results, especially in remote and very remote schools.

We express particular concern about the fact that Indigenous Year 3 children in remote schools are probably the most disadvantaged group in Australia with respect to these tests because they carry a double burden when they first come to school. They have to learn how to read and write for the first time, and they *also* have to learn the kind of English that is used at school.

To ask these children to establish initial literacy in a language or dialect they do not know, and then expect them to take a standardised test developed for native speakers of that language in Year 3, certainly sets these children up for failure and shame.

In Chapter Six, we offer a set of new research questions to structure innovative approaches to research on problems urgently needing attention today. We also offer an alternative approach to Dual Language education to address the challenges faced by Early years children, which we regard as probably the greatest equity issue currently facing NTDoE and the national Closing the Gap agenda in Indigenous education.

Chapter Four: Indigenous children in and out of school in the Northern Territory

How many schools and students are there in the Northern Territory?

There were 190 schools in the Northern Territory in 2011. Of these schools 36 were non-government and 154 were administered by the NTDoE schools. There were also 38 *Homeland Learning Centres* (HLCs), two of which were non-government (NTDET 2012, p. 28).

> HLCs are small remote sites delivering education services to small groups of students who are unable to attend a school because of distance. They are administered by a central school which sends teachers to visit the HLCs on a regular basis to support an Interactive Distance Learning mode of delivery. While the total number of HLCs remains relatively stable across the years, the locations of these changes are as a result of the mobility of families living in very remote locations (NT DET 2012, p. 28).

In 2010, nearly a quarter of all students (23%) attended the 95 schools where over 80% of the students were Indigenous. In 85 of these schools, enrolments were nearly 100% Indigenous. These schools are, of course, mostly in the remote and very remote areas (NTDET 2011a, p. 30).

Distribution of schools by region and sector (government and non-government)

Table 5 shows that nearly six out of every ten Northern Territory students (58.2%) who were enrolled in government schools in 2011 attended 63 schools classified as *provincial*; 27 in the Darwin area (33.3%) and 33 in Palmerston and its associated rural area (24.9%) (NTDET 2012, p. 30). Unlike other states and territories, there are no schools classified as *metropolitan* in the Northern Territory. The rest of the Northern Territory is classed as *very remote*, except for Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin rural beyond Bees Creek, including Batchelor, Adelaide River and Jabiru, all classed as *remote* (NTDET 2011, p. 101). All the other government school students were much more thinly spread, often in small and isolated schools, over the rest of the Northern Territory.
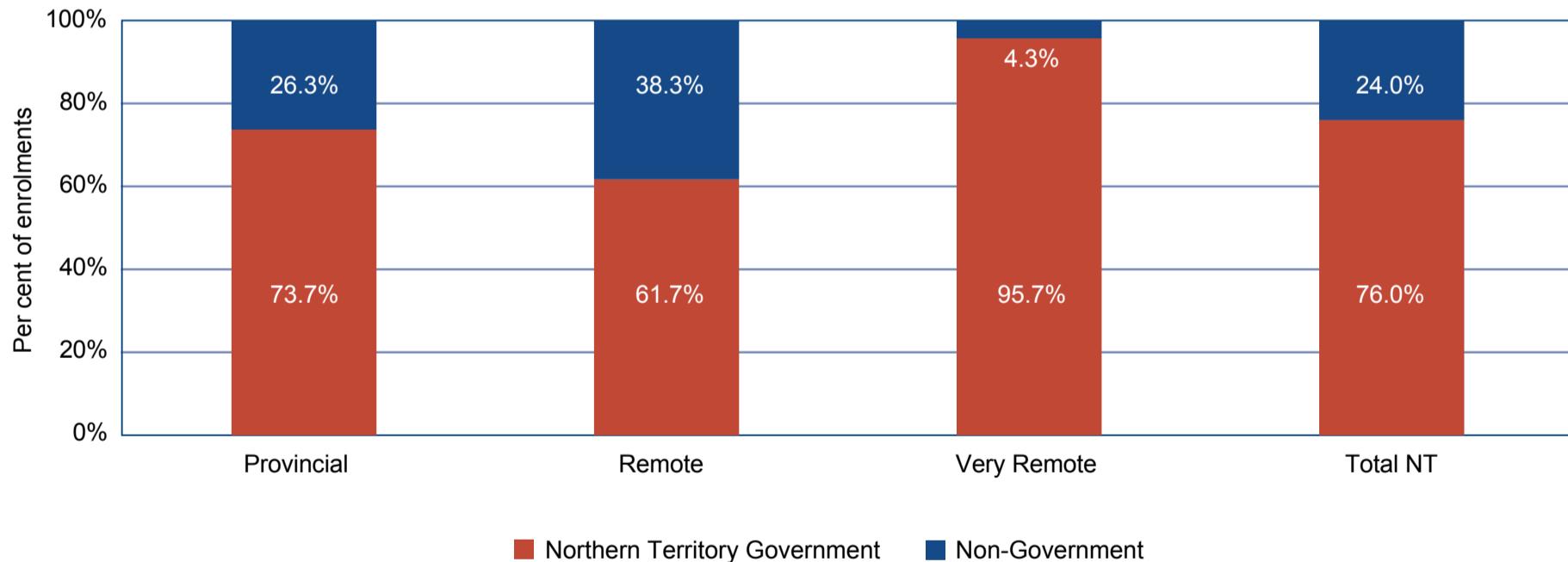
Table 5: Proportion of enrolments by region in government schools in 2011

Region	Schools Number	Enrolments Number	%
Darwin Region	27	11 052	33.3
Palmerston & Rural Region	33	8 258	24.9
Alice Springs Region	36	4 483	13.5
Arnhem Region	17	4 296	13.0
Katherine Region	23	3 238	9.8
Barkly Region	18	1 832	5.5
Total NT	**154**	**33 159**	**100**

(From: NT Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2011-2012, p.30, Table 3. Government school enrolments by region, 2011)

The total number of students enrolled in all NT schools in 2011 was 43,646, a similar number to 2010. Nearly one quarter of these students attended non-government schools (NTDET 2012, p.32), especially in and around Alice Springs. Figure 5 shows these patterns, including how government schools cater for almost all the students living in very remote communities.

Figure 5. Enrolments by sector and geolocation

Source: DET Performance and Data Management Age Grade Census
(From NT Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2011-2012, p.31, Figure 14: Percentage of enrolments by sector and geolocation 2011.)

Distance education

Three of the government schools are Distance Education schools, with 3.1% of students enrolled in them in 2010 (NTDET 2011a, p.30). These are supported by the *Northern Territory Open Education College* (NTOEC) based in Darwin, the *Alice Springs School of the Air* (ASSOA) and the *Katherine School of the Air* (KSOA).

NTOEC provides 'senior secondary education for students unable to attend Northern Territory schools'. It is also used 'to extend the secondary curriculum available to students attending urban, regional and remote schools including Community Education Centres.' Full-time and part-time enrolments are accepted, including from adults who want to study senior secondary school subjects (NTOEC website 2013).

ASSOA was the first distance education school for primary children in Australia. Commencing in 1951 it was known as a 'Correspondence School' because lesson materials were delivered to the children and their work was returned to the teachers by what we now call snail mail. Children talked to their teachers in Alice Springs using a pedal radio. KSOA commenced in 1966, operating in a similar manner. Today, these schools cater for preschool, primary and middle school children, using modern interactive computer technology for teaching and learning.

Although these Distance Education schools are classed as remote schools, they cater for students in a range of locations, including urban students who cannot attend a regular school for various reasons, including illness. Children who are travelling interstate with their families may also be enrolled. Most of the students, however, live in isolated locations such as cattle stations and Indigenous communities. A few live across the Northern Territory borders in neighbouring states.

In the case of NTOEC, Regional Learning Agents (RLAs) facilitate the work of the school in the community. It is their responsibility 'to liaise with regions, schools and teachers on a regular basis to foster close relationships and to provide appropriate advice on the NTCE, pathways for students, NTOEC courses, resources and due dates for students work' (NTOEC website).
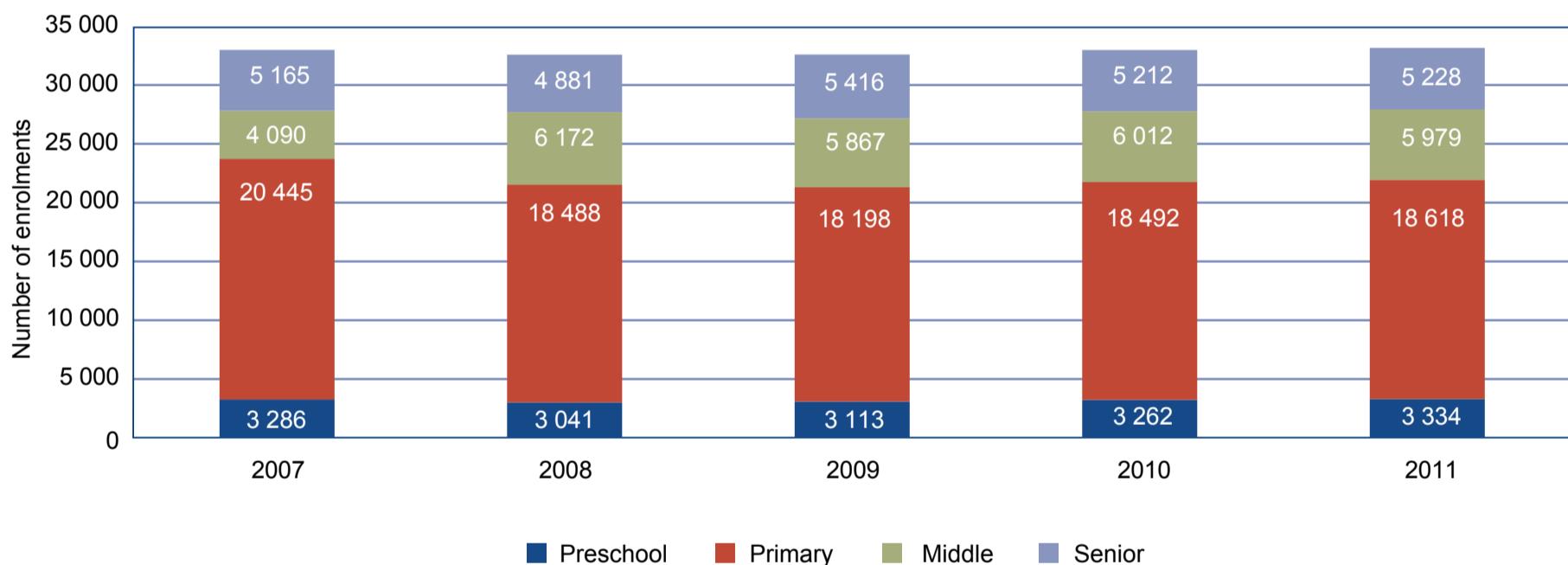
Other students

In 2011, there were also 110 international fee paying students in government and non-government schools (NTDET 2012, p. 50). No statistics are available on the numbers of Northern Territory students who board with friends or relatives or are enrolled in boarding schools in other states or territories.

Students in government schools by stage of schooling

Figure 6 shows the distribution of enrolments in government schools by level of education. The structure of schooling changed in 2007 when the middle years level was introduced, with Year 10 students included in Senior Secondary. In 2008, Year 7 students were moved from Primary to newly established Middle Schools. 'Primary education now consists of Transition to Year 6. Middle years consist of Years 7 to 9 and Senior years consist of Years 10 to 12' (NTDET 2011a, p. 33).

Figure 6. Enrolments by stage of schooling in government schools 2007 to 2011

Source: DET Performance and Data Management Age Grade Census
(From: NT Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2011-2012, *p.31, Figure 15: Enrolments by stage of schooling (government schools), 2007 to 2011.)*

Between 2007 and 2011, there was a gradual increase in the number of government school students. Most of these were Indigenous students (NTDET 2012, p. 32). The increase in Indigenous enrolments is probably the result of several of the factors discussed in Chapter One; more young children starting school due to the relatively high birth rate, increased pressure on children and young people of all ages to enroll since the NTER, increased awareness that Australian law requires
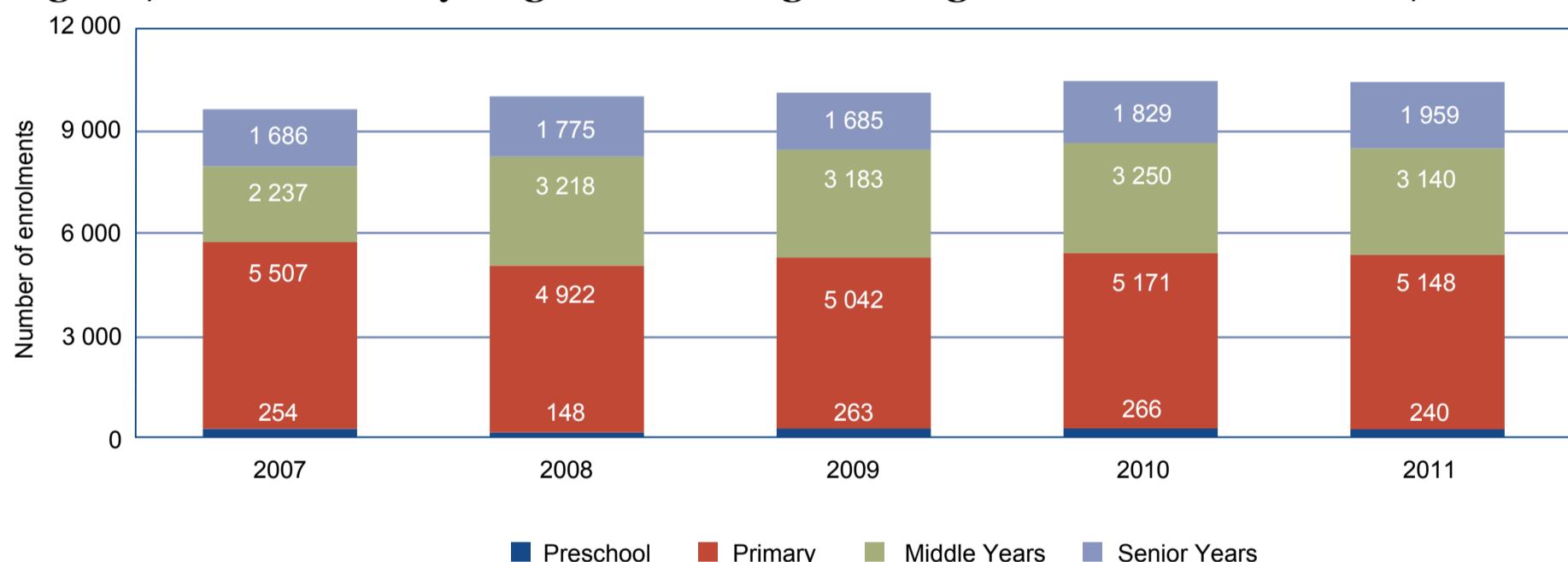
children and young people be enrolled in a school or training institution until they reach seventeen years of age, and greater efforts on the part of the Northern Territory government in recent years to provide educational opportunities for all school aged children and young people.

Students in non-government schools by stage of schooling

Figure 7 shows the pattern of enrolments in non-government schools. We can see that although the numbers overall are only about a quarter of the numbers in the government schools, the *proportion* of enrolments in middle and senior years is higher than in government schools, while the proportion in preschools is much lower, which shows parents are happy to send their children to government schools for Early Years education, but tend to send them more often to a non-government school as they get older.

Figure 7. Enrolments by stage of schooling in non-government schools 2007 to 2011

Source: DET Performance and Data Management Age Grade Census
(From: NT Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2011-2012, *p.32, Figure 16: Enrolments by stage of schooling (non-government schools), 2007 to 2011.)*

There are more Indigenous students as well as non-Indigenous students in senior classes in non-government schools. The proportion of Indigenous students to non-Indigenous students in non-government schools also increases in higher years, as these 2010 figures show:

> In 2010, Indigenous students represented 26.0% of the primary students in non-government primary schools. This compares with 48.0% Indigenous students in government primary schools in 2010 (NTDET 2011a, p. 55).

> Indigenous students represented 31.6% of all middle years students in non-government secondary schools in 2010. This compares to 44.6% Indigenous middle years students in government secondary schools (NTDET 2011a, p. 56).

> Of the senior years cohort in 2010, 30.6% of students were Indigenous. This is only slightly lower than the proportion of Indigenous senior years students in government schools, which is 34.2% (NTDET 2011a, p. 57).

Bearing in mind the Northern Territory government is legally obliged to make adequate educational provision for students up to the school leaving age of seventeen, these figures seem to suggest that recruitment practices by schools seeking student enrollments, or options available for senior years students in non-government schools, are more attractive than those offered by government schools.

Nevertheless, between 2007 and 2011, Indigenous enrolments in non-government schools increased by only 49 students overall. By contrast, the number of non-Indigenous students enrolled in non-government schools rose by 803 students during those years (NTDET 2012, p. 32 Figure 18).

Vocational Education and Training

There were 24,000 students in total enrolled in *Vocational Education and Training* (VET) courses in the NT in 2011, plus another 7,150 apprentices and trainees (NTDET 2012, p. 59). Between 2007 and 2011, the number of Indigenous students enrolled in VET courses was lower in 2008 (10,000), 2009 (9,800) and 2010 (9,815) than it had been in 2007 (10,400) (NTDET 2012, p. 61). This happened in spite of the NTER and in spite of changes in recent years to regulations relating to schooling. These figures suggest that the provisions made for post-school training in 2010 were

not sufficiently attractive to make sure young people who are required by law to be at school or in a training course were, in fact, enrolled. In 2011 the numbers rose again to slightly more than the 2007 levels, to 10,517.

A recent study of Indigenous VET students from remote communities in Western Australia may provide some insights into why VET training does not always attract Indigenous young people. Oliver et al (2013) studied the situation in a private boarding school where the students were speakers of traditional Australian languages, Kriol and/or Aboriginal English (AE), and still learning the kind of English normally used in schools and work situations. Oliver et al found that even in a supportive and committed environment, the approaches to training offered to the students were failing to produce graduates sufficiently competent and confident to start work in the jobs available to them. Students, their teachers and members of the students' communities were interviewed and observations were taken of students in their classes and while doing work experience. Analysing some of the guidelines and other paperwork relevant to the different occupations students were being prepared for, it was found that even the students felt their ability to use standard English in the workplace was not good enough. It was one of the main reasons they became discouraged, did not stay with their course, or in their jobs after they left school.

The study found the students needed very specific *task-based training*, including role play and other chances to learn and practice the normal English used on the job, both in relation to work-oriented tasks and in more casual social conversations during the day, for instance asking how the weekend went, etc. They needed to learn how to understand and participate in normal joking situations in the workplace, and to be able to read, understand, and act on written, as well as spoken instructions. They needed to be thoroughly familiar with the different ways that safety issues are signaled and explained in workshops. Some students said they 'felt *shame*' being the only Indigenous person in a workplace and many did not know how to respond when asked questions. Some thought it was OK not to answer questions. This created misunderstandings with their non-Indigenous workmates and supervisors. But Eades (2013) explains repeatedly that people who use English in Aboriginal ways are quite comfortable when questions are not answered. It is not considered rude or inappropriate. In fact, because life in Indigenous communities is often so public, refraining from answering questions can be an important and respected way for people to preserve some degree of privacy. Young workers need to be taught explicitly that most non-Indigenous people think it's

rude or confrontational not to answer questions. Students of all ages also need to be given role play practice in fun situations to help them learn how to answer questions appropriately in standard English.

In many cases, the students also needed much better control of the technical language of the work they were learning to do. Again, a task based approach to teaching technical words and ways of talking about technical things gives students the chance to learn and practice these new ways of talking.

Students needed professionally developed EAL/D training courses designed by specialists qualified to analyse their language learning needs. It is not enough to simply learn work skills associated with a trade or occupation. Being taught in the same manner as native SAuE speakers did not address students' workplace language gaps. If this is the situation in Western Australia, it is very likely to be similar in VET training situations in the Northern Territory.

Pre-school opportunities

In 2007, 94% of remote Aboriginal communities lacked preschools according to Brennan (2007). This meant that Indigenous children began school 'already at a disadvantage' (Kroneman 2007, p. 6).

According to NTDET, the situation with regard to preschool education is as follows:

> School is not compulsory for children until they are six, however children turning four on or before 30 June, are eligible to enrol in a regular preschool program at the start of the school year in urban areas and, when accompanied by a responsible carer, from three years [of age] in remote areas. Children turning four after 30 June are eligible to enrol in a preschool program on or after their fourth birthday, if places are available and with the understanding that the child will access more than 12 months of preschool (NTDET 2011a, p. 41).

In 2011, total preschool enrolments were 3,334 with 1,394 of these being Indigenous children. At 41%, the proportion of Indigenous to non-Indigenous children is about the same as in the whole school population. This suggests an appropriate representation of Indigenous children in preschools by 2011 (NTDET 2012, p. 45). The figure for 2010 was 1,352 children (NTDET 2011a, p. 41). The question, however, is whether Indigenous families make as much use of preschool opportunities as non-Indigenous families.

We know that preschools can help young children and their families get used to the cultural expectations of school. Children who have experienced preschool generally make a better start at primary school than children who have not. If our goal is to help young children enjoy school and experience better rates of success there, then giving all children access to preschools makes sense.

Early Childhood education is also a fundamentally important time for establishing a sense of self and personal and cultural identity. As we have discussed in previous chapters, very many Indigenous children come to school speaking an Indigenous language, with little or no experience of standard English. Appropriate pre-schooling in the Northern Territory can only be provided in partnership with communities and caregivers. Ideally, a both-ways approach to learning works best because it provides a strong foundation for a confident future as a bicultural person able to operate across the cultural divide. The cognitive and social importance of these children continuing to develop their own home languages during these critical years cannot be understated. It is essential that staff who speak the children's languages are not only employed, but also well trained in order to operate with confidence as equals with their non-Indigenous peers in the preschool situation.

Early Childhood practitioners will find themselves on a steep learning curve if they have not been trained to work in multilingual, multicultural contexts with children from cultural and linguistic backgrounds different to their own. They also need the skills to analyse the kind of English spoken normally and naturally in the preschools attended by children who are native speakers of Standard Australian English. Particular words, phrases and styles of speech that native speakers use normally, without thinking, all have to be taught explicitly at this age through games and role plays so that young Indigenous children feel comfortable to participate in the full range of activities offered in preschools.

In 2006, Ministers from all states and territories agreed that: 'universal access to high quality early childhood education for Indigenous children aged 0-5 is an essential precondition of 'school readiness' and successful participation in primary school' (MCEETYA 2006, p. 5). In 2007, the *Australian Education Union* (AEU) called upon the Australian and Northern Territory governments to commit to providing two years of quality preschool education for all preschool-aged children in the Northern Territory (Kroneman 2007). There have been significant improvements over the intervening years with regard to access to preschools and play groups, particularly since the NTER. These include the use of mobile facilities in some communities.

Further back, in 1999, the independent *Learning Lessons* report commissioned by the Northern Territory Government recommended that: 'mobile preschools and playgroups [be] considered as interim solutions to ensure guaranteed access for all children to structured early childhood education' and that: 'within a period of five years [by 2004], there be guaranteed access to play centres and preschools for all children in the three to five year age group' (Collins & Lea 1999, p. 10).

In 2012, the *Council of Australian Governments* (COAG) had as one of its *Closing the Gap* goals: 'ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education' by the end of that year. Another goal was that 'every child will have access to a preschool program in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling by 2013' (DEEWR 2013).

Mobile early learning facilities are an excellent idea for homeland centres not permanently populated. However, they are not appropriate in communities with mostly stable populations.

That facilities for preschoolers are not always given the priority they deserve is evident from the experience of a teaching principal of a remote school:

> When I questioned the absence of an AT [Assistant Teacher] in my large class of high needs middle primary students, I was told that if I wanted the AT time I could close the preschool. The preschool experience is vital to future success, so that was not an option (Kroneman 2007, p. 26).

Preschool attendance patterns

It appears that families with young Indigenous children do not always make good use of preschools when they are available. The measure of success used by NTDoE is whether or not a child comes to preschool for more than eight out of ten sessions, in other words, 80% of the time. If attendances are lower than that, we have to ask what it is about the program that is unattractive to young Indigenous children and their families. The practice of blaming the parents or caregivers helps no one, because if we truly believe preschool is helpful to young learners, it is our job to make it attractive for them.

In 2011, the department noted a significant improvement between 2009 and 2010 in the number of enrolled Indigenous preschoolers who attended more than 80% of the time, but the improvement was from a very low base. Attendances rose from 21% in 2009 to 31.6% in 2010.

It is important to note that the pattern for non-Indigenous preschoolers is hugely different. In 2011, eight out of ten (81%) non-Indigenous preschoolers came to school more than 80% of the time (NTDET 2012, p. 45).

These figures suggest that, even when preschools are available, many Indigenous families are not convinced they are worthwhile. Perhaps the programs are not culturally appropriate for their children? Perhaps carers, or the children themselves, feel uncomfortable in the preschool environment? Or perhaps communities are not clear about the benefits that are supposed to come from participating in preschool opportunities?

In 2011, the department's goal of having preschool programs 'delivered by a four-year university qualified early childhood teacher in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year' by 2013 was mooted (NTDET 2011a, p.68). In 2012, 'teaching resources to support Transition teachers to implement the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Curriculum simultaneously' (NTDET 2012, p.69) still had not been developed. These resources need to be informed by EAL/D theory and practice. The learning tasks children are expected to do need to be analysed to find out what specific features of the English language should be explicitly taught. We cannot expect teachers who are not EAL/D specialists to be able to develop appropriate adaptations of mainstream resources without support and dedicated help from qualified EAL/D Early Childhood specialists.

Both-ways approaches to Early Childhood education

We know that even in urban areas, Early Childhood teachers will probably have at least a few children in their classes who do not speak standard English at home. We saw in Chapter Three that up to 100% of children in many remote communities are likely to be speakers of an Indigenous Australian language, including Kriol, when they arrive at school. Many will know so little school English they will have difficulty understanding their non-Indigenous teachers. The teacher's standard English will almost seem like a foreign language.

An important role for a non-Indigenous early childhood teacher, as Farmer & Fasoli (2011) suggest, is that of a mentor for Indigenous co-workers in the early learning context. Co-workers are also most effective when they are confident enough to mentor the teacher to help them understand Indigenous perspectives. Learning to become effective mentors is not quick or easy for either party,

but it is definitely effective. It also takes time for non-Indigenous teachers to come to terms with the idea that European strategies for bringing up children are as culturally biased as those of any other society and are not necessarily better.

For the sake of their ongoing cognitive and social development, children of preschool age need to continue to learn in culturally appropriate ways in their home languages (Simpson & Wigglesworth 2008; Jacobs 1990; Lee 1993). If the Australian and Northern Territory Governments are genuinely committed to 'Closing the Gap', they will give urgent priority to making sure that qualified Indigenous preschool teachers who speak the children's languages or dialects are employed in all community preschools.

Young children must be supported to develop in culturally appropriate ways, while at the same time developing a beginning familiarity with Western-style education. Because young children are in such a sensitive stage of development, trainers of Indigenous preschool teachers and workers need to have full appreciation of the value of both-ways education.

Training programs for Indigenous early learning professionals can be structured to allow participants to explore and come to a deeper understanding of their own cultural strategies and beliefs about child rearing. These understandings provide graduates with more confidence and ability to work with non-Indigenous people. Together, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Early years professionals can develop a balanced program of learning activities which supports ongoing social and cognitive development through the children's home languages and cultures, while at the same time giving them a start in understanding what mainstream schooling involves.

However, children's progress in preschool is also highly dependent on their teachers' skills in teaching young learners who speak other languages or dialects. And unless there is deep understanding and respect for the children's need to keep developing normally through their home languages, preschool may even damage the most linguistically or culturally vulnerable children. To protect their development, Lee (1993, p.63) recommended Indigenous children under five be given access to Western Early Learning materials and equipment from as early as possible, but that non-Indigenous direction in the way children interact with the materials be limited. She suggested 'wherever possible, care-givers could be encouraged to engage with the learning materials with their children, using their strongest language' or dialect.

Non-Indigenous educators can learn by quietly observing what Indigenous caregivers do with learning materials. They can also show Indigenous families what non-Indigenous people usually do with the equipment as part of a both-ways approach. It's important to also explain why particular ways of using learning activities are encouraged by mainstream educators in preschools, e.g. activities to develop concepts about number, colour, size, etc.

At the same time, Indigenous staff are well positioned to teach children how to use activities and materials they would normally use outside of the school in the ways skilled Indigenous people use them. This ensures that children also keep up with their local Indigenous cultural development and education. This may also involve inviting the most appropriate community members to work with children within the preschool environment, making the transition between home learning and school learning smoother, more comfortable and more effective for the children and their families.

The offer of professional development after teachers have been appointed, especially in the context of the Northern Territory, may be too late for some recruits. One of the harsher realities of life in the Northern Territory is that it might be several months into the new school year before a teacher meets an EAL/D support person, even if one is available. Appointees deserve thorough up front information on the EAL/D strategies for effectively teaching of children who come to school with a language other than SAuE.

Ideally, teachers need to be ready to start work as soon as they reach their new schools. Most importantly, they need to be prepared in advance for the likelihood they will be working in a team with Indigenous staff. As a resource for non-Indigenous staff aiming to work in these contexts, *You're in New Country* (Farmer & Fasoli 2011) makes clear that learning to mentor and be mentored in a balanced way can be a steep learning curve for new teachers. But the effort associated with this is essential if the new four-year trained teacher, in most cases from a different part of Australia, is to experience success from the beginning of the appointment. This resource is currently provided by NTDoE for all early childhood teacher recruits to the Northern Territory. It is also freely available on the web by searching for it by name.

School attendance patterns in the Northern Territory

Most people agree that schooling and further education and training provide choices about what kind of work we will do, how we will spend our money, what kind of house we will live in, and so on. All Australian children are required by law to enroll at school when they're six and attend

regularly until they are seventeen years old. Under the *Northern Territory Education Act*, it has been compulsory since January 2010 for all students to complete Year 10 and then engage in education, training and/or employment until they turn seventeen.

In most parts of Australia, children are enrolled automatically in a school on or before the year they turn six, and attend school nine out of ten school days through the year. In line with current Australian Government policy to provide quality preschool learning experiences for all four year olds, many children regularly participate in some kind of formalised learning situation when they are aged only three (with a parent or guardian), or four or five.

It may come as a surprise, then, to learn that a large number of children and young people in the Northern Territory are not enrolled in any kind of school program. What is even more surprising is that nobody seems to know exactly how many are missing out on schooling. Estimates are used instead of exact figures. For instance, at the end of 2011, the NTER evaluation team commented:

> Although it is not possible to determine accurately the number of non-enrolled school-aged children in the NTER communities, it has been estimated for the Northern Territory as a whole that as many as 2,000, or 13%, of Indigenous school-aged children (aged 5 to 14 years) are not enrolled in school. Such estimates must be viewed with caution, because while it is easy to know how many young people are enrolled at a point in time, it is difficult to establish the number of young people in the population at the same time (NTER 2011, p. 322).

In March 2011, when a question was asked in the Australian Parliament about Northern Territory school enrolments, the Education Minister responded it was estimated that 2,700 children were not enrolled in 2009 (McNally 2011). It is likely this larger figure includes teenagers between fifteen and seventeen years, along with younger children. An investigation in 2007 by the Australian Education Union using several sources of information, drew the following conclusions:

> there are still large numbers of Indigenous students who are not enrolled at all, with estimates ranging from 2,000 students of compulsory age [6-15 at that time] to more than 3,500 of secondary age, to as many as 5,000 potential students under the age of 18 in remote areas who have no access to secondary or vocational education services. There are communities that still do not have access to schooling, although no actual assessment of these areas or their extent has been published. In addition, while attendance rates vary across communities, enrolled Indigenous students have an attendance rate of 60% on average (Kroneman 2007, p. 19).

There are many reasons why it has been difficult to establish, with certainty, the number of children participating in schools in the Northern Territory. These are discussed below.

Participation rates: How many children and young people attend school?

Discussion about *participation rates* in education can have two meanings which overlap. The first meaning focuses on the proportion of children or young people who are *actually enrolled* in a learning situation, compared with the total number who *might potentially* be enrolled.

The second meaning compares the proportion of learners who *actually attend* school or training with the total number who are enrolled. Attendance numbers given as percentages of enrolment numbers are shown in Figure 8 below. This is one of the reasons why accurate figures for the total number of children and young people who should, legally, be in school or training in the Northern Territory are difficult to find.

It is interesting to learn that, according to a Western Australian Department of Education publication:

> There is currently no mechanism to detect children of compulsory school age who have never enrolled in an education program. A national analysis of non-enrolment and non-attendance data ... found that [an] estimated 18,000 students between the ages of six and 14 years [were] not enrolled nationally. ... Only children who are enrolled in a school or education program can be tracked by the Department once they stop attending (Department of Education, no date or page numbers).

