

Successful Sustainable Literacy Practice for Indigenous Australian Students

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Key issues

- What is literacy?
- Literacy and disadvantaged groups
- Literacy programs for Indigenous Australian students
- Teachers and literacy learning
- Assessment and measurement of literacy learning
- A good literacy curriculum

What is literacy?

- Multiple definitions influenced by context and purpose
- Highly contested
- Broader and narrower definitions
- Broader: Expression of social and cultural histories and projection of preferred futures (Freebody)
- Narrower: The ability to read and write, including the ability to comprehend
- Many dimensions, learned in different ways

What is literacy?

- Problems can arise when people use 'literacy' to refer to different understandings, especially when judgements are being made. Because there is no one universal definition of literacy, it is important that, at the start of specific projects and campaigns, common understandings of what is meant by literacy in the immediate and relevant context are reached. This will remove the possibility of those involved working at cross purposes (Freebody).

Literacy for Indigenous students

- SAE literacy same as for all Australian students
- Developmental processes important – different starting points; ESL/ESD for many Aboriginal students
- Sequence of SAE literacy learning the same
- Has been very little acknowledgement of Indigenous heritage of language and literacy practices

Literacy and disadvantaged groups

- Strong links between educational disadvantage and social/economic disadvantage in all developed countries
- Key factors in non-improvement : unhealthy preoccupation with governance and structures; too much acceptance of under-achievement; weaknesses in approach
- Key factors in improvement: good leadership; high expectations; strong curriculums; positive teaching and learning cultures

Literacy programs for Indigenous students: How well do they do?

- Proliferation of policies and programs
- Policies and evaluations on DEEWR websites
- *What Works* Literacy website – no one answer given. Is there an answer? Can we discover 'what works'?

Literacy programs for Indigenous students: How well do they do?

Current targeted programs

- *National Accelerated Literacy Program*
- *MULTILIT* Cape York Schools
- *Western Australian Aboriginal Literacy Strategy*

Teachers and literacy learning

- The quality of teachers and teaching is the most important school-level factor in improving the learning of **all** students in **all** contexts.
- Wide variations in content and nature of teacher preparation courses
- Teachers need to understand how literacy skills develop and how to assist students to develop literacy skills
- No convincing evidence that Aboriginal teachers are more effective than non-Aboriginal teachers in improving student literacy

Assessment and measurement of literacy

- Distinction between **assessment** (teachers gather a range of assessment data that reflect students' progress over time), and **measurement** (done through standardised tests that compare the performance of individual children and groups of children against pre-determined norms)
- Main purpose of **assessment**: teachers acquire knowledge about students' learning and their own teaching so that they can effect improvement.

Assessment and measurement of literacy

- **Measurement** allows governments to ensure that all children learn to read and write at an appropriate level
- In the best interests of the students, the two goals need to be aligned, but there is an inevitable tension between them

A good literacy curriculum

- Daily structured literacy session
- Addresses all components of literacy learning
- Based on developmental approach

For Indigenous students:

- A two-way approach
- Explicit ESL/ESD instruction where required

Good literacy practices

From In Teachers' Hands

Participation ... teachers gain strong student participation in learning activities; establish significant relationships with students; actively use language to encourage participation

Knowledge ... teachers show an understanding of literacy concepts and skills; use metalanguage that provides students with vocabulary and linguistic features that help them make connections between what they already know and the concepts being learnt

Orchestration ... teachers have high levels of awareness; can manage interruptions and lapses of student attention; can maximise learning opportunities; make transitions in and between activities seamlessly

Good literacy practices

From In Teachers' Hands

Support ... teachers scaffold, give feedback, are responsive, and explicit at word and text levels; support students through assessment-based teaching

Differentiation ... teachers individualise instruction as far as possible; monitor learning groups and individual activities; build on learning through carefully designed follow-up activities

Respect ... teachers create a social context in classrooms that focus on literacy learning; welcome students and provide them with positive support; build confidence that makes tactful interventions productive

Need supportive structure and context

- Trained teachers
- Systemic support – mandated action
- Ongoing professional learning and support

Future Actions

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