## Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools

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<th>Responsibility of:</th>
<th>Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce</th>
<th>DET File: ASP/2010/0075</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective Date:</td>
<td>4 November 2010</td>
<td>DOC: 2010/07587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Review Date:</td>
<td>4 November 2011</td>
<td>VERSION NUMBER: 1</td>
</tr>
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EMBEDDING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PERSPECTIVES IN SCHOOLS

Guidelines for Schools
Acknowledgments

This document was made possible by the efforts and contributions of many people, especially the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members from Queensland and the Northern Territory who provided advice and direction. This includes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in schools across Central Australia
- The Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools Reference Group: Richard Hayes (Chair), Carol Dowling, Randall Cook, Naomi Bonson, Jonathan Hermawan, Susan Bowden, Gary Fry, Suzie Peckham, David Guy, Joyce Taylor, Annarella Sebbens, Margie Anstess, Mark Motlop, Maree Bredhauer, Tracey Masterton, Thelma Perso.

We would also like to acknowledge the Queensland Department of Education and Training for permission to re-develop and use parts of their document of the same name, developed by Thelma Perso.

* The term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is used throughout this document to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ means ‘native or belonging naturally to a place’; this acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia.
Rationale

It is vital to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within school practices. In doing so, school communities are able to be responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This greatly improves school capacity to design and implement whole-school strategies that build on, or strengthen an educational foundation based on equity, opportunity and achievement for students, families and communities.

A better understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures develops an enriched appreciation of Australia’s cultural heritage, supporting the process of and can lead to reconciliation. This is essential to the maturity of Australia as a nation and fundamental to the development of an Australian identity.

The need for embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within schools is based on the premise that increased understanding is needed to build corporate knowledge within the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NTDET) that is responsive to the needs of an important client group. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students represent over forty per cent of the total student population. It is essential to equip the school workforce with appropriate cultural competence\(^1\), knowledge, skills and understanding to cater for these students. Culturally inclusive curriculum will enable all NTDET employees to implement effective cultural competence practices in the Department. This will ensure a supportive learning and working environment for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NTDET.

Improving educational outcomes for Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a major priority for education both nationally and within the Northern Territory. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the curriculum is fundamental to strengthening identity and self-esteem. It is well documented that a strong sense of identity and good self-image has a direct positive impact on educational outcomes.

This guide offers strategies for leaders and teachers to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across all areas of school practice, giving all students access to a balanced educational curriculum. It is designed to challenge mindsets and, in doing so, broaden world views to ensure that students and staff

\(^1\) Cultural Competence is the ability to understand, interact and communicate effectively and with sensitivity, with people from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence is a personal capability that is not necessarily innate but develops over time. A precondition is a deep awareness of one’s own identity since it involves examining one’s own biases and prejudices. A culturally competent person is able to empathise with how people from other cultures might perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgements about their world. Consequently it has four elements: awareness, attitude, knowledge and skills. (Martin & Vaughn, 2007, Cross et al, 1989)
are capable of examining their beliefs, values and actions in new ways.

By embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives throughout the school, we will enable students to:
• develop respect for different cultural values and beliefs
• appreciate the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as part of Australian heritage
• understand the effects of European settlement
• understand the effects of government policies, both federal and state, on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
• be aware of contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Australian society
• have the skills to recognise prejudice and racism, and the ability to counter them
• have a heightened awareness of and empathy with the natural environment of Australia.

This will allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to develop their sense of identity and pride in their culture, as well as building knowledge and understanding of their cultural heritage, thus contributing to developing a positive self-concept and high self-efficacy.

By incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into school practices, we can better ensure that the curriculum:
• is culturally inclusive, valuing all cultures and backgrounds
• is uniquely Australian, celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies as fundamental to our heritage
• provides a balanced representation of all Australian peoples, stories, beliefs and practices
• helps to develop the knowledge and understanding needed by all Australian children
• is relevant to the learning needs of all Australian students (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, long-term residents and new arrivals)
• promotes equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

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2 http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au/pages/Educators/perspectives
Contents

Acknowledgments

Rationale

1.0 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
   1.1 What are they?
   1.2 Why should schools engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives?
   1.3 A National priority
   1.4 A Territory priority
   1.5 Influence and Impact

2.0 Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the whole school community

2.1 Personal and professional accountabilities
2.2 Organisational environment
   2.2.1 Human resources
   2.2.2 School environment
2.3 Community partnerships
   2.3.1 Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols
2.4 Curriculum
   2.4.1 What is the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum?
   2.4.2 Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
      (i) Where do I start?
      (ii) Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and knowledge frameworks
      (iii) Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities
      (iv) Understanding language and appropriate language usage
      (v) Understanding oral traditions
      (vi) Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocol
      (vii) Planning, developing and evaluating curriculum materials
      (viii) Critical understanding and review of texts
      (ix) Personal and professional accountability, and pedagogy
(x) Pedagogy: building cultural bridges
(xi) Assessment and Reporting
(xii) Awareness of the organisational environment

3.0 Concluding comments

Appendix: Useful resources and Information

1. Knowledge frameworks
2. Contacts
3. Websites
4. Protocols and Intellectual property
5. Acronyms
1.0 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

1.1 What are they?

Perspectives are about seeing things differently. Different viewpoints are formed by individual experiences, learning, cultural beliefs and values.

The perspectives of a group of people are their ways of viewing, or experiencing, the world. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives are the points of view that Aboriginal and Islander people have which differ by the cultural groups they belong to and their experiences. For example, Aboriginal and Islander people have a different perspective of Australia Day as an event in Australia’s shared history; for many non-Aboriginal and Islander people this is a day for celebrating the birth of a new nation but for most Aboriginal and Islander people it is a day of mourning as it is the time of ‘invasion and colonisation and the start of the erosion of their language, traditions and cultural identity. Similarly, occasions like the Queen’s Birthday may not hold particular meaning of significance. In contrast, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people look forward to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievements in all facets of life in Australia’s contemporary society. The Queen’s Birthday is a national event still not fully understood and embraced by wider Australia.

Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are closely aligned to nature and the environment with particular emphasis on cycles and patterns and the effect each has on the other. It is based on an undeniable link to the land, language and culture. These links also affect perspectives. For example, close ties to country by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups affect the way land is treated; not as a commodity or resource but as an extension of the group and something to be nurtured. More modern contexts have provided Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the opportunity for the land to be used as an economic source e.g. mining and development, whilst still maintaining a strong personal and cultural connection to the landscape and geography, shared over generations; through song, stories and dance.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are an important component of Australia’s history and cultural heritage. All Aboriginal and Islander people maintain their cultural identity whether in urban, rural or remote locations, and engage in a range of cultural practices.

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3 Queensland Studies Authority 2001, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Senior Syllabus http://wwwqsa.qld.edu.au/syllabus/2045.html
Education Queensland The holistic learning and teaching framework http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/educators/cultural-aware-localstory.html
1.2 Why should schools engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives?

It has been identified nationally that teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and perspectives to all Australians is a key component of ensuring improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in Australia. Other reasons for doing this include:

- leads to understanding and mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- increases cultural competence that focuses on individual capability in both reflective and proactive ways. It is initially about identity and relationships – the degree to which we know ourselves in our primary cultural contexts, determining the degree to which we are truly able to relate to others from diverse cultural contexts;
- supports teachers to offer engaging and relevant contexts for learning by all students;
- provides non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with Aboriginal and Islander viewpoints; and
- supports teachers to better understand their Aboriginal and Islander students.