In many parts of the world, countries cannot afford to provide schooling for all children. The *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) uses the term *out-of-school* to refer to children who cannot, or do not, enroll in any kind of school.

In the year 2000, UNESCO set the goal of universal primary education for the whole world by 2015. Although the number of children out-of-school in the poorest parts of the world fell rapidly between 2000 and 2005, the rate of improvement has now slowed. With an estimated 67 million children still not at school globally in 2009, it doesn't seem now that the 2015 goal can be achieved. The program, *Education for All*, acknowledges that 'disparities based on wealth, location, ethnicity, gender and other markers for disadvantage' all affect children's opportunities to go to

school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012). Given Australia is such a wealthy nation by world standards, it is unacceptable that we too have out-of-school children whose choices in later life will be affected by limited school-based learning.

Births, travelers and the Tri Border area

What are some of the other reasons why it is difficult to know how many children and young people there are in the Northern Territory and how many should be at school or in training? Estimates are made using census results, which should be more accurate now the Australian Government has put extra funding and manpower into conducting the census in remote regions. The number of babies born in a particular year is compared with the number of children who enroll in a particular level at school a few years later. But it is also necessary to find out how many children in each age group may have left the Northern Territory or died, and how many have arrived from other states, or left with their families.

To improve understanding of student movement a *Tri Border Attendance Strategy* was proposed in 2007 by the Australian Government, developed during 2008 and implemented in 2010. Education departments in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory were to work together to develop a centralised database 'to effectively map and monitor student enrolment and attendance within and across borders' (NTDET 2011a, p. 77). This plan does not seem to be mentioned directly in the 2012 NTDECS report. It was not clear by mid 2013 what kind of data had been collected and whether the strategy had made gathering enrolment data more efficient for students who move regularly within the Tri Border region.

Students' names may change

A further complication for education administrators is that Indigenous children often have several names. The name on their birth certificate might not necessarily be the one generally used. It is also disrespectful in some traditionally-oriented families and communities to continue to use the same personal name as someone who has died. The name a child used in one school might change by the time she or he enrolls in a new school, perhaps only weeks later.

Indigenous people in the Northern Territory did not traditionally use surnames in the European way. Surnames, even when they come from the language of the person concerned, were often imposed on families by missionaries, government welfare officers, or station owners. In some regions, birth certificates automatically included an English first name, whether or not the family had given their

baby an English name. These names would be used by government people, sometimes because the teachers or welfare officers or nurses did not bother to learn the person's Aboriginal name or names. Many non-Indigenous people do not realize that, even in families where everyone has an English name, many Indigenous people also have one or more names in their own languages.

Even among non-Indigenous people, children from families whose parents have separated may use two or more surnames at different times during their lives. This makes it difficult for authorities to keep track of the name changes and monitor school attendance of the child.

Patterns of school attendance

As we saw above, not all children who live in the Northern Territory are enrolled in a school. Even when they are enrolled, they may not come to school as often as children who live in other parts of Australia.
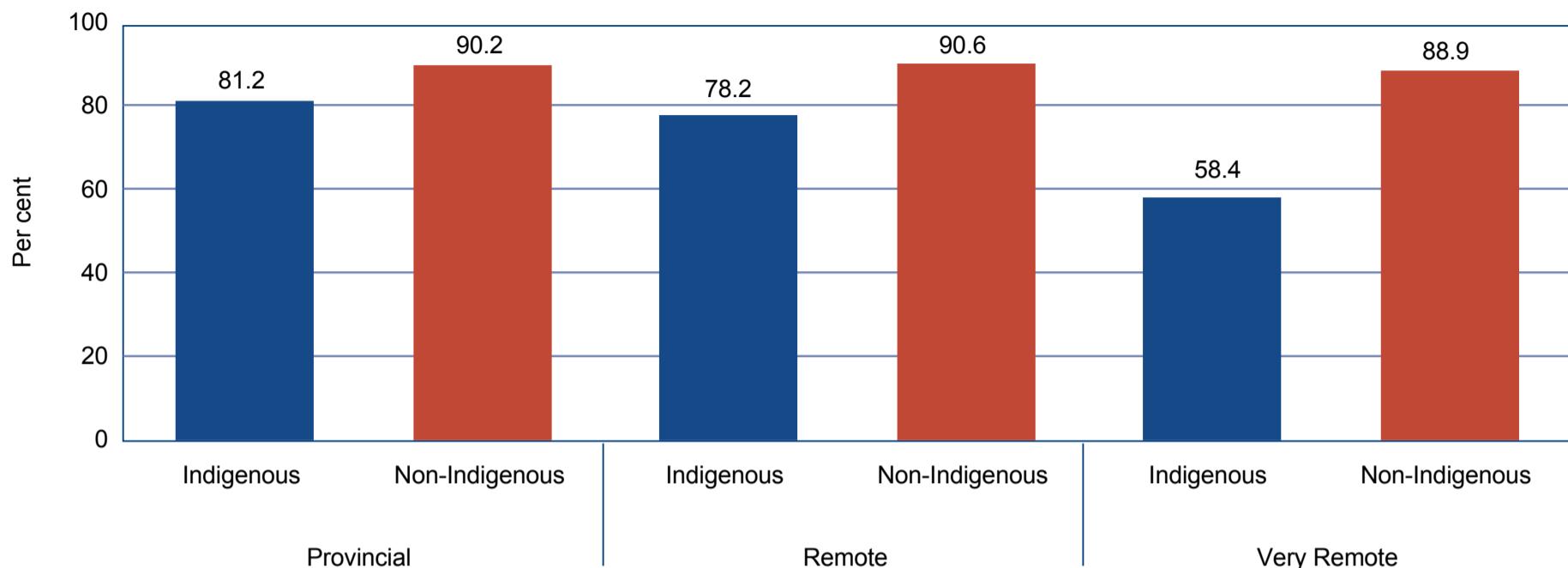
The *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority* (ACARA) reports on what they call *student engagement* (attendance) in Australian government schools. They report that student engagement is 90%, or slightly more, in all states and territories except the Northern Territory, where the average attendance is closer to 80% (ACARA 2009).

An average attendance rate of 80% translates to four days a week. A student who attends five days a week one month and then only three days a week the next month also has an average rate of attendance of 80%. We can imagine other attendance patterns that equate to 80%. Averaged figures tend to hide the fact that those with regular attendance will probably get more benefit from their schooling than those who often come only three days a week.

If we look at Figure 8, we see that the overall figures used by ACARA hide an important fact. Average attendance rates of Indigenous student in Northern Territory government schools in 2011 were significantly lower than those of non-Indigenous students. Their attendance rates in remote and very remote areas were even lower. An overall rate for the Northern Territory as a whole is created when the attendance rates of all students in all regions are averaged out.

Figure 8. Average attendance in government schools in different regions

(From: NTDET Annual Report 2011-2012, p.34. Figure 20: Average attendance by Indigenous status and geolocation (government schools), 2011.)

Table 8 shows that Indigenous students in the Darwin area (provincial) come to school nearly as often as non-Indigenous students. Even in the larger towns of the remote regions, the rate is still near to equivalent. But in very remote regions, the average rate for Indigenous students is a little less than three days a week, whereas the few non-Indigenous students in very remote regions come to school nearly four and a half days a week on average.

We need to ask again whether coming to school is something children and young people think is useful or interesting. Of course there are other reasons as well for non-attendance. NTDECS noted that 'seasonal trends associated with extreme weather patterns experienced across the Territory' affect student attendance rates (NTDECS 2012, p.33). The attendance situation in the Northern Territory as a whole in 2011 was explained as follows:

> The average attendance rate of non-Indigenous students across geographic locations is fairly consistent, with a maximum variation of 1.7% between remoteness categories. This is in contrast to Indigenous students where there was a significant variation, with the highest difference in attendance rates being 22.8%. This reflects the lower attendance rates of Indigenous students, particularly in very remote locations with an average attendance of 58.4%. The lower attendance rate is influenced by a number of factors, including the high mobility of population in remote contexts, the requirement to travel for cultural reasons, as well as to access services only available in larger towns (NTDET 2012, p. 34).

The NTER Evaluation team found attendance rates were worse in 2010 than in 2007, although they had improved in 2008 and 2009. Conceding it was possible that the unusually wet year in 2010 had been a factor, the team commented that 'data for 2011 are required to determine if that decline may be considered a 'true' decline or if it is related to other conditions' (NTDET 2011, p. 292).

The 2011 NTDET annual report also noted a drop in the overall attendance rate of Indigenous students in government schools from 2009 (69.7%) to 2010 (67.8%) (NTDET 2011a, p. 35). In the 2012 report however, the average attendance for all Indigenous students is difficult to find, so the question asked by the NTER Evaluation team is not easily answered.

Primary years attendance rates

The average attendance rate for Indigenous primary children in government schools in 2011 was 70% compared to 93% for non-Indigenous primary children. Just over nine out of every ten non-Indigenous students came to school 80% of the time, or four days on average. By contrast, fewer than four Indigenous students came to school that often (NTDET 2012, p. 40).

Middle years attendance rates

Attendance rates of Indigenous students in government schools fall dramatically in middle school. In 2011, the average attendance rate for Indigenous students was only 64.1% compared to 89.6% for non-Indigenous students. Seventy-nine percent of non-Indigenous students in the age group came to school 80% of the time. This is more than three times the number of Indigenous students who came to school four out of five days on average. Only about two to three (25.4%) middle years Indigenous students came to school this often (NTDET 2012, p. 42).

How can we explain this shocking decrease in attendance rates during the Middle years of schooling? No discussion of the matter is provided by the Department in relation to their Table 10 (NTDET 2012, p. 42), which deals with education performance measures.

Middle year students are young teenagers who, in any culture, are busy developing new interests in life. They become restless at school and often clash with their teachers and the school administration. Some begin to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. It is also a time when young people become more sensitive about how they are seen by other people and are particularly sensitive about failure.

Young people in all cultures may react to the experience of failure by avoiding situations where they feel embarrassed or inadequate, or where they're singled out for criticism or punishment. And, as we saw in Chapter Three, Indigenous young people may be particularly sensitive about any situation which 'makes them feel shame' in any of the Aboriginal English senses of that word. Some young people experience such extreme distress they engage in self-harm or even commit suicide.

The ever-increasing rate of youth suicide in remote regions of Australia is a constant reminder that this country has failed as a nation to provide all young people with equal opportunities to grow up to be confident, competent adults. The situation was so serious in the Northern Territory that the Legislative Assembly set up a committee to inquire into it. The committee's reporting on their investigation stated that:

> Suicide is an issue that affects all sectors of society. However, there are some particularly concerning trends that require special attention. Comparison of suicide data of 10 to 17 year olds in the Territory from 2001-05 and 2006-10 indicate that the rate of Aboriginal youth suicides has increased (from 18.8 to 30.1 per 100,000) while the rate for non-Aboriginal youth has decreased (from 4.1 to 2.6 per 100,000). The Committee was also informed of a disturbing increase in the rate of suicide among Aboriginal girls aged 10 to 17 years (Select Committee on Youth Suicides in the Northern Territory 2012, p. x).

Most of the children and young people in the ten to seventeen year old age group are in the Middle years of schooling.

One important reason why Indigenous young people can become so desperate at this age is that their primary schooling has often not prepared them to study at age-appropriate levels in their Middle and Senior years of schooling. Literacy levels can be so low that many students are unable to read the ordinary written materials of everyday life, and many students can barely write. They might be able to text each other using codes that work for their age group, but when it comes to dealing with schoolwork, they're often seriously frustrated or even confused. We will look more closely at the question of literacy levels in Chapter Five when we focus on NAPLAN results. We'd like to emphasise that blaming young adolescents for not wanting to come to school is not the answer. It is important to ask why it is that schools have failed them so badly in a country which is considered so wealthy by world standards.

Senior years attendance rates

The average attendance rate for non-Indigenous senior years students in 2011 was 87%. The rate for Indigenous students at this level (65%) is even lower than it is for middle year students. When it comes to the proportion of students who come to school more than four out of five days on average, we find 67% of non-Indigenous students in this category. But only two out of ten (22%) Indigenous students make it to their classes four days a week on average.

Many Indigenous students in the senior years age group have already begun their adult lives, many are already parents responsible for their own babies and toddlers and many have cultural obligations. The majority of sixteen to eighteen year olds may be Centrelink clients in their own right. The first thing we need to ask is whether the school and training opportunities that are available to them fit with their world view about what is possible or suitable for them as young adults. Do educational institutions offer them learning programs with clear immediate benefits? Can they realistically expect to find employment with the levels of education they have achieved at this stage? As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, an important Western Australian study by Oliver et al (2013) found one of the problems faced by young people from remote communities was that even if they did attend training courses, they often did not feel their levels of standard English were adequate to communicate with non-Indigenous people in workplace situations. They felt uncomfortable and embarrassed and just wished they could speak English more fluently and competently. There may also not be enough jobs in their community for them to take on employment once they have completed their training, a factor which figures significantly in Northern Territory remote and very remote communities on a regular basis.

A training officer from a Northern Territory mining company told one of the authors of this book that she didn't know where to start with Indigenous recruits from the local community. In most cases, she said, their literacy levels were far too low for her to give them the normal, routine orientation course that every new employee had to take.

Although there are many young non-Indigenous adults who also have low literacy levels, the proportion is much higher in Indigenous communities. Again, this is a basic equity issue. All Australians have the right to expect the school system to do its best to make sure they enter adulthood with the literacy and numeracy skills they need for adult life. And, as we have discussed

in earlier chapters, it's now a fact of life that young people from remote communities often decide to move to larger towns and cities seeking greater opportunities. They are no different from other young Australians in this regard.

Young Indigenous people in the Senior years age group may have hopes and dreams for their futures but, especially in remote and very remote communities, many have no opportunity to learn about the real requirements of mainstream Australian life, finding simply surviving everyday life takes up all their time and attention. They may not be in the habit of thinking and planning for the future and may find it difficult to develop the skills to do so, because their lives are completely taken up with the demands of the present. When they enroll in training programs, it's essential that the learning experiences offered demonstrate immediately to them that it is possible for them to begin to build up their English language skills and develop increased confidence to cope with unfamiliar people or social behavior and expectations. As Oliver et al (2013) show, their courses need to be structured so language and intercultural skills progress alongside their ability to handle the manual, technical, or administrative aspects of the jobs they are being trained to do.

National concern about school attendance patterns in the Northern Territory

The NTER Review Board, created to assess the progress of the 2007 NTER, commented on feedback received during consultation with Indigenous people and educators as follows:

> The consultation feedback from community people and a number of educators based in communities paints a pervasive negative picture about the role and importance of formal education in the community. Schools, whether they are government, community or church-based, are generally not recognised by children, families and the community as an important asset for social and cultural development. There is little evidence that Aboriginal language and culture have been seriously incorporated into the formal school curriculum even though English was not the first language spoken in most communities that the Board visited (NTER 2008, p. 19-20).

The Review Board understood how important it is that Indigenous languages and cultures not only be respected in the schools, but also 'seriously incorporated' into the curriculum. This means that teaching and learning must be provided through local languages, as well as SAuE, according to both-ways educational philosophy.

When Dickson (2010) studied levels of engagement in schools in the Warlpiri area, he too came to the conclusion that removing the long-standing bilingual program was at least one of the factors involved in community disengagement with the school. As we saw in Chapter Two, the communities in which Dual Language programs had been set up in the 1970s generally felt a sense of ownership for their schools, and with their own cultures respected by educational systems, they tended to encourage their children to attend school.

As a recent report from the *Centre for Child Development and Education* in Darwin notes: 'Greater local decision-making autonomy [has been identified] as a key factor enabling trust and reciprocity between community and school staff and hence better student learning outcomes'. The report also emphasises that: 'The availability of culturally welcoming places within or adjacent to the school where Indigenous parents, families or community members feel culturally 'safe' and can engage with and support their children's school learning' are also important in building trust and acceptance in the local community (Silburn et al 2011, p. 37).

It seems these commonsense ideas about making school a welcoming place have sometimes been forgotten in recent years. And yet, at the same time, NTDoE insists all children and young people should come to school or attend training every day.
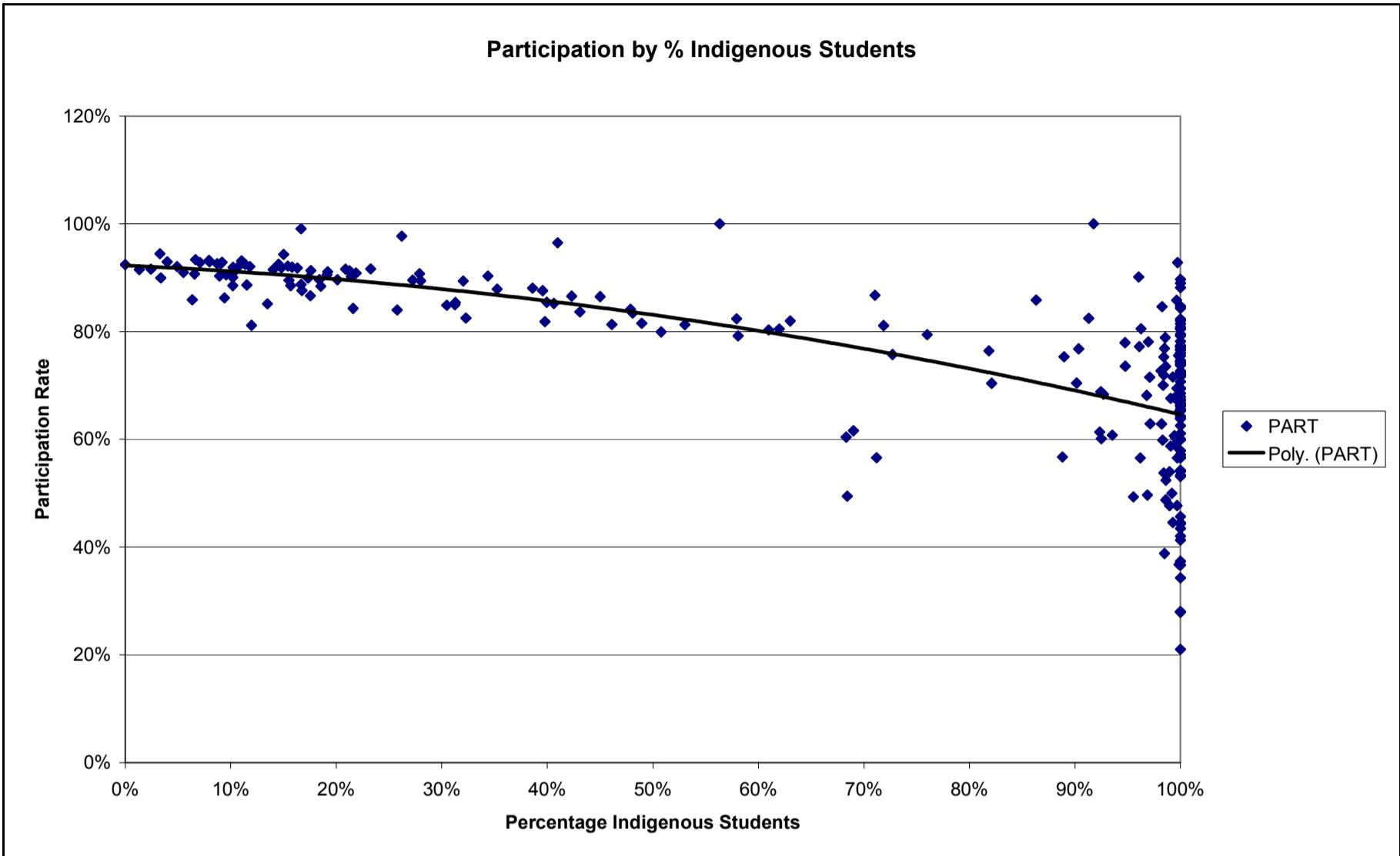
Differences between individual schools

When we think about engagement or participation in schooling, it's important to remember some schools have very much better attendance rates than others. Attendance figures are usually averaged across groups of schools. For instance, Ladwig & Sarra (2009, p. 36) show in Figure 9 below, the great difference between different schools with 100% Indigenous enrolments.

These schools are shown as dots on the right-hand side of the scattergram. We can see that one school right at the bottom has an unusually low attendance rate of just over 20% (one day a week) on average. And yet another, with a rate of over 90% (about four and a half days a week), was better than many of the schools with mostly non-Indigenous enrolments shown over on the left-hand side of the graph.

Figure 9. School percentage attendance by percent Indigenous enrolment 2008
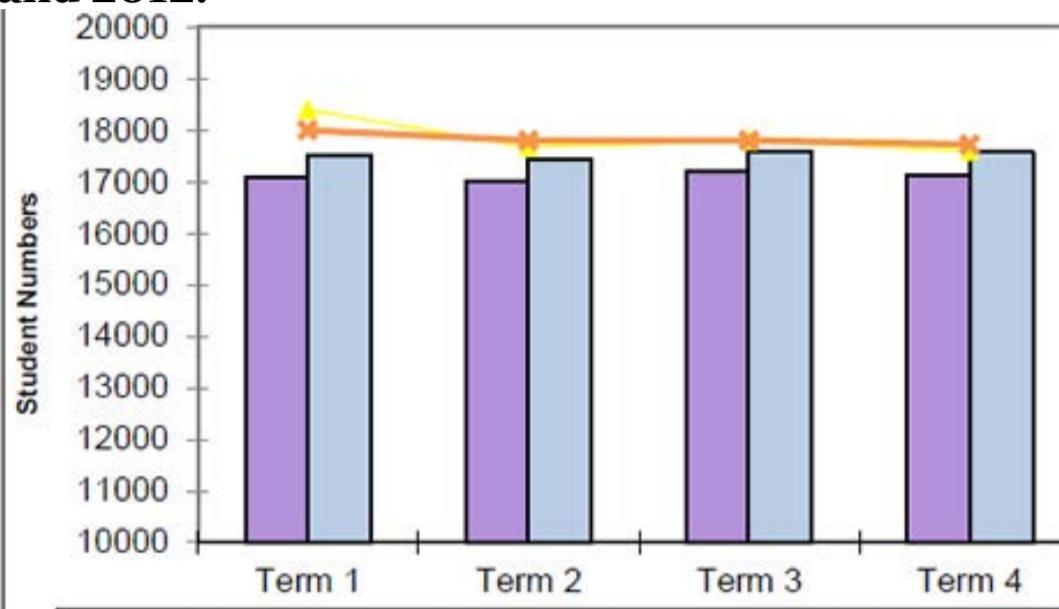
(From Ladwig & Sarra (2009, p. 36) 2009 Structural Review of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training: delivering the goods.*)*

Differences between regions

Figures 10, 11 and 12 show relationships between enrolments and attendance in a different way. Figure 10 deals with the only provincial region in the Northern Territory, which, as we saw in Chapter one, is the Darwin/Palmerston area. Figure 11 shows patterns in remote schools, which include large towns like Alice Springs and Katherine, and Figure 12 shows the very remote Northern Territory schools.

Figure 10. Enrolment and attendance levels in provincial government schools, 2011 and 2012.

(From: Enrolment and Attendance Statistics, NTDECS website. Chart 1: Government provincial schools.)
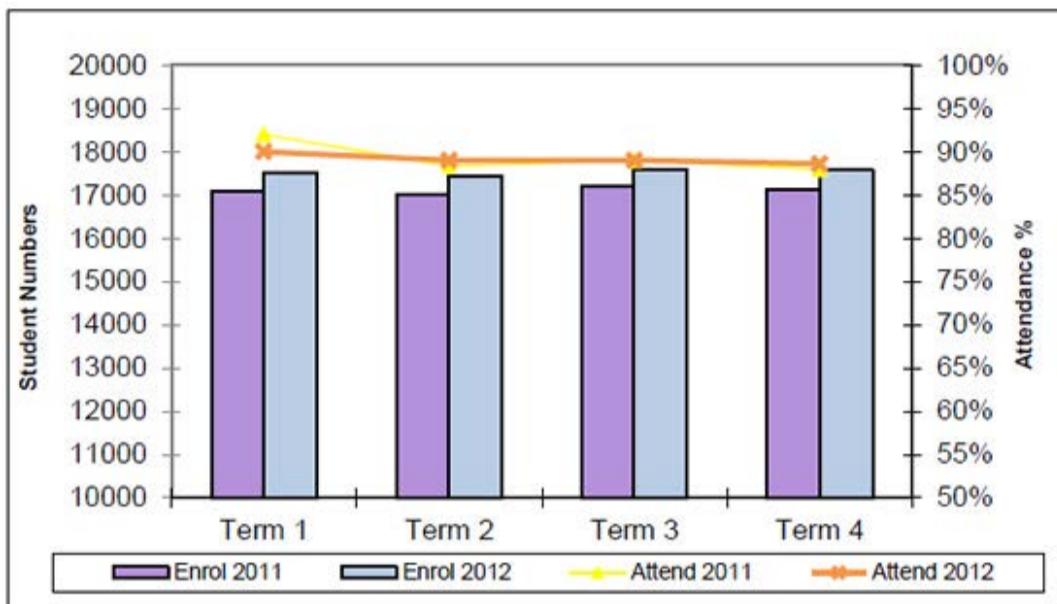
In these graphs, the tops of the bars and the numbers on the left-hand side show how many students were enrolled in government schools in 2011 and 2012. We see from Figure 10 that there were between about 17,000 to 18,000 students enrolled in provincial schools in those years. We also see a consistently higher enrolment in 2012, compared with 2011. This probably partly reflects the movement of the population into the areas around Darwin in recent years. New families came to Darwin from other states and other countries as well as other parts of the Northern Territory.

It is also likely that more students who already lived in the Darwin and Palmerston areas in 2011 actually enrolled in the schools in 2012, due to legislative changes to the Northern Territory Education Act which instituted fines of over $2,000 for non-attendance. More detail is provided below.

The yellow line across the top of the bars for 2011, and the orange line for 2012, relate to the percentage figures shown down the right-hand side of the graph. We see from Figure 10 that the students in provincial schools came to school more than 90% of the time (more than four days a week on average) in Term 1. Their average attendance rate had dropped to below 90% by Term 4 in 2011 and in 2012.
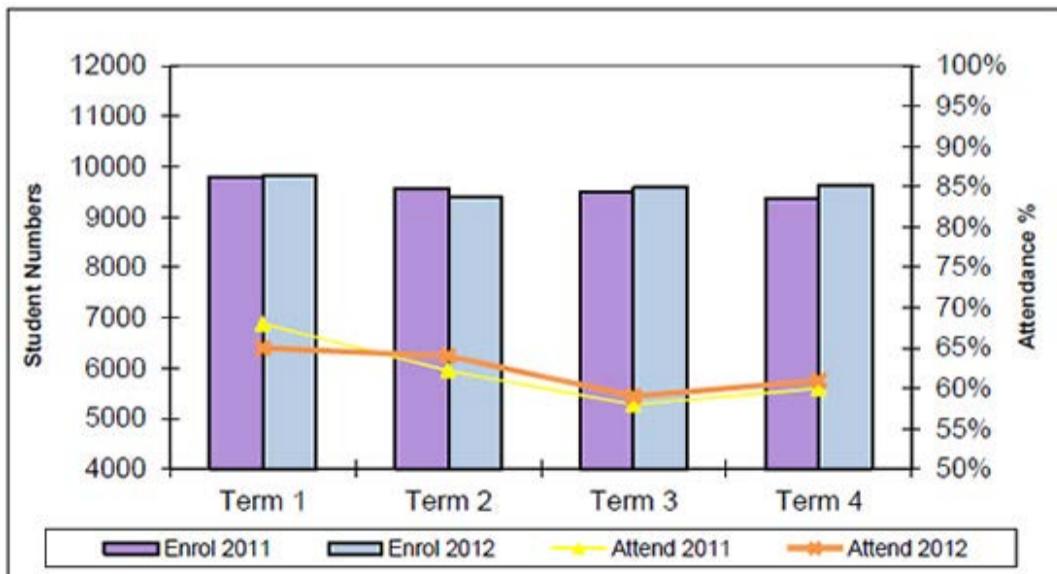
Figure 11. Enrolment and attendance levels in remote government schools, 2011 and 2012.

(From: Enrolment and Attendance Statistics, NTDECS website. Chart 2: Government remote schools.)

In Figure 11, we see the figures for remote schools, including Alice Springs and Katherine. The number of enrolments, again between 17,000 and 18,000 in this region, also were higher in 2012 than in 2011. Again, there were probably two reasons for this. More people may have moved into the towns in 2012 and more students who lived in this region may have enrolled in the schools under pressure from the government for improved school attendances. It's good to see that attendance rates in these schools are not very different from those in the Darwin and Palmerston areas.

Figure 12. Enrolment and attendance levels in very remote government schools, 2011 and 2012.

(From: Enrolment and Attendance Statistics, NTDECS website. Chart 3: Government very remoteschools.)

Figure 12 shows there were between 9,000 and 10,000 students enrolled in very remote schools in 2011 and 2012. The number fell in Term 2 in both years, especially in 2012. Enrollments rose

again in Terms 3 and 4 during 2012, but not quite to the same level as in Term 1. In 2011, the number of students enrolled dropped in Term 2 and stayed low in Terms 3 and 4. Where did these students go if they were no longer enrolled in very remote schools? Did they drop out and become out-of-school children and young people?

It is shocking to see the very low attendance rates in 2011 and 2012 in the very remote schools, compared with the schools in and around Darwin and in the remote regions, including the larger towns. The yellow and orange lines show how, even in Term 1, fewer than 70% of the students were coming to school, on average, throughout the term. Numbers dropped further in Term 2, and further still in Term 3, during the cooler months of the year.

Although attendance levels rose again in Term 4, they did not rise to the same level as in Term 1. Term 1 can be the most uncomfortable time of the year in terms of heat, although where the schools are air-conditioned, perhaps that may help bring children to school. We could also surmise children and young people might be curious to see who the new teachers are at the beginning of the year, hence this may be another factor contributing to higher enrollments. They may also be more enthusiastic to come along and find out whether the school has anything to offer that they might want to participate in. Perhaps one of the reasons their attendance rates fall off after term 1 is that many of them lose interest in the learning activities provided for them. Again, we can ask what attempts have been made to convince the children themselves that what they learn at school can be genuinely useful to them, or at least interesting or fun.

Most young children, in any culture, do not spend a lot of time thinking and planning for their future lives. Children often have difficulty conceptualising themselves as future adults, and do not have the life experience to see how a particular set of lessons at school might be useful at some later time. When these general characteristics of the way most children think are put together with the fact that Indigenous children are often free to make many of their own decisions, even at a very early age, we can understand why it is so important for them to be shown in practical ways that the things they learn at school are useful in their current day-to-day lives. This is a challenge classroom teachers may not be used to dealing with. Perhaps it could be as rewarding for the teachers as the learners to work out why a particular group of children should be asked to do particular tasks, learn a particular set of skills or acquire particular understandings?

Differences between attendance rates of individual students

As well as thinking about differences between schools with respect to participation in, and engagement with learning programs, we also need to think about differences between individual students who may vary a great deal in how often they come to school. As the 2011 NTER report explained:

> A 60% attendance rate is equivalent to attending school three days per week, on average, but that is an average for *all* students in *all* schools. The reality is that there are some students who attend fairly regularly (more than 80% of the time) and some who are absent on most days ... [A] South Australian analysis [in the late 1990s] showed that in those schools with low attendance rates and high proportions of Indigenous students — like the NTER schools — the lower attendance rates were a result of a number of individual students with extremely low attendance rates and absenteeism was not a problem for the majority of students (NTER 2011, p. 324).

Clearly, children and young people who hardly ever come to school are likely to be the most disadvantaged in terms of any benefits that flow from school-based learning. While it is important to find ways to make school interesting and relevant to the lives of all students, there are special opportunities and challenges with regard to these most disadvantaged students.

If students feel uncomfortable when they attend, they're not likely to come back. If they're forced to come back they may do so with high levels of anger or embarrassment. Innovative approaches are needed to fit in with cultural expectations. The people most likely to reach these children and young people may be the family members they trust and respect. Deciding to please strangers from other places may be a novelty for a while, but communication problems and cultural differences can make it all too hard. Students will soon stop coming to school when they're bored or overcome with a sense of failure.

Family members might be employed as professional outreach people in partnership with qualified teachers based at the school. Temporary learning areas might be set up in the community in places where groups of reluctant attenders like to hang out. Family members might come to these places with a set activity each day, an activity collaboratively designed with the classroom teacher to interest and engage the children or young people who are not at school.

These learning activities could be made appealing by having a clearly identifiable learning goal explained to the students at the beginning of each session. This learning outcome should be

realistically achievable during two or three hours engagement with the activity. Each day could be seen as a fresh day in terms of what is taught and learned so students who engage with an activity one day, but not the next, can still be confident they have successfully learned something new each time they come.

