Effective teaching and learning strategies

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages — Resource guide

This resource guide lists strategies that have proved successful in the teaching and learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. It has been adapted from several sources, including international settings.

> The language and associated cultural knowledge belongs to the respective groups and the authenticity and use of such knowledge should be negotiated with communities, particularly Elders and other custodians.

Ten strategies

1. Leave English behind.
2. Use non-verbal communication for better comprehension.
3. Teach in full sentences and conversations.
4. Aim for real communication in your target language.
5. Language is also culture.
6. Focus on listening and speaking, rather than writing and grammatical analysis.
7. Explore activities for teacher and learner to do together.
8. Use audio and videotaping.
9. Be an active language learner.
10. Be patient and proud of each other and yourselves.

> Schools are reminded that forced removals and relocations have altered the language landscape of communities, and that government policies and practices had a dramatic effect on cultural strength and identity. Language revitalisation in school communities may reawaken some of the trauma associated with these events. Reconnecting with language and culture is an empowering process that needs to be sensitive to the needs of communities and individuals.

1. Leave English behind

Attempt to use the target language as the main language for teaching and learning in the school community. Enhance communication with non-verbals or visual cues. Learn how to ask questions in your language, e.g. "What is this?" and "What is that?" When there seems to be a need to use English, teach/learn how to say that word or sentence in the target language.

2. Use non-verbal communication for better comprehension

Approaches such as Total Physical Response (TPR) use non-verbal communication to assist language teaching and learning. Strategies include mime (gestures, actions and facial expressions), objects and pictures, context and rephrasing. Reinforce action words (verbs) through physically doing/acting the action, e.g. "sit down", "pick up".

One of the best ways to learn language is to listen and practice saying the words and then repeat this in a range of everyday settings when opportunities arise to use language.

3. Teach in full sentences and conversations

While vocabulary — individual words and their pronunciation — is important, authentic language teaching and learning occurs when these words are used in sentences and conversations. Language teaching and learning often requires listening and saying words and sentences many times in different contexts. For example, if you are trying to teach the word for door, don't just say "door"; learn and say simple sentences, e.g. "This is a door", "Where is the door?", "I am opening the door", "I will close the door".

4. Aim for real communication in your target language

One of the best ways to learn language is to listen to words, practise saying them and then repeat them in a range of everyday settings when opportunities arise. Language must be used beyond language lessons; it should be used in all parts of your school community and incorporated into everyday conversations. For example, greetings, introductions and farewells could all be spoken in language. At home, simple instructions or statements, e.g. "Pass the sugar/milk," "I am hungry," could be spoken in language.

5. Language is also culture

Language does not operate in a vacuum, but is embedded within culture. Teaching and learning language is not just translating words or sentences from English; it also means learning about cultural elements such as customs, values and appropriate ways of behaving. In most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages there is a cultural overlay which may determine how language is spoken within the community. Teaching and learning language "on country" or in cultural contexts will enhance understanding. For example, if teaching plant names, use community settings to see the actual plants and have community members explain the different ways they are used.

6. Focus on listening and speaking, rather than writing and grammatical analysis

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are oral-based; therefore oral language approaches should form the basis for the teaching and learning of languages in schools and communities. Written forms of language should be introduced gradually into teaching and

learning programs and should serve to reinforce oral learning. Writing and grammar are important, but there does not need to be a focus on these to learn how to speak a language.

7. Explore activities for teacher and learner to do together

In the United States and Canada, "master–apprentice" models are used, in which learners ("apprentices") are matched up with teachers ("masters") and spend periods of time together only using language. This approach has been adapted in some Australian settings where young people spend time with an Elder or language speaker. The idea is to enhance language teaching and learning through ongoing sessions with language speakers; these activities can be structured or unstructured learning. For example, the activity may be food-gathering and the young learner/s may spend time with an Elder or other community members learning cultural practices as well as using language as much as possible in such settings.

8. Use audio and videotaping

These can be important aids for teaching and learning language. Where possible, record Elders and language speakers as guided practice for learners in the school community; if there are no speakers available in the community explore the use of historical recordings. There is a range of technology, including computer software, for recording and documenting languages. This raw data can then be used to produce teaching and learning resources and other materials to help maintain and preserve languages.

9. Be an active learner

Encourage learners to take an active role in their language learning; identify their individual needs and adapt/extend lessons to suit their interests. Be willing to ask questions.

10. Be patient and proud of each other and yourselves!

Learning a language can be a frustrating and slow process; it is important to be patient and encourage everyone in the teaching and learning process. Be proud of the effort people are making to teach/learn language and their contribution towards preserving the language for future generations.

Learning and teaching languages

This list of strategies is not prescriptive. Schools are encouraged to explore other approaches in partnership with their communities and to incorporate practices that are contextualised to their community setting and reflect the language of country.

Schools are also encouraged to seek out language centres and other community groups in their local/regional areas and explore partnerships that can support the revival and teaching and learning of languages in their communities. These networks should include established groups such as the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Committee (QIECC), Queensland History Teachers' Association (QHTA), Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA), the Queensland Historical Society, universities and TAFE colleges, local government libraries, local museums and art galleries. Government departments employ experienced personnel who can provide valuable assistance and advice through involvement in school programs.

Language resources

The following selection may be useful for school communities to support the teaching and learning of languages.

Aird, M (1996) *I Know a Few Words: Talking about Aboriginal languages.* Keeaira Publications: Southport, Qld.

Amery, R (2000) *Warrabarna Kaurna! Reclaiming an Aboriginal language.* Swets & Zeitlinger: Lisse, The Netherlands.