1.3 A National Priority

There are a number of important national findings, decisions and recommendations that position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives to play a major role in schooling.

The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody⁴ was a comprehensive survey of Aboriginal law and justice issues, including the underlying causes which bring Aboriginal people into excessive contact with the justice system.

The findings of the Royal Commission and its recommendations have been widely publicised since their release in May 1991.

The recommendations include:

Educating for the future —

*That curricula of schools at all levels should reflect the fact that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters. It is essential that Aboriginal viewpoints, interests, perceptions and expectations are reflected in curricula, teaching and administration of schools.*

In April 1999, state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

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⁴ For more information on Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and its recommendations: www.naa.gov.au/publications/fact_sheets/fs112.html
(MCEETYA) in Adelaide. At that meeting, Ministers endorsed a new set of national goals for schooling in the twenty-first century. The new goals were released in April 1999 as the *Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the twenty-first century*.\(^5\)

Goal three states that:

Schooling should be socially just, so that —

3.1 students’ outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students’ socioeconomic background or geographic location

3.2 the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students

3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students

3.4 all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to and benefit from, reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

MCEETYA also released *The National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools*\(^6\) in 2005. The statement emphasises the need for education to focus on developing inter-cultural understanding. This involves the integration of language, culture and learning to help learners know and understand the world around them.

This National Statement also identifies (p.7) that:

*Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have a unique place in Australia’s heritage and in its cultural and educational life. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, they are fundamental to strengthening identity and self-esteem. For non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, they provide a focus for development of cultural understanding and reconciliation.*

In 2010 the Commonwealth launched the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy\(^7\) which has four goals:

1. Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making
2. Equality of access to education services
3. Equity of educational participation, and
4. Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes

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It is in this national policy context that these guidelines ‘sit’; the advice provided in this document will support schools to play their part in implementing this policy.

1.4 A Territory Priority

The current policy framework set by the Northern Territory government includes A Working Future\(^8\). This strategy outlines a strong vision for remote areas. It’s about government and local people working together to make our towns and communities better places to live. A Working Future is the whole story of how government will work in remote areas of the Territory. It is the Territory Government’s plan for improving the lives of remote Territorians.

A Working Future is closely aligned with the COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement which aims to improve outcomes for all Indigenous Australians. The agreement recognises that improving outcomes for Indigenous people requires adoption of a multi-faceted approach that sees effort directed across seven key building blocks: Early Childhood, Schooling, Health, Economic Participation, Healthy Homes, Safe Communities, and Governance and Leadership.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) is implementing this strategy. DET staff, centrally and regionally located as well as in schools, are working with communities and other agencies to improve access to quality education and training for students in the Territory.

The priority action areas of A Working Future that contribute directly to improved education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Islander students are:

• attendance and participation
• retention and completion
• literacy and numeracy attainment
• workforce and leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

The following table aims to assist leaders and educators with implementation of these four priority action areas, outlining key ways to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within all school practices.

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<th>Priority action areas</th>
<th>Key Strategies</th>
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<td>Attendance</td>
<td>• Ensure the intended curriculum is relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge.</td>
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<td>• Develop strong partnerships between schools and communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retention and completion</td>
<td>• Develop and deliver engaging and culturally inclusive curriculum in responsive learning environments.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Develop targeted strategies across Northern Territory sites and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.</td>
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\(^8\) http://www.det.nt.gov.au/parents-community/students-learning/indigenous-education
| Literacy and numeracy attainment | • Develop teaching practices that include explicit teaching of Standard Australian English and that meet the developmental needs of individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.  
• Value and respect the knowledge — including language and literacies — which students bring to the classroom. |
| Workforce and leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture | • Provide professional learning in cultural competency for all NT DET employees in cultural competency.  
• Encourage employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all areas of the Territory.  
• Provide appropriate support, professional development and career pathways for all staff. |

### 1.5 Influence and Impact

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives include the ways of knowing and doing for Aboriginal and Islander peoples, from pre-contact, contact\(^9\), post-contact through to today. They are diverse, complex and multi-layered. When embedded within an educational institution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives influence:

- improvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student learning outcomes in schools
- organisational frameworks
- culturally appropriate teaching, learning, assessment and reporting practices
- curriculum content and delivery
- balanced representations
- employment opportunities of Aboriginal and Islander staff within the institution, and
- Promote ways of thinking and doing that optimally utilise the diversity within groups to create powerful ways of succeeding with complex inter-cultural challenges

Each of these will be unpacked in Section 2 in order to support schools to maximise these potential influences.

There are a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge frameworks that support the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the Northern Territory. These Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge frameworks consider the histories and experiences, cultures and communities, values and beliefs, languages, knowledges and relationships that make up Aboriginal and Islander views of the world and their interactions within it; see Section 2.4.2 (ii).

In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives have a great deal to offer the Territory sustainable schools initiative. The vision is for all schools in the

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\(^9\) ‘Contact’ refers to the periods of time when the first exchanges and experiences took place between European explorers and settlers and Aboriginal or Islander people throughout Australia.
northern Territory to be environmentally sustainable schools. As stated in *Educating for a sustainable future: A national environmental education statement for Australian schools* (2005, Curriculum Corporation, Victoria):

> The nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia’s relationship with the environment provides many examples of sustainable use of the limited resources of the Australian landscape. ¹⁰

### 2.0 Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the whole school community

Appropriate inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the whole school environment requires processes and practices to be embedded within four distinct, inter-dependent domains of the school:

- personal and professional accountabilities
- organisational environment
- community partnerships, and
- curriculum.

Through a focus on each of these four domains, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives can be embedded into the whole school structure, forming an integral part of the school’s philosophy and practice.

The process of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within a school environment is multi-faceted and requires that each of the four domains be addressed simultaneously in an iterative and interactive way.

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Figure 1: A multi-faceted process

2.1 Personal and professional accountabilities

Each individual has a different set of beliefs, values and knowledges. NT DET employees are professionally accountable for including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within their curriculum. It is important that teachers and leaders commit to take on leadership roles within their school environment to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are woven into the fabric of the school environment.

To successfully embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the whole school requires the reframing of curriculum which includes reconceptualising what curriculum is in the context of an all-encompassing definition of curriculum (see Section 2.4). This requires the reframing of the beliefs, values and knowledges of individual staff members, and the attitudes and perceptions of staff, students and school community.

The reframing process invites teachers and education workers to consider their own background and experiences, and to position their personal perspectives and attitudes in relation to their own personal story within Australian histories. This process is also known as Critical Race Theory.

Unpacking whiteness refers to the process of examining what it means to be privileged on the basis of physical appearance — ‘white’ — and of belonging to dominant mainstream culture; cultural perspectives are unpacked and reassessed through the process of unpacking whiteness.

It’s important to recognise that this process is ongoing and that each journey is personal and different. School leaders may need to allocate time, resources and other support to enable teachers to explore this potentially new area. Examining individual personal histories in relation to Aboriginal and Islander histories may produce strong and conflicting emotions such as guilt, anger, mistrust, denial, sadness, mourning, excitement or joy.