Above all, non-Indigenous teachers need to remember, when a reluctant student does turn up at school, no matter how infrequently, not to make an issue of how often that person has been absent. Growling at the student or even teasing them in a good natured way may discourage them from coming back again. Smiling and welcoming them back, and perhaps, if it seems appropriate sometime later in the day, expressing genuine interest in where they've been (perhaps visiting another community, or out hunting, or watching an exciting event on television) is far more proactive and supportive than disapproval or censure.
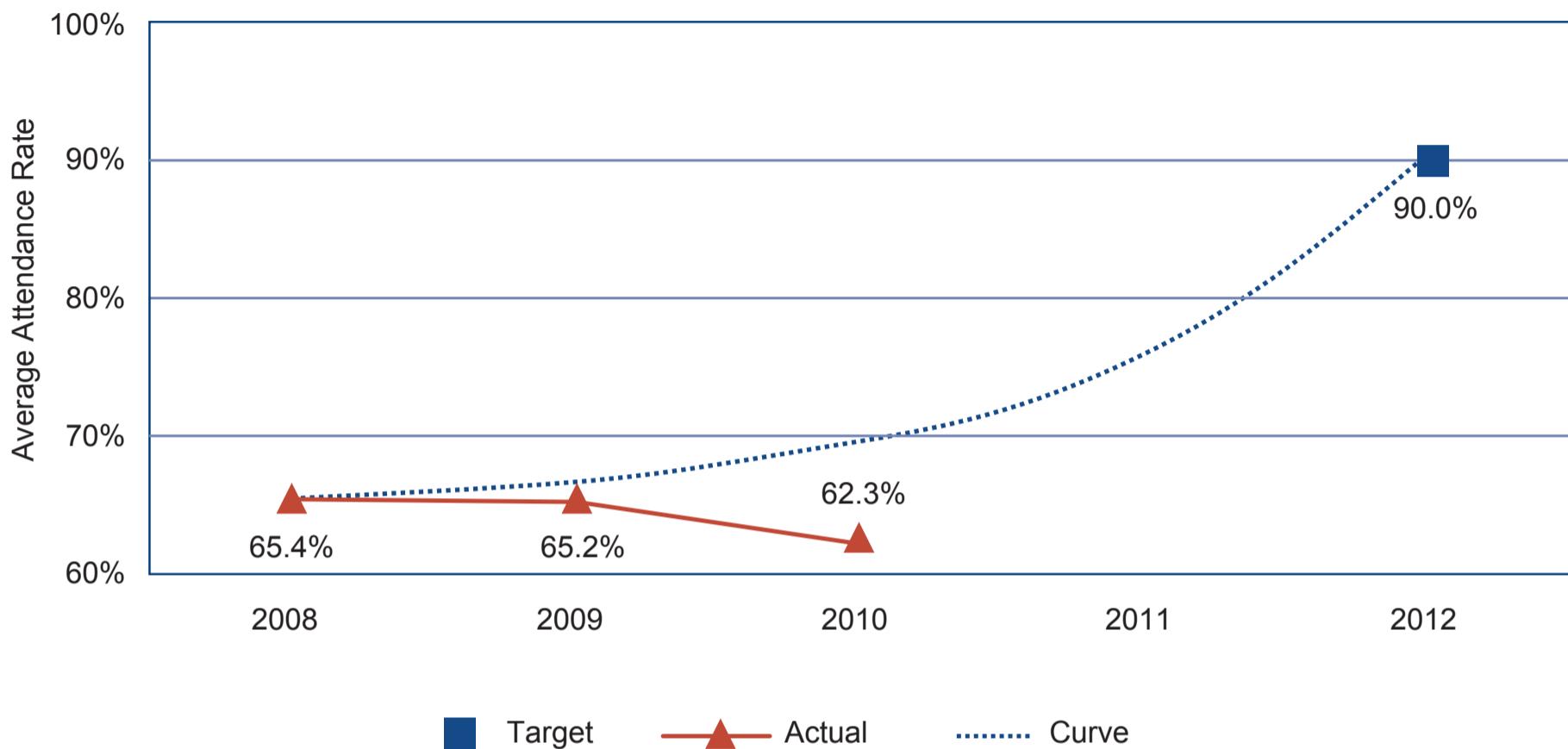
Being careful not to shame the person because of work they've missed is especially important. Often it will be best to ask an Indigenous colleague what work should be given to this student. It might also be helpful to ask one of the other students who is familiar with the work to sit with the returnee and help them until they become more confident. Indigenous colleagues will know which students should sit and work with the one who has returned. Special care must always be taken, even with regular attenders, and even in Darwin or the larger towns, not to ask two students to work together who cannot do so for cultural reasons. Indigenous colleagues are the best people to ask for advice on this matter.

Some non-Indigenous teachers might also need to adjust to the idea that it is better for a young child or older student to achieve something collaboratively with another child or young person in the class than to achieve nothing at all. Western ideas about *cheating* or *copying* are just that, culturally biased ideas. Many cultures value collaboration and feel uncomfortable with too much emphasis on individual excellence. We might also remember that, even in European societies, it was once acceptable to copy out work as a way of learning. Learners who correctly copy something, as long as teachers also make sure they understand what the writing means and why it is important, are learning words and spelling patterns they may not know. It is *mindless* copying of information which the learner can neither read nor understand that is a waste of time. If, having copied something, a learner later uses the same words or sentence patterns to write something original, true learning will be demonstrated, even if the learning process is considered unconventional by modern standards.

As we see in Figure 13, in 2011 the department had a goal of 90% attendance in very remote schools by 2012 (NTDET 2011a, p. 82).

Figure 13. NTDET attendance target for very remote schools in 2012

Source: DET Performance and Data Management

(From: NTDET Annual Report 2010-2011, p.82. Figure 48: Systemic targets by 2012 — attendance in very remote schools.)

In this graph we see what the attendance curve would look like if:

a) the goal for 2012 had been achieved and:

b) if there had been a gradual improvement since 2008 toward that goal.

The previous target for 2008-2009 had been a little more realistic at 80%. This graph shows that not only was that goal not achieved, but the attendance rate actually dropped between 2008 and 2010. We know from Figure 12 that attendance rates in 2012 turned out to be similar to those of previous years. Given these facts, it is necessary to ask why the department thought it appropriate to set the totally unrealistic goal of 90% attendance in very remote regions by 2012. Efforts directed towards understanding why goals are so often not met in the Northern Territory would seem to be called for, rather than setting such unrealistic short term goals.

While it is true that children and young people who attend school more often generally do better than students who hardly ever come to school, at the same time the quality of teaching and learning must be given primary importance ahead of attendance issues. If what is done with, to and for children and young people when they attend school is seen as meaningful and worthwhile, an increase in attendance rates is more than likely to ensue.

As mentioned above, and explored in detail in Chapter Three, school English is an additional language for a very large number of Northern Territory students. We know that in the very remote regions, almost all learners speak a traditional Australian language, or Kriol, or perhaps Aboriginal English at home. Reluctant attendees may come to school more often if they can go home each day with new knowledge about issues relevant to their lived experience and explicitly taught English language knowledge and skills.

Several important points can be emphasized about the use of English as an Additional Language or Dialect strategies with students who are still learning the language of schooling:

- Content learning is offered at age-appropriate levels so that older learners do not feel humiliated by the learning material offered to them and so that a realistic attempt is made to make their subject area learning relevant to their developmental stage.

- Standard Australian English is taught *through* the subject area, not as an extra subject.

- Each session at school is planned with a language focus based on the teacher's assessment of the students' level of proficiency in SAuE, using *Learning Progression* assessment tools developed for use throughout Australia.

- Students learn to *focus on form* and *notice* different ways of talking used in different social and educational contexts.

- Students are given role play and other task based opportunities to practice new words and language patterns until they are confident to use them easily with other people outside the school.

- Wherever possible, learning is related to real life concerns and responsibilities of the learners in their lives outside school.

- As in other countries, an EAL/D approach can be used alongside a language maintenance approach in a Dual Language learning program where this is desired. In the Northern Territory this is often called both-ways teaching and learning.

It is important to remember that children and young people who grow up with strong control of their home language as well as a dominant language like English, often show cognitive and social development gains that are superior to those of students who are taught entirely through a language or dialect they do not use at home.

National concern about attendance issues

The Northern Territory is not alone in facing the problem of making education sufficiently interesting and relevant for Indigenous children and young people to want to come to school every day. In February 2011, *The Australian* newspaper summarised the national situation with regard to Year 10 students between 2007 and 2009 as follows:

> Figures released in the Productivity Commission's annual Report on Government Services show attendance rates for [Indigenous] Year 10 students at public schools fell between 2007 and 2009 in every state and territory except Western Australia, where they were stable.

> The largest declines were in South Australia and the ACT, which recorded drops of 6% over the three-year period, and in Tasmania, which fell 5%. WA recorded the lowest participation rates in the nation — 64% —followed by the NT on 67% and South Australia on 69% (Edwards 2011).

When children and young people do come to school, it is important there are enough teachers, school rooms, desks, learning materials and other resources necessary to ensure that they have good learning experiences. It is disappointing to learn that even with low attendance rates:

> At the start of the NTER, average student attendance exceeded the available classrooms in at least 10 schools. Facilities were often overcrowded, were inadequately maintained and had poor temperature control. The NTER invested an additional $10.3 million to construct 20 new classrooms, in addition to the $97 million invested under Building the Education Revolution for classrooms in these communities (NTER 2011, p. 29).

The issue of school attendance and the funding of schools is discussed in considerable detail in the Australian Education Union report of 2007 report (Kroneman 2007).

Of particular concern at the time of the Intervention was the fact that schools were being staffed and funded on the basis of attendance rather than enrolment figures, something that shocked the writers of the *Little Children are Sacred* report earlier that year. The authors remarked: 'We have been dismayed at the miserable school attendance rates for Aboriginal children and the apparent complacency here [in the NT] (and elsewhere in Australia) with that situation' (Wild & Anderson 2007, p. 18). They also said: '…given that children and young people who chronically non-attend or are excluded from school are severely disadvantaged and that there is a correlation between school non-attendance and criminal activity, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, violence and sexual abuse, the government must as a matter of highest priority' (p.27) ensure that attendance issues are addressed and sufficient opportunities are provided for all young people to have access to appropriate educational opportunities.

The report also gave the example of Wadeye as a community so underfunded by successive governments that it decided to seek legal help in 2007 to recoup some of this unpaid funding.

> The impact … when children do come to school was well illustrated in Wadeye in 2005, 2006 and again in 2007. The community made a concerted effort and the children came, but there was no space for them, there were no resources and not enough teachers. As a result, before the resources could be provided, most of them stopped coming. The reality is that the Catholic primary school at Wadeye was the only school in a community with a school-aged population of nearly 1,000 children, including nearly 300 secondary aged children (although a secondary school has since been established). The Catholic school is funded and staffed on the same basis as all government schools in remote regions, that is, on attendance rather than enrolments. Melbourne based legal firm Arnold Bloch Leibler … argue that 'for every dollar spent on the education of a child in the Northern Territory, just 43 cents is spent on the education of a child in Wadeye'. Funding on attendance rather than enrolments is a major reason for this difference (Kroneman 2007, p. 27).

We might also add that funding on the basis of the total number of school-aged children would be even higher if it took into account the number of children and young people who are legally required to be in a school or training situation but are not enrolled in any education course.

What governments are doing about school attendance patterns

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments have, quite rightly, expressed serious concern at the low attendance rates in the Northern Territory, compared with other parts of Australia. Since

2007, a range of strategies has been introduced by those governments in an attempt to ensure enough schools, teachers, and resources are provided to cater for all children and young people of compulsory education age.

Everyone agrees that children and young people who attend school every week and, if possible, every day, usually learn more than students who only come now and then.

The Australian Government

Under the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* policy, the Australian Government has set up a *School Enrolment and Attendance Measure* (SEAM) for the Northern Territory. It applies to non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous school-aged children and young people. Parents or caregivers who do not enroll the children in their care, or do not make sure that those children or young people attend school or training every day if possible, can have their Income Support Payments from Centrelink suspended for up to thirteen weeks (SEAM website).

Caregivers who do not meet these requirements first receive a letter from NTDoE in relation to non attendance. If the student still doesn't enroll, or if their attendance doesn't improve, the caregiver has to attend a compulsory conference. Social Workers and Education Liaison Officers should be available to give support and answer questions at the conference. Centrelink payments may be stopped if the child or young person is still not enrolled, or still doesn't attend school after the conference.

The SEAM approach is a punishment approach. It has been tried in other parts of the world where it has generally failed. Any person of any culture will probably feel shame, frustration, anger, or even despair, at being subjected to this program. Although the *Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs* (FaHCSIA) insists that: 'This approach is supported by individual case management' and families are 'offered support from school and from Centrelink social workers before any consideration is given to having support payments suspended' (FaHCSIA 2009), the most likely effect is to bring additional hardship and stress to the family.

The fact that SEAM does not seem to directly involve the child or young person who doesn't want to go to school is also a problem. It is culturally out of alignment with Indigenous expectations

and values about giving respect and independence to young people, regardless of their age. Before considering this issue of independence further, let's look at some research findings relevant to the Australian Government's SEAM strategy.

Sally Cowling found, in a study of similar programs elsewhere, that where threats were used, school attendance patterns did not improve in any significant way. She also discovered that international research 'shows that suspending income support payments to families and making access to payments contingent on a child's school attendance has been singularly ineffective in reducing truancy' (Cowling 2009, p.10).

Cowling also points out that more harm than good can be done by such programs, because the people who are threatened with sanctions are often those who are already not coping well in society. Negative effects of placing even more stress on such families has been well documented. For instance, Cowling says that:

> With respect to increased risk of harm, a disturbing study by Paxson and Waldfogel (1999) found that tougher sanctions for non-compliance with welfare rules in the United States are related to higher levels of substantiated cases of child maltreatment and physical abuse and neglect. In the context of the Australian Government's commitment to the development of a National Child Protection Framework there is a discord between the provisions of the Act and this evidence base. Research from the US demonstrates that the imposition of payment suspension or cancellation on families experiencing pronounced distress and dysfunction may also lead to young people facing a higher risk of harm, homelessness or removal to out-of-home care when parents (correctly or incorrectly) attribute loss of income to decisions made by their child or adolescent (Cowling 2009, p. 8).

Cowling is concerned that even if the actual suspension of Centrelink payments is rare, no one appears to have worked out how families in this situation are supposed to manage. She cites another American study on the effects of such sanctions on mothers:

> Reichman and her colleagues (2005) found that, compared to non-sanctioned mothers, mothers who have their payments suspended are at higher risk for hunger, homelessness, utility shutoffs, inadequate medical care, material hardship, poor health and relying on families and friends for housing (Cowling 2009, p. 8).

Cowling also mentions the effects of stress on children and young people who are seen to have brought such hardship to their families. She comments that: 'It is worth noting that Campbell and Wright (2005) found that problems such as illness, bullying and poor school performance

had a greater impact on attendance than irresponsible or lazy parenting and truancy' (Cowling 2009, p.7). Drawing together points from research on factors that *do* improve school attendance, Cowling lists the following:

- Facilitating access to quality early education and care;

- School-wide attendance programs based on school, family and community partnerships;

- Intensive ongoing interventions involving well-defined attendance policies, parental engagement via home visiting programs, and strengths-based family counseling;

- The development of individualized learning plans; and

- The employment of highly trained school staff who are able to build relationships based on mutual trust and respect and provide education that is relevant to the cultural background of the community within a focused learning environment (Cowling 2009, p. 7).

Cowling also draws attention to 'a major study of 84 projects funded under the *Indigenous Education and Strategic Initiatives Program* (IESIP).' This study found that successful IESIP projects:

- respected 'Aboriginal languages and Indigenous patterns of discourse',

- 'involved Indigenous teachers, parents and community members in all aspects of the schooling process',

- included skill development and cultural awareness professional development for school staff,

- used 'early intervention strategies to ensure adequate acquisition of literacy skills',

- had 'high expectations of students', and

- built 'meaning and purpose into learning activities by making them 'relevant to students' experiences and interests' (Cowling 2009, p. 11).

A 'safe and secure learning environment' that was welcoming to students as well as to their parents and other community members was also important, as were computers where 'students felt in control of their learning situation and could work at their own pace and level' (Cowling 2009, p. 11).

When we look at this list, we see again that the SEAM policy may put too much focus on the goal of improved attendance and not enough focus on the question of *why* children and young people might want, or need, to stay away from school.

Certainly, although it may be the case that some hard measures are necessary in any society to protect children's welfare, it is difficult to see how adding to the pressures experienced by these

already highly disadvantaged families will assist in getting their children to attend school. Resorting to strategies that punish children and their families for not using school and training opportunities may be legal, but a reluctant learner is rarely a fully successful learner. It's much better to try to find a way to encourage that learner to see there is value in school-based education.

The Northern Territory Government

A major attendance-related initiative of the Northern Territory Government is the *Every Child, Every Day Action Plan 2010-2012* (Northern Territory Government 2010). In October 2013, this plan expired and, according to the NTDoE website, was still under review. It was not clear in early 2014 what strategies were planned for the future.

Like SEAM, the *Every Child, Every Day Plan* focuses on parents and caregivers. These strategies follow European ideas about who is primarily responsible for children's actions and decisions. However, as we know, many Indigenous people expect young people to be more independent and able to make their own decisions, especially once they are leading their own independent lives in the senior years. A program called *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* in Western Australia also puts a great deal of emphasis on making parents responsible for their children's failure to attend school regularly. None of these programs seems to consider the possibility of directly engaging children and young people in making school attendance plans for themselves in partnership with their caregivers and the school.

Nevertheless, many of the strategies in the Northern Territory Action Plan were excellent. Involving parents and caregivers in the school and partnering with businesses in the community to take a united approach to children who are not at school, are positive elements. In communities or towns where local businesses come on board, school-aged children are not served in shops during school hours. They may even be rewarded in some way if they attend school regularly. The use of high profile people in the 20 Growth Towns as role models for children and young people, encouraging them to appreciate the benefits of education and training, also makes sense. We need to know whether the Action Plan was evaluated, how successful it was, and what current initiatives are in place for encouraging school attendance.

The Northern Territory and Western Australian attendance plans also recognise that some of the reasons children don't come to school have to do with the school itself. For instance, the Northern Territory plan acknowledges that new teachers in remote communities may be experiencing

culture shock. A pilot *Community Mentoring Program* for new teachers was started in 2010. The Western Australian strategy mentions the importance of making school a welcoming place. It also acknowledges the need for professional development for teachers to help them understand cultural diversity in their schools.

NTDoE also has a *Remote Teaching Initiative* which is part of the *National Alliance for Remote Schools* involving the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australian and New South Wales. This initiative focuses on joint recruitment strategies 'to select, recruit, retain and develop a flexible and highly competent teaching workforce that will be available to remote schools across the five jurisdictions' (Northern Territory Government 2010). The importance of these remote area teachers being recruited with specialist EAL/D training is not, however, mentioned in the Northern Territory Action Plan. It seems education administrators and politicians do not consider language as one of the dimensions of children's unwillingness to come to school. As already stated, at the very least, newly recruited teachers need to be given an accredited preparation course in EAL/D principles and teaching methods before appointment, along with a cultural orientation program. They also need regular ongoing contact with, and support from, experienced EAL/D specialists in the schools.

Perhaps the reason these language issues are ignored is because many teachers and administrators are monolingual speakers of English. They have never had to develop native-speaker-level literacy skills in an additional language in order to cope with an unfamiliar culture. Developing age-appropriate literacy skills in a new language is very much harder than learning a few words and phrases for conversational use as a tourist in another country. It takes longer and requires specialised teaching.

Traditional Indigenous approaches to raising children to be successful adults

We have suggested in this chapter that too much attention is given to making parents responsible for children's attendance at school instead of asking whether we can negotiate directly in a respectful manner with children and young people themselves about the fact that all Australian children and young people under seventeen need to be enrolled at school or in training courses if they are not working.

Indigenous children and young people often make their own decisions about what they will do each day. Parents may prefer their children attend school, but they may think it inappropriate to interfere with a child's autonomy. Many non-Indigenous people find it difficult to understand that even very young children might be expected to know what they want and be allowed to make decisions for themselves.

There is no doubt that different cultures expect different kinds of behaviour and different levels of personal responsibility from children. Cultural expectations also change over time. Australian, American and British babies are generally fed when they feel hungry these days. But when one of the writers of this book was a baby in the 1940s, her mother was told very firmly that she had to wait for four hours before giving the next feed, even if the baby was crying. Today this seems wrong, but in those days it was considered 'best practice'. Cultural beliefs and patterns of behaviour related to feeding babies have changed in mainstream Australian society.

In order to learn more about Indigenous child rearing practices, Annette Hamilton took her own young child and lived in a caravan with *Anbarra Gidjingali* families at Maningrida from 1967 to 1968. Although she had read that Indigenous Australians treated their children differently to Europeans, she found she had a lot to learn:

> Watching the life of the camp day after day I was fascinated by the utterly novel (to me) way that people handled babies and children. I had read about permissive child-rearing, and in fact I rather thought I was 'permissive', but I had never thought it possible for children to have so few restraints and their parents so few anxieties about them. I found my own child changing. He became more generous, more outgoing, more temperamental and emotional, and utterly unafraid of the camp, although he had doubts about the Europeans. He begged to sleep at the camp with his friends, and I felt all the comparative luxuries I had to offer at home in the caravan were nothing compared to the warmth and companionship he found there. He gave away all his toys and shoes, and received little trinkets, stones and feathers in exchange (Hamilton 1981, p. 12).

Hamilton went on to write a comprehensive account of what she had learned from her Anbarra friends about how babies and children were treated at different stages of development.

She found that because of the way they were held, they developed better control of their heads and ability to look around them within a few weeks of birth than European babies whose heads were always supported (Hamilton 1981, p. 30). The Anbarra babies were also 'fed at any time …

whenever they cry, but not only then'. They were 'always in physical contact with others' (p.31) and received 'much more sensory stimulus from the environment, as well as more physical stimulus from other people' (p.31-32) than non-Indigenous babies.

Hamilton commented that: 'European babies from their earliest days are encouraged into a routine of feeding and sleeping', while Anbarra babies ate and slept irregularly, according to the patterns of life going on around them. She noticed they were not allowed to go hungry and compared it with the way non-Indigenous children in the 1960s and 1970s were expected to put up with feelings of hunger and not eat between regular meals (Hamilton 1981, p. 32-33).

Between eighteen months and five years, 'a great many children are to be found alone or exclusively in company with other children away from immediate adult supervision' (Hamilton 1981, p. 85). Hamilton concluded that during this second period of a child's life, often after a new baby had arrived, a child was 'expected to adapt rapidly to new circumstances, to accept the peer group as the most significant force in its daily life, and to look to other children rather than mother or father for support and learning experiences'.

Although parents remained 'indulgent of children's demands, especially demands for food' they made 'no effort to anticipate needs or structure the children's wants in any way'. In the meantime, the children learned 'to assert themselves, sometimes with physical aggression'. They were rarely punished physically by older people, although 'use of stereotyped threat gestures' were common and used with 'less and less effect as the child grows older' (Hamilton 1981, p. 100).

Hamilton also felt that adults expected 'children to learn what they needed to know' naturally, in the context of events going on around them (p.100). She noticed that: 'Children are free to attend, and to some extent participate in, virtually all adult activities but they are not pushed to do so'. She also observed that: 'By the time they reach five they are physically graceful and skillful from constant running, throwing and swimming, and through the absence of cautions and warnings about physical danger they have learnt to feel entirely at home in the environment' (p.101). As the children grew older they became more independent still, even learning to find their own food.

Hamilton tried to understand what she had learned during her time in Maningrida. She suggested that:

> In the traditional environment the survival of each child is something to be contributed to, not by badgering it and bullying it into eating its peas or going to bed on time, but by listening to its own suggestions and obeying them. For the survival of a child is not something to be taken for granted; on the contrary, the growing to adulthood of each person is a miracle of sorts, for the precarious conditions of demography and medicine mean that people live constantly with death in their midst, not just the death of the old or the fighting men but the death of babies and children (Hamilton 1981, p. 129).

Since early death of babies and young children is still a far more common fact of life for Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory today than for non-Indigenous Australians, despite recent improvements to life expectancy, perhaps non-Indigenous people should not be surprised many traditional child socialisation practices and attitudes continue, even in urban and town environments.

A shift in Western theory is also taking place in the way children are perceived in the wider society. For more than a century now, Western ideas about children have been heavily influenced by the theories of Piaget (1896-1916). He regarded children as essentially incompetent until they had matured through a sequence of developmental stages. Early childhood specialists are now beginning to revise these views to put greater emphasis on what young children *can do*, rather than what they *cannot do* at certain ages. With this shift, there is also a growing respect for the autonomy and agency of children as young human beings living in the web of social relationships that make up their worlds.

This shift is in harmony with many of the attitudes Indigenous Australians have traditionally held, and is reflected in the resource manual entitled *You're in New Country* written for non-Indigenous early childhood professionals working in the Northern Territory. Much of what it says is also relevant to other non-Indigenous professionals in other situations. Readers are advised that:

> In remote communities, children are allowed greater levels of independence and often make their own decisions about a lot of things including where they go, who they will go with, when they want to eat and sleep. Adults respect their children's choices. These increased levels of independence will need to be reflected in the day-to-day operation of the [early childhood] service (Farmer & Fasoli 2011, p. 26).

Farmer & Fasoli also refer to Scougall (2008) who says:

> It has only been in relatively recent times that the value of Indigenous child-rearing practices has been recognized. In the not so distant past they were generally regarded [e.g. by Gray, et al 1994, p. 83-84] as 'lacking in discipline' relative to western norms. ... some child-rearing practices that were once viewed negatively by non-Aboriginal people can, in fact, be effective means to develop independence and emotional and physical resilience among Indigenous children, thereby enabling them to cope with the often harsh circumstances that they are likely to encounter later in life (Scougall 2008, p. 29-30).

Scougall in this case was referring to conclusions Malin et al (1996) made, arising from research with urban Indigenous families in South Australia. A recent collaborative, intercultural research project in the field of Early Childhood Education (Fasoli & Ford 2001) found that it was more important for non-Indigenous people to understand the cultural importance and nature of relationships between small children and caregivers and teachers, than to merely incorporate supposedly 'Aboriginal' activities into the timetable.

These research findings provide additional support for reviewing the methods we use to encourage students to attend school. We should at least try the experiment of talking directly to children and young people about the fact that all children in Australia have to go to school regularly, or be in training. We could perhaps ask the children what the schools and training institutions can do to support their decisions to try to attend more regularly.

Some of the strategies familiar to many non-Indigenous teachers, such as praising a child for good behaviour, may not have the expected effect. As Steven Harris noticed nearly 40 years ago at Milingimbi, 'verbal praise from parents or other adults' is unusual and young people do not learn 'to expect much praise'. Their 'actions, therefore, are not dependent on it' (Harris 1984, p. 37-38). Harris thought that not praising children too much might be part of the overall strategy of raising children to be independent and capable of deciding for themselves what they would do.

If it is necessary to follow up with less pleasant investigations or inquiries about absences from school, these should be undertaken quietly and patiently, well away from public view and with an Indigenous colleague who knows the family and who will have advice on the best way to deal with the situation to ensure accurate information is obtained before talking to the family. It is possible they may know something the school does not, for instance, that the child's mother may be ill, or

the child has been staying with relatives in another community, etc. Ceremonial obligations may also be involved in non-attendance. Enquiries about reasons for absences are always necessary prior to any discussions being held.

From discussion above, it follows that when attendance plans are being developed, even the youngest children can be treated as capable of making decisions and participating in talk about coming to school regularly. Harris (1984) argued that: 'conformity and independence are coupled' in the society he studied (p.34). He noticed that mutual dependence between members of a community was an important feature of Indigenous life in that community. Children often feel comfortable conforming with what is required, so long as they feel they have been allowed to make their own decisions about it. In fact, Harris considered that: 'This coexistence of a high degree of dependency and the unassailed right to behave independently, is one of the more noticeable features of ... life in that community' (Harris 1982, p. 34). Any plan for improved school attendance, whether a whole school approach or an individual approach, needs to involve Indigenous colleagues and community members, as long as those people are considered by the community to be culturally appropriate people to talk with, or for, the family of children who have been absent from school.

School attendance is also not just about coming to school. Very importantly, it's also about *staying there all day* to maximise involvement in all learning activities. This is not always acknowledged in attendance strategy documents and it may not be well understood by children and young people or their families. Again, Indigenous colleagues need to be consulted about the best way to convince children and young people to stay at the school until the last learning activity for the day has been completed.

This behavior is essential if children and young people are to develop the skills they need for coping with all the demands of Western-style schooling and, for that matter, with the demands of life in mainstream workplaces. Children may say that they would like to be a mechanic or a nurse or a teacher or work in a shop, but they need to learn from an early age that people in these and similar types of jobs have to stay at work all day if they want to be treated as equals to non-Indigenous people who do this kind of work.

In Chapter Five, we look at learning outcomes as measured by National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests. In their current state, NAPLAN and similar tests do not,

and cannot, adequately or fairly assess core learning outcomes of all children in Northern Territory schools, especially in remote and very remote regions, and especially those of the youngest children in those regions.

We have seen in this chapter that factors such as attendance are fundamentally important in the challenge of improving test outcomes. If we want Northern Territory students to achieve National Minimum Standards (NMS) on NAPLAN tests, we also need to know what level of English language proficiency is required to be able to read the tests and confidently answer the questions at each year level in which the tests are taken. This is important because the tests have been prepared for native standard English-speaking learners, not students who are still learning school English. Chapter Five looks more closely at this issue.

Chapter Five: NAPLAN in the Northern Territory

Did, done, does, and doing

In 2009, Year 5 students in every school in Australia were asked to select 'the word that correctly completes' the following sentence:

> Sam ------ his homework before he went to soccer training.
>
> did   done   does   doing

Large numbers of Australian children confidently and competently chose *done* instead of *did*. Like most of the children who chose *did*, the children who chose *done* also made their selection just because it felt right. Neither group of students needed to go to school to learn how to complete this sentence appropriately in their home dialect of English.

The problem, from an educational point of view, is that *did* is the expected form of the *simple past tense* in Standard Englishes across the world. Linguists refer to it as the *prescribed form*. In English-speaking countries, it is expected that the standard form will be used in teaching and learning at school.

Done is the expected form of the simple past tense in many non-standard varieties of English around the world. People who speak standard English often think that *non*-standard patterns of grammar are incorrect, or even inferior. Linguists know, however, that different ways of talking are useful in different situations and with different people. Linguists also know that many people can change the way they talk, depending on who they're talking to. This is an example of social and dialectal flexibility.

The problem is that we cannot necessarily expect that children who use non-standard English at home will notice by themselves that their teachers use words like *did*. They don't know, unless they're specifically taught, that they're expected to write *did* instead of *done* in sentences like the one in the NAPLAN test. Many teachers tell students they're wrong when they use non-standard grammar, without explaining why. All they need to say is that there are different ways of talking and that, when we do school tests, we're expected to write *did*, even though at home we might say *done*. Learners of all ages need focused practice in standard English because it not only helps them

get better marks at school, it may also help in later life with regard to employment. Some teachers make it easier for students, as we saw in Chapter Three, by talking about 'school English' and 'home English'.

The point is, that both the alternatives, *did* and *done*, reflect the ordinary everyday speech patterns of Australian people. Both are correct for their speakers. Many people switch between the two forms, depending on where they are and who they're speaking to. Only a moment's thought is necessary to remind us that statements like: *We been there plenty of times; I done it yesterday*; and: *They seen him in Darwin*, are common. Probably well over half the people living in the Northern Territory today use these non-standard grammatical patterns every day. The same people may use standard forms of English when they're at work.

Children who come to school saying *did* don't have to learn a new way for talking and writing for school. Children who say *done* at home have to learn a new set of grammatical patterns to add to the ones they already know. This issue of standard and non-standard patterns of grammar applies to many non-Indigenous people, as well as many, but not all, Indigenous people.

NAPLAN (National Assessment Plan Literacy and Numeracy) assessments come under the National Assessment Program (NAP) administered by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). ACARA insists that:

> NAPLAN is not a test of content. Instead, it tests skills in literacy and numeracy that are developed over time through the school curriculum (ACARA website: The Tests).

Certainly, competence in Standard Australian English (SAuE) does develop over time, but most native speakers of this dialect acquire its basic grammatical patterns *before* they start school. Their first efforts at learning to speak and understand other people are made in a home environment where standard patterns of grammar are frequently used. They learn standard English automatically, without having to think about it.

Young children who speak other languages (e.g. Walpiri, Greek, Kriol, or Indonesian) or other dialects (e.g. Aboriginal English or Malaysian English) often start learning standard English patterns *after* they come to school. They generally speak their own home language or dialect

fluently, just like native speakers of SAuE, but now they have to learn a new way of talking. This makes schoolwork more difficult for them than for children from homes where SAuE is the main form of communication.

When ACARA states that NAPLAN only assesses literacy and numeracy skills, we see a strange blindness to the fundamentally important fact that literacy and numeracy skills have to be *demonstrated in Standard Australian English*, not in the home languages or dialects the children speak fluently. No mention is made or attention paid to this reality of NAPLAN testing.

But by not keeping this basic fact in mind, the teaching and learning needs of the many children and young people throughout Australia who need to learn SAuE in order to be able to demonstrate their competence in literacy and numeracy, are made invisible to politicians, administrators, and classroom teachers. Because these needs are so often invisible, resources are not allocated for professional language teaching staff and language learning support materials.

Failing to provide appropriate teaching and support to *all* Australian children to ensure they have equal chances to achieve well at school is an equity issue. It is the proverbial *Elephant in the Room* which is ignored time after time in discussions about how to improve students' literacy and numeracy outcomes. It is that hulking thing lurking in the room but made invisible because no one wants to face up to the challenges of taking it seriously.

For example, in an otherwise excellent resource designed to help teachers and other school personnel understand how to interpret NAPLAN reports, NTDoE provides a *Data Analysis Guide* (NTDoE 2012b) which includes a discussion of the grammar test item quoted at the beginning of the chapter. With respect to the fact that many Northern Territory students chose *done* or *does*, instead of *did*, the writers comment that:

> The students' responses indicated that they had difficulty with the concept of verb tense and agreement. The teachers analysing this data would need to look for other similar errors across the test and follow up with questioning and explicit teaching of this concept (NTDoE 2012b, p. 20).

Technically, the first part of this statement is misleading in two ways. Firstly, native speakers of any language do not need concepts like 'verb tense' to be able to use their own language or dialect correctly. The concept embodied in this phrase is the kind of concept scientific linguists

and teachers use when talking about languages. The idea that verbs 'agree' with each other is also a linguistic concept. It is what we call a *metalinguistic* concept. Metalinguistic language is language used to talk about language.

Perhaps we might want to say that speakers of languages do have such concepts in an unconscious sense, but that's not the ordinary meaning of the word *concept*. Generally, when we think of someone having a concept, we mean they have a particular idea they're aware of having and can communicate to other people using specific words. Most people can't explain in a precise way why they use particular grammatical patterns, which is the reason why they resort to saying one way is 'right' and another way is 'wrong'.

The second way in which the statement above is misleading is that most students who picked *done* probably spoke non-standard English at home. Their choice shows that they *did not*, in fact, have any trouble with verb tense and agreement because *done*, in this case, is the appropriate form in their own dialect. The problem was only that they didn't realise they were being asked to complete the sentence in a way that wasn't normal and natural for them.

To get this test item right, non-standard speakers of English would have enough *metalinguistic awareness* to:

a) notice that a different dialect is used at school,

b) consciously remind themselves to use school English in the test, and

c) remember that *did* is the correct form to use, even though they would say *done* at home.

Metalinguistic awareness may sound rather challenging, but it's just paying *conscious* attention to language instead of using it naturally and automatically without thinking about it. Some ordinary forms of metalinguistic awareness are when we notice something funny about a particular word and make a joke about it, when we try to imitate someone else's accent, and when we think about the way we ourselves sound when we talk.

Small children who learn two languages from birth show metalinguistic awareness when they suddenly realise, for the first time, that they are talking in different ways to the different people in their lives. Up to that point they're not consciously aware they they're bilingual.

What about the students who chose *does* in the NAPLAN test? Here we again have a problem with the two verbs not agreeing with each other (not staying in the same tense), but the choice is understandable if we remember that standard English uses *does* for habitual activity, e.g. *Sam* does *his homework before he* goes *to soccer training*. Students who made this choice were probably thinking that Sam would regularly go to training. They were focusing on the beginning of the sentence and not paying enough attention to the clue at the end, *went*, which requires *did* for verb agreement across the sentence as a whole. To avoid this mistake in future tests, we would remind students to remember to look at all parts of the sentence before making their choice.

It's certainly appropriate to remind teachers, as DoE's *Data Analysis Guide* does, that they should look for error patterns and use them as an evidence-base for future teaching. *Error analysis* of this kind is a fundamental part of effective language teaching. But teachers would find it much easier to do linguistic error analysis and explain to their students why different forms of verbs are used in different contexts, if they already knew something about the different dialects of English they were dealing with, and the processes involved in learning a new language or dialect. Teachers need good levels of metalinguistic awareness and linguistic understanding to identify linguistic problems and explain them in language students can relate to.

We have explained the *did/done* issue from the point of view of speakers of non-standard English, whether or not these children are Indigenous Australians. Standard and non-standard dialects overlap in many respects. For instance, many of the same vocabulary items, like *soccer*, *homework* and *training* are the same, as are other parts of the grammar e.g. *went* as the simple past tense of *go*.

The problem is different for students who are learning English as an *additional* language. These students might select *done* even *doing* instead of *did* because they're in an early stage of acquiring a new set of grammatical rules. In their case, the problem is a *developmental* problem, not a matter of differences in dialects.

Government resources and policies to support teachers of EAL/D learners

ACARA knows that for EAL/D learners: 'Schools and state and territory education authorities already have in place policy and strategies to support teachers to ensure these students reach their

full potential' (ACARA 2012a, p. 1). In many schools around Australia, EAL/D specialist teachers help classroom teachers prepare learning programs for learners who are still acquiring Standard Australian English.

It's interesting that these same teaching strategies can also help many children who speak SAuE at home. This is because they make aspects of language use explicit which are not generally explained by mainstream teachers. EAL/D support staff often also work alongside classroom teachers to support learners who need extra help with their English during lessons in the different subject areas. Where all, or most, of the learners are still learning how to use standard English for schooling, the most efficient strategy is for the classroom teachers themselves to be a qualified EAL/D teachers.

The fact that ACARA makes policies for *all* linguistically and culturally diverse Australian students without discrimination is good. It means that Indigenous students are not singled out as if their language learning needs were significantly different from those of other students who also need specialized assistance to learn English for school-based learning.

Nevertheless, as discussed in previous chapters, students in remote communities *are* different from migrant and refugee students in mainstream schools in some important ways. Many of them are not, for instance, immersed in a world of SAuE in their day-to-day lives, as migrant children generally are at school. Most have few chances to meet or play with native standard English-speaking children, especially in the very remote communities. And most teachers in mainstream schools model standard ways of using English consistently, whereas there can be a tendency to slip into local ways of talking in very remote schools. If this happens, students' opportunities to hear how English is used in towns and cities become even more limited.

It is clear that Indigenous children and young people have exactly the same right as any migrant child to receive the specialised teaching and support required to bring them to the same level of understanding and ability to use English as their native standard English counterparts. But as we emphasized in previous chapters, research in Australia and overseas shows that, even with principled EAL/D teaching from the very first years of schooling, the catch-up time can be up to five to seven years.

It is obvious from the ACARA documents, that the Australian Government understands teachers need to be properly prepared to use the evidence-based EAL/D strategies developed internationally.

To reiterate, these techniques enable the *language of learning* (English) to be taught *through* the content of each learning area using a *task-based* approach. Ideally, English language learners should be able to keep up with their native English-speaking peers in terms of age-appropriate content, even while they are still learning to talk and write about it in a proficient way.

Unfortunately, as also emphasised previously, many teachers appointed to Northern Territory schools do not receive the benefits of the policies and strategies that ACARA assumes are available to support them when they first arrive. Financial cutbacks may often be the foundation of this problematic lack of policy enactment at the local level.

If they have access to appropriate resources and professional support, teachers without EAL/D qualifications can improve their ability to understand and help their students learn standard English by using the *English Language Learning Progression* maps or charts provided in each state and territory and by ACARA. Examples include: (ACARA 2011a), (NTDET 2009a, b, & c) and (WADET 2010a, b, c, & d).

These maps show teachers what to look for in the four *Language Modes* of *Listening, Speaking, Reading/Viewing*, and *Writing*. Descriptions of what typical learners at each phase of language learning can do in each of these modes are provided to assist teachers to identify where each of the learners is on the *developmental continuum* described in the maps.

The description of each developmental phase and level is accompanied by indicators and examples to help teachers learn what to look for as they observe the students and monitor their progress in the different learning areas. Guidance is also given about *teaching considerations* relevant to the learners' *stages of development* and *levels of proficiency*. Annotated work samples are provided at age-appropriate levels to show how to identify language-related evidence of the students' stages of language learning. Some guidance is also given about the linguistic and cultural demands of the different curriculum areas. As we will see later in this chapter, with specific reference to mathematics, these demands are often invisible to classroom teachers who are native speakers of SAuE.

As the writers of the Western Australian Progress Map explain, developmental mistakes must not be confused with dialect differences. The reason for this is that different approaches to teaching are required when the source of the error is different.

> Varieties of English should not be confused with the different developmental stages which a learner undergoes in the process of mastering English. Sometimes learners' linguistic forms show evidence of maturational constraints. For example, irregular verb forms (e.g. went, ran) and complex modal verb structures (e.g. should have been) are generally acquired only over time and during a particular stage of development. Sometimes learners' first language may affect their mastery of a second language or dialect. These learners demonstrate interlanguage forms which reflect the form and structure of their first language. Over time, evidence of interlanguage reduces as mastery of English increases and as each learner progresses. The forms of English used more closely resemble the [Standard Australian English] commonly used in schooling contexts (Western Australian Department of Education and Training, 2010a, p. 11).

An *interlanguage* is a kind of in-between language specific to a particular learner. It develops and changes over time as learners slowly add a new language to their existing home language/s. It may include grammatical patterns similar to those in the learner's earlier languages. Eventually, it is replaced by an internalised version of English that's more and more like the versions native speakers have in their brains. At this stage, learners may become fully bilingual or multilingual and able to use their new language at a level of general competence equivalent to that of native speakers.

We see examples of this level of proficiency when it's difficult or impossible to tell something has been written by a person who learned English as an additional language. That same person may, however, have a noticeably different accent when speaking. This is because pronunciation habits from our first languages often carry over into later languages, especially if we did our language learning as teenagers or adults.

Psycholinguistic research has shown that trying to force language learners to use grammatical patterns they are not yet developmentally ready to acquire can be a waste of time. It's better to support the learning at the stage it's at and build on that learning steadily and systematically over time. Teachers whose training included courses in Applied Linguistics, or who have an EAL/D qualification, are more likely to be aware of developmental differences than regular classroom

teachers who can benefit from the support of trained EAL/D support staff to assist them develop the metalinguistic awareness and technical linguistic knowledge they need to support and guide students' English language learning.

The *Data Analysis Guide* provides many useful suggestions to help teachers use the assessment data provided by NAPLAN to inform their teaching. Unfortunately, with the very large Elephant in the Room, no specific guidance is provided with respect to errors that are in all probability related to the EAL/D background of the students. In fact, the word *English* only occurs once in the document, in a brief reference to the NAPLAN statistical category *Language Background Other than English*. No attention is given to the fact that NAPLAN tests have been developed for, and standardised on, populations of predominantly native English-speaking students.

We suggest that, while there are many reasons why Northern Territory students achieve at much lower levels than students in the rest of Australia, making sure they receive teaching which takes their language and dialect backgrounds into account in a principled way is the biggest challenge currently facing educators in the Northern Territory today.

NTDoE itself emphasises that: 'Multilingual learners are a diverse cohort comprising 40% of the students in the Northern Territory.' (NTDoE 2012a) In the *Teaching Multilingual Learners Program* item on the departmental website, it states that: 'Education for multilingual learners through ESL methodology is core business for the NT Department of Education.' The more modern term *EAL/D* is used in other Northern Territory documents. As we explained in Chapter Two, SAuE is not a *second* language or dialect for many migrant and Indigenous learners; it may be their third or even their fourth. English should also never be regarded as a *foreign* language for children born in this country. Ability to use standard English competently and confidently is their birthright, even where it is an additional language or dialect, added to their existing range of language competencies when they start school.

NTDoE provides a separate website about Indigenous learners. On this website the national *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010-2014)* is mentioned. The plan provides 'a road map for closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners'. Six priority areas are listed as the ones 'that evidence shows will have the most impact on closing the gap'. These are: Readiness for school; Engagement and connections;

Attendance; Literacy and Numeracy; Leadership, Quality teaching and workforce development; and Pathways to real post-school options. Focus schools 'with the greatest need and where efforts should be focused' have been identified in the Northern Territory.

Our Elephant in the Room is back again in these statements about urgent priorities for Closing the Gap in Indigenous education. Ability to use Standard Australian English confidently and proficiently is relevant to every element of this roadmap, but language factors are not mentioned. To acknowledge the presence of our elephant, we might ask:

- Where is the focus on support for Indigenous students who are still learning standard English ?

- Where is the specific language support for young Indigenous children first entering school fluent in their home languages, but with no English at all?

- Is EAL/D support and respect for home languages a factor in whether or not children and young people can, or want to, engage with and make connections with what's offered at school?

- Is the fact that teachers and learners are so often unable to communicate effectively with each other a factor that might be relevant to closing the gap on attendance statistics?

- Is systematic, evidence-based, targeted, task-based and language-focused teaching not relevant to acquiring the English language skills necessary for taking literacy and numeracy tests written in Standard Australian English?

- Is specific, focused, teaching about relevant rhetorical culture-specific strategies and vocabulary not relevant to developing the skills to write a text in standard English which will persuade one's readers of a particular point of view? (This is required to demonstrate proficiency at all year levels in NAPLAN writing.) • Is awareness of, and respect for, the students' home languages not relevant to leadership, quality teaching and development of teaching and administration staff?

- Are pathways to real jobs after school not heavily dependent on whether young adults can confidently and competently communicate with non-Indigenous people in Standard Australian English?

Indigenous students' language learning needs can be addressed only when they are acknowledged and placed front and centre in policy. The department states that it 'undertakes to provide programs to enable multilingual learners to become proficient in Standard Australian English' so that they can 'access the content and learning processes in the delivered curriculum.' This is an admission that, without those special programs, multilingual learners often have difficulty accessing content and learning processes delivered through SAuE. We might ask how evident those programs are in every school and classroom where EAL/D learners are enrolled?

The statement also highlights once again the strange contradiction represented by the fact that the DoE *Data Analysis Guide* designed to help teachers interpret NAPLAN data never once mentions the language learning needs of those four out of every ten Northern Territory students who are multilingual.

The Multilingual Learners website (NTDoE 2012a) states that teachers can contact *Regional Teaching Multilingual Learners (TML) Project Officers* for extra help, but in October 2013 it was reported that 71 jobs were to be cut and that these would 'include class support roles, such as ESL teachers and behavioural support staff' (James 2013).

In the light of *Closing the Gap* commitments to Indigenous education, language focussed support would appear to be fundamental. Teachers in the Northern Territory need *more*, not *less*, support in their classrooms and EAL/D children and young people, whether of Indigenous or immigrant background, have the right to be provided with the specialised teaching they need to keep up with their native standard English-speaking peers. At the national level, as we saw at the beginning of this section, ACARA assumes such support is provided in every state and territory in Australia where it is needed.

Fully qualified EAL/D specialist teachers are appointed to Intensive Language Centres to cater for newly arrived immigrant and refugee students. Given that many Indigenous students, especially in the early years, also need intensive instruction in SAuE, it is an equity issue that they are not routinely given the same kind of support.

Allocating funds to support classroom teachers to teach effectively in the EAL/D situations found in so many Northern Territory schools may be less expensive in the long run than having to recruit new teachers to replace discouraged teachers who resign.

In the next part of this chapter, we take a step back to find out more about NAPLAN and nationwide assessment in Australia.

The National Assessment Program (NAP)

As mentioned briefly earlier in this chapter, *The National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) tests are part of the *National Assessment Program* (NAP) implemented across all Australia states and territories. The NAP is an Australian Government program

administered by ACARA, which was set up under the direction of the *Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs* (MCEECDYA) in 2009. As well as developing the national assessment program, ACARA is also responsible for developing the Australian Curriculum. The single curriculum, which covers Foundation (Transition) to Year 10, is meant to make it easier for families and teachers when they move from state to state.

Prior to establishing ACARA, the Australian Government developed a set of national *Statements of Learning* for core learning areas covering Years K-12. These were endorsed and accepted by all states and territories in 2008.

The Curriculum Frameworks arising from these statements, and which operated at state level, have now been phased out or are being revised to ensure they fit the national guidelines. From 2009, ACARA began to develop the new National Curriculum documents now gradually being implemented throughout Australia. Northern Territory schools commenced using the new English and Mathematics curriculums in 2012, and teachers and schools could apply to be part of the 2012 Australian Curriculum Pilot for Science and History from Transition to Year 10.

Northern Territory teachers are also involved in another pilot 'that explores strategies for using the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) in conjunction with the Australian Curriculum' (NTDET 2012a). The Northern Territory is important as a trial site because of the great range of differences in home language backgrounds of Indigenous and migrant students in many schools. Teachers who have high levels of awareness and understanding about how to take home language backgrounds into account when developing effective teaching strategies will be able to provide valuable feedback to ACARA about how appropriate the new curriculum is for schools with high levels of cultural diversity.

The Australian Curriculum, when and if it is fully implemented, will also be a great help in the Northern Territory because of unusually high levels of mobility of its population, including school students and their teachers. With one curriculum throughout Australia, teachers will always be familiar with what is required in any school in the country. Students who move between states, or between private and public educational sectors, will not be disadvantaged in terms of level of difficulty and general content of learning, although the subject matter may be adapted to make it specifically relevant to the world the learners in each situation know best.

NAPLAN assesses what has been identified as *essential learning outcomes* in: Literacy, Numeracy, Science Literacy, Civics and Citizenship, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy. The Literacy category has tests in four different domains: Reading, Persuasive Writing, Spelling and Grammar, and Punctuation). The ACARA website states that: 'Currently, NAPLAN tests reflect state and territory curricula via the Statements of Learning for English and Mathematics.' It also states that: 'Once the Australian Curriculum is finalised and implemented across the nation, ACARA will work with state, territory and federal governments and other stakeholders to develop assessment frameworks which reflect and measure achievement against the Australian Curriculum.' The aim is to find out how well Australian children are achieving in each learning area. This is done by testing children in all states and territories at the same time, using the same tests.

The first NAPLAN tests were held nationwide in 2008. Each year over one million students do NAPLAN assessments in May. The results to date have not been published until October in preliminary form, too late for them to be of much use to teachers as evidence in relation to the students they have in that year. Fully detailed data is not published until either the end of the year of testing, or early the following year. Again, this is far too late to be of practical assistance to classroom teachers.

Literacy and Numeracy tests are taken in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, which means that individual students only do the tests every second year. The other learning areas are surveyed every three years in a random sample of schools across Australia. Literacy and Numeracy assessment aims to provide a *comprehensive understanding* of how well individual students, schools, states and education sectors are performing and is reported at the *MySchools* website. Assessment in the other learning areas aims to provide *snapshots* of student performance across Australia.

The results each year can be compared with previous years to see whether there are any significant differences. The actual scores of the students (the *raw scores*) are scaled using a technical procedure to provide average scores (the *mean scale scores*) so that they can be compared from year to year, even though the questions on the test papers are different each time. Sometimes the results seem to show important changes, but in most cases these are not significant from a statistical point of view.

For instance, the Preliminary Report for 2013 reveals there was only one test, in one state, where the average achievement was substantially above and statistically different from 2008 (the first year

of NAPLAN assessments). This was the Year 3 Grammar and Punctuation section of the NAPLAN Literacy assessment in Queensland. There were no differences at this level of significance between 2008 and 2013 in any other state on any of the other tests, or between 2012 and 2013 on any of the tests.

By far the majority of state-level average achievement scores in all NAPLAN tests in 2013, according to ACARA (2013b), were essentially the same as in 2008 and 2012. In just a few cases, average achievement levels were a little better, but not hugely so from a statistical point of view. This general pattern includes the Northern Territory, although it was good to see a small, yet significant, improvement in Year 3 Reading, compared with 2008 and 2012. There was also a small improvement in Year 3 Spelling, compared with 2008, and a small improvement in Year 5 Reading, compared with both 2008 and 2012. These results are encouraging, although they stem from a very low base, compared with the other states and territories, and, overall, the Northern Territory average achievement scores are much lower than in any other state or territory. The primary reason for this is that so many students are unable to do the tests. It must be remembered, however, that even the average scores of non-Indigenous students in the Northern Territory tend to be lower than the average scores of non-Indigenous students in other parts of Australia.

Reasons for nationwide assessments in Australian schools

It might be asked why nationwide assessment was introduced in the first place. The reasons are given by the ACARA as follows:

> In a world where people are increasingly mobile, the majority of today's students, over their lifetimes, can be expected to live and work in a range of places in Australia and even overseas. It is important that there be consistent and well understood measures of student achievement around the country, and that the outcomes of these assessments be used to inform future policy development, resource allocation, curriculum planning and where necessary intervention programs. National assessments provide useful nationally comparable evidence about student achievement. By participating in these assessments schools benefit not only their own students, but also the students in every state and territory (ACARA 2011b).

As we saw in Chapter One, Indigenous young people in the Northern Territory are generally very mobile. Like other young people around Australia, they often prefer to live in, or near, towns and cities where mainstream education skills are required for employment and for full participation in urban lifestyles. Their families and communities need to know they will have the same life opportunities as non-Indigenous young people.

ACARA argues that NAPLAN assessments are not assessments of *content* (in other words, subject matter) but only of the *general knowledge and skills* required to progress successfully through school. For instance, Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer of the *Australian Council for Educational Research* (ACER) and consultant to NTDECS in 2011, correctly argued that: 'Clearly, the role of school education is much broader than the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills, but these are foundational skills on which almost all other school learning is based' (Masters 2011, p. 3).

Taking a few examples from the test, we *do* need to know that all Australian children and young people, regardless of their cultural backgrounds:

- know the values of coins and notes and how to combine them,

- can make number and space calculations that are appropriate for their age and stage of development

- can read and understand written and multimedia information relevant to their needs and interests, and

- can write and create multimedia texts that allow them to express their ideas and help them develop skills for adult life.

These essential competencies are examples of some of the skills assessed by NAPLAN numeracy and literacy tests. Being able to do these kinds of things competently and confidently gives young people more chances in life, whether they come from Indigenous or non-Indigenous families but, as discussed earlier, these competencies need to be demonstrated in standard English for students to reach National Minimum Standards on the assessments. As we pointed out above, however, the tests were developed for children and young people who can already understand, speak and write SAuE, not students who are still learning it. As we will discuss in more detail below, we do not know what level of proficiency an English language learner needs to tackle NAPLAN tests with a reasonable chance of success. Research is urgently needed in this area.

Some people correctly argue that tests such as NAPLAN measure only a restricted set of outcomes and do not assess the total value of a child's educational experiences in a holistic way. This is true, but the two kinds of assessment can, and must, be used together.

Reports on students' achievements in NAPLAN tests are sent home to families. As an ACARA leaflet for parents explains: 'The report is one aspect of the school's assessment and reporting process,

and does not replace the extensive, ongoing assessments made by teachers about each student's performance' (ACARA 2010, p. 2). These include holistic evaluation of students' progress, including classroom observation of how they work and interact with others and normal ongoing monitoring of all kinds. For EAL/D learners it can, and should, also include ongoing monitoring of children's level of standard English development, using the various Progress Maps available in each state and territory.

Learners can be helped to build up the knowledge and skills for the national tests through learning activities that are interesting and varied. Their teachers can also extend children's learning in other imaginative ways to suit particular life situations and interests in different communities. Nationwide assessment of school-based learning outcomes has become a fact of life, but the Australian Government does insist that other assessment methods should also be used to find out how students' learning and personal development are progressing, and what specific needs they might have for additional support.

The proportion of Indigenous students who reach National Minimum Standards (NMS) on NAPLAN tests is lower than that of non-Indigenous students, especially in the Northern Territory. This has been of great concern and was one of the factors leading to *Closing the Gap* policy development. In the 2011 NTER Evaluation report, it was emphasised that when it comes to schools located in the 'prescribed areas', the *majority* of students were unable meet NMS (NTER 2011, p. 30), a situation which, as we will see in more detail below, has not changed very much since 2008.

In a press release in 2011, the then Northern Territory Minister for Education argued strongly and consistently with other public announcements as well that improved school attendance was the key to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes. While it may be true, as we discussed in Chapter Four, that regular school attendance is needed for getting the full benefits of school, it is not the only factor in success. Indeed, some recent research has shown that school attendance did not appear to be strongly related to scores on NAPLAN tests.

The fact that most children living in remote or very remote areas don't speak SAuE at home and need language-focused teaching using EAL/D techniques was not mentioned by the Minister who said that Masters had shown that 'our schools are doing a good job and have sound systems in place to improve rates of literacy, numeracy and attendance' (NT Government 2011, p. 2).

What Masters did, in fact, say with regard to NAPLAN in the report mentioned by the Minister, was that the 'strategies and values underpinning [NTDET's 2010] *Prioritising Literacy and Numeracy* strategy are strongly in line with the observations made in Section 1 of [his own] report and with existing research findings relating to effective teaching and effective system and school leadership practices' (Masters 2011, p. 15-16).

Masters also said that, although those strategies had developed 'a strong foundation for strategic action, the strategic plan does not then develop 'strategies' (by name), but instead proposes a set of 'elements' or 'key actions/deliverables'.' (p.16). It was not yet adequate, in other words, to ensure there would be follow-through so that improvements would actually happen.

Masters recommended that the education system itself focus first on five key strategies (p.17), including clarifying 'what teachers needed to know and be able to do' with regard to improving literacy and numeracy:

> Develop clear specifications of what teachers need to know and be able to do to support students' literacy and numeracy learning. These specifications may be different for different teacher roles and responsibilities. They should include:
>
> - personal literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills
>
> - knowledge and skills in identifying student learning needs
>
> - pedagogical content knowledge in literacy and numeracy
>
> - cultural knowledge and skills in embedding Indigenous perspectives
>
> - skills in teaching English to second/foreign language learners
>
> - skills in teaching oral language development (early years teachers)
>
> (Masters 2011a, p. 17)

It's clear here that Masters was very well aware that all teachers in the Northern Territory require EAL/D teaching skills. In fact he recommended that 'a search for new, 'breakthrough' strategies to increase the English language skills and school readiness levels of young Indigenous children' should be undertaken (p.40). We might ask now: Where is the attention to those parts of Master's report that related to the need for teachers to have high literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills, and the knowledge and skills to diagnose the nature of learners' needs when SAuE is an additional language or dialect for them?

The NTDET document entitled: *Elements and Key Actions/Deliverables from Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* emphasises that: 'It is essential that school leaders and teachers know the difference between literacy and English language competence' (Appendix to Masters 2011, p. 44). The Minister's statement above about NAPLAN results seems to suggest precisely this confusion — literacy may indeed improve if children attend school every day, but they also need to learn *the language* in which they're supposed to become literate.

Learning to read and write (literacy) can be done in any language. It's easier to become literate in the language you already speak, but much more difficult in an unfamiliar language, unless you're already literate. Most Indigenous students are not already literate in their own languages or dialects, so their challenge is much greater than the Minister realised in 2011. Acquiring literacy is also easier in languages with straightforward spelling systems like Italian or Indigenous Australian languages.

Because writing is relatively new to Indigenous languages, their *orthographies* (writing and spelling conventions) are regular and predictable, unlike English which has borrowed spelling patterns from several different European languages. Wigglesworth, Simpson & Loakes (2011) are three linguists who take a scientific approach to analysing NAPLAN test examples. They express their frustration that some people confuse *learning to read* with *learning a new language*. The two processes are completely different in psycholinguistic terms.

Their article is a close linguistic analysis of NAPLAN sample papers available on the web. They show in detail where the language and content of the tests would present challenges to children still learning standard English. These authors also show how, from the point of view of linguistics, some test items regarded by the test-makers as more difficult and suitable for older learners are, in fact, easier from a language-learning point of view than some of the items intended for younger children. They also found that some elements that speakers of standard English think are easy, can be difficult for children from other language backgrounds. For instance, they explain that:

> A major problem with NAPLAN is that it does not measure achievement relative to starting point. Mastery of a sentence like 'She likes cats' is trivial for a first language speaker of English, but it is an achievement for a child whose first language is Kriol, because they will have had to learn the difference between he/she, the subject-verb agreement of likes, and the plural of cats, all features which are not present in Kriol (Wigglesworth et al. 2011, p. 322).

This article highlights a range of different problems in the sample materials, all related to the fact that the tests have not been designed to assess learners of SAuE.

Purdie et al. (2011) also focus on home languages and their relevance to test results in a national longitudinal study of Indigenous children's literacy and numeracy. This Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) study was designed to track development in literacy and numeracy throughout the primary school years. Tests designed for native standard English speakers were given to 287 Indigenous children over four years. When the results were analysed, a gap between the achievements of non-Indigenous and Indigenous children in the same schools and across the schools was found. Factors associated with the levels of achievements on the tests were explored.

Although *Language Spoken at Home* was found to be statistically relevant to the children's results, in that speakers of standard English generally did better than non SAuE speakers, this factor was not given any more attention than other factors such as absenteeism, attentiveness and parental occupation, which were also found to be significant. Although further longitudinal studies were recommended, the possibility of making home language a focus of future ACER research and classroom teaching was not mentioned in this report.

Although it may seem surprising that nationwide tests designed to test literacy and numeracy would not take into account that many of the children taking the tests are still learning school English, this is not a mistake EAL/D specialists make in the classroom. Their training helps them to assess and monitor how well learners are developing with regard to SAuE. The methods they use can also be used for monitoring and assessing how well the children are learning content material in the various subject areas.

Although ACARA designs NAPLAN assessments essentially for native standard English-speaking students, their documents show they are certainly aware of the range of student diversity in the school-aged population. More importantly, ACARA makes it clear that EAL/D support and strategies should be available to all students who need them.

ACARA's views about student diversity

The Australian Government is aware that adjustments to the curriculum are required for specific groups of learners to cater for their diverse needs, e.g. students with disability, gifted and talented students, and EAL/D students.

ACARA emphasises, however, that after identifying the content in each learning area appropriate for the students' age group, 'dignified teaching and learning programs that will challenge and engage all students' must be planned. This means that: 'Age-equivalent content that is meaningful and respects students' individual needs, strengths and interests' must be used as the vehicle for progressing through the curriculum while, at the same time, developing literacy, numeracy and age-appropriate learning skills (ACARA 2013a, p.7).

It is not appropriate, in other words, to offer watered-down content to Indigenous learners who come to school with low levels of literacy or numeracy. The issues and problems addressed in each of the learning areas must be ones that are meaningful, important and relevant to the students' ages and stage in life, regardless of their current competence to use standard English for literacy and numeracy. Literacy and numeracy skills can be developed by engaging their interest in those genuine concerns that affect their day-to-day lives in the worlds they know best.

In line with these principles, ACARA also emphasises that:

> All students are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning programs drawn from a challenging curriculum that addresses their individual learning needs. Teachers will use the Australian Curriculum to develop teaching and learning programs that build on students' interests, strengths, goals and learning needs, and address the cognitive, affective, physical, social and aesthetic needs of all students (ACARA 2013a, p. 4).

A range of instructional adjustments are recommended in the case of EAL/D learners. Some examples include: 'modeling and demonstrating skills, knowledge and cognitive strategies', 'scaffolding student learning through guided practice and support', 'identifying key vocabulary for explicit instruction' and 'providing opportunities for students to think aloud (verbalisation)' as they work (ACARA 2013a, p. 7).

These are all good strategies which can be used in a task-based approach to teaching EAL/D students, regardless of their ages. When staff have the training to undertake a needs-based and place-based evaluation of their particular learning site, as discussed in Chapter Three, a whole school approach can be used to identify and develop a strategic plan to improve English language skills, and with them, literacy and numeracy skills across all the learning areas. (See Königsberg et al 2012)

To teach subject-specific and culture-specific concepts it is necessary to focus in a planned and systematic way on the vocabulary items, grammatical patterns, and specific styles of using English in each learning area. For instance, we use English differently when talking about a novel or poem than when making a scientific report. It's often also useful for learners to use their own languages or dialects to clarify difficult or unfamiliar concepts and develop new ideas before trying to express them in school English. As discussed in Chapter Four, allowing less confident and competent Indigenous students to work collaboratively with their more competent peers can also be incorporated as a strategy in a coherent strategic plan to improve student learning.

ACARA recognises that students who are still learning English as an additional language or dialect are at risk of leaving school without achieving their potential because they have to acquire the *language of learning* as well the *subject matter* and the *skills* for each learning area. This is huge challenge compared with the challenge faced by children and young people who have been speaking standard English all their lives. In this context, ACARA emphasises again that:

> EAL/D learners enter Australian schools at different ages and at different stages of English language learning and have various educational backgrounds in their first languages. For some, school is the only place they use English (ACARA 2012a, p. 1).

