



The Queensland Indigenous ESL Program and the Language Perspectives Team based at the Far North Queensland Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU) welcome the Senate Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing.

This submission refers to the Inquiry's third term of reference in relation to Indigenous learners of English as a Second/Subsequent Language or Dialect (ESL/D) in Queensland.

*1. The impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on:*

- a. the scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice,*
- b. the quality and value of information about student progress provided to parents and principals, and*
- c. the quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community*

Quality national educational data should contribute to advancing educational equity in Australia for Indigenous students, however, we submit that there is **a demonstrable need for an English as Second Language/or Dialect (ESL/D learner) disaggregation of the NAPLAN data**. This could be achieved by creating an ESL/D box on the front page of NAPLAN test booklets in addition to, or as a replacement of, the current LBOTE box.

In a climate where high stakes NAPLAN testing has inadvertently confused discussions around operative educational variables for Indigenous students, we would strongly recommend that NAPLAN now drive the data-driven agenda to assist with making visible the degree to which Indigenous students are proficient in Standard Australian English (SAE). ESL/D data forms a direct and valid link to appropriate classroom interventions for ESL/D students, unlike categories such as LBOTE and Indigenous status.

The current measures of disaggregation according to Indigenous status, students with a language background other than English (LBOTE) and The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage provide a false and pernicious picture of Indigenous learner performance and are leading to inappropriate and wasteful measures of intervention.

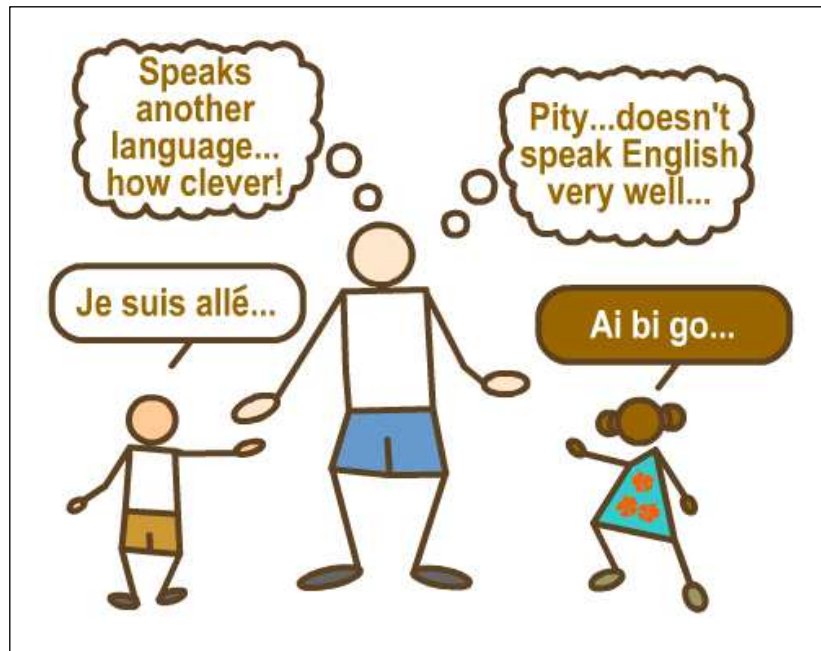
- a. Performance data from Indigenous students is generalised under the data group 'Indigenous status' which does not take account of proficiency in the language of testing: SAE. Our present research data suggests that up to 75% of Indigenous learners in Queensland do not speak SAE as their first language variety (L1). In Queensland, only a very small number of Indigenous students speak traditional languages as their L1 nowadays. The majority of Indigenous ESL/D students across Queensland and even in the remote areas are L1 speakers of several distinct creoles and many related varieties which have been caused by processes of language contact and language shift. Although a large percentage of the lexicon is historically of English origin, the linguistic systems (ie. sounds, meanings, inflections, word building, phrases, clauses, sentences, social usages etc) of creoles and related varieties differ thoroughly and fundamentally from SAE. In other words, students speaking these varieties as their mother tongues can neither access nor perform in SAE-speaking classrooms or SAE tests, without acquiring an additional language, namely SAE.

- b. The data, therefore, under 'Indigenous status' does not provide quality or valid information on the true capacity of Indigenous learners. Please note that we have evidence of students saying that they fail because they 'are Indigenous'. (Note too, that this heart-breaking deduction is actually supported in the manner that 'Indigenous status' is highlighted, so it could be construed as negative, on the MySchool website: The percentage of Indigenous students in each school is highlighted under 'School Facts' on the right hand side of each school's data. As this is the only ethnic or cultural category to receive such visibility, and this ethno-cultural category is not correlated to pertinent educational categories, the message is not positive. Also, the proportion of Indigenous students is included again in the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, one can only assume from the context that it is not adding to the advantage side of the weighting.)
- c. Because the current data is not disaggregated according to second language proficiency, the data on Indigenous students is consistently reported and discussed in the media according to 'failure'. It is indefensible for a country such as ours, with its value of 'a fair go for all', to allow children as young as seven to be discussed as failures, with no consideration as to whether they can comprehend their school teachers or understand the NAPLAN tests. It is indefensible to create a situation where parents are forced to believe, wrongly, that their young, non-English speaking children are failures, given the research available on the effect of parental expectations on educational success in early education. The current disaggregation categories create the picture that 'failure' is due to being Indigenous and/or poor. Indigenous parents are provided with no other major disaggregation category which provides them with any explanation as to why their capable children have failed in the Australian education system at so early an age.
- d. The lack of disaggregation is leading to generalised literacy intervention measures which are economically wasteful and educationally detrimental, because they do not take account of the need for second language instruction. The high stakes of NAPLAN testing is driving so-called "data driven" responses, however the data collected and made visible through NAPLAN results provides no data at all which would indicate that the barrier to learning and performance for a given student might be related to their second language proficiency level in SAE. Therefore NAPLAN is detracting attention from second language instruction in SAE – a critical ingredient in classroom learning outcomes.
- e. Performance data disaggregated under the LBOTE group does not provide quality data on Indigenous ESL/D learners, since the LBOTE group is reported to be performing within national norms, a finding at variance with the disaggregated Indigenous status group who are ESL/D learners in our experience. This occurs for two reasons: i. the LBOTE grouping includes unspecified numbers of students who are fluent in SAE; and ii. the complexity of the current Indigenous language situation obscures students' language backgrounds, so that they are not seen as LBOTE. They are often considered to speak English badly, as opposed to being recognised as having a full and distinctly different first language and being in the process of learning SAE. (see Figure 1) In other words, **without the requirement of second language assessment in schools for students being tested on NAPLAN**, Indigenous learners are generally not placed within the LBOTE group.
- f. Due to misunderstandings about Indigenous students' language backgrounds, schools may not be able to identify students as ESL/D learners without using ESL assessment procedures alongside an ESL/D disaggregation box on NAPLAN test booklets. It is our belief that NAPLAN could address this by directing schools (or systems) with identified ESL/D students to supply second language proficiency levels in SAE for those students, which could be correlated with NAPLAN performance data.

- g. Australia's colonial history has caused wholesale language contact and shift within many Indigenous families. However, the creoles and related varieties arising from these language situations have not all developed a standardised nomenclature. Speakers might refer to their vernacular (ie. everyday spoken language variety) via non-standardised terms like 'slang' or 'lingo' which do not appear on enrolment forms and have not been given public recognition and status. For these and many, many other reasons, the English option tends to get ticked on forms, despite its being a wildly inaccurate description of linguistic facts. (see Figure 2 below). Given past educational history and outcomes for Indigenous Australians in this country, Indigenous families are generally not positioned (see point b & c above) in ways that enable discussions of their rich and complex language situations. Therefore it is essential that NAPLAN understands that the LBOTE category is not capable of capturing accurate information about Indigenous students' language backgrounds. The only method which will disaggregate ESL/D students, including Indigenous ESL/D students, is to collect information about ESL/D status and direct schools to supply second language proficiency data.

**We submit that the capacity to disaggregate Indigenous ESL/D learners through the use of ESL/D assessment frameworks exists in all States, Territories and systems. Reputable second language assessment tools have been developed in States, Territories and systems; indeed the original Australian school second language assessment tool that was developed and then adopted or adapted or drawn on in Australian education, has been taken as a model in the development of such tools internationally. The present second language assessment tools used in Australian schools include those specifically adapted for, or devised to include, Indigenous ESL/D learners.**

## Appendix 1



**Figure 1:** Some languages, such as French, are well recognised, with a highly familiar name (French), a prestigious culture (cuisine, fashion...) and a visible place in mainstream Australian culture (ie. most Aussies could have a go at rendering a French accent). Other languages, such as creoles and related varieties in Australia, have little recognition, lack standardised names and are invisible in mainstream Australian culture. (The girl is saying "I went..." in *Torres Strait Creole*, which is sometimes called *Ailan*, but like many Australian creole varieties is also called *Broken*, but has also recently been termed *Yumpla Tok* in some Torres Strait contexts.) Many speakers of creoles are not seen as having Language Backgrounds Other Than English and are therefore not seen as learners of SAE, nor provided with appropriate teaching approaches to support their second language development.



**Figure 2:** Much data about Indigenous students' language backgrounds is highly inaccurate. The language variety spoken by the children above is 'Yarrie Lingo', a creole spoken by most members of the Yarrabah community in far north Queensland. A very high percentage of Yarrabah students are, therefore, ESL learners.