Right Talk, Right Help

Our Children. Our Future

A resource book for School Support Officers Assisting Learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in Catholic Schools, Townsville Diocese
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A resource book for School Support Officers Assisting Learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in Catholic Schools, Townsville Diocese

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Some Key Terms

**Torres Strait Creole (TSC)** is the Creole language spoken throughout the Torres Strait islands and among communities of Torres Strait Islander people in North Queensland. There are two main dialects of Torres Strait Creole, based on the two traditional languages.

**Aboriginal English (AE)** is the name given to the various kinds of English spoken by Aboriginal people throughout Australia. Technically, the language varieties are dialects of English. They have much in common with other varieties of Australian English, but there are distinctive features of accent, grammar, words and meanings, as well as language use. These Aboriginal English features often show continuities with the traditional Aboriginal languages. In many subtle ways Aboriginal English is a powerful vehicle for the expression of Aboriginal identity. (Diana Eades 2005)

**Standard Australian English (SAE)** is the dialect of Australian English used by government, education and the media. Dictionaries usually describe the usage of the standard dialect.

**Indigenous** is used as a term to describe the complex groups of Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait Islander peoples in our schools. The term recognises that these people are Indigenous Australians, while still acknowledging differences in language and culture.

**School Support Officers Assisting Learning** refers to teacher assistants/teacher aides who work with teachers in classrooms assisting student learning.

**Home Language** represents the languages or dialects that the child speaks at home. This may be a traditional Indigenous language, a Creole or a dialect of Standard Australian English, for example, Kala Kawaw Ya, Wik Mungkan, Torres Strait Creole, Aboriginal English. Schools need to be aware that many children are exposed to multi-lingual settings in their home environments.
Acknowledgements

This book is the result of input from the principals, teachers and school support officers of the three ‘lighthouse’ schools, St Michael’s School, St Kieran’s School and The Marian School. In addition, Indigenous school support officers from Townsville, Mount Isa and Palm Island made an important contribution.

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Foreword

The purpose of this project is to provide a useful resource for school officers who are working with teachers to improve the educational outcomes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) students in our schools. The project arose out of concerns expressed by principals, school officers and teachers to clarify and support the role of school officers who work with teachers and students in classrooms. Over a number of years they have attempted to identify essential knowledge and skills required for this work and to identify strategies that could improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

The research for this project drew on the expertise and experience of the principals, teachers, school officers and communities of our Townsville Diocesan schools and in particular from three schools, The Marian School, St Michael’s School and St Kieran’s School. We are grateful for the opportunity to include examples of ‘what works’ from these schools. We also extend our sincere thanks to the participants of our NIEW Day workshops in Townsville, Mount Isa and Palm Island. Your understanding of the learning needs of your students and your willingness to share your experiences and expertise have contributed significantly to this resource.

This book is a companion to our earlier publication, Right Talk Right Place, which focused on Indigenous students' Standard Australian English language learning and their ability to ‘code switch’. Teachers and school officers are therefore encouraged to refer to both resource books when planning support programs for the Indigenous students in their schools.

Libby Knight
Project Officer
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Contents

Where am I?
   Traditional languages map; Townsville Diocese 6
   Our communities 7
   Our schools 7
   Our students and their languages 10
   Our challenges 11

What is my job?
   Who am I and what are my skills? 12
   What do I need to know about my school? 15
   What is my role? 16
   Who are my students? 17
   Helping with reading 18
   Helping with writing 21
   Helping with mathematics 22

How do I do my job?
   Cultural diversity in the classroom 23
   How can I support children learning? 24
   Listening 24
   Questioning 24
   Communicating 24
   Time management 25
   Confidentiality 25
   Managing behaviour 26

Other useful information
   How students learn 28
   Students with disabilities 30
   Culture and Communication 35
   Resources - Books 39
   Websites 39
   References 40
Traditional Language Map, Townsville Diocese, North Queensland
You have just started work as a school support officer. It is likely that you have already had a lot of life experiences including working and parenthood. Nevertheless it is quite likely that you have spent very little time in a school since you were a student.

This section introduces you to our schools, communities and students. It is only an overview though and if you want more detailed information you need to access our website www.tsv.catholic.edu.au which also leads you on to the websites of our individual schools.

Our Communities

The most significant thing about our Townsville Diocese is its diversity. It encompasses rural, coastal communities from Proserpine to the Cardwell Range, western rural and mining communities including Mount Isa, the industrial, commercial and port cities of Townsville and Thuringowa and the Indigenous community on Palm Island. This diversity is reflected in the cultural heritages and influences within the communities including Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, British, European, Asian, Pacific Islander and more recently arrived African and Middle Eastern.

Our Schools

Our schools reflect this cultural and geographical diversity and include small rural primary schools, boarding schools, city primary schools and secondary colleges, as well as P-12 Catholic Colleges (including the largest in the State, Ryan Catholic College). These schools have an important role within the Church because they derive their characteristics from their Catholic identity. The educational activity that is carried out in our Catholic schools is grounded in the interaction of faith, life and culture and this is reflected in the daily operation of each school.

In summary, the Catholic School is a community which focuses on the person, providing an experience of belonging; supporting families, both spiritually and physically; encouraging participation in the wider pastoral work of the community; and, encouraging respect and acceptance of the beliefs and values of all.

The percentage of Indigenous students in each of our schools varies considerably and has generally increased in recent years. The most significant numbers are in our boarding schools where students come from remote communities including Palm Island, the Torres Strait, Cape communities and Western communities. St Michael’s School on Palm Island is also significant as a school serving the Indigenous community of the Island.