The process involves developing a deep personal understanding of:
- attitudes and perceptions held about Aboriginal and Islander people
- underlying values and beliefs and how they might have developed into attitudes and perceptions, and
- the influence these may have in the way one delivers and enacts the intended curriculum.

At the end of the process, teaching staff should be able to see where and why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives have been skewed or omitted, and what they might do to rectify this.

All Australians have shared histories. Examining one’s own perceptions allows individuals to acknowledge and respect the impact Australian histories have on the different positions that people take within Australian society today.

It is important for school leaders to monitor this process appropriately, respond to negative attitudes and perceptions as they arise and enhance the opportunities for positive actions to occur.
The following considerations/actions will help school staff to undertake this personal and professional journey successfully:

- Be aware of the motivations for developing and implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within school practice, including curriculum.
- Identify and work with community protocols; these will vary between communities.
- Identify different kinds of text that are used to communicate, for example, human, symbolic, media-based, written, audiovisual, visual, oral and personal experience, and subsequently.
- Develop techniques for critical evaluation of texts that consider:
  - the author’s perspective and background, whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
  - appropriateness of terminology.
  - authenticity, authority and ownership.
- Challenge stereotypes and beliefs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Recognise that Aboriginal people are distinctly different from Islander people, and that within these two distinct groups exists a complex mix of many language groups. Each has its own individual belief systems, languages and dialects, lore and relationships to the land, seas or waterways.
- Acknowledge the impact that government policies play in shaping Aboriginal and Islander societies.
- Investigate and seek to understand the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Recognise the influence of the media (for example in perpetuating racism).
- Seek to understand the perspective of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school and the historical relationships of these students and their families with local Aboriginal or Islander people; colonisation involves colonisers and those colonised, and the repercussions of this need to be considered. (It is particularly important to research the local history from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, to ensure that a true and accurate history is sensitively presented.

It is important to take time to work carefully through historical issues as they arise. For some students and school staff, for instance, the realisation that their families were personally involved in the dislocation of Aboriginal and Islander people from their lands can be quite disturbing.

**Focus Questions to support schools to audit current practice**

- What do I know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the local area?
- What attitudes and perceptions do I hold about Aboriginal and

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11 A good place to start to challenge some generally held beliefs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/parliamentary/rebutting
Torres Strait Islander people? Where do these beliefs come from?

- What do I need to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? How can I increase my knowledge?
- What do other staff and students know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- What attitudes and perceptions do local families hold about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? Where do these beliefs come from?
- What does the school community need to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- What strategies can I use to combat negative attitudes towards Aboriginal or Islander people?
- How will I make the school environment suitable for sharing personal attitudes and perceptions?

### 2.2 Organisational environment

The school’s organisational environment consists primarily of two dimensions: its staffing and human resource dimension, and its organisational and structural operations dimension. Both of these dimensions need to be considered by any school desiring to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the school and in the curriculum.

#### 2.2.1 Human resources

The employment of Aboriginal and Islander staff is central to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the organisational environment of the school.

Schools should consider the following strategies in attending to this:

- **Employment** of Aboriginal and Islander peoples in many roles including principals, teachers, assistant teachers, teacher aides, community education counsellors, cultural consultants, guest speakers, artists in residence, Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers, teachers and community members, and volunteers;

- **Inclusion** of Aboriginal and Islander staff and people in school planning and pedagogical processes, curriculum delivery, evaluation and reporting. This can be encouraged through a variety of formal and informal settings, not only through invitation but also through actively seeking out people for consultation.\(^\text{12}\)

- ** provision of professional development for all teaching staff to participate in activities that develop greater understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal and Islander education issues and perspectives.\(^\text{13}\)

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\(^{12}\) Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Community Engagement Charter* 2005

\(^{13}\) Contact Transforming Indigenous Education in NTDET
Strategies that will facilitate the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff include:

- actively identifying positions for, and recruiting, Aboriginal or Islander staff by working with:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations to promote and disseminate advertised positions
  - district Human Resource personnel to recruit suitable applicants; this might include contacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the region through the district office and local networks
- supporting the professional development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and identifying and offering career pathways development for them.
- establishing community partnership programs with local tertiary education and training providers including CDU and Batchelor Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Training and Education (BIITE), and regional DET Indigenous Training Coordinators to train individuals within school priority areas which will ensure the school can access suitably qualified, credible and sustainable Aboriginal and Islander staff to support teaching and learning programs.

2.2.2 School environment

The school environment includes the day-to-day organisational structures and operations within the school. Factors such as timetables, resources, facilities, professional development and program flexibility all impact on embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within schools.

Good practices that support embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives through the whole school environment include:

- Governance: Aboriginal and Islander parents and community members involved in meaningful school governance processes (RC/SP)
- Communication: Good communication between schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is the key to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives throughout the whole school environment. Some schools might consider establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee (IEC)\(^{14}\) to assist in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the curriculum and school programs. Schools can ensure that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is aware of the school’s programs and special events by posting newsletters and

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\(^{14}\) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committees (IEC) may consist of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, IEWs, teacher and staff representatives and a member of the administration. IECs should play a role in making recommendations for the allocation of school and Commonwealth funding. However, its key functions could be to assist in the communication between school and community and to establish effective partnerships for the delivery of programs and disseminating information between community and school.
flyers with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, and inviting Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) and Home Liaison Officers (HLOs) to attend school staff meetings. A community notice-board within the school can also open up good communication between the community and school.

• **Open-door policy**: Maintaining an open-door policy where parents and community members can ‘drop in’ and be a part of the class and schooling environment will enhance relationships with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. An open-door policy promotes unity within the whole school community.

• **Timetable flexibility**: Timetable constraints can often impede the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the school environment. Flexibility is needed to enable timetables to align with local Aboriginal or Islander community events or cultural speakers’ availability. This facilitates staff to work more closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and respects different perspectives and priorities.

• **Program flexibility**: Program flexibility offers non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff the freedom to adjust and redevelop work programs and support materials to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are embedded within school practices. From an administrative perspective, auditing the intended curriculum to identify where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives might be included within current work programs is a good place to start. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are complex and dynamic; curriculum should be flexible and responsive to community needs.

• **Resources**: Relevant and appropriate teaching materials are required. These must be identified in the resource allocation of school budgets. BIITE, the Institute of Aboriginal Development and the Strehlow Centre (at the Araluen Arts Centre in Alice Springs) have libraries and resource centres with a wide variety of artefacts, books, videos, DVDs, posters, computer programs, puzzles, dolls, games or magazines that are available for school use. Librarians can also provide advice about the purchase of these materials. All students should have access to these resources.

• **Professional development**: Staff training (in-service and pre-service) is crucial to the school’s ability to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. Cross-cultural training is a key element in the professional development of staff. This cannot be delivered as a ‘one off’ induction, but rather a continuous and ongoing series of professional development activities. The professional development should also be followed up with hands-on curriculum redevelopment and unit writing. School leaders can ensure that annual

11 For registration and online catalogue of Learning and Engagement Centre libraries go to: www.education.qld.gov.au/information/service/libraries/atsi

16 Team approaches to curriculum planning ensure the sharing of ideas and the combating of misinformed attitudes. Reconciliation Australia — Walking Together kit can be found in Reconciliation Resources on Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Archives website: www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car
professional development in this area is offered to all staff.

- **Professional accountability**: Attitudes and perceptions will impact on the way Aboriginal and Islander students are taught, and on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are incorporated across the school. Leaders should conduct, monitor and review agreed goals regularly, including teaching and learning practices used by staff.

- **Community–school resource sharing**: NT DET provides key resources and facilities that many community people have limited access to. The whole school community can negotiate to collaboratively share libraries, computer facilities, rooms and sports grounds. Aboriginal and Islander community organisations also have resources (human and physical) that can benefit schools, particularly with the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

- **Facilities**: Facilities can be developed throughout the school to assist in making the school a welcoming environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members. These might include outdoor classrooms, learnscapes and trails. Outdoor classrooms also enable bush foods and native gardens to be integrated into the school setting. Allocated rooms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and community members, which include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander murals and public artworks, might also be considered. These facilities can provide ‘talking points’ for staff, students and community and add to valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions.

- **Intellectual property**: A crucial ethical issue is *Who owns the information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories gathered by students or staff and shared by Aboriginal and Islander people within the school community?* Both traditional lore relating to ownership of cultural knowledge and Commonwealth copyright laws, should be observed. Cultural information provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is usually their intellectual property and owned by these community people. Similarly, it is important that school leaders are aware of research undertaken within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that is conducted by students in the school; they must ensure that the ethical and moral obligations of the staff and students are maintained and that appropriate methods of storing information are established. When students interview, film or record an Aboriginal or Islander community or individual for example, the school must ensure that the appropriate copyright and permission forms have been completed, labelled and filed appropriately along with the primary and secondary source material collected.

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17 Learnscapes are places where a learning program has been designed to permit users to interact with an environment. They may be natural or built, interior or exterior and may be located in schools, near schools or beyond schools, may relate to any one or many key learning areas and must be safe and accessible. For more information: [www.learnscapes.org](http://www.learnscapes.org)

18 Many schools within NT DET host an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hub, unit or centre (or a parent room) within the school environment. This centre becomes a special place for many people within the school and offers a safe location for students and community to gather and plan events or discuss ideas or issues.

19 Prior to the commencing of a research project, negotiation needs to take place with the relevant stakeholders on how the
Other actions by school leaders and staff that can have a positive impact on the organisational environment include:

• advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as part of the implementation of the DET Indigenous Education Strategic Plan\(^{20}\) across the school community
• ensuring active participation/involvement of heads of departments, deputy principals and principals
  - Involvement in community activities unrelated to the school (RC/SP)
• acknowledging Traditional Owners at events\(^{21}\)
• explicitly detailing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within work programs, unit designs, assessment tasks and lesson plans
• creating opportunities for staff to share good practices in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, such as regular discussion at staff meetings
• including community events in school calendars and newsletters, for example, World Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’s Day, Mabo Day, NAIDOC and other local events
• Developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander showcase award for students and teachers showing reconciliation strategies in their work
• developing an accountability framework to measure targets set in relation to the four priority areas of Partners for Success; see Section 3.0.

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**Focus Questions to support schools to audit current practice**

• What changes in the school environment would assist in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives?
• What barriers may I/we face in embedding this knowledge in school practice?
• In what ways does the school support the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
• What approaches has this school and other schools attempted? What can I learn from them?
• Are there any sensitive issues that school leaders and administration support staff may need to know about?
• When might I need an Aboriginal or Islander person to work with my class?
• What will enable and facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement within this school?
• What training might Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members or Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers need to support embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in our school?

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\(^{21}\) See Queensland Studies Authority website for information on how this acknowledgement should be done: [www.qsa.qld.edu.au/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/index.html](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/index.html)
• What school processes will I/we use to protect the intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are working with us?
• Where can I/we find assistance within the Department for checking whether the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge presented is culturally appropriate?
• How will the success of this school in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives be shared, promoted and publicised?

2.3 Community partnerships

Strong community partnerships between the local Aboriginal or Islander community and school staff is vital to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the school and within curriculum processes. Schools will ‘not leave the starting blocks’ without effective local partnerships and consultation.

Local Aboriginal and Islander communities offer a wealth of knowledge about traditional learning, cultural and spiritual knowledge, protocols and community processes, special events and contemporary responses to colonisation and current Australian society, that can be used to inform and build processes to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in a school.

Strong partnerships between the school and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities not only provide teachers with opportunities to form personal relationships based on trust, but also empower community members to engage with schools from their own perspectives. These partnerships are central to successfully developing and implementing ‘embedding’ strategies, and for evaluating how well Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives have been embedded in the school.

Good practices for school leaders and educators in developing and sustaining community partnerships with Aboriginal and Islander communities include:
• keeping up to date with events hosted by local Aboriginal and Islander community organisations and advertising these in notices or newsletters
• including annual Aboriginal and Islander events (local, regional and national) on the school’s calendar
• ensuring that students and staff learn about Aboriginal and Islander community organisations, locally and nationally, as a component of the curriculum
• developing and disseminating a list of local community organisations
• supporting the development of units of work and school programs around community needs
• ensuring local communities are involved in the explicit teaching of local Aboriginal and Islander protocols, and respect for country
• establishing community–school protocols for sharing both cultural and school information
• engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of units and school projects, particularly those of
cultural sensitivity or diverse viewpoints

- establishing a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee with Aboriginal and Islander representatives to progress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the school
- creating areas within the school that promote community involvement, for example, allocated rooms, establishing bush tucker gardens
- establishing learning circles\(^\text{22}\) within the school community
- inviting local Aboriginal or Islander community members (specifically Traditional Owners) to open special events
- hosting a reconciliation event
- presenting at a parent and carers’ information night
- ensuring that there are Aboriginal or Islander representatives on selection panels, and that a question relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives is asked at interview for all new positions in the school
- developing processes for interschool sharing of good practices for embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the school environment\(^\text{23}\)
- devising projects in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which enable schools to ‘give back’ to the community, for example, community training such as:
  - oral histories projects
  - local community newspapers
  - computer training
  - project planning and managing.

If there are currently no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in close proximity to the school area, schools should look beyond the local community. It may be necessary to develop relationships with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities from a nearby town or location. These relationships with neighbouring communities will often draw on knowledge from the school’s local area and assist in locating Traditional Owners or former community members from the school district.

Helpful contacts include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers and staff
  - Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers and Community Education Counsellors in schools, districts or regions
- Home Liaison Officers
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers
  - Senior Aboriginal staff in regional DET offices and various divisions (CD)

It is important to consider the influence of the native title process, traditional ownership of country and knowledge, language boundaries and their associated

\(^{22}\) A learning circle is a small group of people who meet regularly to discuss and learn about issues that concern them, their community or the wider community. For more details see: Reconciliation Resources on Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Archives website: www.austlit.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car

\(^{23}\) www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
lores. Often there is confusion around these issues that can lead to a breakdown of relationships. Schools will benefit from understanding the family relationships within the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and their particular associations to country where the school is located and to their traditional lands. The reactions of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to these issues should be considered and sensitively negotiated.

2.3.1 Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols

It is essential to understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols in establishing and developing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members.