This is certainly true of many learners in the Northern Territory, especially children and young people who only attend school now and then, missing much of the learning program each year. When it comes to continuity of learning experiences, many of these students are in the same kind of educational situation as refugee children who have experienced traumatic episodes in their lives, or have been unable to attend school because of war or political conflict in their home countries.

Limited Literacy Language Learners

Refugee children and young people who have spent large parts of their lives out of school often have limited literacy, or no literacy at all in their own languages, even if they are quite mature in other respects. These learners are described in EAL/D documents as the *Beginning English: Limited Literacy Background* group. It makes sense to apply this description also to those Indigenous children in remote communities who have not been consistently enrolled in schools, or who have not attended school regularly. ACARA describes the characteristics of these learners as follows:

> These students are learning English for the first time, with little or no foundation in continuous, formal education. They can speak one or more languages/dialects other than English, but have little or no experience with print literacy in their first language. Some students may be unfamiliar with books, needing

explicit teaching to understand that the print marks on the page symbolise meaning. In a familiar learning environment, they will begin to engage with simple curriculum demands, *particularly with support from a speaker of their first language*, and targeted contextual scaffolds (e.g. visuals and gestures). Learning a language requires constant focus and attention, and students will tire easily and may experience a high level of frustration. High levels of explicit teaching are required throughout the day both from the specialist teacher and the classroom teacher. These students may be capable of understanding the content of the curriculum for their year level. However, as they are new to learning in and about English, they will *find it difficult to show achievement as described in the achievement standards for their year level, as these rely heavily on English language proficiency to convey content knowledge and understandings* (ACARA 2011a, p. 18, our emphasis).

It is again clear from this statement that ACARA accepts that learners with limited literacy backgrounds in the beginning stage of English language learning need specialist support. So, again, we can ask why this support is not routinely provided in the Northern Territory, if the Australian and Northern Territory Governments are sincere about Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learning outcomes in Northern Territory schools.

ACARA EAL/D Teacher Resource

The ACARA statement quoted above comes from the *English as an Additional Language or Dialect: Teacher Resource* (ACARA 2011a), developed for use with the Australian Curriculum, and designed for classroom teachers and EAL/D specialists to use in assessing and monitoring the language learning development of their students.

This resource includes the ACARA *Learning Progression* chart (or map) showing how English language proficiency develops over time in each of the language modes of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Viewing, and Writing.

Learning progressions such as these are based on psycholinguistic and educational linguistic research into predictable developmental paths taken by learners when acquiring standard English as an additional language. Descriptions of what learners know and can do at each phase (or stage) are provided so that teachers can locate each learner on the developmental continuum.

Examples of vocabulary items, listening behavior, pronunciation problems, oral and written communication skills, and ability to control specific grammatical patterns, are provided to illustrate the general statements. This information helps teachers focus on the data required to identify

their students' specific language learning needs. Learning tasks are then developed to specifically address those needs, while at the same time providing normal age-appropriate learning content in each subject area.

Differences between languages and writing systems are pointed out (ACARA 2011a, p.84). The socially constructed and culture-specific ways that spoken and written texts are put together are mentioned (p.85). Some of the specific techniques and language elements used by standard English speakers, often unconsciously, to make what they say and write hang together in a cohesive way are listed (p.85), and metalinguistic terms like *tense, syntax,* etc. are briefly explained to give teachers a starting point for learning how to identify features of their students' spoken and written language which show their developmental stage.

A particularly interesting piece of advice is given with respect to students who cannot meet age-related benchmarks because of their current stage of English language development. ACARA explains that:

> EAL/D students who do not meet age-related benchmarks when assessed against learning area achievement standards are not necessarily 'underperforming', but rather they are achieving at levels commensurate with their phase of English language learning. Assessment strategies that rely less on language and more on content knowledge can be used to assess EAL/D students against the achievement standards in each learning area. To enable students to demonstrate their understanding of learning area content, assessment tasks may need to be adapted to cater for their level of English [SAuE] proficiency. For example, allowing a Beginning EAL/D student to demonstrate understanding of a scientific concept through a diagram, or comprehension of a narrative through illustrations (ACARA 2011a, p. 7).

The EAL/D *Learning Progression* was successfully trialed in New South Wales in 2012 in a major statistical study involving 944 EAL/D students and 97 specialist and classroom teachers 'from 56 schools, including primary, secondary, and central [schools that cater for students from Kindergarten to Year 12] as well as Intensive English centres.' The schools were mostly in 'metropolitan regions with a few from provincial areas' (NSWDEC 2013, p. ii-iii).

The trial considered three research questions:

1. Can teachers with a diversity of experiences and expertise in ESL education, assess each of the four language modes consistently using the EAL/D Learning Progression, across a broad range of EAL/D students?

2. Is there sufficient evidence to support the intended interpretations and uses of teachers' EAL/D Learning Progression phase assessments?

3. What are the successful elements and useful resources identified by teachers from the trial process? (NSWDEC 2013, p. ii)

The finding in relation to the first research question was that: 'on the whole, the *EAL/D Learning Progression* enabled teachers to make consistent judgments of English language proficiency across the four language modes (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)' and that they could generally use the learning map to 'distinguish between the four phases [Beginning, Emerging, Developing and Consolidating English] within each mode and between each of the modes' (NSWDEC 2013, p. iii).

In relation to the second research question, it was found the '*EAL/D Learning Progression* provides a balanced and accurate reflection of English language development' and 'The instrument can be used to derive a single measure of English language proficiency for each EAL/D student, for the purpose of allocating … funding to schools' in NSW. In this context it was interesting to discover that some students were at 'different levels for academic aspects of language (reading and writing) than conversational aspects … (listening and speaking)' (NSWDEC 2013, p. iv).

In relation to the third research question, there were several findings, including that the teachers thought the *Learning Progression* would be useful 'for informing mainstream program planning' (NSWDEC 2013, p. v)

Relationships between EAL/D *Learning Progression* results in reading and writing were also matched with the same students' results on NAPLAN Literacy tests and found to be in concordance with each other. The report commented that this 'strengthens the argument that the EAL/D instrument is functioning as intended' (NSWDEC 2013, p. iv).

Unfortunately, the results are not automatically transferrable to the Northern Territory context. There were only 20 Indigenous students (3.1%) included in the study, with none being from remote

or very remote communities. However the New South Wales findings certainly suggest that there is an urgent need for the ACARA EAL/D *Learning Progression* to be trialed in the Northern Territory across the full range of schools where Indigenous students who are learning to use English as an additional language or dialect are enrolled. It would also be interesting to conduct statistical analyses of relationships between EAL/D listening and speaking and NAPLAN tests.

Can students be exempted from NAPLAN tests?

It might be thought from the concern for equity expressed in ACARA documents that special provisions would be made with respect to NAPLAN assessments for all students who demonstrate they are unable to reach age-related benchmarks because of language-learning factors. As it happens, it *is* possible for a very small number of students to be exempted if their parents make successful applications through the child's school. Students with severe or complicated learning disabilities and also students who have been learning English in Australia for *less than one year and who speak another language at home* can apply for exemption. Although these students don't do the tests, they are counted with the group of students who did attempt the assessment, but could not achieve the National Minimum Standard (NMS) on that test.

There are other students who would normally receive help with classroom learning, for instance students with severe vision or other problems which make it difficult for them to complete a test in the normal way. These students may apply for permission to use their usual aids.

The preliminary report for NAPLAN assessments held in May 2013 (ACARA 2013b) was available when this book was being finalised. In it we find that the overall exemption rate for the 2013 Year 3 Reading assessment was just below two in every 100 students (1.9%). The Northern Territory rate was a little lower at 1.7%, while the highest rate was 2.8%, or nearly three out of 100 students, in Victoria. Does this mean Victoria had a larger proportion of newly arrived migrant and refugee children in Year 3 than other states? Or did they perhaps have a larger proportion of severely disabled students, or a combination of both? Or is it possible that a larger proportion of parents and schools took up the opportunity to apply for exemption in that state?

Whatever the reason for the higher proportion of exemptions in Victoria, it does not address the fact that, in the Northern Territory in May 2013, there were very many children who could not apply for exemption, even though their levels of English language proficiency may have been similar to those of immigrant or refugee children who had been in Australia for less than one year. These

Indigenous children were born in Australia, were not severely disabled, and probably lived in a remote or very remote community. Even a previously out-of-school child who had started coming to school for the first time in Year 3, and who had not yet developed any useful level of literacy in his or her home or school languages, would not have been eligible to apply for exemption from the Year 3 assessments under the current national guidelines. It is difficult to see how these regulations are not discriminatory in the cases of such children. The problem is that ACARA does not have a system in place for *routinely assessing the English language proficiency of any Australian child and linking it to NAPLAN tests*. This situation is especially unjust in the case of Indigenous children living in remote and very remote communities.

Parents have another option if they don't want their child to do NAPLAN tests. They can apply for their child to be withdrawn, because of religious beliefs held by the family or their philosophical objections to testing, to take two examples. Again, a formal application must be made to the principal before the assessments start.

The Australian Government encourages all families to allow their children to participate in NAPLAN assessments because the results are used to try and get a picture of student achievement across the whole country. The highest rate of withdrawals in the 2013 Year 3 Reading test was in the Australian Capital Territory where 4.3% of children were withdrawn. This compares with a national figure of 2.3% and only 2% in the Northern Territory.

Many Australian families allow their children to simply be absent on NAPLAN assessment days. In the 2013 Year 3 Reading test, the Northern Territory had the highest rate of absenteeism of all states and territories at 11.1%. The national rate was only 2.5% and the lowest rate was in New South Wales where only 1.6% of students were absent on the day of the Reading test.

Rates of withdrawal, absenteeism and exemption are all relevant to the calculation of *participation* rates in NAPLAN assessments. The participation rate for each state and territory is worked out by comparing the number of students who do the test, or were exempted, with the total number of students in that year, including all the students who were absent or withdrawn from the assessments. Participation rates vary for the five different NAPLAN assessments and the different year levels, but Northern Territory participation rates are lower than in other states across the board by up to ten or more percentage points difference in some cases.

The Northern Territory's highest participation rate in 2013 NAPLAN assessments were in Year 5 Grammar and Punctuation and Year 5 Spelling, where 89% of the students did the test. The Australian average was 95.9%, with New South Wales again the highest with 97.7% (ACARA 2013b. p. 14-15). Comparing these figures with the 2012 participation rates in the same two Year 5 tests, we find the participation rate of Indigenous students was 81.3%, compared with 96.3% for non-Indigenous students (ACARA 2012c. p. 122).

Participation rates make a difference to NAPLAN scores at the Northern Territory level. Although the average score for each state or territory is calculated using only the results of the students who actually did each assessment, the students who were absent are counted in the number that did not reach the NMS in each assessment. Staying away when the tests are scheduled can improve the average test *scores* for a school, but it also reflects badly on the school because it increases the number of students who did not meet the NMS. ACARA does not recommend that schools ask students to stay away on NAPLAN assessment days.

Across the board, we can see that more students vote with their feet in the Northern Territory than in other parts of Australia. We can guess at some of the reasons why they do this. We know that Indigenous students' attendance rates are generally low, even on non-assessment days. What we do *not* know is whether the students' own perceptions of their English language proficiency levels are a factor in their decisions to avoid NAPLAN assessments. We also do not know whether, in fact, their ability to use standard English is a factor in any difficulty they might have with the tests, because, as we commented earlier, there is no official way of finding out in the cases of English language learners what level of proficiency is necessary to be able to read the tests and understand the questions.

We *do* know that absent students are automatically included with the group of students who did the assessments but were unable to reach the NMS. We might agree that students who stayed away probably wouldn't have achieved NMS if they had participated, but we have no answers as to *why* they would have achieved low scores. Without a better understanding of the nature of the difficulties they experience with English language literacy and numeracy, it's difficult to support them in a targeted way in order to make a difference in their ability to do the assessments in future.

Some people argue that Indigenous students who are still learning to use standard English should be exempt from NAPLAN tests. Although this suggestion makes sense, particularly in Year 3, there are several problems associated with the idea.

Firstly, requiring children to take these culture-specific tests in Year 3 gives them a chance to familiarise themselves with all the conventions and routines associated with test-taking before they get to the rounds of tests in Years 5, 7, and 9.

Secondly, there is also a possibility that some teachers may feel they've been let off the hook to some degree with regard to teaching the general skills required to take tests in the early years. There is no doubt that test-taking requires a foundational set of culture-specific behaviours (like sitting still and focussing on one task until it's finished) as well as other knowledge and skills learned at school.

Thirdly, there may be a danger that national attention on Indigenous students' achievement levels in Literacy and Numeracy will fall away if not they are not highlighted in the annual publication of NAPLAN assessments. Closing the Gap goals require that we must solve the problem of how to an deliver an appropriate level of educational support to Indigenous children in remote communities to ensure they can achieve similar levels of success at school as other Australian children.

Another suggestion is that all children, immigrant as well as Australian-born, who are still learning to speak English as an additional language might take an alternative test, one specifically suited to their age and stage of language development. But this would only make sense if:

a) there was a suitable test available for use across Australia, and,

b) these children also receive principled EAL/D classroom instruction from the day they first enrolled at school.

Suitable standardised tests are not available and consistent and principled EAL/D teaching was not being offered in most remote communities in Australia while we were writing this book.

The real problem is that neither the Northern Territory nor theAustralian Government has the information needed to make sound judgments about the amount or type of English language instruction needed by Indigenous children and young people who are still learning how to use English in the school setting.

Although governments at all levels, and bodies like ACARA, make and publish policies about the need for EAL/D support for Indigenous children and young people, follow-through in the form of language specialist appointments and systematic *use* of the EAL/D Progress maps that are available to classroom teachers is still inadequate, a point we keep coming back to in this book because it is such a serious deficiency in the delivery of education to English language learners in Indigenous Australia. This is especially surprising in an era where education authorities put such store on collecting data to generate evidence-based strategies for *Closing the Gap* between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes in this country.

To see how important it is that we start asking the right questions about the data required to improve Indigenous educational outcomes, we will now take a brief look at the differences between the states and territories with respect to students' ability to achieve National Minimum Standards (NMS) on NAPLAN assessments. For full information each year, readers are advised to study ACARA's annual preliminary and final reports on NAPLAN outcomes. Detailed explanations are given in these reports about how to interpret the graphs and tables used in reporting the data.

NAPLAN Literacy results

ACARA explains the way NAPLAN assessment results are presented as follows:
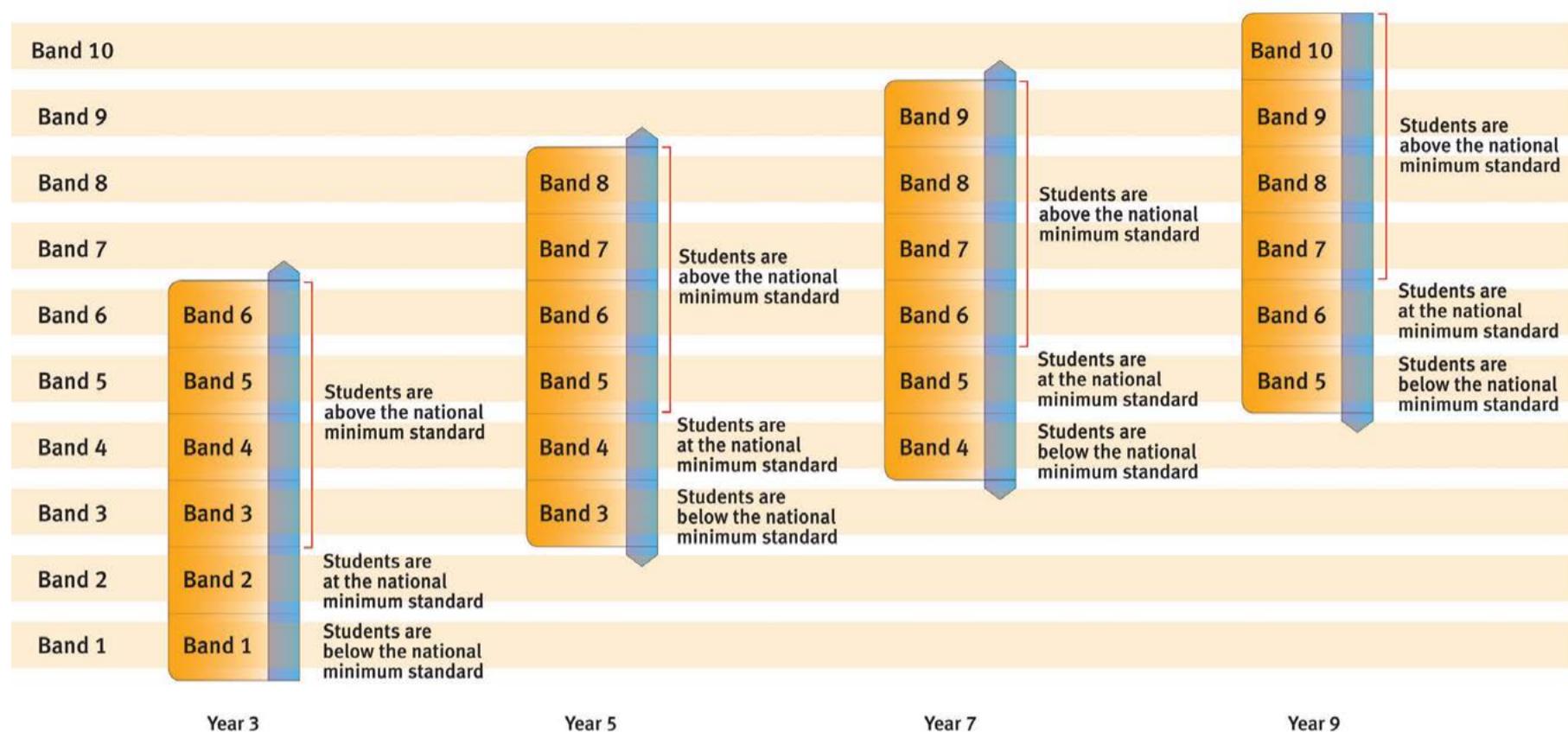
> NAPLAN results are reported using five national achievement scales, one for each of the NAPLAN assessment domains of Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy. In 2011 and 2012, results for Writing are reported on the Persuasive Writing scale. Each scale consists of ten bands, which represent the increasing complexity of the skills and understandings assessed by NAPLAN from Years 3 to 9. Six of these bands are used for reporting student performance in each year level. Student raw scores on tests are converted to NAPLAN scale scores so that the scores can be located on the national domain scales.

> The NAPLAN reporting scales are constructed so that any given scale score represents the same level of achievement over time. For example, a score of 700 in Reading in one year will mean the same in future testing years (ACARA 2012c, p. iv).

In Figure 14, we see how the scales for each year level overlap with some of the same bands as other year levels. Some of the questions that the children get in Year 3 tests, for instance, are of similar difficulty to some of the questions in the Year 5 tests. This is because, at every year level, there are a few students who are achieving at a much higher academic level than the others, and some who are achieving at a much lower level than the rest of their cohort (their year group).

Figure 14. NAPLAN Literacy and Numeracy National Assessment Scale

From: ACARA national NAPLAN report for 2012 (2012c, p. v)

The bands in the scale are organised with the bottom achievement band indicating a result *below* the level most students at that year level would be expected to achieve. The second band represents the minimum level of achievement expected. This is called the National Minimum Standard (NMS). Many students achieve at levels well above the NMS in each year level. As ACARA explains:

> Students whose results are in the minimum standard band have typically demonstrated only the basic elements of literacy and numeracy for the year level. Students whose results are in the lowest band for the year level have not achieved the national minimum standard for that year, and need focused intervention and additional support to help them achieve the skills they require to progress in schooling (ACARA 2012, p. v).
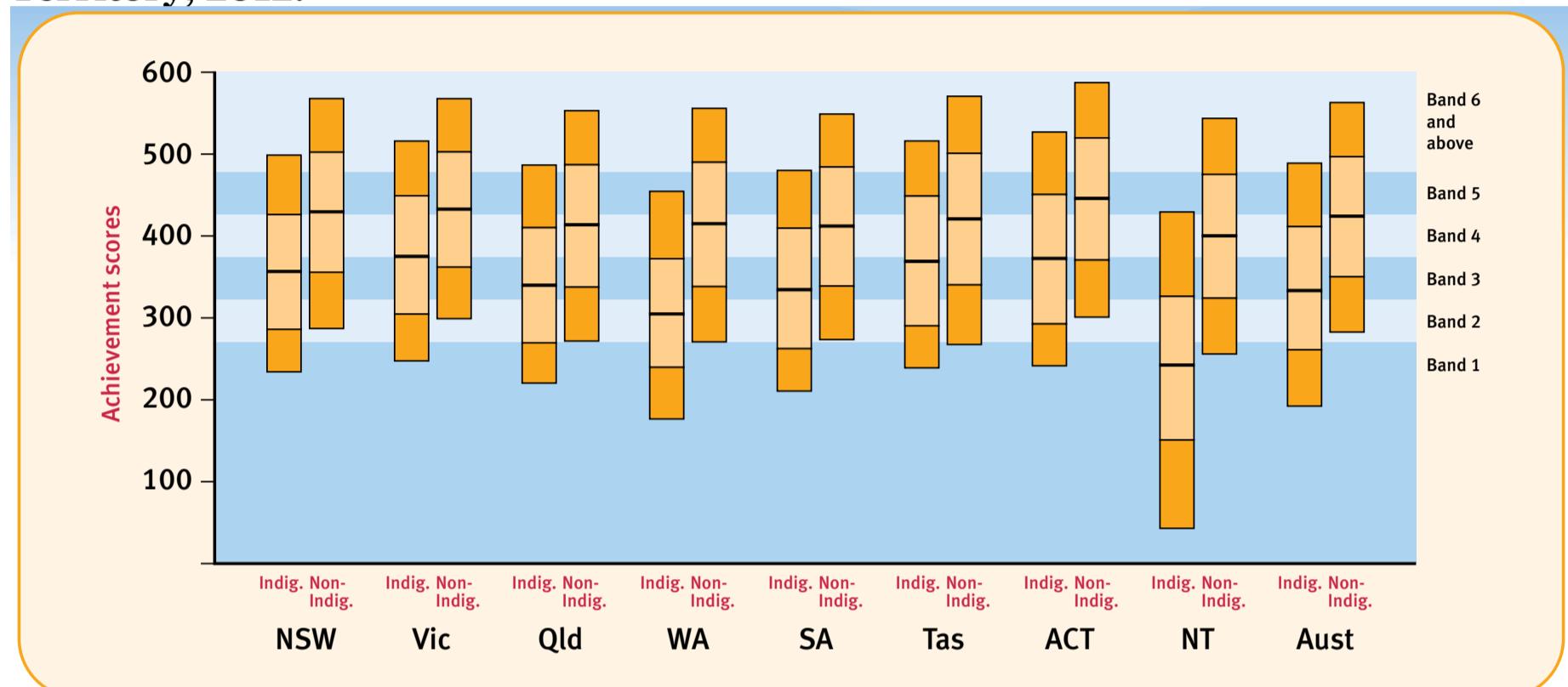
Figure 15 shows how differences between Indigenous and non Indigenous cohorts are displayed in ACARA's final reports. Year 3 Reading is shown as just one example. To study the results of other tests in Year 3 and tests taken by other year groups, readers are encouraged to find the latest online reports of NAPLAN results.

In this graph we can see how, in all states and territories, the achievement levels of Indigenous students are more likely to be in lower achievement bands than those of non Indigenous students.

Looking at Band 2 (pale blue), we see that nearly all the non-Indigenous Year 3 children in Australia were able to reach the NMS, except for the Northern Territory, where a few fell below the National Minimum Standard.

Figure 15. Year 3 Reading Achievement by Indigenous Status and by State and Territory, 2012.

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Indigenous Mean scale score / (S.D.)	356.7 (81.4)	375.0 (82.7)	339.8 (82.4)	304.9 (83.6)	334.4 (84.4)	369.0 (87.0)	372.6 (90.5)	242.4 (113.2)	333.3 (93.4)
Non-Indigenous Mean scale score / (S.D.)	429.6 (85.2)	432.8 (81.7)	413.7 (85.5)	415.1 (86.6)	412.1 (83.7)	420.8 (92.3)	445.9 (87.2)	400.2 (88.4)	424.2 (85.2)

From: ACARA (2012c, p. 4) Figure 3.R3: Achievement of Year 3 Students in Reading, by Indigenous Status, by State and Territory, 2012.

When it comes to Year 3 Indigenous children, the chart shows us that Indigenous students in Queensland, Western Australia, and especially in the NT, achieved at much lower levels than all the other Year 3 children in Reading. An interesting thing to notice about the Northern Territory Indigenous students' vertical bar is that it's longer than the other bars. This is because the range of marks gained by Indigenous Year 3 children in the NT is wider than in other states. There is a greater difference between the very bottom and the top, compared to all the other groups, even though the top scores in the NT are much lower than the top scores of most other groups, except

for the Indigenous children in Western Australia. We see this very wide range of scores compared to non-Indigenous students and students in other states in all year groups in the NT and in all areas of literacy and numeracy assessment.

The black line across the middle of the vertical bars represents the average achievement score on the scale (the *mean scale score*). We see that the mean scale score for the Northern Territory Indigenous children was much lower than that of any other Year 3 cohort in Australia. In fact the average score in the NT in Year 3 Reading was not even in the NMS range in Band 2. No other state or territory in Australia shows this exceptionally low achievement level.

Indigenous children's achievement levels in Year 3, not only in Reading, but in all the areas assessed, are lower than those of non-Indigenous learners. ACARA states that:

> In all achievement domains and for all jurisdictions, the mean scale score for Indigenous students is well below the mean scale score for non Indigenous students. Differences for Australia overall range from 76 score points in Spelling to 104 points in Grammar and Punctuation. In all domains and for most jurisdictions, the mean score for Indigenous students is at the 20th percentile score for non Indigenous students. …
>
> In each jurisdiction, the percentage of Indigenous students who achieved below the national minimum standard is more than twice the percentage of non Indigenous students who achieved below the national minimum standard. For the Northern Territory, more than 60% of Indigenous students achieved below the national minimum standard in Reading and in Numeracy (ACARA 2012c, p. 63).

This means that more than six out of every ten Indigenous students who either did the NAPLAN assessments, or were absent on assessment days in 2012, were judged as being unable to manage the test well enough to reach even the basic levels in Reading and Numeracy for their year level.

This is still the situation, even though achievement levels in Year 3 Reading for NT Year 3s (Indigenous and non Indigenous, taken together) improved by a significant amount, compared with the other states and territories, in 2013. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the average achievement level of all Northern Territory Year 3s in 2013 were also significantly better than in 2008 or 2012.

Even so, Figure 15 cuts through these statistics to remind us that only four out of ten Indigenous Year 3 students reached the NMS in Reading in 2012. With figures like these, we can understand why children's parents become frustrated and unhappy when the reports of individual children's

achievement levels are sent home. We can also understand why teachers become discouraged. Unfortunately, Indigenous students' achievement levels at other year levels in all the literacy and numeracy tests are fairly similar to the results we've just discussed.

Again, it's important to come back to the point that the NAPLAN Reading test was designed for children who came to school in Year 1 understanding and speaking Standard Australian English. These children were lucky! They were first introduced to the mysteries of reading and writing in the same language they use at home. But, as we know, a very large number of NT Year 3s only start learning English, or if they're speakers of Aboriginal English at home, only start learning standard English, when they enroll in Transition classes. These little children are expected to work out what reading and writing is and why it's worth doing in a form of English they don't know. If that home environment is also one where reading doesn't have a high profile in day-to-day life, these children also have a major cultural as well as linguistic gap to cross before even beginning to understand what mainstream literacy is all about. Again, we would ask why these very young children are expected to reach the same levels of competence as their native standard English-speaking peers in a few short years, without the specialized teaching that both the Australian and Territory governments say they're entitled to receive.

If data about home language were collected by ACARA it would help to inform us to what degree the children's English language proficiency levels are a factor in their low rates of achievement. The most relevant data that is currently collected by ACARA is the broad category referred to as *Language Background Other than English* (LBOTE) group. It's helpful to look more closely at this group to see whether the statistics help us understand the situation of Indigenous students in the NT.

Predictive value of the **NAPLAN LBOTE** category

LBOTE data combines students from very many different language backgrounds. Unfortunately, the evidence of NAPLAN reports since 2008 suggests the LBOTE category has rather limited predictive or explanatory value, although it does have a number of interesting features.

The category includes all students who report that languages other than English are spoken in their homes. It includes students born in Australia with professional parents, perhaps university

lecturers, who speak other languages as well as English with each other and with their children. Their children are often native speakers of Standard Australian English, even though their parents speak English as an additional language.

The LBOTE category also includes students born in refugee camps whose parents may be illiterate and still learning English themselves. It also includes students born in Australia of immigrant parents, but living in homes where little or no English is spoken. The LBOTE category also includes children born in remote and very remote regions of Australia whose families speak traditional Australian languages or modern Australian languages like Kriol. The LBOTE category does not, however, include children from families where a different *dialect* of English, like Aboriginal English or Malaysian English, is used.

It may be rather surprising to find that: 'For Australia overall, students from a language background other than English have higher mean scores than did students from an English-language background in Persuasive Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy. It is only in Reading that students from an English-language background have a higher mean score' (ACARA 2012c, p. 63). What this may mean is that students from LBOTE homes are often expected to work harder than children from other homes in order to make the best possible use of their educational opportunities. Although Persuasive Writing is particularly challenging from a cultural point of view, experienced English as an Additional Language teachers know it's a relatively straight-forward matter to teach willing students how to meet the cultural expectations associated with this style of writing.
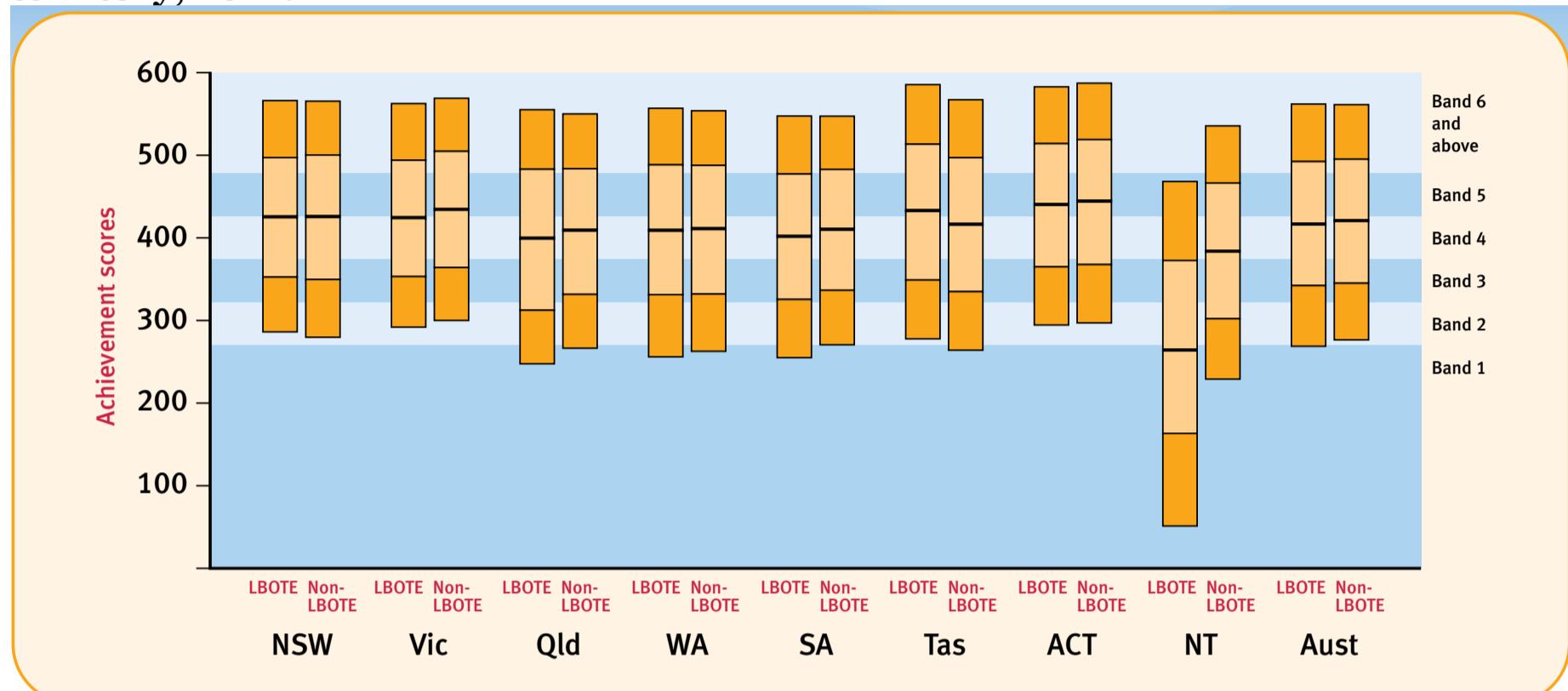
ACARA points out the differences between LBOTE and non-LBOTE students, 'are inconsistent' across the states and territories, except for the Northern Territory. As we are aware:

> For the Northern Territory, English is not the first language for many Indigenous students and mean scores for students with a language background other than English are lower in all five achievement domains than are mean scores for students with an English-language background. … For most jurisdictions except the Northern Territory, there is very little difference between these two groups in the percentage of students who achieved below the national minimum standard in any achievement domain (ACARA 2012c, p. 63).

