

## **Identification and assessment contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners of Standard Australian English: Challenges for the language testing community**

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The paper discusses the contexts of language backgrounds, language learning, policy and assessment relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) students who are learning Standard Australian English (SAE) as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) in the state of Queensland. Complexities surrounding this cohort's language situations and their language learning are explained in order to reveal why existing processes are not reliably identifying nor assessing those Indigenous students who are indeed EAL/D learners. In particular, it is argued, EAL/D processes and assessment instruments need to acknowledge and respond to the challenges posed by the rich and varied Indigenous language ecologies generated through language contact. System-level data does not disaggregate Indigenous EAL/D learners, nor correlate their levels of second language SAE proficiency with their academic performance data. Indigenous students are, however, over-represented in Queensland's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) under-performance data and raising their performance is a national priority and targeted through many government initiatives. Indigenous students comprise a highly heterogeneous group in terms of their cultural, linguistic and schooling backgrounds, and Indigenous EAL/D learners, too, represent a diverse grouping which has only been included relatively recently in Australian second language assessment tools, and around which there has been little extensive discussion, despite significant complexity surrounding this cohort. This paper explores the background contextual issues

involved in identifying and assessing Indigenous EAL/D learners equitably and reliably.

**Key words:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, second language assessment, identification of learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD)/English as a Second Language (ESL), contact languages, Indigenous education policy

## Introduction

Within the field of second language (L2) assessment, identification of the target cohort in schools is a definitional problem which continues to pose enormous challenges and, indeed, this issue has recently been taken up as a priority in the United States (Linguanti & Cook, 2013). Often the problem of definition becomes centred on an initial classification based on demographic information such as ethnicity, geographical origin, self-declared language background or visa status, followed by a focus on administering a second language assessment tool differentiated from mainstream assessment. The L2 assessment process is reliant on *pre-assessing* learners by demographic and non-linguistic means to refine the cohort to the valid target group, rather than on any intrinsic robustness of a stand-alone language assessment of and by itself. This paper explains why such approaches to identification and assessment have mechanisms that can fail to validly capture the cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English (SAE) as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D).

In Queensland, a minority of Indigenous EAL/D<sup>2</sup> learners speak a traditional language, while most speak an autochthonous, or place-based, English-lexified contact variety. Although these have been generated through common and widespread processes of language contact, shift and spread, they are instantiated in regionally and/or locally distinctive speech varieties with varying degrees of mutual (un-)intelligibility. Proficiency scales used in Queensland (e.g. Education Queensland [EQ], 2002, 2008), categorise such contact varieties in terms of their comprehensibility relationships to the standard/lexifier language as languages and dialects. Following these terms,

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<sup>2</sup> The terms 'Indigenous' and 'EAL/D' reflect current national usage by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA): 'Indigenous' includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 'EAL/D' includes simultaneous as well as sequential acquisition of SAE as another dialect or language and in any Australian school learning context.

Australian creoles are largely mutually unintelligible with SAE and are considered as separate languages (L), while other contact varieties, ethnolects and indigenised varieties of English are more mutually comprehensible with SAE, and have been referred to as dialects (D). However, terms such as 'creole', 'dialect', etc., are specialist concepts about language varieties and their histories and relationships employed by linguists, and are by no means easily operationalised. They are also not the sort of information usually elicited through a process reliant on respondents/speakers self-identifying a recognised language with standardised nomenclature, as for example in the Census. Questions such as "Does the person speak a language other than English at home?" with sample responses such as "Yes, Italian", "Yes, Greek" etc – even if followed by a more open prompt "Yes, other – please specify" (e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011, p. 6), do not invite speakers of varieties that lack public/official recognition to provide their own "local, informal labels" which "might make reference to place names (e.g. *Lockhart*, *Curry* [Cloncurry], *Palm* [Palm Island]), or to the kinds of people who talk it (e.g. *Murri*, *Island*) or to its non-standard character (e.g. *Slang*, *Broken*)" (EQ, 2008, p. 1). Depending on the trajectory of acceptance and recognition of an individual contact variety by its speakers, by language specialists and/or by the general public, a contact variety might not actually be viewed by its speakers and/or mainstream institutions as an acceptable linguistic form, in which case speakers would be unlikely to 'claim' their speech variety on an official form (e.g. Carter, 2010; Simpson, 2008). In any case, with no official or standardised nomenclature – or where this is not in general use by speakers – attempts at designating a contact variety might not be understood by the collectors of this information (Angelo & McIntosh, forthcoming). From the outset then, typical processes for identifying EAL/D learners can founder at the initial disaggregation point of nominating (i.e. self-declaring) a language background other than English.

This issue may seem to go outside the standard concerns of the language testing field, but the field has been tasked to augment its professional capacity by engaging with other disciplinary bodies of knowledge (McNamara, 2006). In fact, as this paper shows, where pivotal contextual understandings are lacking, identification and assessment of learners can miss the mark – or not even see it – in relation to Indigenous EAL/D learners. Further, this paper asserts the need for a committed (i.e. deep and ongoing) engagement on the part of the language testing community, as the field of Indigenous EAL/D is evolving: Understandings about Indigenous language ecologies are constantly growing (e.g. Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008). So too is a recognition of how these diverse language contexts impact on Indigenous EAL/D learners, how these learners' needs are perceived and responded to by educators and how this

cohort's performance is evaluated at system levels (including, in the Queensland context alone, for example: Angelo, 2009, 2012, forthcoming; Angelo & Carter, 2010, 2013; Angelo & Hudson, 2012; Angelo & McIntosh, 2010, 2011; Carter, 2010, 2011; Dixon & Angelo, 2012; Hudson & Angelo, 2012, 2013; Lingard, Creagh & Vass, 2011; McIntosh, O'Hanlon & Angelo, 2012; Sellwood & Angelo, 2013).

This paper examines and unpacks the complex contextual issues underlying the assessment of Indigenous EAL/D learners which may be neglected in language assessment processes and tools when including this cohort, and avoids precipitous application to further tools. Reflecting these concerns, it commences with a discussion of the language backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Queensland, in order to inform the language assessment community of the variable linguistic outcomes of language contact and language shift in this state. An understanding of the “shifting langscape” (Angelo, 2006a) characterising these language ecologies enables a critical evaluation of the issues surrounding the identification and assessment of Indigenous EAL/D learners. The paper then proceeds to unpack the additional contextual layers surrounding this EAL/D cohort. Despite differences in their language learning contexts in terms of their first language (L1) or dialect (D1) backgrounds and their degree of exposure to SAE in everyday life, they are shown to be typified by participating in mainstream curriculum delivered by generalist classroom educators. A discussion of the policy contexts reveals Indigenous students are targeted as a disadvantaged ethnic group but while SAE gains an occasional mention –usually as a national standard or medium of instruction– it is not included as an assessable output or teachable input. An analysis of the assessment context of national testing further demonstrates the invisibility of Indigenous EAL/D learners, as the constructs for disaggregating this cohort are not available. Throughout, this paper provides an overview of relevant initiatives focussing on Indigenous EAL/D learners that have been undertaken in the Queensland context over the past decade. This information lays the ground work for the conclusion of this paper which advocates for sustained engagement from the language testing community with the identification and assessment issues outlined in this paper, with a view to impacting effectively on policy leadership for Indigenous EAL/D learners.

### **The Language Contexts**

An understanding of the language ecologies surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners in Queensland is fundamental to an appreciation of the challenges inherent in identifying this cohort as learners of

SAE and thus also to establishing their entitlement to be taught and assessed according to their levels of learner proficiency in SAE. Indigenous language ecologies in Queensland are characterised as a rich and complex 'shifting landscape' that have emerged from widespread language contact. The issues attendant on the linguistic varieties thereby generated need to be acknowledged in discussions of identification and assessment of EAL/D learners with these language backgrounds. Descriptions and conceptualisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' vernaculars can provide evidence for the subset of these students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTEs), rather than considering them as a homogenous cohort definable only on ethnic grounds (McIntosh et al., 2012). The very nature of these language ecologies is, in fact, a major motivation behind the innovations in proficiency scales for school second language learners which specifically include Indigenous students (Angelo & Hudson, 2012; Hudson & Angelo, 2012, 2013; Turnbull, 1999). Information about contact languages and language contact processes is highly relevant to the field of language assessment as it highlights problems for any approaches to EAL/D learner identification which rely on self-declared language backgrounds as an initial disaggregating step. Furthermore, descriptions of EAL/D learners need to be cognisant of the diversity of English-lexified contact languages varieties and how these language backgrounds relate to EAL/D learner pathways.