Indigenous school officers work with teachers and students in most of our schools and they have a range of roles and responsibilities including teacher assistants, library, ICT, community liaison, boarding and administrative support. They are crucial members of our education team whose goal is to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students.
The following snapshots of our three ‘lighthouse’ schools illustrate the cultural and educational diversity within the schools in our diocese.

The Marian School, Townsville
At The Marian School cultural diversity and inclusion are supported by the school community. While the majority of the students are non-Indigenous other groups include Filipinos whose first language is Tagalog, Indigenous Australians including Torres Strait Islanders whose home language is Torres Strait Creole, and Aborigines whose home language is an Aboriginal English. In addition, the school caters for students with special learning needs and students who have been diagnosed with a range of impairments and whose support needs are high.

Staffing also reflects this cultural diversity. The school is proud to have the first Indigenous learning support and special needs teacher on staff, ably supported by an Aboriginal teacher assistant and a Torres Strait Islander teacher assistant. Like the rest of the teachers and teacher assistants, these staff work with a wide range of students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Since January 1999 the school has been enriched by Torres Strait Islander culture through the creation of The Marian School Torres Strait Island Dance Troupe which has proved to be very popular with students and parents alike. Auditions are held at the beginning of the school year and those selected are taught traditional languages through singing, dancing and other traditional cultural activities. The Troupe performs for The Marian School community and other Catholic school communities throughout the diocese. It is often invited to perform at a range of local community events and also performed at the State Indigenous conference where it received many accolades from participants.

St Michael’s, Palm Island
St Michael’s School on Palm Island reflects the unique geographical and cultural setting of the Island community. Geographical isolation means that the students have little contact with students from other schools on a regular basis and must leave their homes to attend secondary boarding schools or live with extended family on the mainland. Palm Islander people (bwgcolman people) are descended from a diverse group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In this unique cultural situation it has been claimed that the people have familial ties to most other Indigenous communities in Queensland.

The school community consists of approximately 80 Island families reflecting the cultural diversity of Palm Island. Each class teacher is ably supported by a teacher assistant from the Palm Island community. Many of these teacher assistants have children or other relatives attending the school and are therefore a valuable link with the wider community. They also make an invaluable contribution to the cultural awareness program that is held each Friday and to celebrations that are uniquely significant for the Palm Island community.
St Kieran’s, Mount Isa

At St Kieran’s School staff, students and parents also celebrate their cultural diversity in a number of ways. The school is a small, close-knit community of 13 different cultural groups of which one quarter are Indigenous, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Like The Marian School, it also has a significant group of Filipino students and students with special learning needs.

The school is fortunate in having two Indigenous teachers who work in the areas of learning support and learning enrichment and two Indigenous teacher assistants who work in a range of classrooms, assisting teachers and students.

NAIDOC week and Harmony Day are among the cultural events celebrated and cultural diversity is further incorporated into the curriculum through their Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) program and their use of the Townsville Catholic Education Unity materials. Currently the school community is planning further cultural enrichment using the cultures within the school as a basis.

St Kieran’s joins with other Catholic schools in Mount Isa to encourage greater participation in school events by the parents and care givers of its Indigenous students. A ‘meet and greet’ bar-b-que is held each term on a rotational basis so that parents and teachers can get together in a social setting. Community Liaison Officers liaise with parent groups to encourage them to attend these functions, the second of which will coincide with NAIDOC celebrations.
Our Students and their Languages

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in our schools are also culturally diverse. A study of the traditional languages spoken by the ancestors of our North Queensland students (Right Talk Right Place, Townsville Catholic Education, 2003) highlights the richness and diversity of North Queensland Indigenous cultures. Often, particularly in our small communities, our Indigenous school officers are representatives of local Indigenous communities, are related to many of the students and are therefore a vital cultural and linguistic link between the school and the community.

Languages Spoken by Our Students

This is a very brief introduction to the main languages spoken by the Indigenous students in our schools. If you are working with Indigenous students you will need to know what their home language is so that you can help them learn Standard Australian English (SAE), the language that we use in our schools.

Traditional Languages

At the end of the 18th century there were approximately 250 different Aboriginal languages spoken in Australia, with approximately 600 dialects. Many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in our North Queensland schools, particularly those from remote communities, speak a traditional language as either their first or second language.

Torres Strait Creole (TSC)

About 18,000 Torres Strait Islander peoples who live on the islands of the Torres Strait and on the Australian mainland speak TSC. It is a separate language from English and has developed as the lingua franca of the Torres Strait peoples at the expense of the traditional Torres Strait languages, Kala Lagaw Ya (western language) and Meriam Mir (eastern language). Islanders also have an elaborate sign language that may either replace or be used in addition to verbal communication.

Aboriginal English (AE)

Aboriginal English (AE) is the term used to describe the dialects of English spoken by Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia. Speakers use a lighter form of their dialect, closer to Standard Australian English (SAE) in formal situations and a heavier form, closer to their Indigenous language/s with family and friends. You may also find that the heavier dialects are more likely to be spoken by students from remote communities. AE has distinctive features of pronunciation, grammar, word meanings and language use that are different from SAE. Language usage is also different e.g. direct questioning, silence, explicitness, directness and deliberateness.

AE is now recognized (since 1960s) as a legitimate variety of English. It is primarily an oral language and is an important aspect of Aboriginal identity because each community’s English includes part of the Indigenous language/s of the area. Nevertheless it has a history of being dismissed by both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people as ‘bad English’. There are also significant differences in communicative behaviour between speakers of AE and SAE. You need to be aware of these differences so that you can avoid misunderstandings that may adversely impact on students’ education.
Our Challenges

Although few of the teachers in our North Queensland schools have received specialised training in understanding the complexities of teaching English to second language or second dialect speakers, yet that is one of the main challenges for teachers of Indigenous students.