We can see this big difference between LBOTE and non LBOTE children in Figure 16 which again focuses on Year 3 Reading.

Figure 16: Achievement in Year 3 in Reading by LBOTE status, by state and territory, 2012.

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
LBOTE Mean scale score / (S.D.)	425.5 (84.9)	424.5 (82.2)	399.7 (95.3)	409.2 (92.0)	401.9 (88.6)	433.1 (94.6)	440.5 (88.0)	264.3 (125.3)	416.8 (90.8)
Non-LBOTE Mean scale score / (S.D.)	425.8 (87.1)	434.6 (81.8)	409.3 (86.6)	411.2 (89.0)	410.4 (84.2)	416.5 (92.7)	444.5 (88.1)	384.0 (93.9)	421.0 (86.6)

(From ACARA (2012c, p. 5) Figure 3.R4: Achievement of Year 3 students in reading, by LBOTE status, by state and territory, 2011.)

Even with excellent specialist teaching focused on the language needed for school-based learning, two or three years is not long enough for young children in remote and very remote communities to develop to the same level of competence in English as children who have been speaking SAuE all their lives. It's not surprising Northern Territory results are so low. The *Teaching Multilingual learners* (TML) *Program* (NTDoE 2012a) acknowledges that:

> Multilingual students bring knowledge and learning strategies that differ in world view and in priorities for ways of learning. The stages through which English-Additional-Language/Dialect (EAL/D) learners develop Standard Australian English ... are distinct from those of English L1 [first language] learners

in school. ... Multilingual learners require *ESL teaching approaches* that build on the knowledge they already have as first language users and the knowledge they need as additional language users (NTDET 2012a, p. 1).

The website goes on to state that:

All teachers [of EAL/D learners will] plan, teach and assess using pedagogy that responds to EAL/D learner needs. Learners in remote NT Indigenous schools are EAL/D students and make up 100% of the learner groups. Teaching in these contexts is necessarily ESL informed. Most schools in urban contexts have an identified cohort of EAL/D learners. Where this cohort is significant, the ESL teacher and the classroom teachers team teach to ensure that EAL/D students are taught the English language required within the learning areas, to access the whole curriculum ... (NTDoE 2012a, p. 2).

Given that EAL/D specialist positions are amongst those facing funding cuts, it would be interesting to know how many remote schools do, in fact, have EAL/D teachers to team teach with the classroom teachers.

The Teaching Multilingual Learners website also states the *ESL for Indigenous Language Speaking Students (ILSS)* program exists to focus on:

teaching spoken English to Indigenous language-speaking students in Year one. Additional teachers are provided for schools with larger numbers of eligible students. The achievement target for these students is Level 1 Comprehensive in Speaking on the NT Curriculum Framework ESL outcomes. Teachers are provided with professional learning in ESL methodology, assessment and moderation processes (NTDoE 2012a, p. 2).

This is an excellent initiative. In Year 1, young children are still consolidating their home language skills and it would certainly fit with international 'best practice' to have an EAL/D specialist assisting the children to develop oral skills in standard English as an additional language or dialect. But if the provisions for EAL/D Indigenous learners are in place in all the schools where the students need this help, why are better results not being achieved on NAPLAN tests in the Northern Territory? We can only conclude the students are not being taught by qualified EAL/D classroom teachers and there are not enough EAL/D support staff to guide those teachers who have been appointed to NT schools without appropriate training in specialist methods for teaching English.

Intensive English classes of the kind found in other Australian cities are provided at two primary schools, one middle school and one senior school in the Darwin area, but these are not for

Indigenous learners: The TML site states that: 'Eligible students supported through this program are newly arrived migrant or refugee students with specified visa subclasses granted under the Humanitarian Program' (NTDoE 2012a, p. 2-3).

Indigenous students who have the same English language learning needs as migrant and refugee students in Intensive English classes need the same kind and level of specialized teaching. It makes no sense in terms of stated equity and access objectives on the part of the Australian and Northern Territory Governments not to make sure they receive this level of support.

NAPLAN Numeracy results

We cannot leave the topic of NAPLAN assessments without a brief look at the Numeracy domain. We know from previous discussion that more than 60% of Year 3 children could not reach the NMS on this assessment in 2012. In Year 5, the mean scaled scores for Numeracy achieved by Indigenous students in the Northern Territory were also well below those of non-Indigenous students. In every state and territory of Australia, 'the percentage of Indigenous students who achieved below the NMS is more than twice the percentage of non-Indigenous students' achieving at that level (ACARA 2012c, p. 127).
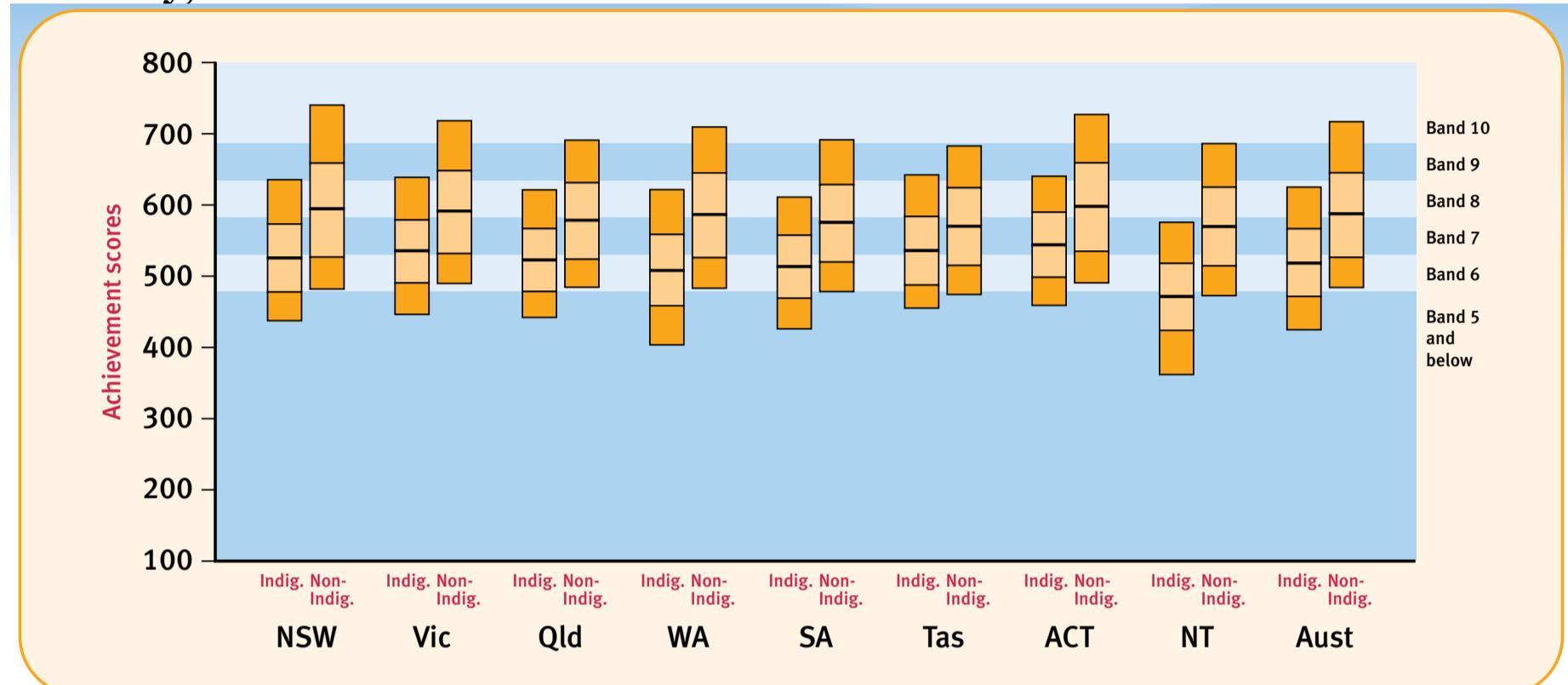
The situation is no better in Year 7. ACARA reported in 2012 that in the Northern Territory, 'mean scores for Indigenous students [were] more than 100 scale points below the mean scores for non-Indigenous students in all domains.' (ACARA 2012c, p. 191) When it came to Year 9 students, the mean score for Indigenous students in Numeracy was 98.3 points below that of non Indigenous students (p.255). Figure 17 shows that, even though Numeracy results of Indigenous Year 9 students in the Northern Territory are lower than for other cohorts, the spread (or range) of scores is similar to that of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. This means that, by Year 9, the students are more similar to each other with regard to their learning needs than Year 3 children discussed above in respect to Reading.

Nevertheless, there is no other Indigenous cohort in any other state or territory where the average score (mean score) was below the NMS in Year 9 Numeracy in 2012. Less than half (only 44.7%) of the Indigenous Year 9 students in the Northern Territory were able to achieve NMS. When we remember that NMS is only the *basic* level at which ACARA expects an Australian Year 9 student

to be able to demonstrate achievement, we can understand why so many training situations that require ability to make calculations and carry out other mathematical procedures are challenging for so many young Indigenous adults.

Figure 17: Achievement in Year 9 Numeracy by Indigenous Status and by State and Territory, 2012.

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Indigenous Mean scale score / (S.D.)	525.5 (60.5)	535.5 (57.7)	522.6 (55.4)	507.9 (64.9)	513.4 (55.6)	535.8 (58.3)	543.9 (56.6)	471.3 (62.5)	518.2 (61.3)
Non-Indigenous Mean scale score / (S.D.)	594.5 (78.6)	591.4 (69.6)	578.4 (63.4)	586.5 (69.4)	575.4 (64.6)	570.0 (63.8)	597.8 (72.4)	569.6 (67.2)	587.5 (71.3)

By Year 9, even a young person who arrived at school unable to speak English nine or ten years earlier, would normally have become a fluent bilingual if she or he had received specialist English language teaching. But this is not happening for most Indigenous young people in remote and very remote communities in the Northern Territory. The achievement patterns of Year 9 Indigenous students in the other domains assessed (Reading, Persuasive Writing, Grammar and Punctuation, and Spelling) were also poor compared with the rest of Australian, and not very different from the Numeracy results.

Literacy requirements of NAPLAN Numeracy assessments

As we know, ACARA argues that content knowledge is not assessed in NAPLAN assessments. It would indeed be good if only the knowledge and skills associated with mathematics could somehow be assessed in the NAPLAN Numeracy assessments. Unfortunately, the tests are, of course, written in school English and, although the words are supported by diagrams and numbers, much more cultural and linguistic knowledge is required to understand what you are supposed to do in order to be able to answer the questions than most native English-speaking people probably realise.

Even when the actual calculation the student has to make is quite simple and straightforward, reading and understanding the question can be challenging for non-native speakers of English for cultural reasons, as well as because of the time it takes a slow reader to puzzle out a problem, even when there are no culturally alien concepts involved.

For instance, Jorgensen et al. (2011) analysed the 2008 NAPLAN Numeracy assessments and found cultural and linguistic bias that would 'significantly disadvantage Aboriginal learners, but most particularly those who live in remote areas.' As the authors explain:

> Not only does the language and sociology of the testing process violate the cultural and linguistic norms for these students, the examples provided … fail to account for the contexts of these students. Imagine the ludicrousness of asking questions about in-line skates to students who live in Central desert regions or conversions between English and Brunei currencies yet such examples appeared in the 2008 tests (Jorgensen et al. 2011, p. 54).

This is a reference to the Year 7 calculator-free 2008 Numeracy assessment. One question included drawings of a pair of roller skates, a cricket bat, and a tennis racquet with the prices of $42, $26, and $98.

> The question asked 'what is the best way to estimate the total cost of these three objects?' and presented four choices, the correct one being '$40 + $20 + $100'. Even ignoring the unrealistic prices for these objects, the items seem a somewhat unusual collection for a national assessment that is presumably intended to be inclusive, and the form of the question is dependent on students having had experience with the notion of rounding as a way of progressively estimating money totals.

> A third item presented as two tables of data, 3 rows by 3 columns, related to mobile phone costs, with a question that required reading and synthesizing data from two columns. To answer the question students needed to interpret text involving over 50 words and symbols, but the mathematical demand was that they merely add 12 and 28 (Jorgensen et al. 2011, p. 57)

The authors comment that: 'The question assumes familiarity with mobile phone bills, tabulated data and sorting relevant from superfluous information'. But we know that most Indigenous students in the Northern Territory use pre-paid cards with their phones. They learn about tabulated data only at school, if and when they attend, and many read very slowly, taking up valuable test time just trying to understand the question. Most Indigenous students living in remote and very remote locations do not read for pleasure in any language, nor do they use written information to sort out relevant from irrelevant information in their day-to-day lives.

The final example mentioned by the researchers 'required the students to interpret two straight line graphs', which is fair, considering that understanding graphs is part of the Mathematics at this level. However the graphs were to be used to 'convert British pounds to Brunei dollars' and the text of the question was again rather complex. The authors comment there is a 'quite obvious reliance of the items on school content' and the 'social heritage of the Aboriginal students is not considered in the design of these questions'. As they say:

> Imagine a question that was embedded in desert knowledge — the backlash from city and non-Aboriginal educators, parents and communities would have been challenging but when the relationships are reversed, the challenge is silent as if there is not a real challenge at all. It is also worth noting that the assessments not only communicate to students that school knowledge is not connected to what they know, but also reinforces to them that they are failing (Jorgensen et al. 2011, p. 57).

Even if ACARA has been attempting in the years since 2008 to create more culturally inclusive questions in the NAPLAN assessments, the very fact the examples above were ever used at all reminds us that the educational needs of Indigenous students, particularly those for whom standard English is an additional language or dialect, are too often simply invisible to mainstream educators and policy makers who are mostly native speakers of Australian English.

Linguistic and cultural differences relevant to how well Indigenous EAL/D students manage Western style mathematics can be even more subtle and difficult for teachers and test-makers to notice than the examples discussed above.

For instance, working with children in three Aboriginal Independent Community Schools in the Kimberley, Kaye Treacy investigated how well children from Kindergarten and Pre-primary, (equivalent to Pre-school and Transition in the Northern Territory) to Years 1-3 understood everyday English and Kimberley Kriol words used in mathematics lessons.

> Forty seven students from Kindergarten through to Year 3 were interviewed in English and in Kimberley Kriol using an assessment tool developed by the Kimberley District Education Office (2001) called *Talking Concepts: the language of mathematics and science.* … The assessment tool consists of a set of pictures and instructions in English which assess 50 everyday words and phrases commonly used within mathematics and science classrooms. The students are asked to put a cross somewhere on the picture according to the given instruction. For example, using [a diagram of a Toyota], students were asked to '*put a cross on the top of the Toyota*' to find out whether they understood the word *top* and have the associated concept (Treacy 2013, p. 636).

Each child was interviewed separately, first in English by Treacy, and then in Kriol by her research assistant. When it was realised that some of the Kindergarten children could not understand English at all, the procedure was changed. The first five questions were asked one by one, first in English and then in Kriol. If none of the first five words were understood in English, the rest of the interview was conducted in Kriol only. The research found that older children generally understood more words in both languages than younger children, but some words were difficult even for Year 3 students.

Treacy comments that even the process of translating some ordinary English words into Kriol so they can be explained to students by Teacher Assistants can be difficult, because of the way the same words are used differently in different contexts.

> For example, when the words *before* and *after* are used in everyday English to talk about before and after the rain, the words show the location of events in time. In mathematics, the words *before* and *after* are used to show the location of numbers in relation to each other. Many of the words [in the *Talking Concepts* list] are used to show the location of numbers in the number sequence. For example, we talk about counting *forwards*, ask what numbers come *between* and which are *more* or *less* than others (Treacy 2013, p. 641).

The word *part* was one that more than half the students had difficulty with in English, especially in Year 2 where 82% did not respond correctly in the interview, although only eight found the Kriol equivalent *seeim lilbit* problematic. It seemed that most of the children understood the concepts associated with these words and that they were 'a focus of thinking in the community', although the

English word was unfamiliar. Other unfamiliar words included: *widest, less than, between, bottom, every, end, over, whole, above, below, greatest, furthest, forward, largest, centre, thinnest, pair, double, similar, none* and *towards*. As Treacy says, 'These words need to be a focus of teaching if students are to access the mathematics within the classroom' (Treacy 2013, p. 640).

We would add that in remote and very remote communities in the Northern Territory, effective teaching involves making sure the meanings of such apparently simple straight-forward words are made clear, either by modeling and demonstration, or by explicit teaching and practice where it seems appropriate. This needs to be done through all year levels until the students demonstrate, in what they say and do, that they can use these ordinary English words appropriately in different contexts. Treacy comments:

> It is a challenge for us as teachers to recognise when we use these words and then notice how we are using them. However, making an effort to recognise the everyday language of the mathematics classroom should help teachers to ensure that students are not alienated from the world of mathematics before they begin (Treacy 2013, p. 641).

It's clear that taking the time to investigate with Indigenous colleagues whether the English words used in mathematics match up with words in the children's home languages is also fundamentally important. A resource similar to the one used in the Kimberley at least alerts new teachers to potential mismatches between Kriol and English, although the process of becoming consciously aware of how often we use ordinary everyday English words with mathematical meanings will take time if these teachers were not taught to notice this aspect of language use when they were at university.

Treacy and her colleagues found that the process of translating the words in the *Talking Concepts* resource was interesting. For instance, there did not seem to be an easily identifiable equivalent of the word *forwards*, illustrated by pictures of boys on bikes. The best translation seemed to be *e gorn* which has more of the meaning of *gone away*. It was also found that the Kriol word *saimsaim* has several English meanings: *as many as, pair, double* and *equal* (Treacy 2013, p. 367). Treacy concluded that this suggests the English words may express concepts which may not be in focus in everyday thinking in the Kimberley.

Prepositions are another area where teachers might not realise their students could be having difficulty in classrooms where everything is explained in standard English. For instance, in

Kimberley Kriol, the preposition *langa* is used to cover all the situations where *in front of, near, on top of, around, behind* and *under* are used in English (Berry & Hudson 1997, p. 115). This pattern is quite common in traditional Australian Indigenous languages as well. The single word might perhaps be thought of as having a meaning like *juxtaposed with* or *associated with in terms of position*. Every language and culture has different ways of understanding and talking about the world, as Lee (1997) explained in an article about the role of language in thinking and learning and its relevance to schooling.

Each cultural group develops sets of words for talking in detailed ways about those parts of experience which mean the most to them. Thinking in detail about number, and developing methods of calculation, were not originally important in Western intellectual development. As McLeish explains:

> So far as the development of calculation is concerned, it cannot be overstated that the whole line of development lay outside Europe: in Sumeria, Babylon, China, India and the Arabian peninsula. Until the breakthrough by the Arabs in the scientific renaissance of the 7th-15th centuries …, Western Europe was a mathematical backwater. … With the Arab scientific renaissance, Eastern number-knowledge, particularly that of India and Arabia, became accessible and respectable to Western scholars (McLeish 1991, p. 5).

Researchers in Australia have tried to understand Indigenous ways of thinking about those aspects of existence (space, time, money, etc.) that are important for mathematics. The aim has been to try to discover whether there might be an overlapping world of thought within which doorways between the different cultural world views might be found. Examples include the interesting articles in Pam Harris' collection of 1991 and Helen Watson and David Chambers' work with the Yolngu community at Yirrkala, published in 1989. There are other examples also, and many articles have been written in an attempt to improve the way mathematics is taught in Indigenous schools, but this is not the place to explore these studies and reports in detail.

We will, however, conclude this section with a quick look at two recent articles by Lorna Quinnell that deal with the challenges faced by Indigenous students in NAPLAN Numeracy assessments for Primary school Years 3, 5, and 7.

Quinnell (2011, p.19) states that 'Focusing on the literacy requirements is good teaching practice.' As she says, 'The language used in a mathematics class can be complex and is often very different from the language used in other subject areas.' Drawing attention to the literature supporting

this statement, Quinnell gives the following examples: Technical words such as *key, net, face, difference, scale, head, tail, rule* and *opposite* all have different meanings in everyday English. Other familiar words and phrases can also be confusing, for instance: *take away* (do we think of fast foods?); *volume* (do we think of our CD player?); *an acute right angle* (did the teacher say 'a cute right angle' and, if so, what does it mean?); *a plane shape* (aeroplane?) and that perhaps fearful thing, a *cross section*. Most teachers would not think of explicitly telling the students what these words mean and comparing them with their ordinary uses in this way but such explanations are necessary to keep the learners focused on the content of maths lessons.

Some mathematical words also have several different meanings, all of which have to be learnt and remembered, e.g. *unit, square, cube* and *scale*. There is more than one word that means zero and '*subtract, minus, take-away* and *difference* are all used for the same concept in mathematics' (Quinnell 2011, p. 19). Quinnell points out that words can have different grammatical functions in different sentences, e.g. *square* can be a noun or an adjective. She gives examples of prefixes and suffixes like *poly-, tri-, quad-* and *-wise* (as in *clockwise*) which all have to be explicitly taught if students are to be able to negotiate a Western mathematics curriculum (p.20). Similarly a number of concepts and their associated vocabulary items which might not be familiar to students in remote and very remote communities are taken for granted as background knowledge by the people who write mathematics worksheets and textbooks.

Quinnell & Carter (2011) focus on Year 7 and 9 NAPLAN Numeracy tests and begin their article by reminding us that: 'Language is the medium through which students learn mathematics' (Leach & Bowling 2000, p. 24). The authors make the point that:

> The NAPLAN tests allow just over a minute per question which does not seem long for students who are struggling to understand and complete the questions in the allocated time. However, special provisions such as readers, scribes, use of dictionaries and extra time are available for some students for instance ESL and special needs students if applications are forwarded to the relevant bodies. Current information on this can be found in the Test preparation handbook on the NAPLAN website (Quinnell & Carter 2011, p. 51).

It would be interesting to know how many Indigenous Year 5 and Year 7 students have received this kind of assistance since NAPLAN assessments began in 2008. In practice, such assistance, as we saw earlier in this chapter, is only provided for students who normally make use of extra aids or personal support in the classroom because of disabilities they may have.

The authors also comment that: 'Although the NAPLAN tests have been attractively presented they have not been designed to be inclusive of all Australians.' The authors give example of terms that might present a comprehension challenge for EAL/D students (meaning that they will need more time for some questions than native speakers of English) e.g. *recipes, floodlights, smudges, conveyor belts, satellite dishes, air-conditioners, paddocks, planks, rockets, aeroplane seating, exchange rates, films, sticks, watches, alarm clocks, DVD players, leaflets* and *the summit of a mountain* (p.52). The authors suggest that: 'Questions which contain familiar content and are attractive to Indigenous peoples should be included in each paper' (p.52). They stress they're not saying that 'teachers should aim to teach primarily for test purposes, but rather that vocabulary is an important part of mathematics teaching and learning' (p.52).

Do NAPLAN results have diagnostic value in the case of EAL/D learners?

Although people sometimes think the results of NAPLAN tests might be useful for diagnosing learner difficulties, this cannot be reliably or validly done in the case of schools where students are still learning English. As many examples have shown in this chapter, NAPLAN tests have been developed for, and normed on, native speakers of Standard Australian, or school English. It seems that administrators and test developers are unable to properly come to terms with the fact that the ability to understand written English, to write answers in English, and to understand how multiple choice questions and other culturally-specific test items work, all make it more difficult for EAL/D learners to achieve the average scores that are expected of other Australian students their own age.

Learners need three quite different sets of skills (reading, writing and knowing about the culture-specific expectations of English speakers) before we can even think about whether they have the knowledge and skills to be tested in these domains.

As we have seen, even an otherwise excellent resource like the Northern Territory's *Data Analysis Guide* (NTDoE 2012b), which was specifically designed to assist teachers to use NAPLAN data as an evidence-base for developing more focused and appropriate teaching and learning programs for their students, completely ignores the linguistic and cultural challenges involved in successful achievement on NAPLAN Literacy and Numeracy tests.

With genuine commitment to *Closing the Gap*, specialist EAL/D teachers would be available to every class where learners need their help. Such support, coupled with regular attendance, of

course, is paramount to successful outcomes for all students in NAPLAN style tests. But regular attendance alone is not guaranteed to bring the required improvements without specialist attention to the language learning needs of those students who do make it into the classroom each day.

When test takers are still learning English, their responses to test items cannot reliably tell us whether they would know how to respond correctly if asked in their home languages, or if they were asked to demonstrate that knowledge in a non-pencil and paper test, e.g. with real money in the case of money problems. A process of checking knowledge and skills using home languages would be extremely useful if interested community members with appropriate educational backgrounds are available. This would help teachers and community representatives, working as a team, to differentiate between *genuine gaps* in mathematical knowledge and problems that related to *reading comprehension* difficulties.

One way in which NAPLAN results could be used diagnostically in the case of schools with high EAL/D populations is if each test item could be analysed linguistically and that analysis examined in relation to school scores on each item. This process might have the potential to suggest whether linguistic or cultural complexity had been a factor in success or lack of success on the item in question.

Certainly, non-verbal, visual support is provided in many test questions. Students might often try to guess what they're expected to do in the test, using knowledge acquired outside the school in their home languages or dialects. But the process of struggling to read the English words, then trying to think about the problem in their own language, then write the answer, all takes much more time than a native English-speaking student would need for the same test item. This is clearly an equity issue.

At the very least it could be argued that students who have been reliably identified as English language learners in any of the pre-competent stages described on the ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression, should be given extra time to do the tests. Assessments of their levels of proficiency as measured by the charts would need to be documented by a qualified EAL/D assessor in advance of the test-taking period in May each year and submitted to ACARA via the school or state education department.

Collecting English language proficiency data would have two major benefits. Firstly, it could be used statistically in item analysis to inform the test construction process. This would help ensure that the type of items found to be extra challenging for English language learners are avoided in future NAPLAN assessments. Secondly, the additional information about EAL/D students' language knowledge and literacy and numeracy skills, together with item level linguistic analysis of the results from remote and very remote Northern Territory schools, would also provide an invaluable evidence base for informing curriculum development in those schools.

Equity Issues and NAPLAN

We have come back time and time again in this chapter, and in the book as a whole, to the issue of equity for Indigenous students, especially those living in remote and very remote communities in the Northern Territory.

It is interesting in this context to note that an Interim Report of the Senate *Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee*, published in June 2013, describes a very brief inquiry set up only the previous month to investigate effects of NAPLAN testing on children. The inquiry was a response to concerns, mostly in the more populated parts of Australia, about pressure being exerted by schools and parents on their children with regard to NAPLAN. Much of this pressure, it seemed, was being driven by commercial businesses marketing various products to parents in an attempt to persuade them that their children needed to do extra study, or take vitamin supplements, etc.

A few submissions however, did come from educators concerned about Indigenous children, including one from the Leonard Freeman, the Principal at Yirrkala school in the Northern Territory at the time. He focused on the unintended consequences of NAPLAN in the education of students in remote and very remote communities, making the important point that:

> NAPLAN tests are unable to provide any useful data on the literacy and numeracy levels of ESL learners who have not yet mastered English sufficiently to access the test. In the remote indigenous context, most students sitting the Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN tests are unable to access the tests as they do not yet have a sufficient grasp of Standard Australian English or of the cultural/social knowledge that the tests assume. Whether the student is progressing well at school (i.e. developing English oracy, demonstrating literacy skills through their first language, developing numeracy concepts) or whether the student is a poor school attender who is not progressing well at school, the NAPLAN test results are likely to be similar in either

case. Year 3 and 5 remote indigenous students who work hard at school, whose family supports their learning and ensures good school attendance, are still regarded as having failed based on NAPLAN results (Freeman 2013, p. 1).

It is not difficult to see that such children and their families might become discouraged and not put the effort into coming to school that they did previously. Freeman also told the Senate Inquiry about the *Central Australian Literacy Expectations* document which, he said, is another 'example of the detrimental impact of NAPLAN on ESL learners' because it 'works backward from NAPLAN benchmarks and breaks [them] down into incremental steps' that have 'become the expectations for all' and 'form the basis of teaching in remote schools'. This means that: 'Programs which claim to accelerate English literacy or which are aimed at native English speakers are now favoured ahead of academically sound ESL programs which demonstrate the genuine progression of ESL students.' (Freeman 2013, p. 4)

The Interim Report of the Senate Inquiry did not look closely at the issues relating to NAPLAN in remote and very remote communities, other than to include, as the last item in a list of 'potential improvements to the NAPLAN program', the desirability of: 'Addressing concerns about the suitability of the current NAPLAN testing regime for Indigenous students and students with a language background other than English' (SEEWRC 2013, p. 13).

When inquiries were made by the authors of this book in October 2013 as to whether the Senate Inquiry is likely to be re-opened, or whether a final report would be released, no answer was available to either question. This seems unsatisfactory in the light of ongoing evidence that NAPLAN assessments are not providing data which helps teachers, children, schools, communities or governments improve (English language) literacy and numeracy achievement levels in remote and very remote schools.

It is even possible that governments are expending too much energy in the wrong directions. In a paper entitled 'Are we making education count in remote Australian communities or just counting education?' John Guenther (2012) reports on an analysis he did of publicly available data from very remote schools. His findings 'challenge assumptions about the statistical association between attendance rates, socio-economic advantage and student outcomes as measured by NAPLAN' (p.2). He takes a close look at arguments about links between attendance patterns and achievement at school and points out that the link between the two is not a simple causal one. In fact, in schools

with above 80% Indigenous enrolment, he found that, statistically, 'the relationship between attendance and outcomes is effectively non-existent' (Guenther 2012, p. 13). Freeman's submission makes the same point from the perspective of the EAL/D learners themselves. When they do try hard to achieve at school, their efforts cannot be picked up by an assessment tool like NAPLAN which has been developed for native speakers of standard English and not for native speakers of Indigenous languages or Aboriginal English.

As Ian Malcolm (2011) emphasises:

> ... there are alternatives to assessing minority students as if they are mother tongue Standard English speakers, but a great deal more needs to be done to explore them: If we are assessing the language skills of people with a diversified linguistic repertoire, we should do just that—fairly assessing their communicative repertoire rather than just assessing them as if their only communicative medium is Standard English— and if we are evaluating the way Indigenous students are *taught* Standard English, we should do just that, and not use assessments that subordinate the educational means to the ends (outcomes) we are seeking to achieve. To diminish attention to the cultural, linguistic historical, sociopolitical and educational context of the lives of the people we are testing is to diminish the significance of any results we may achieve (Malcolm 2011, p. 197, our emphasis).

This chapter has made it clear that NAPLAN tests since 2008 have been of very little value in remote and very remote communities. They do not provide data that can be used as an evidence base for developing improved teaching and learning programs for Indigenous students who come to school speaking other languages and dialects and who are still learning standard English when they leave school as young adults.

As we have emphasised throughout this book, all Australian children and young people have the right to an education enabling them to access the full range of choices any healthy young citizen ought to be able to make in modern Australia. These include choices about where to live, what job to train for, whether to enroll in higher education opportunities, and so on.

For young people living in remote and very remote regions of the Northern Territory, this means learning to use English in mainstream ways, as an additional set of language practices added to their existing multilingualism.

We would like to stress again that our suggestions are evidence-based. International research, as we saw in Chapter Three, repeatedly shows that learners who come to school speaking another

language or dialect can become fully proficient in an additional language by the end of their early years of learning *if* they receive the right kind of language-focused teaching and *if* their home languages are also respected and, where possible, also used in their learning alongside the dominant language of schooling in their country or region.

It is worth collecting the data necessary to compile an evidence base to support the aims of *Closing the Gap* goals in literacy and numeracy outcomes in Indigenous Australia. The starting point is to collect and analyse information about the way Indigenous students use English in situations where language-related factors contribute, alongside attendance, health, and other socio-economic factors, to successful learning outcomes.

Chapter Six focuses, among other things, on the situation of early childhood learners who come from homes where standard English is not the main language of communication. It offers some suggestions about strategies which might be taken up for immediate consideration.