In Queensland, the present day language ecologies experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been shaped through language contact processes. In the course of the last one hundred and fifty years, the social impacts of invasion, colonisation and the legislation authorising removal and segregation of Indigenous peoples from mainstream (predominately English-speaking) society have profoundly influenced the languages that are spoken today. As a result, almost all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in present day Queensland are not acquiring a traditional language as their first language (L1) 'automatically' through constant exposure via naturalistic interactions with their families. Everyday language usage amongst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Queensland has shifted –or is in the process of shifting– away from traditional languages and over to English-lexified contact varieties and/or Englishes (Angelo, 2004, 2006a, 2009; Angelo, Carter & McIntosh, 2010; Angelo & McIntosh, forthcoming; Eades, 2013; McIntosh et al., 2012; Sellwood & Angelo, 2013).

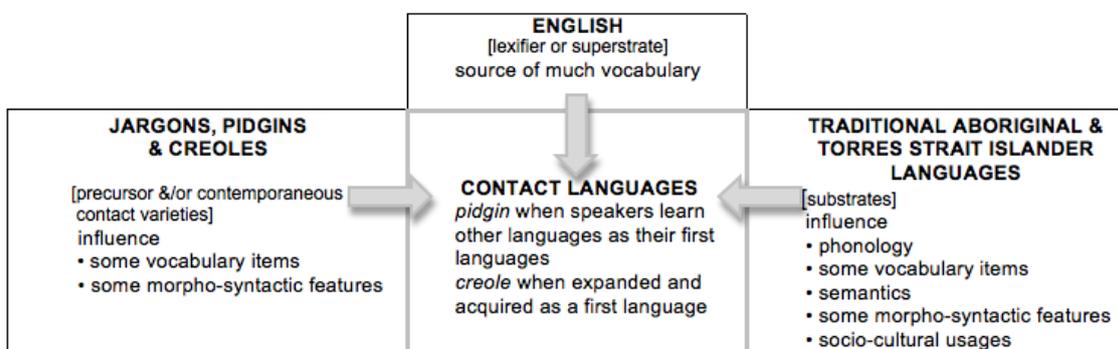
Queensland's linguistic history since European settlement is thus characterised by disruption of traditional speech communities due to contact between speakers of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and speakers of English. Speakers of other jargons (or pre-pidgins), pidgins and

creoles have also played a part, through historically significant populations from China, the Pacific Islands and the archipelagos of South East Asia, who interacted with the aforementioned speakers of English and traditional languages (Angelo, 2004; Sellwood & Angelo, 2013). Sites of particularly intense language contact were the large and hugely multilingual government Settlements of Cherbourg, Woorabinda, Palm Island and Yarrabah where Aboriginal peoples from across the state were relocated *en masse* under the 1897 Protection of Aborigines and restriction of the sale of Opium Act (The Act) into the 1960s (Copland, 2005). Another major source of language contact were the multilingual labour forces that were involved in mining gold and tin, harvesting sandalwood and pearl shell (e.g. Thompson, 1995), *bêche de mer* (also known as trepang or sea cucumber) (e.g. Bottoms, 2002) and sugar cane (e.g. Denigan, 2008) and working in pastoral industries (e.g. Dutton, 1983). As a cheap source of labour, 'residents' of government Settlements were cycled out through such industries and back again (e.g. May, 1994), bringing added linguistic resources back to the rapidly shifting language ecologies of the Settlements.

Typically, in the creation of contact language varieties, a socio-politically dominant language is the source of a large percentage of the lexicon and so English, the colonial language of Australia, is the lexifier of contact languages spoken by Indigenous peoples of Queensland. Lexical items of historically English origin have different pronunciations (phonology), meanings (semantics), inflections (morphology), structures (syntax) and usages in particular cultural and social contexts (pragmatics). Some traditional language vocabulary has often been incorporated too. Speakers of other (i.e. generated overseas) contact languages also shaped the contact languages in Queensland, by spreading some of their vocabulary items and morpho-syntactic features (see Siegel, 2008, pp. 1–6 for discussion of general processes).

To illustrate, Torres Strait Creole – or Yumplatok as it is becoming increasingly known – is an English-lexified creole which was described under the name 'Broken' – as it was then predominately called by its speech community – by Shnukal (1988). It developed primarily from Melanesian Pidgin introduced into the Torres Straits through a variety of sources including, for instance, South Sea Island missionaries. Yumplatok also contains local admixtures of traditional language vocabulary, in the west from Kala Lagaw Ya and the east from Meriam Mer. Widespread contact at different times and on different islands with people of Japanese, Malay, Papua New Guinean and Kanaka (indentured labour from South Pacific islands) origins has also left linguistic traces. A mainland example is provided by Yarrie Lingo, also an English-lexified creole, but one which has only been recognised as a local creole in the last decade (e.g.

Angelo, 2004; Angelo & McIntosh, forthcoming; Yeatman et al., 2009). Historically, the (mostly) Aboriginal residents of Yarrabah brought facility with a number of contact varieties into the Settlement plus language backgrounds comprising more than forty traditional languages. Yarrie Lingo vocabulary consequently includes items from local traditional languages, as well as some which entered from languages further afield. Opportunities for linguistic influences from overseas sources, such as Chinese and other Asian populations or the South Pacific, are also likely due to ongoing interactions, particularly through the workforce provided by Yarrabah residents (Sellwood & Angelo, 2013).



**Figure 1.** Pattern of Linguistic Influences on Colonially Induced Contact Languages Arising in Queensland. Source: adapted from Angelo (2004)

The primary determinant of contact-induced language change is the socio-historical context of the speakers (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988), so outcomes of language contact processes have been variable across Queensland. Under particular language contact conditions, a pidgin –a contact variety not yet the L1 of a speech community– develops and/or spreads when new social circumstances enforce the need for a new common language. As the usefulness of a pidgin expands, so do its linguistic resources, due to increasing speaker utilisation. If the expanded pidgin becomes used predominately by a speech community as its primary lingua franca, then it will be acquired as an L1 by children, at which point it is technically called a creole (e.g. Siegel, 2008). Eades (1983) studied use of English by Aboriginal people in south-east Queensland for her doctoral study and utilises the term ‘dialect’ to describe the English which predominately shares surface linguistic forms with SAE but may be used in distinctive ways by Aboriginal people thereby causing significant miscommunications due to social and cultural mismatches (e.g. Eades, 1988). These varieties can be usefully conceptualised as social dialects based on ethnicity, and are sometimes called ethnolects (Siegel, 2010) and distinguished from creoles. Although creoles are linguistically distinct and complete languages, they are often perceived to be (corrupted) forms of the socially

prestigious and dominant lexifier (e.g. Sellwood & Angelo, 2013; Siegel, 2010; Wigglesworth & Billington, 2013). Depending on awareness and social attitudes, creoles may not be acknowledged or even named (e.g. Angelo, 2006b; Angelo & Carter, 2010; Carter, 2010). This is highly disruptive for processes of collecting demographic information which rely on self-declaration of language backgrounds (e.g. Angelo & McIntosh, 2010; Angelo & McIntosh, 2011). From the national census (Angelo & McIntosh, forthcoming) to local school data (Dixon & Angelo, 2012), there is ample evidence to show that collecting language background information can yield skewed, contradictory and false results about language contact varieties spoken as vernaculars by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples unless it is viewed as a necessarily interactive and mediated process.