Although teachers tend to notice some differences between AE and SAE such as sounds, rhythms, words added or deleted, it is the differences related to deeper cultural understandings that are less easily understood. Understandings of Indigenous worldviews, values and assumptions and how different cultures impart skills and knowledge to their young people underpin their dialects.

Other fundamental differences that present challenges to teachers include pragmatics or the 'habits' of usage that people apply as part of a language or dialect e.g. turn taking in conversation, getting information from others, talking in generalisations, differences in syntax, semantics and phonology.

It is essential that Indigenous students learn to switch from their home language/dialect to SAE and back again. Indigenous teachers and Indigenous school support officers are a vital resource in this process because of their understanding of home language and because they model code switching.

Helpful Hints

In the workshops that we held during the Right Talk Right Place project, North Queensland teachers and school support officers suggested the following as both challenges and necessary strategies for success in working effectively with Indigenous students:

• Students need to be aware of and value their home language and SAE;
• Use flexible and culturally appropriate pedagogy (teaching methods);
• Value languages by acknowledging diversity;
• Display student work for parents and community;
• Develop partnerships with community by bringing parents into school;
• Foster community links with specific activities/displays/newsletters;
• Learning through playing games - have fun;
• Use real life examples in the classroom and share strategies and resources;
• Initiate cultural programs in the school and off campus;
• Recognize the uniqueness of your community? know your students;
• Practice two-way language learning; and,
• Practice effective behaviour management through pastoral care.
Who am I and what are my skills?

When we talked to teachers and school support officers in our three ‘lighthouse’ schools we found that many of our teacher assistants are parents who literally follow their children into their schools. Often they begin as volunteers in their child’s pre-school, develop a liking for the work and move from volunteer to part-time and later full-time work as a teacher assistant. Not surprisingly these assistants said that parenting skills contribute to their work with students in the classroom. Other personal characteristics and skills that they consider important include:

- Patience;
- A sense of humor;
- Good listening skills;
- Knowing how to develop a relationship of trust and mutual respect;
- Flexibility and versatility;
- Creativity;
- An ability to work with a wide range of students;
- An ability to be able to break a task down into a series of smaller steps; and,
- An understanding of cultural diversity.

Many of these are life skills, skills learned from other employment or volunteer work, or skills associated with hobbies. What is clear is that everyone brings a unique set of knowledge and skills to their work.

You may find it useful to work through the following checklist to help you identify your own special set of knowledge and skills.
## Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUR CHARACTERISTICS AND SKILLS</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Need to develop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to develop relationships with students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to develop mutual respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good manners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work with different students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to provide guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to show students how to accomplish things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural awareness and understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Versatility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to follow instructions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to break a task down into steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to assess suitability of resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to develop own resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other personal attributes I possess and skills I have learned:**

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________
It is also useful to think about:
• Things you’re very comfortable with;
• Things you need a bit more practice with; and,
• Things you need to get a lot of help with.

This reflection will give you some idea of what your training needs might be.

What do I do if I want to develop my skills further?
e.g. NIEW Day, on-line learning.
What do I need to know about my school?

You will also find it useful to make sure that you have a comprehensive profile of your school before you start work. The following are the essentials that you need to know. There will also be other things that you want to know or that your principal will consider to be important.

**School profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full name</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street &amp; postal address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal’s name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name/s of teachers I work with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person I contact when absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff meetings I need to attend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant school policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other essential information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is my role?

Your role as a school support officer assisting student learning (more commonly known as a teacher assistant) is to assist the teachers in their work with their students. Your role is very important, both to the students and to the teachers responsible for them.

What you do will generally involve work in one or all of these settings:

• With an individual student developing a student's skills in a particular area; (NB always make sure that you are within sight of another adult; this should be a teacher.)
• With small groups of students on specific tasks set by the teacher; and,
• In the classroom alongside the teacher helping the students with their learning.

In addition, sometimes you may be responsible for preparing learning materials or setting up learning activities for the teacher.

It is important for you to remember that while you assist and work alongside the teacher you do not replace the teacher. The teacher is responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring students' learning. This does not mean that you don’t make a really valuable contribution to students' learning. During our research we heard many teachers exclaim that they could not survive without their teacher assistant!

If you are an Indigenous teacher assistant your contribution to the teacher’s understanding of cultural diversity is extremely valuable and your link to the local community can help to develop and strengthen the partnership between your school and the community in a number of productive ways.

Here are some suggestions for you to consider:

• Consult with the community, especially the Elders, on behalf of the school;
• Advise teachers about cultural knowledge, based on consultation with the community;
• Assist in developing culturally appropriate teaching materials;
• Discuss with teachers ways of involving the community in lessons; and,
• Be a community resource person.

In our ‘lighthouse’ schools Indigenous teacher assistants are especially important in a variety of circumstances. For example, at The Marian School and St Kieran’s School the Indigenous teacher assistants work to support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and contribute significantly to the understanding, acknowledgment and celebration of their cultures. At St Michael’s School on Palm Island, Indigenous teacher assistants work with teachers in every classroom. They are an important link between the teachers and the community of parents/care givers because, unlike most of the teachers, they are an integral part of that community. So, the teachers rely on them to share their knowledge and understanding of the students and their families, their special needs and their cultures as well as assisting the teachers in the classroom. They play a crucial role in modeling code switching from home language to school language and helping the teachers carry out code switching activities in the classroom and in advising teachers on cultural protocols.
Who are my students?