Chapter Six: Asking the right questions

The Elephant in the Room

It is now more than two and a quarter centuries since Europeans first started taking over this land. This book has offered a brief historical overview of the education of Indigenous children and young people in the Northern Territory. When we think about the past, and the situation as it still exists today, it is difficult not to be discouraged by the failure of governments to build a society in which *all* Indigenous Australians are adequately prepared by their schooling to participate fully in today's world, in whatever ways they choose, while at the same time receiving recognition, respect and admiration for proudly maintaining their ancient cultural and linguistic heritage.

Of course, many Indigenous Australians, including those in the Northern Territory, do participate fully as equals in the institutions, rewards and challenges of modern Australia. But, as current nationwide assessments of Australian children confirm, the majority of young Indigenous people still leave school in all states and territories without the full range of skills necessary to engage competently and confidently in the life opportunities available to other young Australians. That this is happening in one of the world's wealthiest countries is a matter for national shame.

Common sense tells us that, although regular attendance is vitally important to receiving the full benefits of what schools have to offer, it is not, and never will be, the whole story. Educational authorities need much better understanding of the reasons *why* children and young people so often prefer to stay away from school, and *why*, even when they do come to school, so many do not achieve the same learning outcomes as non-Indigenous students.

Most significant from a pedagogical perspective, is the importance of *really* coming to terms with the fact that the majority of Indigenous students in the Northern Territory are multilingual. Even when standard English is included as *one element* in their full range of language competencies, relatively few young Indigenous people use this version of English as their main form of communication. Coming to terms with this reality in a practical way means proactively supporting these students' English language learning throughout their education. The best way to do this is to employ teachers who have been trained to teach content material through a systematic, planned program of English language teaching based on research evidence about how people learn additional languages. As we

explained earlier in this book, what may seem easy from the point of view of native English-speaker intuition may be very, very different from what has been shown by linguistic research to be easy or difficult for someone learning English as a new language.

Most young Indigenous people in the Northern Territory speak traditional or modern Indigenous languages, or Aboriginal English, or both. Although many can switch competently and confidently between two or more ways of talking and thinking, too many children and young people lack the confidence, knowledge, or skills to use the standard dialect in speaking and writing at school. Many Indigenous students, especially in remote and very remote communities, may not fully understand what people are talking about when they use standard English. Reading English at the same level as native English-speaking peers can be a major challenge too, partly because the style of language used in books is unfamiliar to many children and young people. It is pedagogically unsound and also very unfair to ask new teachers to teach in remote and very remote communities without appropriate training.

From day one, graduates employed to teach the Northern Territory need to be able to:

- assess the levels of proficiency their students have in each aspect of language involved in understanding and using school English (in Listening, Speaking, Reading and Viewing and in Writing);
- diagnose each student's specific profile of English language learning needs; and,
- develop a program of learning that systematically addresses those needs at individual and class level while, at the same time, maintaining content learning at age-appropriate levels.

These teacher competencies are developed in university courses for teachers of *English as an Additional Language or Dialect* (EAL/D). The way English is taught by qualified language specialists is different from the way classroom teachers generally teach the subject English. The subject English is still generally taught by mainstream teachers with an unexamined assumption that most learners will be native speakers of standard English. When an EAL/D approach is taken across the curriculum, English language learning is not separated from its use in Mathematics, History, etc. EAL/D specialist teachers even use different strategies from mainstream teachers to teach the mainstream subject, English. Regular teacher education programs do not ensure that all classroom teachers know or understand how to teach their subject while developing students' English language skills at the same time.

We know that being able to use standard English competently and confidently in employment and certain social situations facilitates access to the full range of opportunities offered in mainstream Australian society, regardless of whether you are of Indigenous or non-Indigenous background. Policies and strategy documents exist at all levels of government which suggest that governments *do* understand that regular school attendance is not the whole story, although it is, of course, vitally important. Some policy documents and teacher resources even make it clear that administrators are aware that Indigenous children and young people who are still learning school English have the right to receive *the same kind of specialised language-focused teaching as any other Australian student who needs it*. And yet such support is not routinely available to every eligible Australian child or young person. The problem is not confined to the Northern Territory, although NAPLAN results indicate that it is most urgent here.

As we saw in the previous chapter, even workshops carefully designed to analyse NAPLAN results, media discussion of Indigenous education issues, and advertisements to recruit teachers to work in the Territory often ignore this vitally important fact — that limited ability to use English at school is a consistent element in school failure right across the board. This failure to focus on appropriate ways to address the English language learning needs of so many Indigenous students is without doubt the largest Elephant in the Room in discussions about Indigenous achievement levels at school.

All too often, public statements and discussions appear to imply that the teaching strategies suited to children who know and use Australian English as their only language will also work effectively and efficiently for children who speak other languages and dialects. Research in Australian and overseas has proven time after time that this is not the case. In fact, children whose language learning needs are ignored very frequently fall behind their age peers at school.

To ignore the language learning needs of so many Indigenous students, while making provision for many migrant children with similar needs is a sign of disrespect. As a result, the educational programs offered to Indigenous children and young people are sometimes a severely watered down version of the age-appropriate curricula taught in mainstream settings. Resorting to such strategies in an attempt to accommodate the limited English proficiency of many students in the Northern Territory cannot possibly help to achieve *Closing the Gap* objectives.

We should not be surprised if even very young children find school learning programs so unrewarding they sometimes decide to stay away. Imagine the difference, if every day, every Indigenous child or young person in the Northern Territory went home from school or training confident in the ability to use one new grammatical pattern of school English. For instance, they could learn how to ask a question in the way mainstream Australian society expects, or how to explain a process using the ordinary everyday words and sentences that native speakers of standard English already know. Along with small incremental gains in English language knowledge every day, Indigenous learners also need to go home with at least one new piece of content knowledge. As we saw in earlier chapters, it is also good practice for teachers to remind learners of what they've achieved each day so that they leave for home with a conscious awareness of how their learning has progressed.

With regard to the issues of home language maintenance and Dual Language education, Australian governments urgently need research to show whether or not learning gains are greater when learners' home languages and dialects are respected and supported. It is even more urgent to find out whether focused English language instruction across the curriculum, delivered by qualified English language specialists, makes a difference to learning outcomes and attendance patterns. This research is not currently being done in Indigenous schools in any high profile way. Nor are Indigenous children and young people routinely assessed to find out what their levels of English language proficiency are, at every stage of their learning, and whether it is improving over time.

As we discussed above, many mainstream classroom teachers have not been trained to use EAL/D assessment tools to assess their students' levels of English language proficiency, let alone use language-focused approaches to teaching the content matter in each subject area. And yet, as we saw in Chapter 5, there is suggestive research (NSWDEC 2013) that ACARA's new EAL/D *Learning Progression Map* is a reliable and valid tool for assessing and monitoring the progress of English language learners. A Northern Territory trial of this resource would make sense.

Research discussed in earlier chapters tells us that when sustained English language teaching is provided by suitably qualified staff throughout the Primary years, children who speak no English at all on arrival at school can generally be expected to reach or come close to their native English-speaking peers in terms of achievement levels by the end of Primary school. Professional teaching of English language learners is optimized when systematic monitoring of their language development is done and the results used to plan further learning.

What about Literacy? Children can become literate in any language, given the chance, but becoming literate in English is much easier for young children who already speak it at home than it is for children who don't know the language. Surely this basic scientific fact is also simple common sense? Learning to read and write in English is not the same thing as learning English itself. It is much easier to show very young children how the strange squiggles we call 'writing' relate to the noises we make when we talk if the squiggles and the noises are in the same language. Young children who are still learning English do not automatically make the sounds used in English. All languages have different sound patterns and all writing systems represent speech patterns differently, often using very different methods. As we saw in Chapter Three, the spelling systems that have been developed for Indigenous languages are actually much more consistent and straightforward than the English spelling system (because literacy in English has a very long history, compared to literacy in Australian languages).

From their very first years of compulsory schooling, many Indigenous children are presented with cultural, linguistic and educational challenges so complex, in comparison to the challenges faced by most other Australian children of the same age, that being able to compete as equals in such assessments as NAPLAN is simply out of the question.

At the same time, many Indigenous children throughout Australia *definitely do* achieve the same educational standards as non-Indigenous children, even though Standard Australian English may not be the language or dialect they use at home. Some learners go on to outperform many of their native standard English-speaking peers if high levels of support and resourcing are provided. It takes time and serious commitment, but it can be done.

As discussed in Chapter Three, some people occasionally, perhaps even unconsciously, fall into the trap of imagining that if a child or young person has difficulty understanding and speaking English it somehow suggests they might have learning difficulties. This conclusion could only be drawn if the same children cannot understand or speak the languages used in their homes. One only has to watch these children interacting confidently and competently with other people through their home language or dialect to see how unfair it is to judge them on the basis of a language they hardly know, or are too shy to use. Intellectual capacity does not depend on knowledge of and capacity to use standard English, even though this is the language of currency in the formal school environment.

Throughout this book, we have discussed the importance of Indigenous students acquiring English as well as attending school regularly. We have tried to demonstrate how each of these issues relate to the educational disadvantage experienced by so many Indigenous children and young people in school and training situations. Of course we are also aware of the many other contributing factors, such as the lack of economic sovereignty of Indigenous people, inadequate housing, family health issues, movement away from Country, repeated cycles of personal and family tragedy, and the attendant loss and grief, to name but a few. All these factors impact on the lives and educational opportunities of Indigenous students to differing degrees, in different places and in different ways, and should not be forgotten.

Australians cannot dispute the long, sad, legacy of colonialism which still makes life difficult for Indigenous Australians in many situations today, nor can we change the fact that Indigenous people were morally, ethically, legally, and socially discriminated against when not recognised as citizens of their own country until 1967. We cannot deny that some of the White Man's 'pleasures' have become sources of terrible misery and suffering, for some families, in some communities. At the same time, there have always been Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who protested that Indigenous people were not being treated fairly by mainstream society. There have always been Indigenous leaders, educators and community members who repeatedly demanded a fairer deal from all levels of government in Australia, and still do.

In similar vein, there have always been teachers who have devoted their lives to improving the educational experiences of their students. There have always been linguists who have helped communities preserve their languages by developing and sharing writing systems for those languages. Medical and other health care personnel have also worked hard to improve health outcomes in Indigenous communities, and journalists and historians who wrote the truth, even when it was unpopular or controversial, have also helped. Many Indigenous people have worked hard to find common ground with the invaders who often treated them with scant regard or worse. In the 21st century, Indigenous people throughout Australia continue to face monumental challenges to maintaining their cultures and languages, while also acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in mainstream Australian contexts as they choose.

Much research has been carried out in Indigenous communities over the last 50 or so years. Much of it was directed at building a sound evidence base for affirmative action in community settings and government departments alike. Research outcomes have given rise to important educational

benefits, for instance in helping non-Indigenous people understand some of the cultural and interpersonal priorities of Indigenous people, identifying teaching and learning strategies which encourage learners to participate more fully in schooling, and so on.

Unfortunately, too many research projects, even where consultation has supposedly occurred beforehand, and even where Indigenous people have been involved in carrying out the research, have not produced much in the way of usable findings. In the remainder of this chapter, we identify several areas of research urgently in need of funding at this time and make suggestions about directions new research might take.

What new research directions are needed?

We suggest that new on-the-ground research is currently needed in the following eight areas:

1. *ASSESSING AND MONITORING ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIGENOUS SCHOOLS*

    1a. *Research to identify a valid and reliable tool for assessing proficiency levels in Standard Australian English in the Northern Territory context*

The levels of English language proficiency of Indigenous students in remote and very remote regions, and even the larger towns in the Northern Territory, are not currently known, in spite of the fact that national and Territory governments accept that many students use standard English as an *additional* language or dialect. Without a valid and reliable tool for assessing their current proficiency to use English for school-based learning, it is impossible to know to what degree language factors may be compromising their ability to achieve successfully at age-appropriate levels.

The New South Wales trial (NSWDEC 2013) of ACARA's (2012b) *Learning Progression Map* found this assessment tool to be both reliable and valid for use with EAL/D students in that state when administered by teachers who receive prior training in its use. The researchers recommended that a nationwide trial be conducted, particularly with respect to the validity and reliability of the assessment tool when used to assess the proficiency levels of Indigenous students.

Given the proportion of Indigenous students is higher in the Northern Territory than in any other state or territory, an investigation using similar methodology to the New South Wales study (for comparability reasons) is urgently needed. However, because of the possibility of high teacher turnover during the study in some schools, and the likely variability in the amount and consistency of training to enable classroom teachers to use the ACARA assessment instrument in the context

of remote and very remote educational delivery in the Northern Territory, the most appropriate course of action would be to conduct the study using a team of three or four EAL/D specialists working together and systematically visiting the study schools throughout the study period. Previous EAL/D research and practice has shown that trained users of progression maps of this kind generally demonstrate a high degree of inter-rater reliability so, even if the composition of the assessment team changed slightly during the year, a high level of reliability is still likely to be maintained using this approach.

Readers of this book who are not familiar with language learning scales like ACARA's *Learning Progression Map* might be interested to know that, unlike tests designed for native speakers of English, EAL/D scales, charts or maps take into account that the learners are already *competent users of their home languages* and are in the process of *adding a new language or dialect* to complement their existing competencies. Progress over time can be reliably tracked using these scales. Experience has shown that a high degree of comparability is achieved when assessors have been trained to use the scales. However, such comparability cannot be assumed with untrained assessors. The reason for this is that qualified EAL/D teachers have specialist knowledge about *how children learn a new language* and what they need to focus on in determining a learner's current level of proficiency using the scales. Teachers without specialist training, understandably, often have unexamined and incorrect assumptions about how second and later learning takes place and what constitutes a normal developmental pattern in additional language learning.

1b. *Research to understand the nature and rate of English language development in standard English in Indigenous schools over time*

We have been unable to determine whether any routine assessment or monitoring of individual students' language development is currently taking place across Northern Territory schools using an appropriate assessment tool such as the various EAL/D progression charts or maps currently available in different states and territories and at the national level.

The ACARA *Learning Progression Map* could, therefore, be trialed as a *monitoring tool* over one school year in selected representative schools in the Northern Territory to assess its value in those contexts and to determine whether it can be reliably and validly used to monitor development over time in the four modes of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing in Indigenous schools. Studies 1a and 1b could be conducted in tandem by the same team of EAL/D specialist researchers in partnership with ACARA and following consultation with researchers involved in the NSW study.

1c. Research to compare English language progress in remote and very remote schools using matched classes taught by qualified EAL/D specialists as class teachers compared with regular teachers with no specific EAL/D training

As a natural corollary to investigations of the value of the ACARA *Learning Progression Map* as an assessment and monitoring tool, an additional one year trial could be undertaken to determine whether learning outcomes vary depending on qualifications of the classroom teacher with specific respect to their preparation to teach standard or school English to students who do not use it at home. A team of EAL/D specialists recruited for the study would need to be matched with a group of generalist classroom teachers, creating two groups from which comparative data could be derived.

Classroom teachers in both groups of study classes would collect examples of student work in the various subject areas over time in the normal way, and English language proficiency assessment of students in both groups would again be made by independent EAL/D specialists using the ACARA Learning Progression Map.

Data from this study would assist national and Territory governments to determine the degree to which dedicated recruitment programs for EAL/D specialists as classroom teachers should be conducted. Due to the current shortage of EAL/D qualified teachers in Australia, a longer term program for increasing the number of Northern Territory teachers with suitable qualifications could include recruitment of overseas trained teachers with recognised English language teaching qualifications. In the short term, however, in the interest of reliability in the research sense, the studies recommended here are probably best conducted by specialists already familiar with the progression charts currently in use around Australia.

2. DEVELOPING AN EQUITY-BASED NAPLAN PROGRAM

2a. Research to identify linguistic factors implicated in NAPLAN success

The degree to which proficiency in the English language is a factor in the ability to achieve National Minimum Standards (NMS) in NAPLAN Literacy and Numeracy assessments is not currently known. As we saw in Chapter Five, the *Language Background Other than English* (LBOTE) category used by ACARA has limited value in terms of predicting achievement levels in NAPLAN. This is particularly the case in the Northern Territory for Indigenous students.

The New South Wales investigation of the ACARA *Learning Progression Map* reported that:

> The trial analysed the relationship between EAL/D assessments and NAPLAN results for each matched student. As expected, higher NAPLAN results on reading or writing were generally associated with higher EAL/D reading or writing phases, for the same students assessed (NSWDEC 2013, p. iv).

Because there was only a very small number of Indigenous students in the NSW study, and because the findings cannot automatically be applied to other states or territories, further research is urgently needed to discover the strength of correlation between each of the language modes of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing on the ACARA *Learning Progression Map* and the various achievement levels on NAPLAN for Northern Territory Indigenous students.

We would emphasise here the importance of investigating *all* language modes in the Northern Territory context, not just Reading and Writing, and relating these separately to NAPLAN outcomes. Children in Indigenous communities who seem to be fluent in conversational English because of their high level of interactional development may, in some cases, be found on assessment to be operating at an earlier phase in Speaking than teachers realise. The phases in each mode are: Beginning, Emerging, Developing and Consolidating. Coping with the kind of English used in written texts often requires a much higher level of language development than coping with informal conversation, because there are so many non-verbal support factors in speech situations.

It remains to be demonstrated in research, but it also seems likely, we suggest, that Listening skills, in contexts where middle ear infections and permanent hearing loss are more common than in most metropolitan schools, may also prove to be more relevant to students' ability to access and develop the general knowledge and skills ACARA claims are the focus of NAPLAN assessment than test makers and classroom teachers appreciate.

Students with low level Reading skills require more time on task to complete test items, especially those featuring extended use of language and perhaps unfamiliar symbols. Very low level Writing skills, of course, also compromise students' ability to complete tests in an intelligible fashion, even where oral testing might demonstrate that they understand more than the written results suggest.

It would also be helpful to investigate what levels of proficiency in each of the four modes are correlated with ability to achieve NMS on the other Literacy subtests and the Numeracy test. For

instance, are Speaking and Listening levels relevant to outcomes on the Grammar and Punctuation or Spelling subtests, or to Numeracy outcomes? Are Reading or Writing levels relevant to Numeracy outcomes?

If English language proficiency levels in any of the four modes of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are found to be relevant to the ability to reach NMS on any of the NAPLAN subtests in the Northern Territory context, two courses of action would seem feasible.

First, the tests themselves could be subjected to linguistic analysis to identify linguistic or cultural features which might explain their relationships with the *Learning Progression Map* in each case. At the national level, such findings could be used as guides when future NAPLAN tests are being constructed.

Second, teacher resources could be prepared to encourage the use of teaching and learning strategies that focus on the specific language difficulties found to stand in the way of achievement of NMS by EAL/D students. Of course the findings in any of these investigations would also be relevant to the national context, as well as the Northern Territory.

From a national perspective, it is vital we discover whether levels of English language proficiency identified using the ACARA *Learning Progression Map* can be related to NAPLAN assessment results. We know that ascertaining the English language proficiency levels of students who come to school speaking Farsi, Hindi, Dinka, Indonesian, or any other language, helps EAL/D specialist plan appropriate courses for them. There is really no scientific reason why this should not also be the case for students who come to school speaking traditional or modern Australian languages such as Warlpiri, Dhambarrpuyngu, Pitjantjatjara, Kriol, or any other Indigenous language. It is also likely that worthwhile findings can be produced with respect to students who use Aboriginal English at home.

It is worth saying this again, because it is so important for equity reasons: In the case of students who do not use standard English at home, we simply do not currently know the manner in which English language proficiency levels may, or may not, relate to success on any of the NAPLAN assessments.

2b. Identifying cultural factors implicated in NAPLAN success

We reported in previous chapters on research relating to cultural factors that may often be involved in poor performances at school and in assessments such as NAPLAN. Although ACARA claims these issues are taken into account in devising the tests each year, it is clear that students in remote and very remote communities in particular are still likely to be seriously slowed down when taking tests where they have to spend time trying to understand what the test questions are about because they include assumptions about so-called common knowledge that are too heavily based towards mainstream English-speaking students living in larger towns and cities. As suggested in Chapter Five, there would no doubt be a strong parental backlash if the situation was reversed and city children were expected to read and understand questions in which the kinship structure of Indigenous families, or any other culture-specific aspects of life in the Centre or Top End, were to be taken for granted by the test makers as common knowledge. Ongoing work to remove cultural biases from NAPLAN tests, particularly in Years 3 and 5, is essential to ensure equity for all children from non-English-speaking backgrounds, whether these be young Indigenous children or migrant or refugee children.

2c. Trialing a new background factor in NAPLAN statistics: Early English Language Learner status

As mentioned above, and discussed in Chapter Five, the existing *Language Background Other than English* (LBOTE) statistical category used by ACARA has been found to have limited predictive value, especially with respect to Indigenous learners. The main reason for this may be that the LBOTE category focuses on languages used in the home, without ascertaining whether students placed in this category are native speakers of Standard Australian English or not, and without assessing their levels of English language proficiency if they are not native speakers.

We therefore suggest a new background category of *Early English Language Learner* be *trialed nationally* for three years with respect to Year 3 NAPLAN assessments, starting as soon as possible. This category will provide essential data on children's English language proficiency at the time of their first NAPLAN assessments. As indicated in Chapter Five, and explained further below, Year 3 children are the most disadvantaged as language learners with respect to NAPLAN, because they have been faced with the double burden of acquiring literacy for the first time at the same time as learning a new language for schooling.

For the purposes of NAPLAN assessments, we would define an Early English Language Learner as:

> Any child from a language background other than Standard Australian English who, at the time of the tests, has had less than three full years of professionally delivered English language teaching from qualified English language (EAL/D) specialists.

We suggest this new category includes children from migrant and refugee families, including those born in Australia, as well as Indigenous families, and that the trial be undertaken nationally. It would be up to schools, however, to decide which children should be identified and documented for ACARA as Early English Language Learners. We suggest the following procedures to insure the integrity of the category and comparability across schools and jurisdictions.

How would Early English Language Learners be identified?
All schools would need to report the number of school years each child they believe should be included in category has received formal English language instruction from qualified EAL/D teachers. Assessments of the children's English language proficiency levels, made by qualified EAL/D specialists using the ACARA *Learning Progression Map* would also be required.

In the first year of the trial, an assessment made in First term of Year 3 would be required. In the second year, assessments from Years 2 and 3, along with details of any professional English language teaching, would be necessary. In the third year of the trial, assessments and details would be required for Years 1, 2, and 3, taken in all cases in Term 1 each year. The purpose of the assessment data is to allow for fine grained statistical analysis linked on the one hand to amount of learning in classes taught by EAL/D specialists and, on the other hand, to the children's achievement levels in their first NAPLAN assessments in Year 3.

Although NAPLAN tests and EAL/D achievement scales use very different and incompatible approaches to assessing language proficiency, the possibility of systematically comparing literacy and numeracy learning outcomes using data from the two approaches still has considerable research potential. Such research would help to clarify the precise learning needs of young children with the range of different home languages and dialects found in Australia.

We say this in the full understanding that NAPLAN tests are *not* designed to assess the learning of English as an additional language. They are, however, a fact of life in contemporary Australia

and, for equity reasons, we need to know with more precision than we do currently, what levels of English language proficiency are necessary for children to reach National Minimum Standards on each of the component tests.

What does acquiring literacy for the first time involve?

Learning a new language and learning to be literate in any language are two different processes that must be conceptually separated if we are to make real progress in improving Indigenous children's literacy and language learning outcomes in Australia. There are also many migrant and refugee children, especially from homes where literacy might have a low profile, whose chances of succeeding at school would be improved if more were known about their English language proficiency levels at the time of the Year 3 NAPLAN assessments. These include children born in Australia to migrant families.

The first thing to remember is that *talk is transient and aural*, while writing, whether on paper or electronic, is at least potentially permanent. We use our *eyes* rather than our *ears* to process written language. Adults who have been writing and reading all their lives often do not realize what a major conceptual leap is involved in understanding that language can be put on paper or in the computer in the form of writing. It is not as intuitively obvious as many people think. Literacy is a late development in terms of human evolution, while language is built into our genes. Literate older learners who are new to English have already acquired concepts about relationships between language and scripts when they became literate in their home languages. This means that, although they're faced with the challenge of learning a new way of writing, and often a new method of thinking about how the writing symbols relate to the flow of speech and thought, they don't have to learn a second time that talk and the things we think can be made visible in written form. This concept is only acquired once.

In other words, a literate person understands, even if she or he is unable to explain it, that speech can be made visible in symbolic form. This understanding works together with culture-specific knowledge about sound/symbol correspondences used to reduce language to marks on paper or electronic signals in a computer (or idea/symbol correspondences in the case of the classic Chinese writing system that uses characters). New fine motor physical skills such as how to use a computer or hold a pen are also needed. These skills require practice and new coordination skills as well.

When we read, we combine concepts about language with new sets of visual and interpretive skills to make sense of what has been written by ourselves or someone else. Developmentally, this constitutes a steep learning curve for young children. As is well known, children from homes where literacy has a high profile tend to have a head-start on children from homes where TV is more important than books, magazines and newspapers. Perhaps the wide use of electronic devices today may change some of this for the youngest generations, but at this stage we do not yet know whether concepts about relationships between speech and writing will develop earlier through the use of electronic communication devices or not. It may depend on how early children begin to use their devices for texting or email rather than playing games.

Another important reason for focusing on Year 3 learners is, as we saw above, that even if basic face-to-face conversational skills seem to develop quickly, the lead time for building the understandings required for coping with written texts in each curriculum learning area is much longer.

It is important to remember that NAPLAN assessments are designed for native English-speaking learners who have age-appropriate academic language skills, as well as interpersonal communicative skills using standard English.

As learners proceed through school it is helpful if they become consciously aware that the language patterns of written texts are not the same as those of ordinary conversational language, and that many conventions associated with talking and writing about content matter in each subject can be unique to that area of learning. These specific language patterns are hardly noticed by many native English-speaking students, especially those whose parents have post-school educational qualifications. Subject-specific language patterns may also have a background character for many teachers. Teachers might notice specialized subject-specific *vocabulary*, but not be consciously aware that typical sentence patterns or grammatical structures in a particular subject area are also different from the ones we generally use in everyday speech. Learning all these things about language is part of learning to read and write for the purposes of school-based education.

As discussed earlier, these subject-specific uses of language are learned more quickly and efficiently when explicitly taught. Even mainstream learners often benefit from explicit language-focused teaching of this kind, but students who use English as an additional language have an especially strong need because they have to learn new patterns of culture as well as a new language. Current

understandings about the language patterns used in school-based learning have grown out of more than 30 years of research, most notably in the pioneering work of Jim Cummins (e.g. 1979, 2001a, 2001b) and his colleagues.

To reiterate, we cannot expect language learners in remote and very remote schools to reach parity with native speakers in the kind of English used in NAPLAN tests by Year 3 if they only start to learn school English in Year 1. We might perhaps expect them to approach native speaker proficiency levels by Year 5 or Year 7, but only with professional EAL/D teaching and support, and only if they attend school regularly.

Some language learners from any cultural background certainly do achieve parity earlier than others, but generally only in schools where they're surrounded by native English-speaking peers and teachers in places where English is widely spoken outside the school. Even then, many immigrant and refugee learners struggle to achieve levels commensurate with those of their native-speaking peers if their parents had limited educational opportunities or if the students themselves are reluctant readers.

The *four macro skills* or modes of Listening, Speaking, Reading/Viewing and Writing are all central to language use in school environments. Learners exposed to a new language typically demonstrate beginning proficiency in Listening before developing the confidence to speak. This *passive* or *receptive* understanding can be assessed by trained personnel using tools like ACARA's *Language Progression Map*. As active *oral language skills* begin to develop, these too can be systematically assessed, using the Speaking strand of the assessment instrument. Actually, listening is also a very active skill although it has been traditionally regarded as passive.

Writing and Reading may develop in tandem if taught together. These skills are also assessed using separate elements of the progression map. Separate assessment is particularly important, however, because reading skills may develop ahead of the manual dexterity and hand/eye coordination required to produce legible writing. Or reading skills may develop using a whole word recognition approach before a proper understanding of sound/symbol correspondences has been established.

Older learners as Early English Language Learners for NAPLAN background factor purposes
Older refugee and migrant new arrivals, like older Indigenous learners who have yet not established a sound basis for developing English language skills, might also be regarded as early language

learners. A case can be made for identifying these students also as falling into the EELL background factors group for the purposes of NAPLAN testing. For instance, some students from some refugee camps have had no previous literacy experience in any language and some Indigenous youth have such low literacy levels they cannot be regarded as literate in terms of employability. Although these students are more mature in general developmental terms, they face many of the challenges that Year 1 students face as they try to come to grips with what is involved in learning to read and write.

If the Early English Language Learner background category proves helpful in clarifying the specific instructional needs of language learners at Year 3 level after a three year trial, it would be logical to extend it to NAPLAN Year 5, 7 and 9 assessment cohorts. Of course the numbers of students in this category in later years would always be smaller than in Year 3 because students who have received three or more years of formal English language instruction would not be included. Although three years of classroom teaching by teachers with EAL/D specialist training is not enough for students to catch up with native-speaking peers, it should be enough to enable them to complete NAPLAN tests. This can be contrasted with the current situation, where, as we saw in Chapter 3, many students, not only in Year 3 but also in later years in some cases, cannot even begin to read the test papers, let alone answer the questions in writing.

It is important also to remember that many older English language learners do have well established literacy skills in other languages when they arrive in Australia. This gives them the required conceptual base for building literacy in the new language. They may, however, need to learn new hand-eye coordination skills if previous experience is with a right-left rather than left-right oriented writing system. Such students are likely to need more time to complete the assessments than others.

If learners' home languages have scripts that use syllabic or idiographic symbols, rather than the roughly phonemic system of English, new concepts about writing are required. Even when the same writing system (orthography) is used, new principles for breaking the stream of aural language down into a writable script may have to be learned. For instance, the letter 'c' has different symbolic values in English and Indonesian and these have to be learned and remembered in order to understand text written in English.

Some immigrant and refugee students bring academic concepts and skills from earlier educational experiences. If they come from a culture where rote learning is more important than in Australia, however, their academic proficiencies may have a different emphases and overall profile. Even learners with some academic background can find the process of transferring and building academic language proficiencies in a new language takes several years. For instance, the rhetorical patterns English speakers use for setting up discussions or presenting factual information in various writing genres may not have one to one counterparts in the languages of immigrant students. This is the reason such patterns are taught systematically by EAL/D instructors in the various *Academic English* programs offered in Australian schools and universities.

3. EXPLORING NEW STRATEGIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

3a. Research to develop and extend the evidence base for both-ways theory and practice in early childhood education

There is no existing Australian evidence base to support an argument for or against implementing a Dual Language approach in Indigenous education along the lines of current international best practice. Loose talk about the value or problems of Bilingual Education as practiced in the past generally fails to take into account modern research and thinking about what makes balanced and respectful teaching through two languages successful.

The general lack of respect for home languages and dialects in the current educational regime has been evident throughout this book, both historically and now in the 21st century, often in spite of high sounding policies and comforting motherhood statements about valuing Indigenous languages and cultures. There have, of course, been some highly effective and respectful both-ways programs in some communities where local people felt their wishes and values were respected. Unfortunately, these programs have often not been supported or sustained over the long term or widely extended into other schools and communities.

Although a principled trial of modern Dual Language education is certainly desirable, it is currently impossible in most remote and very remote communities because it would require fully qualified EAL/D teachers for the English language side of the program and fully qualified local Indigenous teachers, with qualifications equal to those of their non-Indigenous colleagues, to teach the local language side of the program. Until such a trial becomes possible as a result of serious attempts to train large numbers of local teachers to mainstream professional standards, we cannot know how

well a fully developed Dual Language educational program would work in Indigenous schools, and yet all the evidence from overseas points to the fact that this pedagogy has the potential to lead to improved learning outcomes when implemented in line with current international theory practice.

In spite of the fact that we still do not have enough properly qualified teachers for a fully developed Dual Language trial, there is still an urgent need for significantly greater utilisation of both-ways principles in the Early years, where communities support this initiative, and where suitable community members are available to team-teach with their non-Indigenous colleagues. We say this in the knowledge that the Northern Territory is currently falling far behind its stated goals with respect to Indigenous teacher education, while the situation for very young children in particular continues to be problematic in educational terms in many contexts.

Current both-ways theory and practice (see, for instance, Farmer & Fasoli 2011) offer a respectful and practical way of supporting young children learning school English as a new language or dialect. There is, therefore, an urgent need for this approach to be expanded as an interim measure at least. As such, it not only needs expanded funding, but also ongoing, rigorous investigation to build a substantial evidence base for developing future theory and practice relevant to both-ways learning.

Practical and respectful both-ways approaches to improving the educational chances of young Indigenous children require proficient language speakers of local languages and English to work together as a team in a balanced way, each mentoring the other with regard to cultural and interpersonal expectations, as Farmer & Fasoli (2011) outline in detail.