Asher, J (2004) *Learning Another Language through Actions,* 7th edn. Sky Oaks Productions: Los Gatos, California.

Asher, J (2001) *Brainswitching: Learning on the right side of the brain.* Sky Oaks Productions: Los Gatos, California.

Asher, J (1996) *The Super School of the 21st Century.* Sky Oaks Productions: Los Gatos, California.

Ford, M (1996) "Language nests in NZ: Implications for the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context", *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education,* vol. 24, no. 2.

Garcia, R (2000) *Instructor's Notebook: How to apply TPR for best results*, 4th edn. Sky Oaks Productions: Los Gatos, California.

Grimes, C (2009) *Indigenous Languages in Education: What the research actually shows.* Australian Society for Indigenous languages: Palmerston, NT.

Harrison, D (2010) *The Last Speakers: The quest to save the world's most endangered languages.* Random House: London.

Hartman, D & Hendersen, J (Eds) (1994) *Aboriginal Languages in Education.* IAD Press: Alice Springs.

Hinton, L & Hale, K (Eds) (2001) *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice.* Academic Press: San Diego.

Hobson, J, Lowe, K, Poetsch, S & Walsh, M (Eds) (2010) *Re-Awakening Languages: Theory and practice in the revitalisation of Australia's indigenous languages.* Sydney University Press: Sydney.

Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative (n.d.) *Mayalambala — Let's Move it.* [Resource Kit] Nambucca Heads: Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative. Weblink: www.muurrbay.org.au/muurrbay-resources

Nettle, D & Romaine, S (2000) *Vanishing Voices: The extinction of the world's languages.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Purdie, N, Frigo, T, Ozolins, C, Noblett, G, Thieberger, N & Sharp, J (2008) *Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools: A way forward*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra.

Reyhner, J, Cantoni, G, St Clair, R & Parsons Yazzie, P (Eds) (1999) *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages.* Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University.

Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (1996) *Australia's Indigenous Languages Framework (AILF), SSABS,* South Australia.

Thieberger, N (1995) *Paper and Talk: A manual for reconstituting materials in Australian Indigenous languages from historical sources.* Aboriginal Studies Press: Canberra.

Websites

The selection of websites that relate to the teaching and learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are useful starting points for schools and communities. They may include ideas, resources and other materials relating to the documentation, preservation or teaching and learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

- **Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival** (First Nations, USA)
  Aims to foster the restoration and revival of Indigenous Californian Languages.
  www.aicls.org

- **Aussie Educator Indigenous Languages**
  Portal-style website developed by educators to provide resources and ideas on a range of curriculum topics.
  www.aussieeducator.org.au/curriculum/otherlanguages/indigenouslanguage.html

- **Campfire** — NSW Department of Education and Training
  Interactive website/CD-ROM to support teaching and learning NSW Aboriginal languages.
  www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/languages/languages/aboriginal/campfire/index.htm

- **First Peoples Heritage, Language & Culture Council** (First Nations, British Columbia)
  Aims to assist BC First Nations in their efforts to revitalize their languages, arts and cultures.
  www.fpcc.ca

- **Holding our tongues** — ABC Radio National
  This Hindsight project is about the painstaking task of reviving Aboriginal languages. Listen to examples of language, watch video or find out more about the project.
  www.abc.net.au/rn/hindsight/features/holdingourtongues

- **Indigenous Languages in Australian Schools: A Way Forward**
  ACER report for the Australian Government Department of Education Science and Training (2008) that outlines the current state of Indigenous Languages and recommendations for future directions.
  http://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/18/

- **Indigenous Languages Institute** (First Nations, USA)
  Provides language-related services to Native communities.
  www.ilinative.org/

- **Navajo Language Academy** (First Nations, USA)
  An organisation devoted to the scientific study and promotion of the Navajo language.
  http://navajolanguageacademy.org/nla.htm

- **NSW Quality Aboriginal Languages Teaching**
  Resources developed through nine schools to support language teaching in NSW.
  www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/languages/languages/aboriginal/abl_qt/index.htm and
  www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal_languages/web_site/index.html

- **Ontario Ministry of Education** (First Nations, Canada)
  Provides support materials for the teaching of native languages in Ontario, Canada.
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/nativelang.html

- **Indigenous Perspectives** — Queensland Studies Authority
  The QSA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources, including for languages.
  www.qsa.qld.edu.au/577.html

- **Sharing Culture**
  An on-line software program that enables schools and communities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
  http://sharingculture.com.au/home.htm

- **South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability** (SACSA) Framework
  Provides curriculum support for the teaching of Australian Indigenous Languages within SA.
  www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/index_fsrc.asp?t=LA&ID=EYINTROCONTEXT

- **Te Kete Ipurangi** (New Zealand)
  NZ Ministry of Education Learning Languages website.
  http://tki.org.nz/

- **Te Reo Maori** (New Zealand)
  NZ Ministry of Education website to support the teaching of te reo Maori in English-medium schools.
  http://tereomaori.tki.org.nz/

- **TPR World**
  James Asher's website, offering Total Physical Response language learning materials.
  www.tpr-world.com

- **Strengthening Indigenous Languages and Cultures** (First Nations, USA)
  This site focuses on Professor Greymorning's work with Arapaho language.
  www.nsilc.org/

More information

Please email langtrial@qsa.qld.edu.au, phone (07) 3864 0310 or visit the QSA website <www.qsa.qld.edu.au> and search for "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages".