



FACTSHEET 1

Teaching Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools



BACKGROUND

Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australian schools are the original languages of this country. Learning to use these unique languages can play an important part in the development of a strong sense of identity, pride and self-esteem for all Australian students.



Each language is unique to Country. When the language of the land is spoken, it brings together all of the elements of the landscape and its people. Language holds the relationships of people with each other and with the landscape, past, present and future.

It is the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have access to education in and about their own languages, as enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.*

Learning an Aboriginal language or Torres Strait Islander language helps

students develop a deep engagement with traditional knowledge, ways of being and ways of knowing. It fosters in students an understanding of historical, current and ongoing connection to Country and culture.

Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages are complex and diverse. Engaging with the study of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language can develop:

- communication skills in the language
- insight into diverse Indigenous Australian cultures and knowledge
- understanding of language change and language revival in its historical context.

Schools can play a vital role in facilitating access to language learning and supporting community language revival and maintenance.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Each Aboriginal language or Torres Strait Islander language is recognised as belonging to a group of people who are its owners or custodians. This means that local language custodians must be considered the leaders of the process of planning and developing their language programs, including visits, excursions to Country and use of cultural material as part of the teaching and learning program.

Plenty of time and resources should be allowed for thorough and ongoing consultation processes in accordance with

* Resolution 61/295, adopted 13 September 2007, www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf



Language is my connection to my Ancestral Dreaming and Country. Teaching Gumbaynggirr in schools benefits the whole community. It breaks down barriers, leads to a better understanding of Aboriginal people, and brings Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together. This kind of sharing is our cultural way.

Michael Jarrett, Gumbaynggirr language learner, teacher, and active language user

local contexts and situations. Often there will be more than one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language represented in the local setting, so a decision needs to be reached as to which language or languages will be taught, and who is appropriate to teach and learn the language(s). The ultimate authority regarding the choice of language rests with the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.

PROTOCOLS

It is important that every school language program listens to the people of the Country and the language custodians when planning, teaching and assessing the language program. The language taught at a school should be the language of the land on which the school is located unless there is specific agreement from local traditional owners that another language will be introduced.

Local language programs need to be led by custodians of the language. It is not appropriate for a school to be sharing language before local custodians are ready. Before planning and teaching a language, it is essential for the school and language owners to establish ways of working together that can be an ongoing partnership.

Important things to talk about before starting include:

- Which languages are traditionally associated with the land the school is on?
- Which languages are spoken by people in the local community?
- How many students identify with the language being taught?
- Who has the knowledge, skills and time to teach the language?
- What resources exist for teaching and learning the language?
- Who will own copyright of any resources produced?

A different language might be requested by the local community, or there might be no agreement within the local community on the choice of language. When there is no agreement, the language program should not proceed.

Schools should ensure that language and cultural materials produced by their language programs are kept in safe-keeping places with appropriate deposit and access processes in place. In this way schools will be supporting communities to build and manage a range of resources for their language programs.

Photo Credits: Photo Credits: Miriwoong class at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre). Bardi class with teacher Vincent McKenzie (Christ the King Catholic School, Djarindjin). A Wiradjuri class at Dubbo West Public School (Peter Rae, Sydney Morning Herald).



FACTSHEET 2

Background to the Australian Curriculum: *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages*



In 2015, ACARA released the Australian Curriculum: *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages*. The *Framework* represents a significant step in nationally acknowledging the importance and value of Australia's first languages.

The *Framework* is intended to guide the development of teaching and learning for particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. It is designed to be very flexible and to be adapted for each unique language, community and school.

The reason there is a national framework is to help people across Australia develop school programs that are on the same level as each other in terms of teaching, learning and assessing. It is not intended that every school program be the same as each other, as it's understood that each language, culture and Country are unique in their identity, and in their community language goals.

The *Framework* can be adapted for teaching all Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages. This includes:

- languages used every day for communication by a community
- languages being revived, or
- one of the many creole languages that have evolved through the history of

language contact in Australia, such as Kriol, Torres Strait Creole and other new varieties.

To cater for the differences between the language situations and learner backgrounds, the *Framework* has three pathways:

- First Language Learner Pathway (L1)
- Second Language Learner Pathway (L2)
- Language Revival Learner Pathway (LR).

The pathway approach recognises that the two key variables are 'the learner' and 'the nature of the language'.

Just as the languages have changed over time, and most rapidly since 1788, so have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The *Framework* takes into account that the study of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages is as much about what it is to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person today as it is about ancient traditions and social, cultural and linguistic continuity with the past.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/>



FACTSHEET 3

How the *Framework* is structured

LANGUAGE PATHWAYS

To cater for the differences between the language situations and learner backgrounds, the *Framework* has three pathways. Each pathway is suitable for different learners and different language situations.

First Language Learner Pathway (L1)

- The language is currently used for everyday communication by the whole community across all generations.
- Teaching takes place on Country.
- Learners are mostly from the community and mostly speak the language as their first language.

Second Language Learner Pathway (L2)

- The language is currently used for everyday communication by a whole community across all generations.
- Teaching takes place off Country.
- Learners may or may not be from the community and mostly do not speak the language as their first language.

Language Revival Learner Pathway (LR)

- The language is not currently used for everyday communication in any community.
- The language is being revived, renewed and reclaimed by speakers.
- Teaching takes place on or near Country.

- Learners identify with the language and culture or have some connection to it but mostly do not speak much of the language yet.
- The LR pathway is the most common pathway.

Language Revival includes situations of language revitalisation, renewal and reclamation.

- **Language revitalisation** refers to a situation where there are some fluent older speakers of the language, but intergenerational transmission of the language has been interrupted. Younger generations may understand some of the language and may use some words and phrases, but they do not speak it as their first language.
- **Language renewal** refers to a situation where there are some older speakers who use the language to varying degrees in the community, but not 'right through', and where other language resources must be drawn upon to renew the language.
- **Language reclamation** refers to a situation where there are people who identify with the language, but no current speakers. Historical and archival documentation must be drawn on to reclaim the language.

It is not necessary to distinguish between the three types of Language Revival when choosing a pathway, as all of these situations will fall under the Language Revival Learner Pathway (LR).



YEAR LEVELS AND 'BANDS'

The *Framework* is written in three **bands**: Prep/Kindy to Year 2; Year 3-6; and Year 7-10.

Students are assessed on what they learn over the course of a whole band, not just what they learn in one term or one year. Students should be able to demonstrate all aspects of the achievement standard by the end of the band.

ORGANISING THE CURRICULUM

The *Framework* is organised into two **strands** for learning:

- **Communicating**: using language for communicative purposes in interpreting, creating and exchanging meaning
- **Understanding**: analysing language and culture as resources for interpreting and creating meaning.

These two strands are the same across all Languages in the Australian Curriculum (e.g. Indonesian, French and Japanese).

Within each strand there are **sub-strands**. The sub-strands reflect different ways that language is used and ways that we can think about the structure, grammar and history of language. Strands and sub-strands are the same for all pathways and band levels within the *Framework*.

This diagram shows the **strands** *Communicating and Understanding* and their **sub-strands**:

Within each sub-strand are **threads**. The threads are different depending on the pathway (L1, L2 or LR) and the band level (F-2, 3-6 or 7-10) of the students.

Threads give more detail about ways of communicating in a language and how to develop an understanding language at

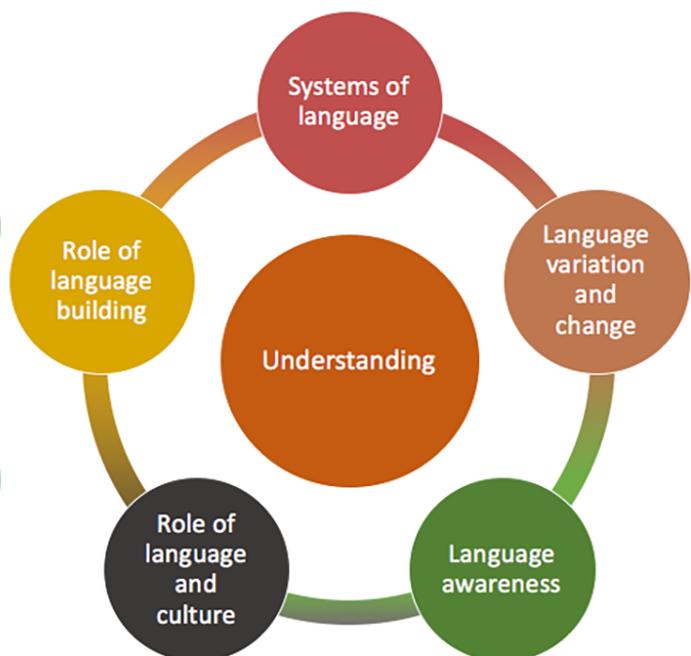
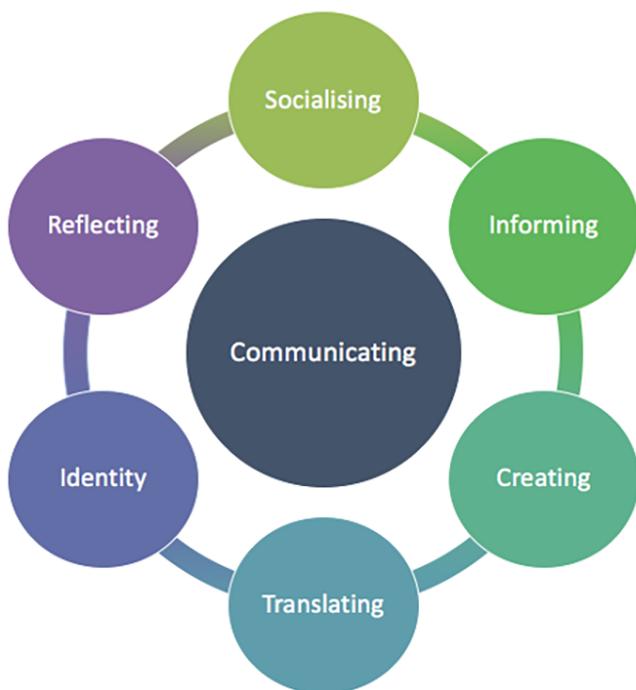


Image: *Cassy Nancarrow, 2016*



different levels. They describe language and cultural content that can be taught and learned. Examples of what to teach within threads are called **content descriptions**.

Content descriptions across all learning areas in the Australian Curriculum are not the same as themes or topics. Instead, they are structured around different language **activities and skills**. Content descriptions are always listed with **verbs** at the beginning such as: create..., use..., play..., translate..., identify..., explore.... This allows teachers to incorporate language learning into any theme or topic identified by local language owners.

For each content description there are also **elaborations** provided in the *Framework*. Elaborations are **more detailed examples** of ways that particular content might be taught. These can be a great starting point for ideas, but teachers should work with language owners to develop locally relevant elaborations as well.

Because content descriptions indicate learning over several-year spans, teachers will need to make decisions about what aspects of the content descriptions will be taught in what year of their program. Year by year, programs can then be used to inform the development of short-term programs (e.g. one term/several weeks).

Example of Content Descriptions and Elaborations

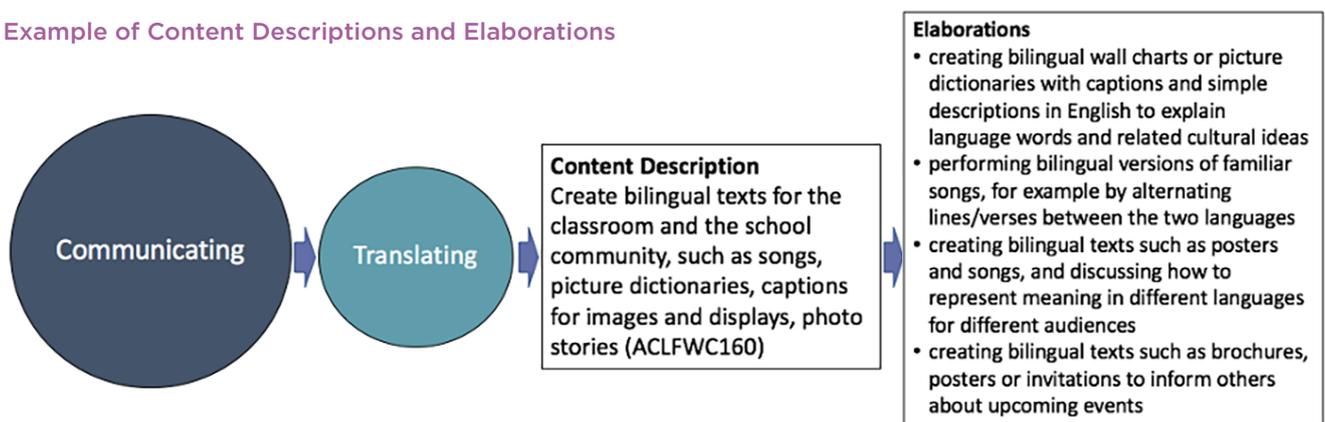


Photo credits: Teacher Tanya McEwan with Wiradjuri students (Surveyors Creek Public School). Miriwoong Language Nest (Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre). Learning Yawuru at Cable Beach Primary School (WA Department of Education). Bardi students and teachers learning on Country (Christ the King Catholic School, Djarindjin).



FACTSHEET 4

Developing a local language curriculum

The local language curriculum, teaching content and assessment needs to reflect the language, the learners and the context of learning. This includes band descriptions, content descriptions, content elaborations, and achievement standards. The examples in the *Framework* can be a useful guide.

The curriculum development team will include members of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community whose language is the focus, as well as curriculum specialists, language experts and language teachers.

WRITING A LOCAL LANGUAGE STATEMENT

A local language statement should be developed to describe the distinct nature of that language, including its use in the community, the place of the language in Australian education, the nature of learning the language, and the diversity of students who will be learning the language.

The statement can be included at the start of planning documents. The statement will be different for every school and could read something like this:

Wik Mungkan language is used in spoken form as the language of everyday communication by many people in Aurukun and surrounding areas across all generations. Wik Mungkan language teaching will occur on Country and will have constant involvement with a variety of speakers from the community and particular places on Country. The L1 pathway provides an opportunity

to develop and extend Wik Mungkan language skills at school in the areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Students entering the early years of schooling in Aurukun have a range of proficiency in the target language Wik Mungkan. Many children have learnt Wik Mungkan or related varieties from their families as a first language and have well-established skills in speaking and listening in the language along with a growing knowledge of local community and culture. Language classes also include students who are beginner learners of Wik Mungkan with little previous experience of Wik language and culture. All students may have varying skills in other languages, including SAE and creole varieties. School may be the first place that children encounter Wik Mungkan language in written form.

Aurukun State School (L1 Pathway), 2019

DECIDING WHAT TO TEACH WHEN

Most language programs start their planning by asking elders in the local community what they would like to see students learning about language and culture at school.

Depending on the community and the language, some topics like Country, seasons, bush foods, relationships, stories or songs might be identified as the most important elements to organise teaching around. There might also be some particular features of the language that speakers can identify



that they want students to learn about, for example how to use particular suffixes, pronouns or verb forms.

A sketch plan can be drawn up with these ideas, put into a table to organise teaching across terms for different year levels.

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Prep – Year 2				
Year 3 – Year 6				
Year 7 – Year 10				

Once this sketch plan has been written, the learning goals should be matched to the curriculum *Framework*, one band at a time. For each band, find the **content descriptions** that match most closely to what the community want to teach. Identify any **sub-strands** or **threads** that you have not already covered and see if local language content could be added to cover those areas as well.