It is a significant point about language contact varieties that they are not all the same. Not all language contact situations lead to the creation of pidgins and subsequent creoles, nor do creoles once created remain inviolate from further language contact processes (e.g. Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008). Contact languages rarely exist in a socio-political sphere that is uninfluenced by their lexifier (Siegel, 2010). In the context of Queensland, language contact is a process that has been at work for well over a century throughout most of the state. SAE has been the dominant linguistic medium through which government services, private sector business and the mass media have been delivered, rendering some proficiency in SAE reasonably inescapable, and thereby ensuring its ongoing influence on contact varieties. On the other hand, legal, social and financial controls over many Indigenous Queenslanders' lives only eased throughout the late 1970s and 1980s (see Frankland, 1994, for details about Queensland, and Malcolm, 2011, for a summary of historical social policy in Australia). The traumas of this segregation are being acknowledged in the present day through government initiatives such as the 'Apology to the Stolen Generations' (Parliament of Australia, 2008) and the recognition of inequitable outcomes for Indigenous Australians through the Closing the Gap agenda (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2008). Socio-linguistic conditions in Queensland inducing cycles of both language contact as well as linguistic segregation have thus fostered a multiplicity of language contact varieties spoken within and across Indigenous speech communities.

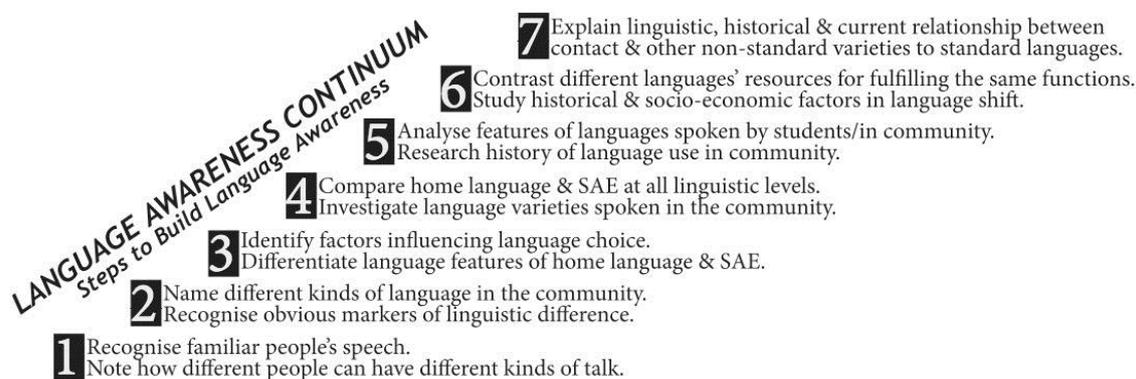
Not surprisingly, the complexities of the 'shifting langscape' characteristic of most Indigenous EAL/D learners' language backgrounds in Queensland have not been well understood. From the perspective of an English-dominant society and education system, the diverse English-lexified varieties generated by Queensland's contact history are likely to be perceived in comparison to SAE, as either more or less different (or error-laden) rather than as valid, worthy or

expressive language varieties in their own right (Sellwood & Angelo, 2013). Despite a burst of activity in Queensland in the 1960s to 1980s which saw descriptions of vernaculars spoken by Aboriginal (e.g. Alexander, 1965; Crowley & Rigsby, 1979; Dutton, 1964, 1965, 1983; Eades, 1983) and Torres Strait Islander (Shnukal, 1983, 1988) peoples, their linguistic situations came to be represented as a simple ethnic binary division of Torres Strait Creole (aka Broken, Yumplatok) and Aboriginal English in Queensland education documents (McIntosh et al., 2012). Whilst Torres Strait Creole was positioned as an English-lexified creole, a single label of Aboriginal English, often described as a dialect of SAE, covered all the linguistic varieties – including creoles and other contact varieties – generated by the many different contexts experienced by urban, rural and remote Aboriginal peoples across the considerable landmass of Queensland well into the mid-2000s in education documents. Significantly for the *language assessment* of Indigenous EAL/D learners, distinctions were not made between those language varieties that are almost indistinguishable at a surface feature level from the target of SAE (whilst differing significantly in socio-cultural usages) versus those that differed greatly from SAE in terms of their surface linguistic features (particularly morpho-syntax). Speakers of the former *produce SAE-like forms in their own varieties*, compared to speakers of the latter who need to *learn many features of SAE in order to attempt them*.

The post-contact language situation in Queensland is again receiving attention. Angelo (2004, 2006a) reappraises the outcomes of language contact in Queensland, demonstrating through socio-historical criteria and linguistic feature analysis why previously unacknowledged creoles are in actuality being spoken on the mainland and should be recognised as such, with a focus on Far North Queensland. Sellwood and Angelo (2013) provide an up-to-date analysis on the invisibility of contact languages with a focus on Yumplatok and Yarrie Lingo. Mushin, Munro & Gardner (2012) investigate the origins and linguistic status of Woori Talk, spoken at the former government Settlement of Woorabinda in central Queensland. Munro (2012) has produced a detailed study of the historical language context with depth studies across south-west Queensland, in the towns of Cunnamulla and St George and the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg. The Understanding Children's Language Acquisition Project (UCLAP) found evidence of young children acquiring a traditional language as their L1 only in the top western islands of the Torres Strait (Kala Kawaw Ya), Aurukun on western Cape York (Wik Mungkun) and Urandangi in far western Queensland (Alyawarre) (Angelo et al., 2010). Children with a traditional language as an L1 are recognised as learning the regional creole as their L2, and adding SAE subsequently (EQ, 2008). This descriptive work

provides necessary groundwork for clarifying the local outcomes of the general processes of language contact.

Recognising contact language speech varieties through research constitutes a substantial step to identifying this cohort as learners of SAE in schools, and thus also to their entitlement to be taught and assessed according to their levels of learner proficiency in SAE. Yet *describing* and *naming language varieties for academic and other specialist audiences* are only a part of the puzzle. There is also a critical need for language awareness, both for educators and their schools and systems as well as for students and their families and communities to enable other parts of the identification puzzle. The Language Awareness Continuum (Angelo, 2006b) posits the stages by which (socio-linguistic) awareness about contact language varieties can be developed.



**Figure 2.** Language Awareness Continuum Stages. Source: Angelo (2006b).

Numerous community-based language awareness projects have been undertaken by the Language Perspectives Group in the Northern Indigenous Schooling Support Unit, which elicited individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's own experiences and opinions about languages in their lives (e.g. Angelo, 2009; Hollingsworth, 2009; Johnston, 2009). Other awareness projects, such as 'vernacular language posters' (e.g. Language Perspectives, 2011; Yeatman et al., 2009) encourage language awareness across a local speech community. Raising language awareness is particularly pertinent for all stakeholders in the school community if the identification and assessment of Indigenous EAL/D learners is to be made more valid. Given the prevalence of language contact phenomena, language identification tools cannot merely request language names as if these already exist in some standardised form. Language awareness approaches encourage participants to recognise and value non-standard and less prestigious language varieties, thereby enabling more valid identification and assessment processes.

## **The Language Learning Contexts**

From the discussion so far, it will be clear that the language backgrounds of Indigenous students in Queensland are not homogenous. However, if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are EAL/D learners, then they are usually speakers of an English-lexified contact language or other English speech variety, and these may not be 'identifiable' by standardised nomenclature. These contact varieties range from creoles, dissimilar to SAE at all levels except for historically related vocabulary, to ethnolects with fewer distinctive surface linguistic features, but expressing different socio-cultural concepts (see Malcolm, 2011, p. 194, who refers to these as "registers"). The act of learning SAE as a target thus ranges from acquiring a new language albeit from a baseline of many (historically) related words to modifying any existing dialectal features which might impede communication and learning in order to negotiate different socio-cultural spaces. Angelo (2012) differentiates how L2 learners of SAE with a creole as their L1 differ in the research from those whose D1 differs from SAE. To date, no complete mapping or description of local language ecologies has been undertaken across Queensland nor have the effects of different L1/D1 language backgrounds (where ascertained) been compared rigorously with regard to their impact on learning SAE, the lexifier, national standard and official language of classroom instruction in Queensland. This section on language learning contexts therefore necessarily presents information that pertains to the Indigenous EAL/D cohort generally, unless otherwise stated. Note, however, that for current classroom purposes in Queensland, 'dialect' refers to varieties that are "considerably different to SAE" (DETE, 2013a, p. 4), so it would never include a variety that was consistently indistinguishable from SAE at a surface level, thus ruling out speakers with more acrolectal contact varieties or SAE-like non-standard Englishes, and this 'working definition' will be followed here.

The perception of common linguistic material (or 'overlaps') between English-lexified creoles and related varieties and SAE encourages speakers of one variety to transfer and utilise their L1/D1 to process the other. This is problematic for classroom learners as the additional target language/dialect is not clearly separated from their L1/D1 (e.g. Berry & Hudson, 1997; Siegel, 2010). It also poses difficulties for SAE-only speaking classroom teachers and is a central issue for classroom language assessment: For instance, teachers cannot easily distinguish between the non-target forms which are straight-forward L1/D1 productions versus those which are L2/D2 SAE learner approximations. Nor if forms superficially match the target language, do they know which could arise as direct L1/D1 transfers versus those which could be learned L2/D2 forms

(see Dixon, 2013, for data and analyses illustrating these issues in a Northern Territory context; see Sellwood & Angelo, 2013, for a word by word semantic and morpho-syntactic comparison of etymologically related items in a Queensland creole and SAE). This means that classroom teachers who do not speak the same language varieties as their students, could well appraise their students' best attempts at English *and* their 'unadapted' L1/D1 productions as indicating the same level of SAE proficiency. For example, not a beginner level because there is some discernible English in there, but not a particularly advanced level either because there are some discernible errors. Yet in actuality, unadapted L1/D1 productions indicate no learning in SAE whatsoever. Clearly, classroom teachers need to learn about students' languages, to understand the conundrums raised for themselves and their students by contact languages and to cultivate professional relationships with (bilingual) adult speakers who share students' language backgrounds (i.e. 'like language speakers') who can provide linguistic insights into students' language use (Angelo & Hudson, 2012; Dixon, 2013; Hudson & Angelo, 2012, 2013).

Learners who speak languages which are completely separated from English might appear to have the more difficult task, as they have very little linguistic material in common with SAE speakers in their early stages of L2 acquisition. Learners with English-lexified contact language backgrounds, on the other hand, might appear to have 'a head start', with more communicative facility at the outset, as some (in the case of L1 creole speakers) or more (in the case of D1 speakers) of their existing linguistic material approximates the SAE target. Transfer of L1/D1 to L2/D2 contexts is encouraged by the 'lexical overlap'. The linguistic proximity can actually constitute a handicap because features of the target are less salient and more blurred by layers of partial similarities, while at the same time giving these learners an additional –but not unproblematic– strategy for accessing the target language (e.g. Siegel, 2010). This particular aspect of this cohort's pathways to SAE needs careful consideration in any descriptions of language learner trajectories-.

Linguistic proximity poses particular challenges for teacher assessment of proficiency levels as it can facilitate some learner engagement with SAE, whilst disguising their gaps (Angelo & Hudson, 2012; Berry & Hudson, 1997; Dixon, 2013; Hudson & Angelo, 2012; Sellwood & Angelo, 2013). The communicative imperative of student-student, student-teacher and teacher-student interactions erodes the separation between such 'overlapping' language varieties, as speakers of SAE and the English-lexified contact varieties –creoles and dialects– naturally seek to make meaning with each other, accommodating and adapting to differences to achieve as much as possible their communicative ends. Whilst communicatively this may achieve (a degree of) success, at a surface level it can

obscure the ability of students and teachers to convey precise, more complex and de-contextualised meanings to each other. Judgements about the proficiency levels of students with contact language backgrounds can thus be profoundly influenced by teachers' understandings of the linguistic dynamics at play.

Speakers of English lexified contact varieties may not receive recognition for having command of a valid language variety –or more than one. It is a common experience of Indigenous EAL/D learners in Queensland that both their L1 proficiency and their L2 learning needs in SAE remain unacknowledged (e.g. Sellwood & Angelo, 2013). Where contact languages such as creoles are spoken, the standard language of education is usually also the lexifier (Siegel, 2010). With insufficient awareness of language contact processes and outcomes, it is easy for L2 learners of SAE who have complex contact language backgrounds to be hidden in discourses of disadvantage and deficit, including low literacy skills, poor attendance, ill-health or nutritional needs, cultural mismatches, special needs in speech language or even learning needs (e.g. Angelo & McIntosh, 2010; Malcolm, 2011). It has, in fact, been argued by McIntosh et al. (2012) that speakers of contact languages might be the most vulnerable learner cohort when 'language' is subsumed within macro categories such as 'literacy' in education documentation: Their language backgrounds are invisible, rendering them invisible as (possible) EAL/D learners within a system that only inconsistently recognises second language proficiency as an operative variable. When Indigenous EAL/D learners are seen through such 'lenses', language assessment tools are rarely brought to bear.

In some instances, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are learning English as a foreign language (EFL), the significance of which is worryingly blanketed out in the recent conflationary ACARA term 'EAL/D' rather than the earlier ESL/D or EFL (see Dixon, 2013, for additional concerns about 'EAL/D' relating to simultaneous versus sequential acquisition by child learners of SAE). By definition, EFL learners are not exposed to English outside of the classroom in their day-to-day lives. In most remote schools, Indigenous EAL/D learners are also not exposed overly much to SAE within the classroom, as their entire cohort usually consists of like-language speakers (e.g. Angelo, 2012), but this also occurs in some rural and even urban contexts. An EFL learning context differs widely from English as a Second Language/Dialect (ESL/D) contexts as in the latter, students are typically assumed to be immersed in an English speaking environment outside the classroom (e.g. Turnbull, 1999). In other situations – including in rural, regional or remote towns and provincial cities – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may attend schools where they comprise just a few individuals, a small proportion of students, a considerable

percentage or (almost) the entire cohort. Where Indigenous EAL/D learners are surrounded by speakers of SAE it is more accurate to describe their learning context as ESL or ESD depending on the relationship between their L1/D1 language backgrounds and the target of SAE, if they are learning it sequentially and adding it to an existing L1/D1. Importantly, language assessment for EFL contexts usually differs from ESL/D contexts.

Arguably, the less students have immersion in (or automatic exposure to) the classroom target language, SAE, the more classroom teachers need specific guidance to explicitly teach the language demands of the classroom curriculum. In EFL classroom contexts, it is usual to provide a developmentally sequenced language curriculum, with in-built assessment of taught language. For such reasons, Wigglesworth, Simpson and Loakes (2011) recommend a curriculum incorporating EFL/ESL methodology for teaching Indigenous students in EFL learning contexts. Taught language is a fundamental premise of teaching and assessing 'EAL/D learners' in EFL contexts. Otherwise, teachers are simply assessing what they have not taught and what the language context has not provided to students. In answer to just such language teaching and learning needs, Angelo (2006c) developed a guide for teachers in remote, predominately creole speaking areas, who work in EFL classrooms in remote community schools. It provides English language teaching strategies, incorporating language awareness for contact language speakers, along with developmentally sequenced language features for focussed language teaching as well as Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) classroom strategies. Note that while this incorporates language awareness, it additionally promotes teaching target language features in an ordered and explicit fashion whilst recognising the classroom setting for this language and other learning. Such curriculum initiatives are of particular importance for the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners in EFL learning contexts with contact language backgrounds as they give direction to classroom teachers who otherwise may have no training in how to support their classroom full of EAL/D learners.

In Queensland, regardless of the learning context (i.e. EFL versus ESL/D, there is no specialised curriculum for EAL/D learners,<sup>3</sup> including for Indigenous EFL learners, contrary to what might be ideally expected of such learning situations. This factor is compounded by a lack of TESOL specialists for Indigenous students. This situation has arisen partly because TESOL specialists in Queensland schools have historically provided services exclusively to students

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<sup>3</sup> There is a matriculation subject for advanced EAL/D learners entitled 'English for ESL learners' which is in extended trial since 2007 (see Queensland Studies Authority, 2013).

with overseas language backgrounds who meet specific eligibility criteria, and partly because Indigenous EAL/D learners' language backgrounds and SAE language learning needs have been inconsistently recognised and serviced. As a result, the TESOL fraternity have been supporting EAL/D learners of overseas backgrounds, so that they have had little opportunity to develop expertise with the particular language backgrounds and language learning needs of Indigenous EAL/D learners. It is therefore classroom teachers who are required to manage mainstream curriculum demands in linguistically complex classrooms with Indigenous EAL/D learners (sometimes exclusively this cohort, sometimes amongst other groups of EAL/D learners and/or L1 SAE speakers). Without curriculum guidance, classroom teachers do not have the level of linguistic and specialist TESOL skills to develop entire programs of language teaching for learners of EAL/D.<sup>4</sup> This variety of learning contexts is significant for language assessment construct and validity.

It is also significant the extent to which the school second language proficiency scales in use in Australia, including those which claim to depict the mainstream context of learning, generally contain assumptions that EAL/D learners up to an intermediate level (e.g. Level 4 on the NLLIA ESL Bandscales [McKay, Hudson & Sapuppo, 1994]) are receiving TESOL support based on a developmental second language curriculum of the intensive language centre model, even if delivered informally in a mainstream school setting. It is not possible within the scope of this paper to provide extensive examples; however, students are to a large degree described as progressing on tasks which are not generally commensurate with the mainstream curriculum of their age group level. In adjusting such scales to fit these mainstream classroom contexts, second language testing experts encounter the tension of describing language development in a learning context without an ESL curriculum or even ESL support, and at the same time possibly ensuring that by so doing they further entrench such less than optimal language learning situations. It should be noted that EAL/D in the mainstream context has been recently recognised in the Australian national curriculum by a suite of resources including EAL/D learning progressions for use by mainstream teachers of EAL/D learners, including Indigenous EAL/D learners). EAL/D annotations for each curriculum area have also been prepared (ACARA, 2011). While recognition is a

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<sup>4</sup> A number of initiatives have been undertaken by Education Queensland to address these gaps, such as the development of teaching resources like the planning framework, *Break it Down Build it Up* for classroom teachers to use in mainstream teaching contexts and the L4L (*Language for Learning*) units assisting classroom teachers to teach language demands explicitly for EAL/D learners (Language Perspectives, 2013a, 2013b). Despite the usefulness of such resources, for the purposes of the language testing and assessment field, the conditions of language learning for EAL/D learners in mainstream classrooms are not systematically guided through a system-wide EAL/D curriculum.

praiseworthy step and a political victory for the EAL/D profession, this creates a similar and very forceful tension, in that the resource may unintentionally imply that there is no need for a curriculum for (Indigenous) EAL/D learners, even those in EFL-like contexts.

Clearly, even when Indigenous learners who are speakers of contact varieties are identified as EAL/D learners, difficulties in assessment validity arise due to features of their language learning contexts. And this raises the question of whether education policy reflects an understanding of these language and language learning contexts, and the need to collect valid and systematic language assessment data for this cohort of EAL/D learners, and is now examined.

### **The Policy Contexts**

Two Commonwealth initiatives impact particularly on education responses involving Indigenous EAL/D learners in Queensland and affect the gathering of EAL/D data in general and the collection of data about Indigenous EAL/D learners in particular. These initiatives both utilise 'literacy (in English)' as the measure of system, school and student performance with little to no recognition of second language proficiency as an operative variable. As these initiatives drive school accountability and funding in the pursuit of improved literacy 'outputs', they disallow the significance of the 'input' of students' levels of English language proficiency with the result that the language learning needs of Indigenous EAL/D learners are not prioritised.

Since 2008, the Commonwealth has implemented the National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) which is the nationwide compulsory standardised testing of all year 3, 5, 7 and 9 student cohorts in literacy (reading, writing, spelling and grammar) and numeracy, all tested through English. The only students with a Language Background Other than English (LBOTE) who are exempt from NAPLAN testing are those who have resided in Australia for less than 1 year, with the result that Indigenous EAL/D learners participate in NAPLAN, regardless of their level of proficiency in SAE (Angelo, 2012). NAPLAN tests are positioned as a test of skills and not content, and claim to test the broad aspects of literacy and numeracy foundational to students' learning and which are assumed to be in common to curricula across Australia (e.g. ACARA, 2012). NAPLAN is 'high stakes' as it is used as the sole source of student achievement and school performance data utilised for accountability measures (e.g. COAG, 2008). Individual students' NAPLAN results in each domain are provided to their families and schools. Each school's performance

results are made available to the public (by year level cohort in each tested domain) on the MySchool website (ACARA, n.d.). Annual reports show comparative performance data for all states and territories disaggregated by sex, Indigenous status, LBOTE, geo-location (i.e. urban, remote, etc.), parental education and employment (e.g. ACARA, 2012).

In 2008, the Commonwealth also negotiated the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), more commonly known as Closing the Gap, with all states and territories (COAG, 2008). This agreement commits all jurisdictions to targets for Closing the Gap in areas of significant Indigenous health, employment and educational disadvantage. The target for schooling is to halve the gap in Indigenous students' reading, writing and numeracy achievements (as measured through NAPLAN tests) within a decade. No specific reference is made to Indigenous students who are learners of SAE. Each jurisdiction plans its own initiatives to improve Indigenous outcomes in all these areas (e.g. Department of Education & Training [DET], 2009).

At a national policy level, EAL/D learners generally, and Indigenous learners specifically, have thus been inconsistently acknowledged. Yet even instances of acknowledgement do not necessarily translate into targeted actions or data collection for Indigenous EAL/D learners. For example, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development & Youth Affairs [MCEEDYA], 2011) – developed after the Closing the Gap agreements – includes references to Indigenous EAL/D learners in background information, but all accountable outputs neither (differentially) target Indigenous EAL/D learners, nor utilise any EAL/D assessment tools (McIntosh et al., 2012). The Queensland response to Closing the Gap in education includes ESL needs as a major influence on Indigenous student outcomes (e.g. DET, 2009, p. 46), but specific inputs and outputs in terms of language, such as assessed or targeted English proficiency levels, are not included (McIntosh et al., 2012).

Within Queensland policy, there is an EAL/D Policy Statement (DETE, 2013b) which states that all schools will identify their full cohort of EAL/D learners (i.e. regardless of any funding, ethno-cultural, visa, etc. considerations) and Indigenous EAL/D learners are explicitly included. Schools are to meet their EAL/D learners' needs by differentiating mainstream curriculum delivery through classroom teachers in whole-class contexts. Where students are not meeting year-level expectations, teachers will implement focused language teaching to address specific gaps in an EAL/D learner's linguistic repertoire. Schools will assess their EAL/D learners' general language proficiency using the 'Bandscales for ESL Learners' (EQ, 2008), a six level general proficiency scale

belonging to the NLLIA ESL Bandscales (McKay et al., 1994) family, and are to monitor these learners' progress in acquiring SAE. The ACARA (2011) EAL/D Progressions have not been taken up in Queensland. It consists of four general proficiency levels which do not align straight-forwardly with existing proficiency scales (EQ 2002, 2008) – despite elements having been drawn from prior scales such as these.

At a state level, EAL/D learners are not currently reported on as an entire cohort, although at a local or individual level schools may be accountable for reporting on EAL/D learners for specific purposes. However, as there are no particular EAL/D targets or EAL/D services for Indigenous EAL/D learners, neither their identification nor their assessment as EAL/D learners is prioritised by schools. At this point in time, at a state and national level, due to lack of policy requirements, Indigenous EAL/D learners' proficiency levels in SAE – and any progress assessed on a language proficiency scale– is not collected, and so such information cannot be correlated with this cohort's NAPLAN achievement data (Angelo, 2012).

### **The Assessment Context**

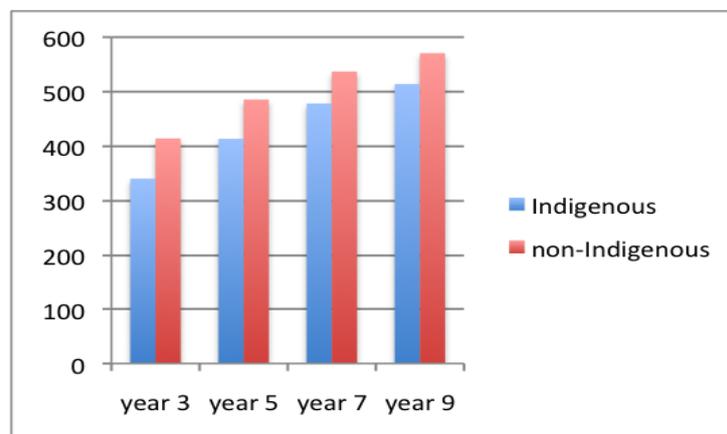
No system-level data correlates EAL/D proficiency levels with Indigenous students' achievement data. Indigenous students are, however, over-represented in Queensland's NAPLAN under-performance data. The publicly available NAPLAN results (ACARA, 2012) are examined here to illustrate the profound invisibility of Indigenous EAL/D learners in system data and the need for high quality language proficiency assessment instruments to redress this.<sup>5</sup> If their status as EAL/D learners is not apparent and the extent of their EAL/D language learning needs is not known, there is no valid effect data for educational interventions for this cohort. Judgements and evaluations of programs aiming to improve these EAL/D learners' achievements cannot be accurately formulated on the basis of NAPLAN data alone. The following discussion demonstrates the difficulties involved in using NAPLAN data as the sole source of information about Indigenous EAL/D learners in Queensland.

NAPLAN data is disaggregated for Indigenous and non-Indigenous status, but not for other ethnic groups. Whilst this goes towards a recognition of the impact of invasion and colonisation on the real disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous Australians today, this initial categorisation of the data suggests a homogeneity about Indigenous students, a necessary but sufficient

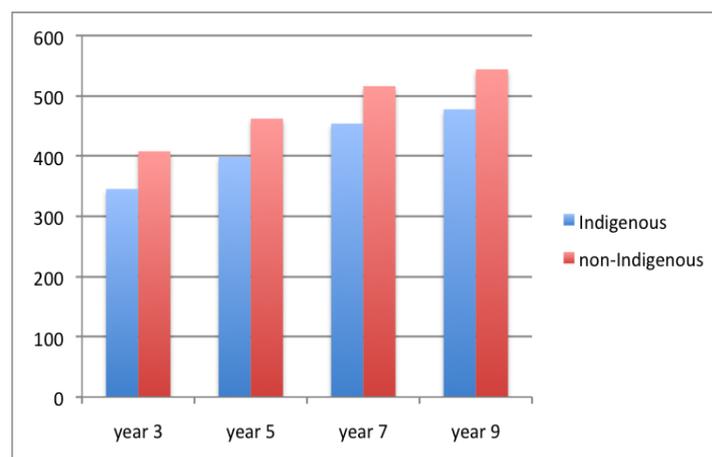
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<sup>5</sup> See Malcolm (2011) for a more general challenge to the validity of NAPLAN for Indigenous Australian learners and the need for the use of second language proficiency scales adjusted to Indigenous learner contexts.

conceptualisation about Indigenous students' performance. This possibly undermines further efforts to untangle various specific barriers to Indigenous student achievement (see for example Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). Figures 3 and 4 below show NAPLAN test results in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 for 2012 Reading and 2012 Writing respectively, disaggregating Indigenous and non-Indigenous students according to their mean scale scores. These figures show that there is a consistent and considerable gap in the achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students as measured through NAPLAN reading and writing scores.



**Figure 3.** Mean Scale Score in NAPLAN Reading for Queensland, Disaggregated for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Students' Results in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 4, 68, 132, & 196.

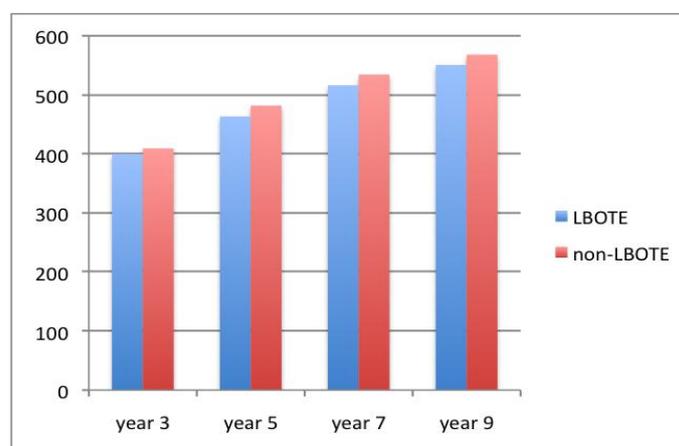


**Figure 4.** Mean Scale Score for NAPLAN Writing for Queensland 2012, Disaggregated for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Students' Results in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 15, 79, 143 & 207.

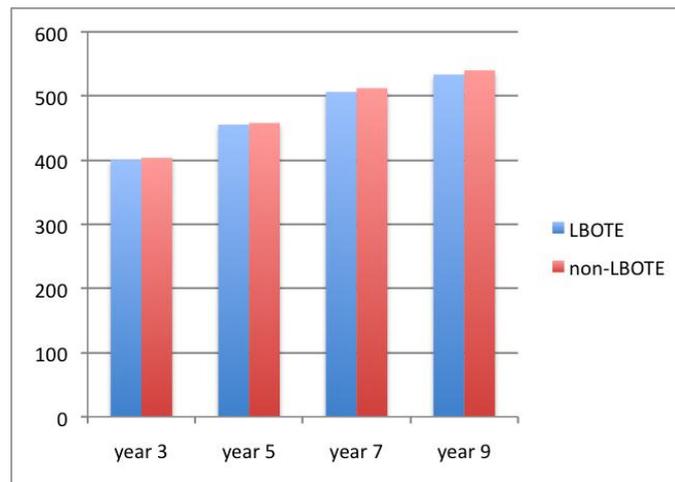
NAPLAN data is also disaggregated for Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) which is classified for this report as "if either the student or parents/guardians speak a Language Other Than English at home" (ACARA,

2012, p. vi). Queensland's 2012 NAPLAN results are disaggregated for LBOTE and non-LBOTE students in Reading (Figure 5) and in Writing (in Figure 6) below. LBOTE has proven a problematic category on many grounds, most particularly because it does not relate to any second language learning needs (e.g. Lingard, Creagh & Vass, 2011; Creagh, 2013). Dixon & Angelo (2012) also report that the LBOTE category has been interpreted by some Queensland schools as exclusive of Indigenous students, because they are already identified in another data category (i.e. Indigenous) and/or because EAL/D services are only provided to students with overseas backgrounds (and not to Indigenous students). Furthermore, there has been confusion as to the source of such LBOTE information for NAPLAN purposes: must it come from enrolment data, or can students self-declare or are teachers allowed to indicate this on the basis of their informed professional knowledge.

Figures 5 and 6 show that LBOTE students in Queensland (which category will not include all Indigenous LBOTE students) do not appear to be underachieving as consistently and dramatically as the Indigenous student cohort in terms of their mean scale scores.

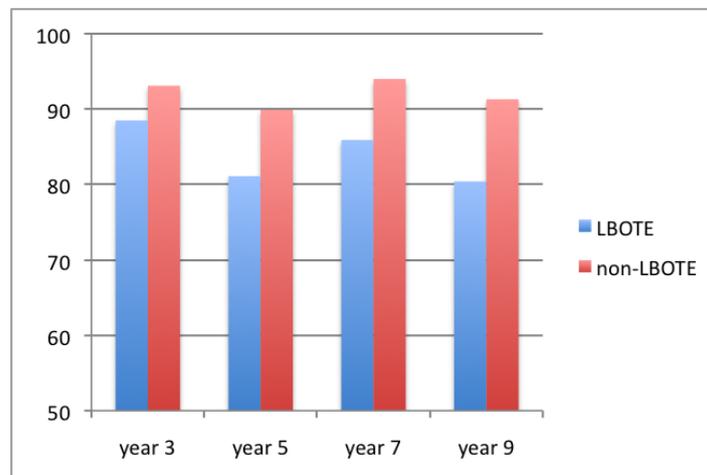


**Figure 5.** Mean Scale Score for NAPLAN Reading for Queensland 2012, Disaggregated for LBOTE and Non-LBOTE Students' Results in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 5, 69, 133 & 197.

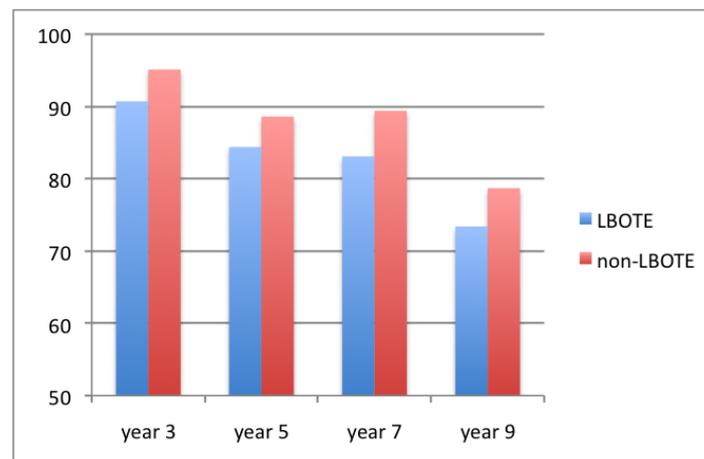


**Figure 6.** Mean Scale Score for NAPLAN Writing for Queensland 2012, Disaggregated for LBOTE and Non-LBOTE students in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 16, 80, 144 & 208.

However there are many indications that LBOTE learners are not achieving at the same levels as non-LBOTEs. Figures 7 and 8 below, for instance, show that the percentage achieving at/above national minimum standards is always lower than non-LBOTE students and the standard deviations for LBOTE scores are also consistently much higher.

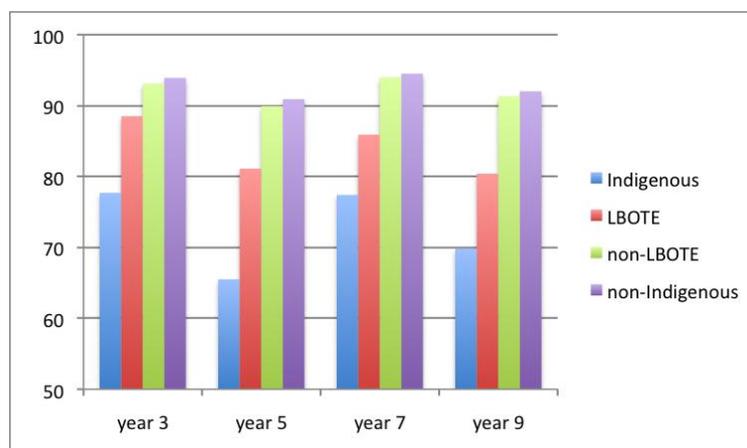


**Figure 7.** Percentage at or above the National Minimum Standards in NAPLAN Reading for Queensland 2012, Disaggregated for LBOTE and Non-LBOTE students in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 5, 69, 133 & 197.

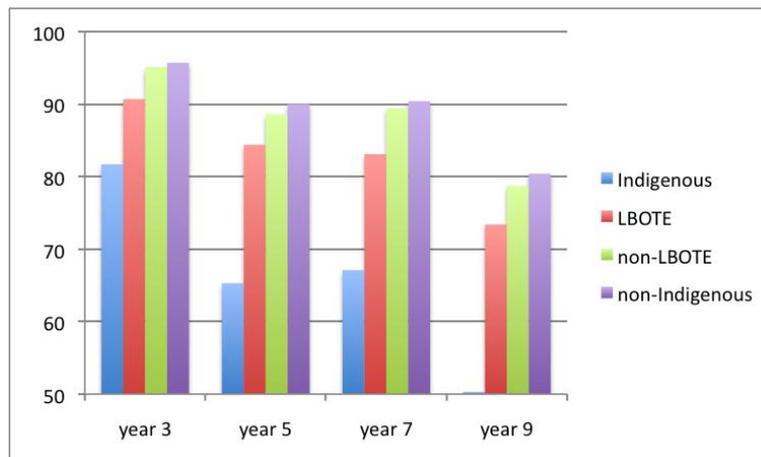


**Figure 8.** Percentage at or above the National Minimum Standards in NAPLAN Writing for Queensland 2012, Disaggregated for LBOTE and Non-LBOTE students in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 16, 80, 144 & 208.

The percentage of non-Indigenous and non-LBOTE student cohorts achieving national minimum standards is considerably higher than of the LBOTEs which in turn are higher than the percentage of Indigenous students who are meeting them as seen in Figures 9 and 10.



**Figure 9.** Percentage at or above the National Minimum Standards in NAPLAN Reading for Queensland 2012, Comparing Indigenous, LBOTE, non-LBOTE and non-Indigenous cohorts in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 4, 5, 68, 69, 132, 133, 196 & 197.



**Figure 10.** Percentage of students at or above the National Minimum Standards in NAPLAN Writing for Queensland 2012, Comparing Indigenous, LBOTE, non-LBOTE and non-Indigenous cohorts in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 15, 16, 79, 80, 143, 144, 207 & 208.

It is rarely overtly acknowledged that a subset of LBOTE students are Indigenous, and vice versa, so a division between Indigenous and LBOTE students is often implied –and has been (erroneously) extrapolated by some schools as reported above. The national NAPLAN report (ACARA, 2012) draws specific attention to the fact only in an unfortunately deficit context to explain an otherwise anomalously poor NAPLAN result for LBOTE students in the Northern Territory (NT). The report explains explicitly that, in this jurisdiction, the LBOTE category includes many Indigenous students for whom English is not the first language, as if by way of justification for the consistent and dramatic underachievement of LBOTE students there:

For the Northern Territory, English is not the first language for many Indigenous students and mean scores are lower in all five achievement domains than are mean scores for students with an English-language background (ACARA, 2012, quote repeated on p. 71: Year 3; p. 127: Year 5; p. 191: Year 7; p. 255: Year 9).

Figure 11 below shows nationwide year 3 NAPLAN Writing results disaggregated by LBOTE status to illustrate these results in the NT, although as the above quote indicates, this effect is noted across age groups and test domains.



**Figure 11.** Mean Scale Score for NAPLAN Writing for Year 3 in States, Territories and Nationally in 2012, Disaggregated for LBOTE and non-LBOTE students. Source: ACARA, 2012, p. 16

Figure 12 below provides the nationwide results for the same year level and test domain but disaggregated for Indigenous status. The same pattern of dramatic underachievement in the NT is apparent for Indigenous students as is visible for LBOTE learners in Figure 11 above.

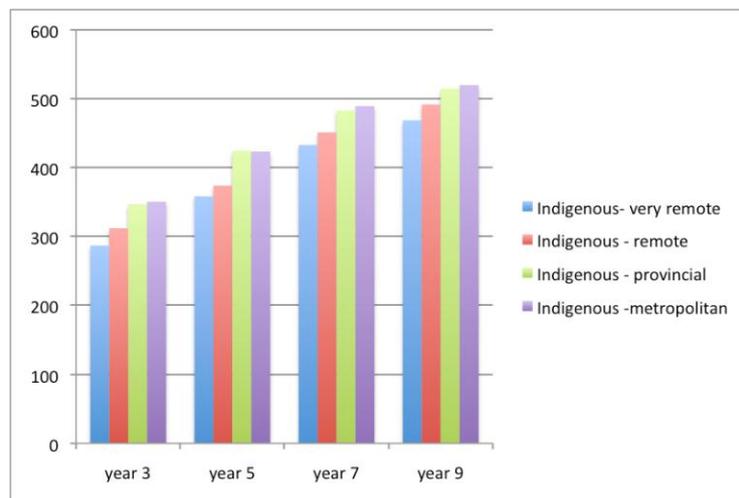


**Figure 12.** Mean Scale Score for NAPLAN Writing for Year 3 in States, Territories and Nationally in 2012, Disaggregated for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Source: ACARA, 2012, p. 15.

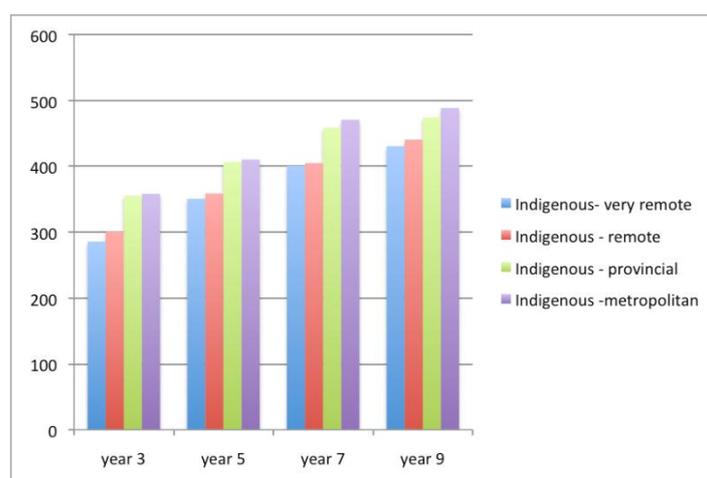
The 'extreme' case of the NT is where the largest proportion of students identified with an LBOTE will consist of Aboriginal children who are EFL learners. The NT also has largest number of Aboriginal children who are still speaking traditional languages in the country, and as their traditional languages are hard to overlook, they are often identified with an LBOTE. Note, however, that by far the largest language background of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is Kriol (ABS, 2006), the English-lexified contact language spoken as a chain of dialects from western Queensland across large tracts of the Top End through into the Kimberleys (Schultze-Berndt, Meakins &

Angelo, 2013). Apart from the “outlier” of LBOTE achievement in the NT, language is often not visible as an operative variable for Indigenous students' achievement. It is of concern, that Indigeneity can become accepted as a reason in itself for student underachievement.

In Queensland, location is an approximate but reasonable indicator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with EAL/D (or more specifically, EFL) learning needs in NAPLAN data because the more remote the context, the less likely for SAE to figure in everyday Indigenous community life. Mean scale scores disaggregated by Indigenous status and geo-location show a clear distinction between the achievement of very remote and remote Indigenous students and those in provincial and metropolitan areas as seen in Figures 13 and 14:



**Figure 13.** Mean Scale Score for NAPLAN Reading for Queensland 2012, Disaggregated for Indigenous Students in Very Remote, Remote, Provincial & Metropolitan locations, in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 7, 71, 135, & 199.



**Figure 14.** Mean Scale Score for NAPLAN Writing for Queensland 2012, Disaggregated for Indigenous Students in Very Remote, Remote, Provincial & Metropolitan locations, in Years 3, 5, 7 & 9. Source: ACARA, 2012, pp. 18, 82, 146 & 210.

This examination of NAPLAN student achievement data shows that only by circuitous, secondary data routes might Indigenous EAL/D learners be rendered somewhat visible in public assessment data. This cannot be drawn from the assessment data alone, so an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language ecologies and Indigenous students' consequent learning contexts must be used as a lens to focus on their presence. There is clearly a need for policy change requiring the systemic collection of EAL/D data through appropriate identification processes and language proficiency tools for mainstream classroom teachers to use with this cohort (and others) of EAL/D learners.

### **Towards a Context Sensitive Approach**

The problem of identifying, assessing and attending to the language needs of EAL/D Indigenous speakers of non-standard and non-prestige English-lexified contact languages and English dialects is largely unacknowledged and unaddressed at the national policy level, but also within research discourses on (language) curriculum, pedagogy, data and assessment. This paper has explored the many contexts that impact on such learners in Queensland which render them a largely invisible EAL/D cohort. In spite of the fact that the problem is multileveled and perhaps overwhelming in terms of its complexity, range and scope, the paper has revealed and drawn on awareness raising work undertaken on the combined fronts of community, education and research. Such ground work will assist to some extent with identifying cohorts of Indigenous EAL/D learners through their language backgrounds, and by increasing stakeholders' sociolinguistic understandings about these language

ecologies. Similarly, some pedagogy and curriculum initiatives acknowledge the need to scaffold classroom teachers' ability to plan for explicit instruction of identified and relevant language demands alongside delivering mainstream curriculum.

Likewise, over the last decade in Queensland there has been an effort to respond to the imperative that these learners should be assessed by EAL/D instruments which are sufficiently modulated to describe their specific language ecologies and their particular language learning situations. Two iterations of the NLLIA ESL Bandscales have been developed: first, *Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners* (EQ, 2002), and more recently a summary document for mainstream teachers, *Bandscales for English as a Second Language/Dialect (ESL/D) Learners* (EQ, 2008). These experiences and subsequent research findings are suggesting that in order to describe the proficiency development of these learners there is a need to re-think some of the fundamental constructs underlying school proficiency scales, rather than recycling existing descriptions with occasional 'add-ons' of features distinctive of a cohort. Indeed some of the 'inherited' concepts were not designed for classroom contexts, let alone for use by unsupported classroom teachers in linguistically complex classrooms delivering mainstream curriculum (Angelo & Hudson, 2012; Hudson & Angelo, 2012, 2013).

The pragmatic question in second language assessment proficiency tools of when to generalise across EAL/D cohorts and when to differentiate for specific EAL/D cohorts is an important one. When is differentiation fundamentally required? This question applies within cohorts of Indigenous EAL/D learners too. Is the EFL context of some Indigenous EAL/D learners 'sufficiently' reflected in current tools? The addition of the 'D' for 'dialect' in terms such as EAL/D are indicators of intended inclusivity for Indigenous students with less obvious contact language backgrounds who are learners of SAE. However, there are degrees of difference between English-lexified contact language varieties and SAE which would affect the language learning pathways and needs of EAL/D learners with these backgrounds.

It is vital to recognise that questions around EAL/D learners with contact language backgrounds are not only relevant for Indigenous EAL/D learners, but also for other EAL/D cohorts who are part of a shifting 'langscape' within their own speech communities, such as many Pan Pacifica and Melanesian EAL/D learners, as well as some from a number of African regions. There is also possible relevance for those 'born in Australia students' who do not grow up in SAE-speaking households and have the target of SAE somewhat obscured by the non-standard and/or learner varieties of English spoken around them. There

also appears to be also some commonality with attributes and issues described for the 'long term English language learner' cohort in the U.S. (e.g. Menken & Kleyn, 2009; Olsen, 2010).

Because of the non-prestige nature of these contact languages and their complex and varied relationships with their English lexifier, there can be no instant clarity. There is a need for experts in many fields, and particularly in second language assessment, not to 'silose' on this issue, but to offer time and intellectual effort, to see the complexity and to stay abreast of developments. Further progress in assessment policy leadership relies on understanding the neglected area of the identification and assessment of school-aged Indigenous speakers of contact language varieties as an evolving body of knowledge.

### Acknowledgements

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