The only certainty about the students you work with is that each one is unique and they have a range of personalities and temperaments just as they have a range of learning needs. Your main challenge is to provide opportunities for each child to develop as a unique person. It is helpful to begin with the assumption that every child can learn, but each will learn differently in different circumstances.

You may find it useful to consider how the following set of statements on working styles apply to the students you work with (and your own preferred working style!).

**Suggestion:** you can photocopy and complete a sheet for the students you work with to give you an indication of what works best for them.

Discovering a child’s working style

As you read through these statements about preferred working styles think about the students you work with and how they might respond to them. This will give you a good idea of the range of working styles in a typical classroom.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When the student is working on something:</td>
<td>7. She/he works best:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She/he focuses on every detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She/he looks at the big picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. She/he does her/his best thinking and working:</td>
<td>8. She/he works best:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. She/he works best:</td>
<td>9. She/he works best:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In short bursts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over long periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. She/he likes to work:</td>
<td>10. She/he works best:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With really bright lights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With dim light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. She/he works best:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When she’s/he’s a bit chilly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When she’s/he’s warm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Helping with Reading

Most of the work you will do with students to support their reading will be on a one-to-one basis. Many of you may have completed some training on the Support-a-Reader Program. The ideas that follow have been developed from that program.

How Can I Support Reading?

- Model reading for the child
- Share a love of reading
- Nurture the enjoyment of reading
- Daily reading aloud one-to-one.
- Read interesting books
- Encourage the child to select the book
- Accept the child’s efforts to make meaning
- Encourage the child to become self-reliant.

How do I Support Beginning Readers?

**Introduce the book:**
- Child chooses from a range of books;
- Talk about the cover;

**Go through the book:**
- Discussing the illustrations;
- Predict the story line;
- If possible, link the events or information to the child’s experiences.

**Orientation:**
- Teacher assistant reads the book;
- Confirm or reject the predictions;
- Teacher assistant and child share responses.

**Shared Reading:**
- Teacher assistant and child read together;
- When the child is reading confidently, begin to leave out words that can easily be predicted.

**Supported Reading:**
- Child attempts to read independently;
- Teacher assistant becomes a listener;
- Listener waits and observes;
- Listener gives clues and supports child’s use of strategies.
How Do I Assist Readers to Overcome Errors?

How will I respond?

1. When the reader makes an error and meaning is not lost?
   • Do not interrupt reading.

2. When the child reads on and meaning is lost?
   • Say, “I didn’t understand that”
   (Wait)
   • Give a clue by talking about the context.
   (Wait)
   • Model self-correction by re-reading the sentence, sounding the initial letter of the unknown word.
   (Wait)
   • Tell the child the unknown word.
   • Then read the sentence and talk about the meaning of the unknown word in relation to the rest of the sentence.

3. When the child stops and cannot continue?
   • Point to the initial sound and run your finger along the rest of the sentence.
   (Wait)
   • Model for the child by reading on (or re-reading), sounding the beginning of the unknown word.
   (Wait)
   • Give a clue by talking about the context.
   (Wait)
   • Tell the child the unknown word. Then read the sentence and talk about the meaning of the unknown word in relation to the rest of the sentence.

NB The most important thing for you to do when hearing a child read is often to be quiet and wait. Give the child time to work it out and then praise their attempt.
Responding positively to children’s reading

Make sure you praise young readers when:

• They read a sentence correctly;
• They correct themselves after a mistake; and,
• They get a word right after being prompted.

Some suggested ways that you can praise young readers:

• That’s a whole sentence right. Good.
• That was fine. You noticed ‘fix’ wasn’t quite right and you corrected yourself. Good.
• Yes, that’s right. You figured it out without me telling you the word. Good.
• You read that section well!
Helping with Writing

Although your teacher/s will provide you with guidance on how to support students with writing the following are some general guidelines that you will find helpful. It is likely that the students you will be assisting will be in one of the early stages of writing.

**Role Play:** this is the first stage of writing where students experiment with ways of writing, using scribbles, random letters or letters from their own name. Often these writers will ‘read’ their own writing.

**Experimental:** at this stage writers are aware that what they say can be written and they start to write for a purpose, often grouping letters together to represent the word that they hear.

**Early:** at this stage writers will write things like short stories, letters and short reports. They use simple sentences, attempt punctuation and guess at spelling words they don’t know on the basis of sound.

All of these beginning writers will benefit from a range of opportunities to write so you can support them in their writing efforts by:

- Providing writing tools like blank paper, crayons, pencils and other writing materials
- Writing for your students; make sure that you write exactly what they say
- Encourage children to write and praise their attempts
- Encourage children to talk about their writing and tell you what it says
- Share a wide variety of texts with children e.g. books, magazines, brochures, newspapers and electronic texts
- Talk about letters, sounds, words, sentence patterns and interesting features in texts
- Talk about the way different texts are organized e.g. shopping list, picture book.
Helping with Mathematics

Your teacher/s will provide you with the relevant materials and instructions to support students who need assistance with Mathematics.

Here is some basic information about Mathematics and the ways children learn that may be helpful.

The concept of number is the most important concept for children to grasp before they progress in Mathematics. You may often be asked to work with students on developing these skills so the following developmental sequence for counting may be helpful.

Developmental Sequence for Counting

You will probably find that children’s counting skills develop in the following sequence.

**Immature counting:** children often use their own repeated sequence before they learn the conventional sequence e.g. recite number names, one three, five, nine.

**Rote counting:** children can recite the number names in the correct sequence but do not necessarily link a number name to something being counted.

**Point counting:** children point to, touch or move an object with each number name.

**Rational counting:** children point to, touch or move an object with each number name and they can identify the size of the group by the last number counted.

**Counting on:** children can begin counting at any number. This is a useful strategy for addition.

**Counting back:** children can count back from a given number. This is a useful strategy for subtraction.

**Skip counting:** children start by counting in twos, fives and tens. This provides a foundation for multiplication, division and working with money.

(Adapted from: The Year 2 Diagnostic Net, Intervention Strategies: Number)

The program, **Support a Maths Learner** is a particularly useful tool for teacher assistants. There is a kit (probably located in the library) in every school in Queensland and the kit contains the following books:

- Introduction
- Number Representations
- Patterning
- Counting
- Photocopy Masters
Cultural diversity in the classroom

The potential for misunderstanding due to differences in attitudes, values and behaviour exists when two or more cultures exist within one classroom.

In reality, this situation exists in most of our classrooms. Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are concerned, although there is not one shared culture, research has shown that there are definite differences between worldviews, child-rearing practices and learning styles of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Nevertheless there are also experiences and attitudes shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who have similar lifestyles.

There are a number of important cultural factors about young Indigenous learners that Indigenous teacher assistants are more likely to be aware of. For example:

- Young Indigenous children are very likely to have a ‘home’ language, so the Standard Australian English of the classroom is a second language (or dialect) of English for them;
- Their language tradition is oral rather than written so Indigenous students are more likely to enjoy story telling and sharing stories rather than writing them;
- In their communities Indigenous children learn life skills by watching their elders and they are expected to learn quickly and to assume certain family responsibilities early in their lives;
- Many Indigenous parents regard their children as autonomous individuals and expect independent behavior, including making their own decisions, which their parents then respect.

Translated into a school context you can expect that:

- Indigenous students are likely to be visual and kinesthetic (learn by doing) learners;
- They are more likely to favour concrete learning in context over more abstract learning;
- They are also more likely to favour cooperative learning situations where they can share their knowledge and understanding with others in a group.
How can I support children learning?

Experienced teacher assistants at our ‘lighthouse’ schools identified good listening and questioning skills as being essential in their work with students.

Listening
Listening is not the same as hearing; being a good listener is a skill that you can develop and that you can encourage your students to develop by modelling effective listening. If you really listen to what a student is saying then you don’t only recall the words she/he spoke, but you also have some understanding of how she/he feels about the subject.

Here are some useful tips for effective listening:
• Look at the person speaking and concentrate on what she/he is saying;
• Don’t try to talk and listen at the same time;
• Listen for ideas, not just words;
• Ask questions only when necessary to clarify what is being said;
• Avoid interrupting;
• Listen to the way the speaker is expressing his/her thoughts;
• Respond to the ideas, not the person; and,
• Think about why the speaker is saying what s/he is saying.

Questioning
Asking good questions is a skill that you can develop with practice. Here are some useful tips.
• Try to avoid asking students too many closed questions, requiring only a yes or no answer.
• Encourage students to ask questions because this is often a chance for them not only to clarify something but also to develop a deeper understanding of the subject being discussed.
• Be mindful of how you treat a student’s response. Be positive about the fact that the student has responded and then ask other questions to give her/him an opportunity to get the answer right, if her/his initial response has been incorrect.
• Take opportunities to challenge students by asking ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions.

Communicating
The ability to communicate effectively with the students you work with and their teachers will ensure positive outcomes for everyone involved. It is important to note that we communicate both verbally and non-verbally and that our non-verbal behaviour sends a very strong message.

You may find the following ideas useful to consider when you are working with students.
• Eye contact: eye contact shows interest but students of many cultures (including Aboriginal) often drop their eyes and their heads when speaking to an adult. This is rarely rudeness so it is important not to stress the need for direct eye contact too strongly.
• Physical distance: physical distance is usually associated with relationships. Sitting or standing too close to a student can make her/him feel ‘crowded’ or over-powered. Physical contact: in Indigenous cultures physical contact, for example a hug, arm on shoulder, sitting close, is a sign of respect, cultural acceptance, a trusting relationship.
Time Management

Time management skills are also important if you want to do your job well and make sure that you don’t get stressed.

Your teacher (or teachers) will develop a timetable with you and it is important that you follow it carefully.

Here are some other time management tips that may help you:

• Check your timetable at least one day ahead so that you are well prepared;
• Arrive at school at least 30 minutes before the start of the school day;
• Check staff notices each day for any changes to the school schedule;
• Cross reference your personal time table with the school time table;
• Prioritise any extra duties;
• Check with the teacher if you have competing demands on your time;
• Keep a record of your work with students;
• Clarify with the teacher if you are unsure of your tasks;
• Make time to discuss resources you may need with the teacher (or write your request in your communication book); and,
• Keep notes on things you need help with or are worried about.

Confidentiality

Before you begin working with students in a school it is important to think carefully about your responsibilities regarding confidentiality and the Privacy Act. Schools collect information about their students and families that you may have access to from time to time. In addition, teachers may share personal information about particular children with you for a specific purpose. It is essential that you respect the privacy of this information and do not share outside your work any information about children and their families that you have come across during the course of your work. Inside work, only discuss this kind of information with the teacher directly concerned with the particular student.

At all times, avoid staffroom gossip about students and their families!
Managing Behaviour

It is highly likely that your school will have developed a Behaviour Management Code for teachers, teacher assistants and students to follow. Parents will also be familiar with this Code. It is important for you to remember that the class teacher is responsible for behaviour management and will give you important tips and model effective classroom management.

In addition, the following tips may be useful for you:

- Give clear, short instructions to students;
- Take into consideration the fact that a range of things can affect students’ behaviour e.g. personal, home, community, as well as school;
- Always model the behaviour you expect from the students because behaviour is something young people learn from who they are with;
- Use positive approaches to promote the kind of behaviour you want. Reward good behaviour rather than always focusing on bad behaviour;
- Be consistent and follow through with consequences; and,
- Use praise to encourage and reinforce the behaviour you want to see.
“This is what works for me” from Annette at The Marian School

- **Lining up:** when you are asked to escort a group of children from the classroom to another area ensure they follow in a single or double line. This encourages children to be quiet when moving so they don’t disturb other classes around them. This also supports positive physical behaviour.

- **Hands up:** it is important to encourage children to put their hand up when they wish to ask a question or need your attention. This ensures all children have a turn and keeps noise to a comfortable level.

- **On-task:** check that children are working on the set task. If a child is not on task, you can change the configuration of the group and separate the disruptive students. Use stickers and sticker cards to reward good behaviour. Encourage the right behaviours by praising only the ‘good’ behaviour.

- **Polite behaviour:** model polite behaviour such as use of ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ to encourage students to practice polite behaviour.

- **Tidying up:** before children leave the area make sure they leave it tidy. This encourages respect for their learning area and for themselves as learners.

- **Positive physical contact:** if a child displays inappropriate behaviour (such as hitting or using ‘bad’ language) then the child must be returned to the classroom and/or the teacher must be informed of this behaviour. A disruptive child will inhibit the learning of other children around them.

- **Learning Support Book:** each classroom has a book where the teacher writes details of learning activities for teacher assistants to implement with targeted students. The entries include date, activity, comment and signature. Teacher assistants are encouraged to comment on the success or otherwise of the activity. If there are no instructions from the teacher the teacher assistant describes the activity that she/he undertook with the students. This is an effective communication tool and an invaluable record of learning support for students.
How students learn

Recent research that influences teachers’ approaches to teaching has described the different intelligences we all have and how our different orientations influence the way we prefer to learn. The table below identifies and briefly describes the characteristics of eight intelligences, linking them to children’s preferred ways of learning. Researchers have also linked the level of our emotional intelligence with our approach to learning and the way we relate to people.

Teachers know that their students have a range of work preferences and a range of intelligences and they plan their units of work so that their students have the opportunity to work in their preferred way at least some of the time.

It is also useful for teacher assistants to observe their students carefully and provide opportunities for the students they are assisting to do the same.

If you are working with a Learning Support Teacher the students you are asked to support may have special learning needs and may be working on temporary or permanent programs of support. This will depend on the nature and level of their diagnosed impairment or the ‘gap’ in their learning.
## Eight Ways of Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children who are highly:</th>
<th>Think</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>In words</td>
<td>Reading, writing, telling stories, playing word games, emailing, texting</td>
<td>Books, CDs, writing tools, magazines, diaries, dialogue, discussion, debate, stories, computer, access to internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical-Mathematical</td>
<td>By reasoning</td>
<td>Experimenting, questioning, figuring out logical puzzles, calculating, chess, computer games</td>
<td>Materials to experiment with, science materials, trips to the planetarium and science museum, access to internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial</td>
<td>In images and pictures</td>
<td>Designing, drawing, visualizing, doodling, computer games</td>
<td>Art, LEGO, videos, movies, DVDs, imagination games, mazes, puzzles, illustrated books, trips to art museums, access to internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily-Kinesthetic</td>
<td>Through bodily sensations</td>
<td>Dancing, running, jumping, building, touching, gesturing, climbing, throwing</td>
<td>Role play, drama, movement, things to build, sports and physical games, tactile experiences, hands-on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical</td>
<td>Via rhythms and melodies</td>
<td>Singing, whistling, humming, tapping feet and hands, listening, playing musical instrument</td>
<td>Sing-along time, trips to concerts, music playing at home and school, musical instruments, access to internet, CDs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>By bouncing ideas off other people</td>
<td>Leading, organizing, relating, discussing, negotiating, group work, partying, emailing, texting</td>
<td>Friends, group games, social gatherings, community events, clubs, mentors/apprenticeships, access to internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>In relation to their needs, feelings, and goals</td>
<td>Setting goals, meditating, dreaming, planning, reflecting</td>
<td>Secret places, time alone, self-paced projects, choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalist</td>
<td>Through nature and natural forms</td>
<td>Playing with pets, gardening, investigating nature, raising animals, caring for planet earth</td>
<td>Access to nature, opportunities for interacting with animals, tools for investigating nature, access to internet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from: Armstrong, Thomas 2001)
**Students with disabilities**

Students with disabilities are those students who have been diagnosed by medical practitioners to have a specific (sometimes multiple) disability that will impact on the student's learning. Although these students are included in mainstream schooling they will have a verified Educational Adjustment Program (EAP) Profile from which an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will have been devised in consultation with parents/care givers, teachers, guidance personnel and medical specialists and that addresses their unique, special learning needs. As a teacher assistant you may be part of the team that works with one or more of these students in order to achieve the goals of the IEP.

Although all students with disabilities are unique individuals there are some general principles that can be applied to guide you in your work.

Firstly, it is most important to stress that you need to follow the learning program devised by the student’s teacher.

If you have any concerns about the program or the student you must discuss these with the class teacher. It is not appropriate for you to by-pass the class teacher and discuss your concerns with guidance personnel or parents.

**Strategies for teacher assistants**

Although there are strategies specific to the needs of students with a particular disability that your teacher will advise you of there are, however, some general principles that apply across all students with disabilities.

All students can learn.

Students with disabilities are no different from other students in that they can learn; the difference is that they will need either adaptive devices, more time, and/or changes to the way learning materials and activities are presented.

Students' experiences of school should enhance their self-esteem, self worth and sense of identity

As a teacher assistant you can support a student's development in these areas by:

- Facilitating the student's participation with other students;
- Using materials that are age appropriate;
- Helping to develop social skills in the student; and,
- Providing positive feedback to the student.
Communication
Many students with disabilities will have problems with communication. It is therefore useful for you to consider the following suggestions that may help you in your work:

• Be honest when you don’t understand a student’s attempt at communication;
• Confirm that you have correctly understood a student’s message by using reflective listening and e.g. restate the message for confirmation;
• Confirm with a student that she/he has understood what you have told her/him;
• Allow a student ‘wait time’ to think and respond;
• Frame questions carefully in order to receive an unambiguous response;
• If a student is using an augmentative communication device you will need to be familiar with its operation;
• Many Indigenous students suffer from Otitis Media. Make sure that these students have heard you clearly;
• Use visual supports or non-verbal gestures to facilitate communication; and,
• Repeat and simplify instructions whenever a student has not understood you.

Physical and learning disabilities
The following is an overview of disabilities that students in your school may have. Please be aware that this information is designed to give you an overview. The teacher/s you are working with will provide you with more detailed, relevant information about how a specific disability impacts on the learning for each student you are assisting.

Physical impairment (PI)
A physical impairment interferes in some way with a student’s ability to move and/or coordinate movement and will be located somewhere on a broad spectrum from mild to severe. The more common conditions associated with physical impairment are cerebral palsy, spina bifida and muscular dystrophy.

Physical impairment affects a student’s participation in schooling by affecting all or some of the following, depending on the specific condition;

• Mobility,
• Gross motor skills,
• Fine motor skills,
• Communication skills, and
• Social skills
Vision impairment (VI)
Vision impairment includes students with low vision who use print and those with little or no vision who use may braille. All areas of learning will be affected depending on the degree of impairment.

Hearing impairment (HI)
The degree of hearing impairment can range from mild to profound and all degrees can impact on a student’s learning, particularly in the areas of;
• Communication skills,
• Language,
• Listening and comprehending,
• Speech,
• Learning skills,
• Attention and concentration, and
• Social interaction skills.

Otitis Media: this is an inflammation of the middle ear that is medically treatable but can cause a conductive hearing loss. Many Aboriginal students suffer permanent, temporary or chronic hearing loss because of Otitis Media. Daily sessions of the BBC program (Breathe, Blow, Cough) can improve these children’s hearing.
Use of a sound field amplification system or bone conductor is typically recommended for these students so it is important to support the daily use of this equipment.

Speech-language impairment (SLI)
Speech-language impairment is a loss or abnormality of the specific parts and functions of the brain and body used for processing and producing speech and language and causes a communication disability. Students with speech-language impairment will have a specific impairment in understanding and/or formulating speech and/or language.
Speech-language impairment can affect a student's ability to;
• Understand and express information,
• Relate to teachers and peers,
• Express needs, abilities and interests,
• Participate in group activities,
• Develop a positive self-concept,
• Learn appropriate behavior and social skills,
• Problem solve, and
• Acquire literacy and numeracy skills.
Intellectual impairment (II)

Intellectual impairment is characterized by significantly sub-average intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with related limitations in two or more of the adaptive skills (i.e. everyday coping skills). It is caused by factors that affect brain functioning and manifests before a student turns 18 years of age. It is important to note that there is a diversity of characteristics, abilities and needs among students with intellectual impairment as there is within the rest of the school’s population. The main areas of difficulty affected in the learning process are:

- attention,
- thought processing,
- memory,
- perception, and
- generalization

These difficulties impact on the student’s:

- Social skills,
- Daily living skills,
- Communication,
- Self-care skills, and
- Problem solving.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a life-long developmental disability that affects the individual’s understanding and interpretation of the world around them. This leads to social relationship, communication, behavior and sensory problems. It can affect people of all intellectual levels. Students with ASD may have problems in the areas of:

- Communication,
- Social competence,
- Behaviors that interfere with learning, and
- Sensory information processing.

They benefit from lessons that are highly structured, predictable and are supported by specific teaching strategies in the above areas.

Social-Emotional Behavioral Disorders (SEB)

The most common Social-Emotional Behavioral Disorder is Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD). Students with this disorder have problems in the areas of inattention and inability to concentrate on a task at a level appropriate for the child’s developmental level. Symptoms can include:

- Poor concentration,
• Distractibility,
• Impulsivity,
• Hyperactivity,
• Failure to finish tasks,
• Poor organizational skills,
• Poor listening skills,
• Forgetfulness, and
• Aggression.

Students supported under this area of need will typically display severe symptoms, impacting significantly on their ability to achieve educational outcomes.
What do I need to know before I begin my work with a student?

Before you begin supporting a student with special needs the classroom teacher or learning support teacher needs to:

- Define your role;
- Discuss guidelines and boundaries with you;
- Share expectations of student learning outcomes with you;
- Set up a system e.g. a communication book, for recording your work with the student;
- Arrange to meet with you regularly and give you specific feedback;
- Make sure that you have the necessary skills and/or specialist knowledge and support your professional development; and,
- Explain your role in relation to parents.

Here is an overview of how you can effectively provide support to students:

- Develop a positive relationship with each student;
- Develop an awareness of a student’s learning style;
- Allow each student to develop as an active and contributing member of the class group;
- Minimise unnecessary withdrawal or isolation of a student;
- Help the student to develop friendships and networks;
- Celebrate success with the student, teacher and class; and,
- Encourage students to do as much as possible for themselves (avoiding the development of learned helplessness or over-dependence).
Culture and Communication

Communication is created by culture. How people do things is determined by what they consider to be important in their culture, so the way of communicating will reflect the values and beliefs of a culture. For example, there are many words in the Eskimo language for snow. There are many words in Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages describing relationships, where English only has nine original terms for relations (the others are composites).

Culture often determines the way messages are transmitted.

It can vary through technology (computers, written material, conventions of letters, verbally or non-verbally), in style, extreme politeness, and even through who is participating. Some societies have taboos on who speaks to whom when communicating across cultures.

How do we communicate?

The way we communicate depends on our cultural upbringing and background. Specifics of how Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people and other people communicate will be covered in the next section.

The following are some general rules about communication:

• We can never not communicate, we are always communicating
• Pure communication is not possible
• We see things which do not exist
• We do not see things which exist
• We perceive differently
• How we communicate is determined by our cultural background

Communicating with people from different cultures may provide some barriers, due to different cultural understandings, languages and styles.

It is widely recognised that inter-cultural communication is made easier if:

• General communication skills are good
• Participants have open attitudes towards the other cultures
• Status of participants is similar
• Cultural views are similar
• Knowledge of participants is similar

Effective cross-cultural communication relies on overcoming areas where the potential for bad communication exists through different status or different cultural understanding.
Cultural Differences

Extended Families: While a European nuclear family may consist of four members, for example, a mother, father, sister and brother, and may be living quite comfortably in a three-bedroom house, the extended family kinship in, for example, Aboriginal cultures, would prove to be an extremely crowded situation. In such households numbers could vary from four to twenty or more. This sharing contributes to survival under difficult circumstances. Therefore loyalty is a priority where family is concerned.

Deaths: When a death occurs in a non-Indigenous family, often three days are acceptable for mourning behaviour. However, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the mourning period could be from one week to a month or so. It is seen to be disrespectful if other commitments overshadow this event, and some family members could disown any person guilty of this.

Parental Support: Lack of Indigenous parental input does not mean that parents are unconcerned. On the contrary, they often feel threatened in a school context by the language barrier, or because of their lack of formal education. A visit to schools where they are always in a minority could become less threatening using the assistance of the school counsellor or Indigenous teaching assistant. Touchstone activities could be a way of improving parental relationships positively.

Absenteeism: There could be many reasons for student absence from school. Schools should be places where a student wants to attend rather than be forced by the compulsory Education Act. Curriculum development is the area where changes could be made to integrate Indigenous cultures. By instilling a positive attitude in students the following may be reduced:

- Family commitments such as babysitting or looking after a sick relative
- Accompanying older relatives to seek medical advice, to pay accounts to assist where there is a language barrier
- Deaths, weddings, family visitors from out of towns, or sickness
- Sympathetic parents who believe the system does not cater for their child’s needs.

Truanting: Most parents are unaware of their children truanting. The following are some reasons why students truant:

- Feel they are being picked on
- Don’t understand the subject
- Peer Pressure
The following few points could be of some assistance to the classroom teacher in fostering a positive relationship between student and teacher as well as improving classroom climate.

GIGGLING: If a student giggles when being disciplined, this can be a sign of nervousness or being frightened and not necessarily of disrespect.

EYE CONTACT: Students will often hang their head and not look at the person speaking to them. Direct eye contact can at time be regarded as being disrespectful in Aboriginal and Islander cultures.

SMILING OR GRINNING: Students smiling or grinning when being disciplined can be a sign of embarrassment rather than disrespect.

REFUSAL TO ANSWER: At home some children are not allowed to reply to parents when being disciplined. This could explain why students sometimes refuse to answer teachers. Building trust is vital.

THE CLASSROOM CONFRONTATION: The disciplining of a student in front of the total class in a raised voice can result in the student becoming embarrassed or ‘shamed out’. This is particularly so if there is even some “perceived” injustice in-the discipline. The student may react by completely “clamming up” or by becoming abusive and at times losing almost total control over the language being used.

Open confrontation is best avoided with all students.

Sometimes better results can be achieved and the problem resolved effectively by the teacher remaining calm and continuing to speak with the student in a respectful but authoritative manner rather than by raising the voice.
Resources

Books
Armstrong, Thomas (2001) Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, USA
Berry, Rosalind & Hudson, Joyce (1997) Making the Jump, A Resource Book for Teachers of Aboriginal Students, Catholic Education Office, Kimberley Region WA
DEETYA (1997) Support a Maths Learner
Department of Education, Queensland (1996) Support a Reader Program, Queensland Government
Diocese of Townsville, Catholic Education (2003) Right Talk Right Place, Townsville Catholic Education.
First Steps (1997) Writing Resource Book, Rigby Heinemann, Australia

Websites
www.userfr.com This is the website of User Friendly Educational Publishers
www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au/ This website provides links to a collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources
http://education.qld.gov.au/learning_ent/ldf/pst/taide/rpl_rcc-kit.html This website links you to information about Certificate 111 in Education Support Recognition Kit
www.ispdu.com.au This is the website of the Indigenous studies Product Development Unit of TAFE
www.tsv.catholic.edu.au This website provides information about our schools and educational programs. There are also useful links to other sites
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Diocese of Townsville, Catholic Education (2003) Right Talk Right Place, Townsville Catholic Education.


Sarra, Chris (2003) Young and Black and Deadly: Strategies for Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students, Paper No. 5, Quality Teaching Series, Australian College of Educators, ACT