Basic protocols include:
- making introductions
- establishing open communication
- building positive relationships.

Schools need to consult their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers, or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, about how to engage with key Aboriginal and Islander people.

The establishment of local protocols will assist in teaching particular content areas, and in making arrangements about how and when Aboriginal and Islander people are involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of curriculum programs.

Relationships developed between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are guided by community protocols and developed through mutual trust and respect.

It is important to understand that protocols will differ from one community to another. Although similar protocols exist between all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, specific protocols related to the local area may also exist.

**Focus Questions to support schools to audit current practice**
- What community issues or concerns may arise through embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the school?
- Who do I/we need to consult before I/we start to plan the process?
- Are there any sensitive issues that the community may need to know about in this context?
- What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge of the community needs to be collected, recorded and used?
- How can community events be linked to this school?
- Who from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, will be involved with the planning, delivery and evaluation? What role will Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander students, teachers, staff and parents, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers have in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the approach?

- How will I/we establish and maintain contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- What protocols will need to be observed during the planning, delivery and evaluation of the approach?
- Will the outcomes of the unit of work benefit Aboriginal and Islander people or the local community?

2.4 Curriculum

Curriculum is much more than a document which outlines what is to be taught. It is dynamic and encompasses:

- the learning environment
- resources
- teaching approaches and strategies
- assessment programs and methods
- the values and ethos of the school
- the relationships and behaviours among students and teachers.

These are all interconnected and provide the experiences that contribute to student learning.

2.4.1 What is the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum?

By clearly understanding this definition it can be seen that all the afore-mentioned domains (Personal and professional accountabilities, Organisational environment, Community partnerships) are either included in, or impact strongly on, the curriculum offered by the school.

Curriculum can be thought of as a sequence of elements: the intended, enacted, experienced, assessed, and achieved curriculum, each one responsive to the others. A good curriculum has each of these elements aligned so that the intended learning is what is assessed and what students achieve (see Figure 2).

In this context

- The *Intended curriculum* should include an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives and may include specific knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their language/s, culture and location.
- The *enacted curriculum* focuses on teachers’ pedagogical practices which will

24 Northern Territory Curriculum Framework Overview, 2009
naturally depend on their own personal and professional accountabilities, particularly with respect to what they personally and professionally know and believe about their students’ knowledges and knowledge frameworks, learning styles, language backgrounds, families and communities;

- The *experienced curriculum* varies from student to student and will be influenced and affected by the perspectives of each individual student and the pedagogical strategies used by the classroom teacher.

- The *assessed curriculum* depends on the quality of the assessment methods and tools used. These must be fair and consider individual student differences, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and ability to demonstrate learning, if they are to be valid and reliable;

- Decisions about the *achieved curriculum* must align with the intended learning and the rigor of the assessment methods used – this will be reported to the student, their family and the system.

In order for these processes to occur a whole-of-school approach is required to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in its curriculum.

One way to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the curriculum is to explicitly teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies or content as part of the *intended curriculum*. The Queensland Studies Authority specifies *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* as a core curriculum focus for students to gain a deeper appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures or histories. Units of work have been written to support schools to teach

![Figure 2] Elements of the curriculum

In order for these processes to occur a whole-of-school approach is required to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in its curriculum.
Although Aboriginal and Islander studies are important, it is imperative that these units are not seen as the only way to incorporate Indigenous perspectives within the curriculum. The perspectives need to be embedded within all curriculum practices of the school environment, as indicated above. Appropriate pedagogical processes in particular, provide learners with an opportunity to experience Indigenous perspectives at a variety of levels.

2.4.2 Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives should be presented to all students. How we teach these perspectives is based on an understanding of why we teach them.

Teachers can be overwhelmed by the extent of possibilities that Aboriginal and Islander perspectives offer to a curriculum. They should recognise however, that their role is more one of facilitation, as opposed to that of being ‘the expert’. This pedagogical approach can frame and support a teacher’s development and understanding of Aboriginal and Islander issues.

The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the school, from Transition to Year 12, should align closely with existing initiatives offered within NT DET.

(i) Where do I start?

A successful program that incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in a school curriculum requires the teacher to work through a variety of phases. These phases involve the teacher’s own learning journey and their individual role within the four key embedding domains:

- personal and professional accountabilities
- organisational environment
- community partnerships
- curriculum.

The first three domains are so closely intertwined with curriculum it is not possible to separate them from the core business of teaching and learning. These domains provide opportunity for teachers to develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.26

The strategies used to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the curriculum are seen as part of a cycle of learning for staff, students and the school community. Implementation is not a linear process which can be followed

25 Queensland Studies Authority, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
26 The What Works workbook and website is designed to help teachers in understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and provides a great place to start: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3.htm
step by step; rather it is a holistic approach within the school and community (see Figure 3 below).

It is both the content and the process used within the classroom that will embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. For this reason it is recommended that teaching staff begin the process whilst teaching curriculum content with which they are most familiar. Each of the domains will need to be continually revisited during teaching as teachers change schools, roles, student cohorts and review different content and Aboriginal and Islander knowledge frameworks.

The many different influences that make up the curriculum of the school will need to be examined and reviewed over time to successfully embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. With time, the interconnections of these will become apparent and learning will be continuous and evolving.

Figure 3: A cycle of learning — embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in curriculum
The following guidance will assist schools to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the curriculum and in making suitable adjustments to pedagogy to embed these perspectives within teaching and learning.

(ii) Understanding Aboriginal and Islander knowledge and knowledge frameworks

Curriculum that offers learners an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge frameworks enables students to gain a greater appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their own personal relationships with them.

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in planning, delivering and evaluating units of work will assist in the inclusion of their perspectives within the curriculum. They can provide a rich resource.

It is advisable to seek input from a diverse range of people and resources as often as possible, to ensure that students are accessing a wide variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and viewpoints on issues.

Fundamental to introducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the curriculum is the recognition that there are two distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian cultures: Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.

There are many similarities between these two cultures, such as the importance of country and seas, and the interconnections between these with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

This is the basis of Aboriginal and Islander knowledge and cultural bases; it is what connects Aboriginal and Islander peoples. Place, time, language and people are important curriculum considerations when analysing events and stories of Australia’s past.

It is important however, to recognise that there are also many differences between these two culture groups, such as languages, traditions, customs and histories. The cultures, languages and histories of Islander people are markedly different to those of Aboriginal people. Also, within each culture, there are many ‘countries’. Each Aboriginal and Islander ‘country’ contains its own set of lores, unique language, stories and traditions. This gives a rich diversity of Aboriginal and Islander cultures with sophisticated and complex kinship and social structures.

An exploration of various Aboriginal and Islander knowledge frameworks from around Australia will assist in understanding the diversity of beliefs held by Aboriginal and Islander people of Australia.

The first contact between Europeans and Aboriginal and Islander people within Australia spans over 200 years. Although there are commonalities between Aboriginal and Islander peoples in regard to their experiences of contact and colonisation, the experience of this impact can differ.27

An understanding of Aboriginal and Islander knowledge systems and perspectives will increase teachers’ understanding of the shared histories between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

Aboriginal and Islander knowledge considers both traditional and contemporary cultural practices and contexts. It is important, too, that teachers develop their understanding of Aboriginal and Islander knowledge from a variety of sources and sensitively include this diversity within the classroom.

