



## Strategies to Support Teachers Working with Central Australian Indigenous Students

### Pedagogy

Indigenous Learning Styles	Non-Indigenous Learning Styles
Collaborative / small group work	Individual
Ecological / shared responsibility	Consumer / accumulation of success
Observation, listening and imitation	Verbal Instruction and verbalizing
Holistic (global) learning (Putting together)	Analytic, verbal (step by step)
Reflective from observation	Practice / learn through mistakes.
Repetition	Scientific Inquiry learning
Spiritual/ connection between past/present/future	Rational / Secular
Visual/ spatial	Theoretical
Contextual (real life context)	Decontextualised
Spontaneous learning	Structured learning
Concrete learning (present experience)	Abstract (symbols)
Real life situations	Practice in contrived situations
Indirect questions no answer required	Direct Questions
Consensual/ group decision	Confliction /debate
Relationship orientated	Time orientated

'Education will only be successful when it values culture and traditions and when teaching is adapted to the cultural learning styles.' (Hughes 2004 p. 249)

### Practical Ideas for Learning Activities

- Effective teaching methodology can be developed through strong teacher-pupil relationships
- Design practical learning experiences
- Reduce competition
- Sequence activities and provide a clear structure
- Discussion of one idea at a time
- Include lots of review, repetition and drill activities
- Relate class work to real life and work place needs
- Take time to demonstrate or give visual cues as you talk, and only talk for brief periods at a time; gather students around you if possible
- Take care to present eye catching worksheets, that allow students places decorate or personalise and capitalise on visual skills
- Try and get students out of the classroom regularly
- Make homework optional
- Lack of motivation is superficial – good teaching that provides a clear focus and well defined frameworks will spark students interest in doing well
- Consider alternative ways of presenting material not just chalk and talk
- Allow students to teach you about their knowledge (bush foods, family kinship relationships)
- Relate things back to the students own experiences as a starting point for learning
- Make the school system explicit

Christie and Harris are two Northern Territory educational writers who studied communication patterns in Arnhem Land. Christie claims that traditional Indigenous children expect to learn by being present at school and by going up through the year levels they do not necessarily have to achieve satisfactory results. In traditional culture learning occurs by participation in the daily affairs of the family and participation in rituals not necessarily through assessment. Communication can break down at school because of contrasting notions of knowledge and how it is acquired. (Christie, M. 1987 p.46-51)

## Strategies to Support Teachers Working with Central Australian Indigenous Students

### Language in Central Australia - Strategies to Improve Communication

- Speak slowly and maintain normal intonation patterns
- Do not speak louder unless someone has hearing loss
- **Complex sentences in English and vernacular languages do not follow the same rules.** Use short simple sentences. Don't break a sentence to put in extra information. 'When Julie Brown comes (remember she's the lady who sent that fax) we'll have a meeting.'
- **Give one point at a time.** Thinking aloud is difficult for ESL students such as 'I wonder if the drought has broken? When will we go to the ....'
- **Avoid figures of speech:** e.g. 'Give me a hand. You're a pain in the neck. Get off my back. You're holding me up. The baby has just dropped off. They will walk all over you. You blew it this time.'
- **Use standard Australian English (SAE) not Aboriginal English. Keep instructions clear and brief. Use the same repetitive instructions such as,** "Sit down!" This is particularly important for young children who may not understand a sentence like 'Would you please sit down?'
- **Reinforce oral language by modelling** repeated requests and asking the student to repeat what you have said. If a student says 'Toilet?' Model the question: 'Can I go to the toilet?'
- **Do not code mix** using Aboriginal English and SAE in the same sentence
- **Meaning** can be made clear through actions, hand signals, visuals and talking about past events
- Provide time for silence and responses. Indigenous people may take longer to respond to a question than non-Indigenous people
- **Some words may not be understood because a certain way of speaking may not be used very much in Indigenous languages.** 'I need' is often interpreted as 'I want' and 'if' is interpreted as 'when'. 'If I go to town I will take you.' can be misunderstood as, 'When I go to town I will take you.'
- **When people say 'yes' it doesn't necessarily mean they have understood agreeing to what you have said.** It is rude in Indigenous communication to disagree with someone so they may agree to what you say but have no ownership of that decision. This form of gratuitous concurrence is often practiced in non-western communication patterns
- **Interpreters** may need to explain in greater detail what is being communicated as concepts may need to be explored
- Polite language. **There are no equivalents of please and thank you**

### Body Language

Indigenous people observe body language carefully. It is polite to also observe how other people are arranged when coming into a situation where people are gathered. It is fine to ask where to sit. If a group of people is sitting on the ground it is appropriate to sit down with them if they want you to join in on the discussion. It may be a good idea to ask, 'Where is the appropriate place to sit?'

'It is rude to stand with hands on hips and talk at people. We should learn what shows respect.' (Downing, in Walsh p.107)

- Accept the sexes dividing into groups
- Speak to students at an adult level and make it clear that their opinion is valued
- Work with students' autonomy
- Realise that there is a 'silent' language used amongst Indigenous students
- Be aware of what may be going on in the family or wider community situation

## Strategies to Support Teachers Working with Central Australian Indigenous Students

### Commands

At a remote school, commands are often ignored the first few times as Indigenous children do not generally act on the first command of their elders at home. Usually after the command has been given a few times the children respond. It is important that teachers set up a routine and standard of student behaviour that is to be maintained early in developing a relationship with their class. Teachers can be spared some disillusionment if they are able to understand why the students react to requests and demands in the manner that is culturally appropriate for them.

### Group Focus

- Let students work in groups to gain confidence
- Make reading aloud to the class optional; respect older students preference to read as a group or in a group
- Work with the Indigenous peer support system eg: allow students to work with someone who helps them, or a partner; set group projects
- Accept that standards will be set within the group, especially by the more outgoing students, rather than by the teacher
- Try and harness the leadership potential of key students who influence other group members

### Remember that the personal relationship between teachers and students is critical:

- Develop mutual respect between students and students and teachers
- Have high expectations, but don't be unrealistic
- Don't give up on students
- Adolescent Indigenous students relate best to mentors and teachers of their own sex

Information for the above compiled from work done by Central Australian Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers through the 2007 ELP survey at the Group School Conference "*What help s Indigenous students to feel comfortable in schools*".

Other sources:

*Alice Springs High School Principals/ strategies for teaching Aboriginal Students,*

*Cultural Awareness in Central Australia* by Susan Moore 2007 DEET,

*Language in Central Australia - Strategies to Improve Communication* by Susan Moore 2006 DEET