There may be things that are important to the language community that are not in covered by the example content descriptions. It may also be that there are examples from the *Framework* that are not relevant to your community. Both of these situations are fine. The *Framework* is intended as a guide, not a rulebook.

Next, look to the **achievement standard** for the band you are planning for and work together with language speakers to develop assessment tasks that will help students demonstrate how they are learning.

ADAPTING CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS

Photo credits: Language teacher Juan Walker says learning Kuku Yalanji at school gives students a deeper understanding of local history (Credit: Rhett Wyman, Brisbane Times). Students playing ‘animal wheel’ during a Wonnaruah class at Kurri Kurri High School (Language teacher Linda Blake).

Schools do not have to teach the provided content descriptions or elaborations exactly as they are written in the *Framework*. They can be a great starting point for ideas, but they should not restrict teachers from using other ideas.

Teaching plans need to suit the students, the language speakers, the local community, Country, language and cultural context. Each school develops their own content elaborations or adapts the suggested elaborations to meet their needs.

The local curriculum team at each school should select, adapt and modify elaborations in ways that best suit the particular language and its context and learners or should create particular content elaborations to accompany the content descriptions for the specific language.

Schools teaching languages that are being revived, still have first language speakers, are regaining fluent speakers, or have substantial resources, could potentially adapt and modify some aspects of content descriptions from the LR, L2 and L1 pathways.

WAYS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Local language teachers will make decisions about ways of teaching that best meet the learning needs of their particular students, and that best reflect the context of their particular language.



FACTSHEET 5

Assessment and reporting in the Australian Curriculum: *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages*



ASSESSMENT

Assessment and reporting are two very different things. The main purpose of **assessment** is to establish where learners are in an aspect of their learning at any given time. Assessment can be formal or informal, but it always plays an integral role in improving learning and informing teaching.

All language programs should include assessment in some way to help teachers understand how the students are learning so that they can continuously adapt their teaching.

Assessment tasks can also help students *actively* learn by requiring them to do something related to their language learning, rather than just passively taking it all in.

REPORTING

Reporting is mostly about communicating with parents about how students are going in their language learning. Reporting can also include communicating with the school and community about how students in general are participating and progressing.

Each state may have specific reporting requirements that schools need to follow. Where there is flexibility in reporting, schools should work with local communities and language owners to develop guidelines and processes for reporting progress in language learning.

HOW IS LANGUAGE LEARNING ASSESSED USING THE *FRAMEWORK*?

In all learning areas of the Australian Curriculum, **content descriptions** outline the content that is taught and **achievement standards** are what students are assessed against. Each achievement standard describes what students are expected to learn over a 3- or 4-year period (F-2, 3-6, 7-10).

A teaching and assessment plan should be developed for each band to enable students to demonstrate the whole achievement standard by the end of Years 2, 6 and 10. This plan is called a **band plan**.

The band plan will include a **table** showing which aspect of the achievement standard will be assessed in each unit, term, semester or year. Evidence of learning is gathered during each teaching cycle to build a picture of each student's achievement over a period of time.

ADAPTING ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

Achievement standards may need to be adapted and modified to reflect the nature of the language, the nature of the learners, and the context of learning.

Language-specific examples such as local concepts, key words and phrases should be included in the achievement standards. Examples from the specific language being taught give teachers a point of reference



when planning what to teach and indicate expected levels of performance in language use and understanding.

Schools teaching languages that are being revived, still have first language speakers, are regaining fluent speakers, or have substantial resources, can potentially adapt and modify some aspects of the achievement standards from the LR, L2 and L1 pathways.

Some schools also choose to break down the band level achievement standard into smaller steps or stages.

The achievement standards will also need to be modified if the *Framework* is to be used for a language program with different entry points. For example, students who first start to learn the language in Year 7 might need more help to reach the achievement standard expected of their year level than students in Year 7 who have been learning the language for a few years already.

When adapting achievement standards, it is important to factor in how much time will be allocated to teaching the language. Each

state and territory recommend the number of hours that should be allocated each week to teaching a language. If schools are not able to provide sufficient time for students to develop their skills and understandings, then the achievement standard they are assessed against should reflect this.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF PRACTICE

ACARA has developed a set of resources, known as illustrations of practice, to demonstrate effective pedagogy and practice in teaching. These represent a range of schools, year levels and teaching and learning environments. Each illustration of practice includes video, school background information, example planning resources and questions for discussion.

When viewing the illustrations of practice, teachers are encouraged to identify the practices that could apply to their own contexts.

<https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/illustrations-of-practice/>



Photo credits: St Patrick's School students say Friday's Gunggari class is their favourite class of the week (Phoebe Hosier, ABC News). Dalisa Pigram-Ross teaches Yawuru at Cable Beach Primary School (Department of Education WA). Wonnaruah class at Kurri Kurri High School (Language teacher Linda Blake). Principal Preston Parter with Waaka Wakka class at Eidsvold State School (Nicole Hegarty, ABC Wide Bay).



Example Band Plan provided by Aurukun State School

SOCIALISING	P	1	2	CREATING	P	1	2	SYSTEMS OF LANGUAGE	P	1	2
Interact with others - use protocols, respect terms, forms of address and sign language				Respond to stories, songs, dance and visual art: sing, mime, role-play, draw, action and movement				Recognise most sounds and can link to written symbols			
Share information about family, friends, community activities and events				Identify and describe animals, birds, people and other characters				Recognise spoken language can be written			
Participate in routine classroom exchanges and discussions				Identify and describe key symbols/movements in art, dance				Understand text direction-reading/writing left to right			
Actively participate in pair and group activities				Retell/describe elements of images, performances, or parts of a story				Identify initial sound, identify final sound, recognise syllables			
Ask and respond to questions				Use familiar words and expressions to create and present shared stories, songs and performances, provide details about characters or events				Identify single words, recognise and read high-frequency words			
Work cooperatively to complete tasks, take turns				Make short presentations - a few connected sentences on familiar and learned topics				Identify nouns in a sentence with extensive support e.g. body, family, animals			
Make relevant suggestions during class writing activities when the teacher is scribing				Use pictures to predict and help make meaning				Identify common pronouns in a sentence with extensive support e.g. I/ he/she/it/they/we			
INFORMING	P	1	2	Join in shared reading with familiar vocabulary, high-frequency sight words and supportive images				Identify common adjectives with extensive support e.g. big, little			
Identify key information - point, match, draw, circle, role play, action, read & match to pictures				Use reading strategies - sounding out, sight words, syllables				Identify common present tense verbs - single/plural e.g. sitting, standing, laying, walking, moving			
Describe habitats, plants, animals and seasonal changes				Use a simple picture dictionary or similar reference material.				Identify common location suffix with support e.g. -ak			
Name and classify items plants, animals and natural objects by cultural categories				Participate in scribed and shared writing				Recognise that messages in Wik are communicated by elders' story-telling, song, dance, visual design and signing			
Name and describe key social and cultural events - when, where, who, what, link to country/people				Label items/picture/object - copy/trace/write letters, key words and sentence patterns				LANGUAGE AND CHANGE	P	1	2
IDENTITY	P	1	2	Key word labels - no capital letters				Know that different words are used to address/communicate with different people			
Use family terms for immediate family members				Identify/use capital letter to start a sentence and names of people/ places, full stop to end sentence				Recognise different languages are spoken at class, school, community, region, Australia			
Demonstrate appropriate ways of interacting and behaving according to kinship structures								ROLE OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	P	1	2
TRANSLATING	P	1	2					Identify connections between stories, places, and people			
Translate words and expressions used in everyday contexts and situations.								Identify places linked to own family and kinship groups			
Co-create simple print, oral, digital bilingual/multilingual texts for the classroom								Recognise protocols for visiting Country			