Schools will have to consider the influence of the native title process, traditional ownership of country and knowledge, language boundaries and their associated lores, and any confusion around these issues or breakdown of relationships in the local communities. These issues should be considered and approached sensitively in the school environment, remembering that there may be diverse reactions to any single issue.

Teachers need to understand the family relationships within the local Aboriginal or Islander communities and their particular associations to country where the school is located and to their traditional lands.

It is not the role of the teacher to be involved in deciding which Aboriginal and Islander language group will be represented within the curriculum. Rather, the teachers’ role is to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the curriculum, with particular emphasis on local Aboriginal or Islander peoples.

(iii) Understanding Aboriginal and Islander students and their communities

The local Aboriginal and Islander community is the key to knowing Aboriginal and Islander students within the school.

Knowing and understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ individual backgrounds and attitudes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues are important to effectively embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the curriculum.

It is also important to understand the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school and the historical relationships these students and their families have had with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the local area. Some issues may be quite sensitive and need to be addressed with care and sensitivity. It is important for teachers and students to value the process of sharing history in our country and understand how past histories impact on contemporary society.

MindMatters, KidsMatter and CommunityMatters are examples of some professional development programs that can provide support for schools’ communities confronting sensitive issues that may arise through this process. This

contact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Australia. Other resources relating to colonisation of Australia: www.k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsie/resourcelist/k6hsie_s2_britcol.html

is a national program that supports Australian secondary schools in promoting and protecting the mental health of members of school communities. It is presented as a whole-school approach that aims to enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful. Social and emotional wellbeing have been linked to young people’s schooling outcomes, their social development, their capacity to contribute to the workforce and the community and to reducing the rate of youth suicide.

(iv) Understanding languages and appropriate language usage

Many Aboriginal and Islander children do not have Standard Australian English (SAE) as their first language: SAE is their second, third or fourth language. In some remote areas of Northern Territory in particular, Aboriginal and Islander students may speak traditional language(s) as their first (or ‘home’) language(s). Others will speak new, ‘non-traditional’ language varieties and creoles (a language that has resulted from combining traditional language and English) and non-standard dialects, and these vary from one location to the next.

It is important to respect students’ first languages — the languages of their home and family. Students’ first languages are their means for forming, building and maintaining relationships; developing, growing and living their cultural understandings; learning, conceptualising and knowing about their world. Students’ first languages are integral to their sense of self and their sense of identity.

SAE is the language of instruction in NT DET schools and the language in which communication fluency is required for schooling purposes, yet many Aboriginal and Islander students are primarily acquiring SAE in the classroom. Classroom curriculum therefore needs to reflect these students’ language learning needs by providing explicit language teaching in SAE through accessible and engaging learning experiences, appropriately scaffolded from the student’s home language to SAE).

Language awareness should be promoted in classrooms in order to provide opportunities for celebrating language diversity and for acknowledging language differences. It is particularly vital that the ‘non-traditional’ language varieties are recognised as valid forms of communication. Creoles and non-standard dialects are sometimes erroneously construed as ‘bad’, ‘wrong’ or ‘poor’ English, rather than appropriate linguistic forms for specific speech communities. If Aboriginal and Islander students who speak creoles or non-standard dialects are not identified as such, their language learning needs may go unrecognised and consequently unaddressed. Furthermore, schooling experiences for students who are made to feel inferior as a result of speaking the only language they know, are likely to be negative, impacting on self esteem and confidence and resulting in low attendance and participation rates.

With language awareness as a foundation, it is possible to identify differences between SAE and students’ home languages without value judgement: differences are discovered, acknowledged, analysed and addressed so as to allow non-SAE speaking students access to the language of instruction in the classroom, and consequently to the curriculum.
As teachers note and develop their understandings of linguistic differences between SAE and students’ home languages, they will be able to predict language features in planned activities or tasks for which students will require language teaching and scaffolding.

Learning another language (variety) is a developmental process which occurs over time. As part of this language acquisition process, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning SAE will often reflect some of the language features from their home language in their attempts at SAE in the classroom. These may be evident in all aspects of their language use, such as the production of specific speech sounds, word endings, phrase and sentence structures, word meanings, and cultural uses, including genres. It is vital that students’ status as language learners be acknowledged and that their ‘learner approximations’ be accepted as a valuable and necessary process in their learning of SAE.

Good practice for teaching English language in Aboriginal and Islander Australian contexts requires:

- language awareness: raising awareness of students’ home languages, acknowledging creoles and non-standard varieties as valid, recognising language differences (for example, *Making the Jump*[^29])
- familiarising language requirements for units of work or tasks: orally deconstructing a relevant text, then jointly reconstructing it before students independently write (for example, *Walking Talking Texts*[^30])
- tracking students’ language learning (for example, ESL monitoring tools[^31])

Approaches which take account of Aboriginal or Islander students’ language and cultural backgrounds, as well as their individual learning and interests, will help them to subsequently access the mainstream curriculum and succeed in the education system.[^32]

(v) Understanding oral traditions

Oral traditions in Aboriginal society exist in a number of interwoven forms. Oral histories are the principal historical records of Aboriginal and Islander peoples and should be regarded as valid historical records. This may represent a change in perspective for many teachers and school leaders.

Oral traditions may include:

- stories which relate to the Ancestral Beings, creation and the law
- stories of early contact with colonists
- stories of true life events


• biographical stories of individuals, and
• cultural obligations, expectations and traditional practices.

Oral traditions substantiate Aboriginal and Islander perspectives about the past, present and future. Oral communications and histories have been supported through various mediums such as rock and sand art, body painting, song, dance, and on artefacts including canoes, masks, message sticks and carvings.

Contemporary histories and events are increasingly being expressed through the visual and performing arts, songs, multimedia such as computers, CDs, radio, film and TV, and literary expositions including prose, poetry, plays and other means of scriptwriting.

(vi) Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocol

These have been discussed in a general sense in Section 2.3.1. It is important that they are considered in the development of curriculum planning and in particular, in evaluating curriculum materials. For example, in approaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to collaborate in the development of units of work and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content that might be used, in determining issues around intellectual property rights for resources selected for inclusion, in determining appropriate pedagogical strategies, in assessing student achievement, and so on.

(vii) Planning, developing and evaluating curriculum materials

The most visible part of implementing Aboriginal and Islander perspectives in the school is the selection of curriculum content (intended curriculum) and assessment of student achievement of this. However, it is often difficult to see what ‘goes on behind the scenes’ in implementing and maintaining a culturally appropriate curriculum.

Whatever approaches to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the classroom are adopted, they cannot be considered to be embedded into the curriculum unless they are consistently and explicitly found within the intended curriculum and the pedagogies used in enactment.

Historically, negative relationships and understandings about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have often impeded the embedding of their perspectives into the curriculum. Developing positive attitudes and perceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their knowledge is an essential first step if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are able to be embedded within the curriculum.

Decisions need to be made initially regarding explicitly teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as:
• Aboriginal and Islander Studies courses/units
• key components within a general unit of study
• knowledge within a general unit of study,
and whether the intended or desirable learning enacted through the delivery of the vehicle chosen is appropriate for constraints of time, teacher expertise and confidence, and resources (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input)
(v) Critical understanding and review of texts

Historical texts and education materials may present dominant cultural views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and events within Australia. It is important to be aware of any myths, distortions and stereotypes they present.

It is imperative that teachers develop a critical understanding of texts (including written, verbal and visual) and review these completely before using them within the classroom.

Textual representations and viewpoints should be critiqued and analysed within the classroom context for students to gain both an appreciation of the need for developing critical literacy skills and a deeper understanding of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander past and present.

Critiquing of text and literature involves considering:
- the origin of authors or editors
- the time, context and intention of the text
- author perspective or bias
- choice of language
- accuracy of facts and descriptions
- presentation of sacred and personal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and its appropriateness
- stereotypical representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and events
- balance of the representations of historical events
- exclusions of critical information
- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within text, and
- Eurocentric viewpoints.

It is most important to consult with the local Aboriginal and Islander community when deciding on appropriate terminology to use within the school curriculum.

It is equally important to consider the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are represented through language in the classroom. Adjusting terminology within the classroom by the teacher and students is important, as it provides students with a model for use of appropriate language and terminology when describing Aboriginal and Islander people and events.

(ix) Personal and professional accountability, and pedagogy

A range of attitudes towards Aboriginal and Islander issues are likely to arise during the process of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the curriculum. Non-Indigenous school staff for example, may be confronted with their own, and those of their students’ and community negative attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes about Aboriginal and Islander Australia and its histories. Similarly, Indigenous staff may be confronted with their own, and those of their

33 www.isee-ilearn.com
students’ and community, negative attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes about non-Indigenous Australia. This may be challenging and might feel uncomfortable at times. However, this challenging yet worthwhile process is essential if individuals and school communities are to develop their cultural competence so that prejudice and discriminatory behaviours do not result from negative attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes.

The process may take time to work through with the school community. However, by using correct protocols as well as involving the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in all stages of the process, dealing with the range of attitudes and beliefs in sensitive ways has the potential to enhance educational outcomes for all students.

It is important to use pedagogical strategies to assist students to both reveal and change any negative attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes they may hold. For example, learning circles, small group responses, role-play and individual reflections provide effective ways to share beliefs within a variety of Aboriginal and Islander perspectives. This process should be undertaken initially in the context of a curriculum content area with which the classroom teacher is confident, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people if the teacher is non-Indigenous – and vice versa - are invited to assist and be heavily involved wherever possible. If the classroom teacher is Indigenous then they should ensure a non-Indigenous person is involved.34

(x) Pedagogy: building cultural bridges

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a holistic view of their world, which incorporates the vital link between Land, Language and Culture. This view is significantly different from what is considered the norm in western society. There is a significant difference between the western and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to the acquisition and application of knowledge. Western thinking generally adopts a holistic approach to wider issues, while its approach in more localised issues is compartmentalised. The end result is that most information in schools and institutions – whether it be oral or written – is organised and presented in a ways that reflects this.

“On the other hand, largely because of the people’s dependence on the spoken word and observation for sharing knowledge about their own world, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approach is quite the opposite. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people look at the whole picture and identify relationships and links within it, whereas their western counterparts often focus on the detail of the individual parts without considering their possible interaction with others. This apparent conflict can be confusing and frustrating for all those involved in sharing the knowledge” 35(for example, see Figure 4).

34 See also Cultures of Collaboration professional learning approach 2010; Northern Territory Department of Education and Imagine Consulting Group International Pty Ltd

35 Ernie Grant, My Land My Tracks: a Framework for the holistic approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, Innisfail and District Education Centre (1998)
These perspectives play out in a variety of ways in the mandated curriculum in western schools. In learning Western Science for example, the first level of classification is between living things and non-living things. In most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, a category of non-living things does not exist; everything is living since there is a shared spiritual connection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their country.

Similarly, in Western Mathematics there is arguably an economic imperative to measure and quantify every square centimetre of the planet in order to manage and control it. In contrast, Aboriginal and Islander people have a different perspective and motivation due to their relationships to land and water that is respectful and nurturing; concepts such as area, perimeter, length, height, volume and mass are based on visual, kinaesthetic and traditional knowledges and purposes. For example, to the question “how far was the tide last night?” a non-Aboriginal person might answer “twenty metres”. An Aboriginal person might respond with “from the black rock to the boab tree”, and this is a specific response for a specific location that might be needed in order to know where to place fishing nets. The western tradition emphasises quantity and measurement whereas Aboriginal traditions generally emphasise quality and comparison.

In teaching Western ways of thinking and viewing that are deeply embedded in western disciplines it is essential that respectful bridges are built from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives of curriculum content to be learned, to Western perspectives of this content. Teachers must undertake to find out these likely perspectives from Aboriginal and Islander people within the local community.

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prior to introducing new topics, themes, laws and values. This should be done not only make the ‘knowledge differences’ explicit but to value both perspectives and to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in discussions about Western knowledge frameworks and values, drawing connections and correlations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge frameworks and values (see 2.4.2 (ii)). Once the differences are uncovered and recognised they can be bridged through appropriate scaffolding designed by the teacher and the appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker or community member.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whilst wanting access to Western knowledges in order to maximise their educational opportunities, in general do not want these perspectives to over-ride or displace those of their own culture. Discussions about how they might be taught as being different but not necessarily the only way can assist in this process and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to value their home and community knowledges and values. This in turn will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to know who they are: to have or gain a strong sense of their own identity and cultural grounding.

It is important that teachers not make any assumptions about all students in their classrooms, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in relation to their

- preferred learning styles
- knowledge of school expectations and classroom behaviours
- knowledge of teacher-student relationships and how these should work
- knowledge of the purpose of questioning in the classroom context
- identity (social, cultural, spiritual and academic)
- familiarity of the ways teachers use language, semantics and tone in teaching.

These aspects of pedagogy are often over-looked but are an essential part of the enacted curriculum. Teachers and staff from Western backgrounds frequently assume that all students share similar experiences and backgrounds as themselves when in fact, they can be markedly different for children from different cultural backgrounds. These assumptions can provide barriers to learning. Essentially, teachers need to make all expected behaviours explicit to all students since these will vary for all students including those of Western cultural backgrounds.

(xii) Assessment and reporting

Assessment and reporting are important parts of implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum at a classroom, school
and system level and need to be an ongoing part of the learning and monitoring process.

Two aspects of assessing and reporting student achievement that require consideration in the context of embedding Aboriginal and Islander perspectives in curriculum are:

1. assessing the perspectives explicitly taught as part of the intended learning; and
2. assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ learning of the intended curriculum.

For the first of these, the assessment program should provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the intended learning which may include:

- the knowledge and understanding of Australia’s Aboriginal and Islander cultural heritage
- knowledge of Australia and Australian society
- an ability to take an active and sensitive part in school life
- an understanding and valuing of Australia’s cultural diversity
- a personal journey of changing attitudes and perceptions
- the development of the skills of investigation, participation and communication
- thinking skills and complex reasoning processes.

For the second, steps must be taken to ensure assessment is fair, and include:

- clearly stated task specific criteria/descriptors for assessing learning outcomes so students know what is expected of them
- use of multiple and varied assessment tools
- ensuring all students can access the assessment task: in particular, they are familiar with contexts used and have been explicitly taught the language and cultural demands of the task.