Both-ways education assists families with language maintenance objectives where communities want schools to be involved in teaching and learning through the children's home languages as well as English. There is potential for investigating how the proficiency of young children to use their local languages competently, while at the same time developing English as a language for schooling, compares in both-ways contexts with the language development of children in predominantly monolingual early childhood learning settings. It is also important to systematically assess other developmental parameters to determine the degree to which both-ways learning does, or does not, facilitate the achievement of developmental milestones. We need more data on the question of whether both-ways approaches can be shown to enhance social and/or cognitive development, as assessed from Indigenous as well as European perspectives.

It would also be useful to conduct longitudinal studies to investigate whether children who participate in both-ways learning in the early years are less, or more, able to reach, or approach, NAPLAN National Minimum Standards in Year 3 than students taught in predominantly monolingual early childhood educational settings.

Community leaders might also be invited to share their evaluations of the degree to which young learners in both-ways learning situations demonstrate better understanding of Indigenous knowledge and values, including ability to use community languages and dialects at age-appropriate levels, than children who participate in English-only programs. Although such evaluations might be essentially subjective, exploring appropriate ways to evaluate and record development of home language knowledge and competencies would certainly be useful in the Northern Territory context.

A Reading through Writing approach to establishing early literacy

As discussed previously, a sound educational principle is to introduce and establish initial literacy in the language or dialect children speak most fluently. This principle faces special challenges in the Northern Territory for several reasons, including lack of familiarity with writing systems for local languages in some communities, low numbers of qualified local early childhood teachers, inadequate numbers of qualified Indigenous Language Researchers, and the use of multiple languages and dialects in many remote and very remote communities, not to mention the larger towns.

In a 1993 report on bilingual education in the Kimberley, Penny Lee briefly explored the potential of a *Reading through Writing* program for situations where early literacy cannot be established on the basis of extensive reading materials in the children's home languages. As she explained:

> Approaches which have focused on reading as the primary access to literacy have not produced the results that were hoped for, in either English or vernacular literacy, across whole school populations. … Whilst it is important to maintain a focus on reading in remote schools, it is possible that giving much more emphasis to writing of a genuinely communicative nature throughout the school and across the curriculum may help some students make the breakthrough they need. Coming to understand the communicative utility of writing through personal experience of its instrumental nature may in turn encourage curiosity about written materials in general and, with it, interest in reading. It is also important to remember that the act of writing itself involves reading what is written, sometimes many times over (Lee 1993:39-40).

Lee developed these ideas partly on the basis of her research observations in two very remote Kimberley schools in 1991. She noticed that young children were often intrigued by the way she wrote notes during observations, showing considerable curiosity about what she was doing. They asked questions and even insisted at times on making their own squiggles in her note pad.

Lee realized that young Indigenous learners rarely, if ever, see anyone writing for genuine personal purposes. Although they were supposed to be learning to write and read (in English) at school, some were making extremely slow progress in literacy even after several years of schooling. Others could read or write a few words, but showed no real interest in developing their skills through the lessons routinely offered by their teachers.

Lee wondered whether some of the children had not yet understood that all writing is speakable (because we can read it out loud) and that what we can say can also be written. As discussed above, concepts about relationships between spoken and written language have to develop before someone can be regarded as truly literate. Children who understand that: "Anything I can say I can write", and also that: "My friends and I can read it" have made the conceptual leap that provides the essential foundation for genuinely productive written literacy. Besides, they can have a lot of fun and get deeply involved in their early literacy attempts when a reading though writing approach is used, as Arlene C. Schultze (2006) describes in detail in her book *Helping Children become Readers through Writing*.

Peter Elbow suggests that putting reading before writing (as in the usual phrase *reading and writing*) puts "the cart before the horse" (Elbow 2004:8). In his article "Write first", he points out that:

> First graders can "write" all the words they can say, albeit in their own manner and using invented spelling. Encouraging this kind of writing gives children control over letters and texts, giving them an understanding that they need ultimately for reading. The word *learning* itself tends to promote reading over writing because we often assume learning refers to input not output, that it's a matter of putting other people's ideas inside us. Writing is more caught up with meaning making, however, and encourages students to break out of their characteristically passive stance in school and in learning. "Reading tends to imply 'Sit still and pay attention', whereas writing tends to imply "Get in there and *do* something'" (Elbow 2004:8).

Talking and writing are similar in that they are both active and can both be used for communication. Although we also read as a way of participating in written communication, reading is perhaps a little more like thinking in that it is not so easily observable. We can see some of the signs that someone is thinking or reading, but we don't see the mental activity itself.

By contrast, the physical activity of writing is more noticeable, as is the physical activity of speaking. Of course reading, writing, speaking and understanding what we hear *all* involve mental as well as physical processes; it's just that writing and speaking may *seem* to be more active, both in observing someone, and in experiencing oneself doing these activities.

If meaningful writing is about putting the things you can already say into written form, it makes no sense at all to ask children to write (and read) words they do not know. This is what we do when we expect children to make their earliest writing and reading experiments in English. We should try to find out first whether or not they can even speak or think in the type of English they're expected to use at school.

Schulze has consistently found, over 30 years of research and practice, that when young children make their initial efforts to write using the language patterns that are closest and most natural to them, they are more successful in becoming writers and readers than many children taught in more traditional ways, with the major focus on reading. In the case of children who are learning English as a new language for schooling, introducing literacy in home languages first is also a well established, evidence-based approach built on 40 years of research into Dual Language schooling, as discussed in previous chapters.

Although Schulze does not primarily focus on multilingual children, the theories behind each element of her program also make sense in multilingual contexts and can be adapted to different cultural circumstances. She describes how her *Writing Workshop* approach is introduced in preschool and other early schooling situations. Each stage of the workshop has been trialed and developed by practicing teachers who helped her refine the various techniques used. As Schultze explains:

> In a writing workshop, each child is allowed and encouraged to develop his or her own voice, which promotes engagement in literacy. Voluntary engagement in a task is the key ingredient to learning and the key to success in school and in life. The kindergartener and first and second grade teachers whom I have

instructed in a writing workshop approach report that their students are really enthusiastic about writing workshop and request it if they miss even one day. As Holdaway (1979) asserts, children know when they are learning (Schultze 2006:viii).

Schultze goes on to explain that:

> Decoding and Comprehending a message are the two basic elements of reading (Gough & Tunmer 1986). A message is the reason for reading and the reason for writing. Therefore, as writers learn how to write, or encode, or communicate their own messages, they also learn that reading is about communicating others' messages (Schulze 2006:viii).

But can literacy be taught in languages that have few or no children's reading books?

We saw in Chapters Two and Three that not having enough reading materials in the children's languages was a serious challenge for the bilingual programs of the 1970s and 1980s, in spite of high levels of commitment and a great deal of sheer hard work in Language Production Centres in Bilingual Schools. It is impossible to match the volume and quantity of early childhood literature available to English-speaking children with materials produced using the limited resources of remote Indigenous schools.

The fact that writing was not part of traditional Indigenous cultures also creates challenges for children and schools. Learning to write and to read and use written language for real life purposes in the 21st century is about learning new cultural behaviours to complement existing cultural patterns. And many Indigenous communities *do* value literacy these days for the fact that it can be used to preserve important knowledge and stories that might otherwise be forgotten as people spend more and more time in towns and cities. A language itself can even be preserved for future generations through writing, as we saw in Chapter Three in the discussion of the world's Endangered Languages. Of course voice recordings are also used, but these are often transcribed into written form as well.

Many people also text and email each other in their own languages or dialects these days, or even set up websites in small languages. These uses of written language definitely fall into the category of instrumental uses. Focusing on writing rather than reading in early childhood helps young children learn from personal experience that what they can say they can also write and that writing can be

useful or fun. Children who enjoy these experiences learn to read what they and their friends have written and are more likely to develop sufficient interest in literacy to keep building up their skills as they grow older than many children taught by more conventional methods.

3b. *Establishing and evaluating a Reading through Writing approach to literacy in early childhood.*

We suggest that an experimental *Reading through Writing* or *Writing First* approach be trialed as soon as feasible in selected schools in communities:

a) where there is strong support for maintenance of home languages or dialects;

b) where adult members of the community who are comfortable writing their own languages or dialects are willing to be employed as Literacy Instructors alongside classroom teachers in the early years of schooling; and

c) where qualified *English as an Additional Language or Dialect* Early Childhood specialists can be recruited to work as classroom teachers and guide the teaching and learning program

The following suggestions provide an outline of how this experimental program could be organised:

1. Literacy Instructors would work with qualified English language specialists who would have legal responsibility for the class. The qualified teachers would be responsible for programming and for mentoring the Literacy Instructors in early literacy theory and practice, but would not at any stage try to use or teach the local languages in the classroom. This recommended approach is the *One Teacher One Language* strategy, based on the well-researched *One Parent One Language* approach to raising children bilingually.

2. In keeping with both-ways philosophy and practice, Literacy Instructors would mentor the classroom teachers in matters relating to local languages, culture and social aspects of remote community life, and also with regard to Indigenous understandings about how children learn and develop in their early years.

3. The EAL/D teacher would introduce spoken English, but not written English, in the first year of the program. Spoken English would be developed at this stage through an *Intensive Oral English* program of the kind routinely offered in the *Intensive English Language Centers* that cater for migrant and refugee children throughout Australia. The oral English program, in other words, would be taught by the specialist, using modern communicative language

teaching strategies and techniques that have been developed for situations where the teacher does not know the children's home languages. In the first year of the trial program, no attempt to teach literacy in English would be made at all. The only focus on English at this stage would be to develop oral language. The children's Speaking and Listening skills in English would be monitored throughout the trial using the ACARA assessment tool.

4. The Literacy Instructor would be guided by the Early Childhood specialist to plan and deliver literacy workshops in the children's home languages, using strategies developed by Schultze, but adapted to the circumstances of remote Indigenous communities and the natural interests of children in community schools. Literacy development in local languages or dialects would be continued throughout the full three years of the experimental program. In deciding how to focus literacy workshops, the classroom teacher would be guided by the Literacy Instructor.

5. It is more than likely that other community members might enjoy being involved in these literacy workshops on a voluntary basis. If this happens, community members might also want to suggest activities where the young learners could experiment with and develop their ability to write and read their own languages.

6. Monitoring children's Writing and Reading development in home languages would take place mainly through records of children's experiments with writing. Where children experiment in other media, for instance writing in sand or with water from bottles on cement, for instance, their work would be photographed for their learning portfolios. Ability to read their own and other people's writing in home languages would be observed and assessed in the usual way for children of this age.

7. Routine learning activities in the various subject areas would be jointly planned by the teacher and the Literacy Instructor for delivery through the two languages in a balanced way, although the qualified teacher would have the responsibility of preparing teaching and learning programs as required by the Department of Education.

8. English language literacy would be introduced for the first time in the second year of the program by the specialist EAL/D teacher, and further developed alongside home language literacy in the third year.

9. Oral language skills in both languages would continue to be systematically developed over the three years using Early Childhood Education teaching and learning strategies drawn from normal western practice in the case of English and from Indigenous practice in the case of local languages.

10. The children in the trial would take NAPLAN tests in Year 3 although it would not be expected that many would be able to meet National Minimum Standards (NMS) at this stage. They would be registered with ACARA as Early English Language Learners, as described above, but their NAPLAN results would also provide valuable additional data for building better understandings about early language literacy development through two languages or dialects in the Northern Territory context.

Some people might argue that any experimental early childhood program should aim to have children achieving NMS by Year 3. Our response is that we currently have a situation where many Year 3 students do not even attempt the NAPLAN tests because they have no literacy skills at all, in English or any other language, or only very minimal skills, so any improvement in this regard is valuable. Professional EAL/D teaching includes systematically introducing learners to all the usual requirements of western-style schooling, including test-taking, etc. at age-appropriate levels.

By Year 5, however, we would expect a significant proportion of students to achieve NMS if they attend school regularly and if their classroom teachers are qualified EAL/D specialists. It would certainly be desirable if literacy development in the learner's home languages could also be continued alongside English after the third year of the trial if communities support it.

We do not recommend the transfer approach used in bilingual education in the Territory in the past because, as Paradis et al. (20011, p. 191) make clear, these programs 'fail to promote high levels of competence in the native language'. Failure to build home language proficiency undermines the academic, cognitive and personal benefits that flow from building on and maintaining knowledge and understandings first developed in home and community environments. The aim in remote community schools should be for literacy development to continue, side by side, in home languages and English throughout primary school.

4. RECRUITING, EMPLOYING AND TRAINING LITERACY INSTRUCTORS IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

4a. Who should be recruited as literacy instructors?

For the purposes of the trial proposed above, any members of the community who are already literate in their own languages, even at a relatively low level of proficiency, might be employed as Literacy Instructors if they and their communities support their appointment to this role. In the longer term, community members who can already write their own languages or want to learn how to do so would be encouraged to become Literacy Instructors and participate in appropriate training programs. Qualified Literacy Instructors would have professional status. A Literacy Instructor qualification could be acquired through a multiple exit point (stepped) course focusing initially on Indigenous language literacy and teaching methods relevant to teaching early writing and reading.

Such a course would interface in later stages with other teacher education or language worker courses already available, or under development in the NT. Elements of the Literacy Instructor course might overlap with existing VET courses, e.g. *Certificate in Indigenous Language and Knowledge Work* or *Certificate in Own Language Work*. Graduates of existing courses might be encouraged to apply for Literacy Instructor positions in the trial described in the previous section. It might be helpful if they could be provided first with further professional development that focused on strategies used to teach early writing and reading skills to young children, but it is also important to remember that there could be great merit in not overburdening Literacy Instructors with prescriptive training in such matters.

The reason for this is that it would be very interesting and useful if Literacy Instructors could be encouraged to use their own culturally-appropriate strategies for teaching young children. Since educators with conventional Western-style training do not know enough about the way young children learn new skills and understandings in remote and very remote communities, it is possible that flexibility in this regard during the trial might result in genuine breakthroughs. The only criterion for deciding whether to continue or expand particular teaching strategies introduced by the Literacy Instructor or community should be *whether or not the children begin to demonstrate early literacy awareness and capabilities in their home languages*. This is the goal of any early literacy course. As such, it should be given priority over ideas about what constitutes the "proper" way to teach writing to young children.

We would argue that Literacy Instructors should be employed in an ongoing way in Northern Territory schools as a means of demonstrating respect for, and celebration of, the unique linguistic diversity in this country. Doing so is a practical way of acknowledging that the linguistic heritage of Indigenous Australians is not only a precious inheritance for Indigenous families, but also a national treasure of immense international interest and global value, as explained in Chapter 3. As discussed previously, the maintenance of traditional Australian languages in particular, and the access they provide to Indigenous knowledges, is fundamental to the mental, social and cultural wellbeing of Indigenous Australians everywhere. All major political parties acknowledge that this is so. This recognition is also formally incorporated into Australian Government policy, as we will see at the end of this chapter in the objectives of the *National Indigenous Languages Policy*.

5. PROVIDING SPECIALIST EAL/D SUPPORT FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS WITH MINIMAL PRIOR EAL/D KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

We acknowledge that it is not realistically feasible at this time to recruit the numbers of English as an Additional Language or Dialect professionals currently required for classroom teaching in every class in every Northern Territory multilingual school. EAL/D specialist staff can, however, also make a significant difference in schools where they are employed to support mainstream teachers to help them plan for language-focused learning across the subject areas.

We are *not* referring here to the employment of any teacher who may be willing to act as a so-called 'ESL Support Teacher' without the specialist knowledge or skills acquired in specialised Diploma or Batchelor of Education courses, or other internationally accredited English language teaching courses. While we agree that providing small group support and one-on-one tutoring to language learners can be very helpful, and should certainly not be dismissed, even where the support person has no special training for the job, this is *not* the same as providing fully qualified expert personnel to help classroom teachers systematically plan and deliver teaching and learning programs that are task-based and language-focused and give as much attention to developing language skills for thinking and learning in English as they do to the content matter.

In this context, it is useful to remember that EAL/D strategies which focus specifically on the language requirements of learning tasks have been found to be helpful to native speakers of English as well as students still acquiring the language for school-based learning. This is because, a great deal of school learning is based on assumptions and specific words and language patterns that are not commonly used in ordinary, everyday life. When these linguistic aspects of school learning

are taught in an explicit way, learners from families not familiar with the culture-specific ways of talking and writing used in schools and universities get a better chance to achieve equally with learners from families with high levels of parental education.

Incorporating EAL/D strategies in mixed classes of multilingual and monolingual learners does not, in other words, disadvantage students who use English at home. When language factors are explained, and attended to in a conscious and systematic way, many learners, including native English-speaking learners, often develop significantly improved understanding of why just trying hard is not always enough. Success at school is also about finding keys to unlock cultural puzzles and learning over time to use culture-specific language codes specific to school-based learning.

Research is needed to find out whether students in schools where a principled EAL/D program is supported by specialist staff across the curriculum:

a) make steadier or speedier progress in their language development than students in other schools, and/or

b) achieve learning outcomes over time that come closer to those of native English-speaking students by the end of primary school.

It is only on the basis of evidence from such research that principled decisions can be made about whether to cut funding for support staff in Northern Territory schools or expand it. Economic considerations should not have priority in the context of national and state level commitments to Closing the Gap in educational achievement across Australia.

6. *INVESTIGATING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING NEEDS OF SENIOR SECONDARY AND VET STUDENTS*

Although we have not been able to give more than passing attention to Senior Secondary education and Vocational and Technical Training in this book, research into the English language learning needs of these older students and trainees is also desperately needed.

We need to ask, for instance, what level of Reading proficiency is required to ensure trainees can confidently read typical notices and information in the workplace context?

What Listening skills are required to ensure the safety of trainees?

What levels of Writing proficiency are necessary to ensure trainees are confident and competent to complete forms used in workplaces?

What levels of Speaking proficiency are necessary to ensure that trainees confidently participate in, and enjoy, normal workplace interactions, including social interactions typical of the culture of their workplace?

These questions can be answered by systematically assessing the students' English language proficiency levels in each of the modes of language use and relating them to on-site observations of student behavior and interviews with the students or trainees themselves and with their instructors.

For urgent equity reasons relating to the employability of young Indigenous adults in the mainstream economy, we cannot emphasise enough the need to collect far more precise data about the English language proficiency profiles of young Indigenous adults, especially in remote and very remote communities, than is currently available.

7. IDENTIFYING IMPEDIMENTS TO SUCCESSFUL INDIGENOUS TEACHER EDUCATION

The consistently low numbers of Indigenous teachers graduating and moving into teaching positions in the Northern Territory should be a cause for serious national reflection. As we pointed out at the beginning of this book, if nearly 27% of Territorians are Indigenous people, as the 2011 census showed, it is reasonable to ask why a similar percentage (one in four) of Indigenous teachers are not employed in Northern Territory schools as fully qualified, locally trained and employed professionals.

During the 1970s and 1980s, important initiatives were taken in several states and the Northern Territory to increase the number of fully qualified Indigenous classroom teachers. Unfortunately, some of these programs were less successful than had initially been expected. This still seems to be the case, as projected figures for new Indigenous graduates never seem to produce the number of fully qualified teachers anticipated. And yet, in the Northern Territory, probably more than anywhere else in Australia, finding out how to succeed in delivering quality teacher education to local Indigenous people has the potential to help address some of the issues around culture shock and high teacher turnover in remote and very remote schools that have contributed to unsatisfactory delivery of educational programs to children and young people.

Indigenous school leavers and mature age students need to feel confident they can cope with using the language of mainstream teacher education courses. Of course many Indigenous students drop out of their courses without finishing them, due to a very wide range of issues. But no systematic research seems to have been done on the role inadequate levels of proficiency in standard English may have. Feelings of inadequacy or shame when faced with the normal demands of mainstream courses may, in some instances at least, be more significant than is actually known. Urgent research is needed to discover whether Indigenous tertiary students who complete preliminary Academic English courses of the kind offered to International students experience more confidence and success in subsequent tertiary study than those who do not.

Perhaps the best way to tackle this potential problem is to invite Indigenous tertiary students who wish to become teachers to actively explore the issue of their own standard English proficiency levels, particularly in regard to their own levels of reading comprehension of academic texts, and their confidence and competence to write at the required level for tertiary studies.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, a subtle kind of racism is at work when non-Indigenous staff hide from Indigenous (or International) students what the real requirements of courses are, allowing students to become too dependent on their support. Of course, the reality of pressures to increase speedy student through-put in tertiary institutions may often encourage academic support staff and lecturers to cut corners by providing excessive levels of assistance to struggling students. This may seem to work in the short term, but is probably a significant factor in later employment difficulties, as we saw in the Language Worker research discussed in Chapter Three.

Targeted preparatory Academic English courses taught by qualified English as an Additional Language or Dialect professional staff could be the most efficient and equitable way to fast-track potential teachers into mainstream teacher education programs. Explicit focus on the cultural expectations of universities in order to help participants develop an appreciation of the expectations and values of mainstream professional life before they enrol in their teacher education courses also makes sense. Ongoing support by Academic English support staff could also help to reduce the stress associated with coping with the demands of mainstream degree and diploma courses. This would include a strong focus on helping students develop strategies to build and sustain their own levels of confidence and independence prior to graduation.

8. INVESTIGATING THE VALUE OF LINGUISTICALLY FOCUSSED COURSES IN GENERAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Mainstream Australian schools are increasingly multilingual in character. Given most teachers in the Northern Territory, and in Australia as a whole, find themselves teaching learners of English as an additional language at some stage of their careers, it seems logical to ensure that all Australian teacher education courses routinely include Applied Linguistics components as core elements.

For instance, all Australian teachers need a well-grounded understanding of the structure and characteristics of the national language to enable them to notice, diagnose and explain areas of language difficulty to their students. Knowledge about dialectal differences and the status of creoles as fully functional languages is also essential in the Australian context.

All teachers would benefit from introductory understandings about the nature of first and later language acquisition, including essential differences, as well as similarities, between the two sets of processes. What is fundamentally important, and often forgotten by teachers and teacher training institutions, is that later languages are not learned in the same way as first languages. First languages are learned by young babies whose first task is to work out exactly what people are doing when they talk to each other. Although communication is natural between human beings, we only need to think of the serious look on toddlers' faces as they puzzle out what is going on around them to realise that acquiring language is, at least to some degree, a discovery process. Adding a later language to one's repertoire does not involve that initial series of light bulb insights. Instead, it builds on understandings developed during first language learning and extends them.

A fundamental element of the *English in the Mainstream* movement of the last 30 years or so is the notion that: "All teachers are language teachers". What this slogan means is that all teachers need to have enough knowledge about the linguistic characteristics and demands of their own subject areas to make these features visible to their students as well. As discussed above, making the cultural and linguistic demands of particular subject areas explicit for students who do not have an intuitive feel for them, contributes significantly to improving equity of access for all students to the benefits of school-based learning.

Classroom teachers also benefit if their teacher education courses have helped them develop linguistic knowledge about the way different languages vary in their use of sounds, patterns of grammar, the

various aspects of experience singled out for naming, and the way in which grammatical processes, and social expectations in different cultures, are used in communicating with different people in different situations.

This knowledge about what language is, and how it is used, builds metalinguistic awareness which develops differently in different people. Language development and use for many people is just something they live rather than think about in a detached way. Monolingual people may find it especially difficult to imagine how other languages could be different from their own. Most of us use language without thinking too much about how it works in our lives or what it means in terms of our membership of literate societies, but teachers need to develop good levels of metalinguistic awareness. Such awareness is extremely useful in diagnosing learner difficulties and helping learners develop the knowledge, skills and awareness to overcome those difficulties at school.

It would certainly be a great leap forward, in terms of acknowledging the language Elephant in the Room, if teacher education in the Northern Territory developed a more language-focused approach to preparing all teachers for the fascinating multilingual situations in which they have to work. Such a focus would make a significant difference to the ability of teachers to respond effectively to the needs of multilingual learners and, we believe, the Northern Territory, given its high level of multiculturalism, could lead the way in this regard.

Conclusion

In this book we have argued that the English language learning needs of Indigenous children is the Elephant in the Room that policy makers, school system administrators, teachers and others are unable to see. It is hard to understand why Indigenous children with similar language learning needs to migrant and refugee children are not routinely provided with Intensive English teaching in their first years of school and why their classroom teachers in later years are not supported by EAL/D specialists working to ensure learning has a structured, systematic language focus until learners become fluent in both spoken and written forms of school English. Policy documents at various administrative levels point to the importance of providing EAL/D support for learners, but there is currently little evidence of practical application of these policies in remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory.

We have also emphasised the pivotal role education can play with regard to language preservation. Arguably, the Northern Territory has a special responsibility towards Indigenous language

preservation because it is the region where the largest number of traditional Australian languages are still spoken by the largest number of children. Languages no longer spoken by children are languages struggling to survive so, with children increasingly using other languages and dialects as their main forms of communication, time is short when it comes to preserving our unique and precious traditional Indigenous languages.

This creates a unique obligation for the Northern Territory education system to find ways to support the preservation of Indigenous languages in their schools. In this context it was encouraging to see a position advertised in August 2013 for a Senior Language and Engagement Resource Officer for Alice Springs. Sadly, that position was only funded until the end of the year. We can only hope more extended, robust, and sustained attention to the need for linguists to work alongside EAL/D specialists and regular classroom teachers will be seen in future as an important element of all government commitments to *Closing the Gap* of Indigenous disadvantage in this country.

The fact that the Northern Territory is almost the last bastion of Indigenous Australian language diversity also strengthens the case for the introduction wherever possible, of home language literacy. The Reading through Writing trial outlined above has the potential to provide a new kind of evidence base for further innovation as more Indigenous teachers, Literacy Researchers and Literacy Instructors graduate from Northern Territory tertiary institutions.

The suggestions about new research directions outlined in this chapter have been developed not only with educational equity issues in mind, but also the objectives of the *National Indigenous Languages Policy*, as follows:

Objectives:

1. National Attention: To bring national attention to Indigenous languages – the oldest surviving languages in the world; and the pressures they face.

2. Critically Endangered Languages: Reinforce use of critically endangered Indigenous languages that are being only partly spoken to help prevent decline in use and to maintain or extend their common, everyday use as much as possible.

3. Working with Languages to *Close the Gap*: In areas where Indigenous languages are being spoken fully and passed on, making sure that government recognizes and works with these languages in its agenda to *Close the Gap*.

4. Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture: To restore the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages to the extent that the current language environment allows.

5. Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools: To support and maintain the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools (Australian Government 2011b).

We acknowledge that there are currently too few fully qualified local Indigenous teachers to deliver fully developed, modern Dual Language Programs throughout the primary school years, in line with evidence-based practice and theory implemented in other countries (e.g. Paradis et al 2011). However, as Paradis et al argue convincingly on the basis of extensive research over more than 40 years, young children are not harmed by learning more than one language in a Dual Language program. Cognitive and personal benefits of bilingualism and multilingualsm can be demonstrated, not only during childhood but also in adulthood. As these authors say:

> Minority language children generally develop the same or higher levels of proficiency in the majority language if they attend additive bilingual programs that provide substantial instruction in academic and language domains through the native language. At the same time, they maintain and extend their proficiency in the native language. In other words, they become bilingual and biliterate in the native and majority languages. Use of the native language can provide an important developmental scaffold for the acquisition of the majority language, especially with respect to academic language proficiency and literacy. L2-only [second language or what is called 'English-only' in the NT situation] or transitional bilingual programs often do not achieve these benefits because they fail to promote high levels of competence in the native language and, as a result, there are no positive transfer effects from the native to the majority language. The achievement of minority students in mainstream classrooms can also be limited by the lack of properly trained teachers; that is, teachers who know how to address their specific language learning and cultural needs (Paradis et al. 2011:191).

An *additive* dual language program is one that supports and encourages 'the acquisition of the children's native or home language at the same time as they acquire an additional language' (Paradis et al 2011:263). A *subtractive*, or English-only, program denies that part of a learner's experience, knowledge and identity that is linked to the language closest to their hearts, their home language or dialect.

Several of our suggestions for new initiatives and associated research are specifically designed to redress inequities that are particularly acute at Year 3 level when the reality of inadequate foundations in English as an additional language instruction and learning show up too often in pitifully inadequate NAPLAN scores.

Twin emergencies sit side by side in the contemporary reality of *Closing the Gap* imperatives. On the one hand, there is the urgent need to improve health and welfare outcomes for all Indigenous Australians. There is also the desperate need to bring school learning outcomes of Indigenous children up to the same level as those of other Australian children. These goals involve more than just equity of access to the services and facilities that other Australians take for granted, even though that access is still a long way from being achieved in any consistent way.

Health, welfare and equitable learning outcomes are also grounded in the personal sense of worth and confidence that comes with the knowledge that other people accept and respect who you are in the world. Indigenous Australians have the right to expect that the traditional foundations of their heritage as First Australians will be valued by mainstream institutions such as schools. Preserving and maintaining the Australian languages that still survive is important to the speakers and custodians of these languages. It is also important to other Indigenous Australians who live in the knowledge that their own cultural heritage and languages have often been cruelly undermined, or even destroyed in many cases, by stronger invading forces and policies in only a little more than 200 years.

The *Closing the Gap* emergency in relation to appallingly inadequate school learning outcomes for so many Indigenous children and young people is shockingly real, especially in the Northern Territory. Our suggestions are made with the goal of helping to ensure that Indigenous learners, even those living in remote and very remote parts of the Territory, get a good start when they first come to school. We want to see them grow up able to make the full range of choices that other Australians make as adults. Many of those choices are simply not available to people who cannot use standard English proficiently or negotiate written language competently and confidently.

The confidence and competencies that underpin life choices in modern Australia come from easy biculturalism. They flow from the ability to negotiate the English-speaking world with the assurance that you will be understood and respected when you speak. They come from the confidence that you have the knowledge and skills to negotiate life pathways that interest and attract you. In the case of Indigenous Australians, they also come from the profound sense of identity that is built on the understanding that who you are in this country is uniquely and intricately generated by ancient links to the land your ancestors travelled, cared for, and sang into very existence.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

ABS   Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACARA   Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

ACER   Australian Council for Educational Research

ACIKE   Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Education

AE   Aboriginal English

AEU   Australian Education Union

AIATSIS   Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

AIHW   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

ARIA   Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia

AuSIL   Australian Society for Indigenous Languages

CALL   Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics

CDU   Charles Darwin University

CAEPR   Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Australian National University)

CIS   Centre for Independent Studies

CLC   Community Learning Centre (Also referred to as Homeland Learning Centres)

COAG   Coalition of Australian Governments

CSIRO   Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

D-BATE   Deakin-Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education Program

DCITA   Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

DEET   Department of Education, Employment and Training

DEEWR   Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

NTDECS	Northern Territory Department of Education and Childrens Services (formerly NTDET)
NTDET	Northern Territory Department of Education and Training
NTDoE	Northern Territory Department of Education (formerly NTDECS)
EAD	English as an Additional Dialect
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAL/D	English as an Additional Language or Dialect
ESL	English as a Second Language
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FATSIL	Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages
HLC	Homeland Learning Centre
IAD	Institute for Aboriginal Development
IBF	Indigenous Boarding Facilities
IESIP	Indigenous Education and Strategic Initiatives Program
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILC	Intensive Language Centre
ILC	Indigenous Land Corporation
ILLS	Indigenous Language Speaking Students
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
NAP	National Assessment Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

NILS	National Indigenous Languages Survey Report
NLC	Northern Land Council
NMS	National Minimum Standard (in NAP tests)
NSWDEC	New South Wales Department of Education and Communities
NTCE	Northern Territory Certificate of Education
NTDEET	Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training
NTDECS	Northern Territory Department of Education and Children's Services
NTDET	Northern Territory Department of Education and Training
NTDoE	Northern Territory Department of Education
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
NTOEC	Northern Territory Open Education Centre
NTNPA	Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement
OM	Otitis Media (ear infection)
RATE	Remote Area Teacher Education Program
RLA	Regional Learning Agent (employed by NTOEC)
RTO	Registered Training Organization
TA	Teacher Assistant
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
SAL	School of Australian Linguistics
SAuE	Standard Australian English (SAE is also widely used but it refers to Standard American English as well as to SAuE)
SEAM	School Enrolment and Attendance Measure
SEEWRC	Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee
TML	Teaching Multilingual Learners (e.g. TML Project Officers)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VET   Vocational Education and Training

WADET   Western Australian Department of Education and Training

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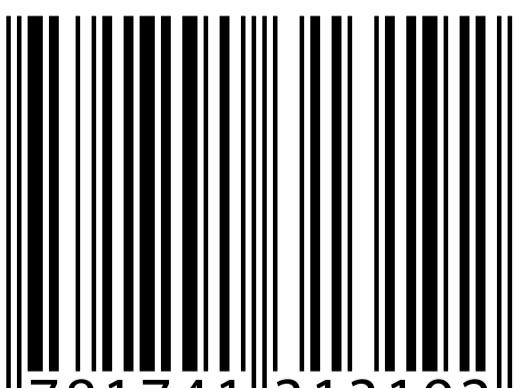
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