Approaches to culturally fair assessment may include strategies for designing questions that:

- are less dependent on verbal and linguistic knowledge
- do not rely on culture-specific background knowledge
- may measure a number of skills or abilities rather than a single one
- vary in format and response.

It may be necessary to adjust the procedures or style of the administration of the assessment for students where English is a second language or dialect to support these students in demonstrating their learning.

**Reporting student achievement**

When reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, schools and teachers should consider:

- the extent to which students have met their needs and interests through the...
school programs
• the ways students demonstrate respect for their culture and the culture of others
• students’ skills in thinking critically about social issues of cultural significance
• the ways students apply their cross-cultural knowledge and understanding.

When reporting students’ progress to Aboriginal or Islander parents, elders and communities it is important to consider:
• the most efficient and appropriate form of reporting to meet the needs of teachers, parents, caregivers and families
• that it is done in educational and meaningful ways
• the importance of cultural sensitivity in commenting on students’ performance
• approaching AIEWs and support personnel to seek their assistance in transmitting information where appropriate.

(xii) Awareness of the organisational environment

The school’s organisational environment has previously been discussed in 2.2. Its impact on curriculum provision in the context of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the school requires additional comment.

Sometimes the school organisational environment may hinder embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within classrooms. Timetables, resources, facilities, professional development and program flexibility are all factors that can impact on the successful delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

It is important for teaching staff to discuss their curriculum intentions with school leaders. This will enable the allocation and provision of appropriate resources and support to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the curriculum.

Focus Questions to support schools to audit current practice
• What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are missing from current work programs and units?
• Where can the dominant paradigms be challenged and balanced within programs or units?
• What is the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective within this unit?
• What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge or perspectives is desirable and intended learning in this unit?
• What procedural knowledge (process knowledge of how something is done within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, e.g. protocols) will be learned in this unit?

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38 This may mean ‘going the extra mile’ to engage with parents. Some schools for example, hold community barbeques, insisting that parents meet with teachers to discuss student progress before the food is made available. These sort of approaches demand a ‘both ways’ responsibility. There is a large body of research evidence indicating that an effective school is one that is proactive and systematic about linking with the home (Lowe & Munsie, 1995; Epstein, 1991)
• What Aboriginal or Islander resources will I need to support this unit?
• What do I know about my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (including their knowledge frameworks, home languages, communities, preferred learning styles?)
• What learning outcomes do students need to demonstrate at the end of this unit?
  (Key Learning Area outcomes and Islander knowledge outcomes, Literacy and Numeracy expectations)
• How will I assess attitudes and perceptions of students and student learning if these are included in the intended learning?
• How will the process and content knowledge be taught?
• What do I know about preferred learning styles of the students in my class?
• How will students demonstrate their learning?
• How will I ensure that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge learnt is refined and extended by students within the class?
• How will students use the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge meaningfully in the classroom context, community and in the future?
• How will I document the pedagogical strategies I use?
• How will students document their processes and share successes with the community?
• How will I ensure that the unit was culturally appropriate and successful?
• How will I share and report on student learning in a meaningful and respectful way to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families?

3.0 Concluding comments

It is essential that schools and teachers embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in the school and especially the curriculum. Our goal is to maximise the learning outcomes of all children, of which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are an extremely important part, as first Australians.

These guidelines provide a frame to support schools in this process. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are considered and attended to in the delivery of the curriculum – specifically through pedagogy – and in order to this to occur Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be involved.

The following table is a useful resource for schools attempting to understand what a school that has embedded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives might ‘look like’, i.e. what is the vision:
| Criteria | Vision
| --- | --- |
| **Personal and professional accountability** | All teachers:  
- Know and have an understanding of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges  
- Understands their own perspectives, beliefs and perceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people  
- Understands how and where to source information about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures  
- Knows and understands strategies to combat inappropriate beliefs/stereotypes by students  
- Understand the shared history of the local area |
| **Organisational environment** | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence actively involved in most areas of school organisation  
- School/teachers aware of likely sensitive issues and have appropriate strategies in place to deal with them  
- Establish trusting, inclusive school environment to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are valued and appreciated  
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees have access to a range of opportunities to support their professional development  
- Processes in place to recognise and support intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in schools and classrooms  
- Protocols and processes in place to check whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge presented is culturally appropriate for the local area |
| **Community Partnerships** | School partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities developed and maintained  
- Protocols for communicating and collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people established  
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community events acknowledged and actively supported  
- Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people available to support curriculum delivery are known and registered in school contact list, and relationships established with them for that purpose  
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in curriculum planning, delivery and evaluation |
| **Curriculum and Pedagogy** | Curriculum units of work are culturally appropriate and connected to the local area and histories where possible  
- All learning styles and backgrounds are attended to in curriculum delivery and pedagogy and in assessment opportunities  
- Successes shared with community  
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives are explicit in delivered curriculum  
- Written, verbal and visual resources are critiqued to ensure distortions and stereotypes are not presented  
- Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and oral traditions are celebrated  
- Home language of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students valued and not seen as “poor English” if a creole  
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on content areas of the mandated curriculum sought, valued and ‘bridged’ through pedagogy  
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to teaching and learning not assumed but explicitly taught |
Appendix: Useful resources and Information

1. Knowledge frameworks

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander:
• Holistic Planning and Teaching Framework:
  www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/educators/
cultural-aware-localstory.html

2. Contacts

For advice and support with sourcing appropriate cultural advisors/consultants to
work with your school, contact your local Regional Manager for Indigenous
Education at your local regional education office. In addition there is an Indigenous
Leaders’ Network within the Department of Education and Training; members can
be contacted by gaining details from your Director of School Performance.

NORTHERN TERRITORY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
EDUCATION COUNCIL

1) Mark Motlop      Chair     Darwin
2) Donna Mc Masters Deputy Chair  Alice Springs
3) Patrick Anderson  Darwin
4) Rod Wason        Tennant Creek
5) Ian Woods        Katherine
6) Miriam-Rose Baumann Daly River
7) Jocelyn Uibo     Ngukurr
8) Nalwarri Nquirrel East Arnhem
9) Jannette Mc Cormack Alice Springs
10) John Morgan      Millingimbi
11) Patrick Browne   Millingimbi
12) Stephen Patrick  Lajamanu
13) Patrick Puruntatameri Tiwi Islands

3. Websites

The following websites are a valuable source of information:

charter.pdf


http://www.iad.edu.au/
4. Protocols and Intellectual property

Protocols:

  - For information on protocols contact your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander council Office, Regional Education Office, or Local Government council Office. In a school, your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker (AIEW) will have information or be able to direct you to where to find it.

Intellectual property:

- Valuing art, respecting culture: Protocols for working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual Arts and Craft sector: www.visualarts.net.au/nv/articles/value.pdf
- Towards a protocol for filmmakers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Content and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. See Australian Film Commission website: www.afc.gov.au/downloads/pubs/protocols.pdf

5. Acronyms

IEC – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee
IEW – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker
MCEETYA – Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAIDOC – National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (Day of Celebration)
QESSI – Queensland Environmentally Sustainable Schools Initiative
SAE – Standard Australian English