



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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FELIKS - FOSTERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN KIMBERLEY SCHOOLS - A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PACKAGE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools) is a Catholic Education Office initiative having its beginnings in the early eighties when the need to teach English as a second language to Aboriginal students in the Kimberley was recognised. The professional development package, designed and successfully trailed by the Language Team members of the CEO Kimberley Region, is targeted at classroom teachers, Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATAs) and Aboriginal community members.

Aboriginal students, depending on the degree of exposure to various influences (eg towns, media, community, schools), are likely to be drawing on Standard Australian English (SAE), Aboriginal English or Kriol and in some cases, traditional languages. In the past most people, including teachers and parents of these students, regarded the student's speech as 'bad' or 'poor' English which needed to be improved or corrected. FELIKS highlights the differences between the three language varieties and enables teachers to understand and pinpoint the areas of difficulty an Aboriginal student might encounter when learning English.

Kriol is the name given to one English based creole and is widespread across the North of

Australia. It is regarded by some linguists to be a structurally complex language, having its own grammatical, lexical and sound systems.

Aboriginal English, being a dialect of English, has basically the same patterns as English, but has many important consistent differences that are only now being recognised.

Linguists describe the English based languages by use of a continuum, with Kriol or Aboriginal English at one end and SAE at the other. People change their speech according to the social situation, but because most Kimberley students do not have enough knowledge of SAE they are unable to switch between Kriol and English (code switching). This lack of knowledge is one of the things that hinder such students in coping with school.

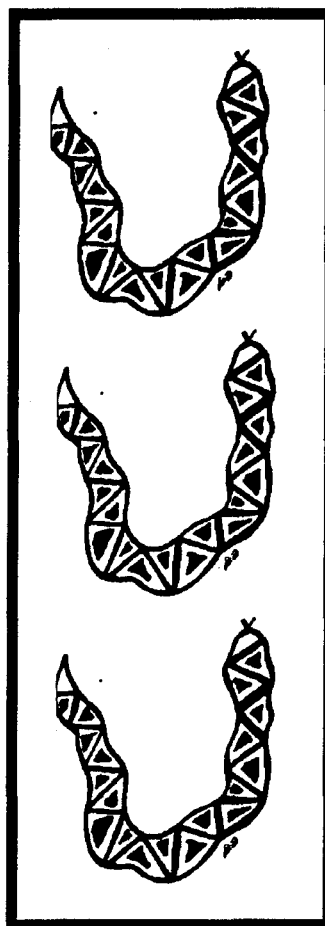
The FELIKS package has been designed to address this situation. It is directed at teachers and ATAs but through them it aims to empower Kimberley students by teaching them SAE without denigrating their home language. In other words, the key to understanding how Kriol and English work together in education is to know that English does not replace Kriol but is added as a second language.

FELIKS covers topics such as word studies; socially appropriate use of language; sounds (phonology) and grammar and gives a background to the three terms; dialect, pidgin, creole. In all topics the theory is accompanied by practical applications for use in classrooms. For instance the students' code switching skills are developed through games and activities in the classroom.

The seven sessions are presented over two full days which are separated to give the participants time to consider the large amount of information received on the first day as well as do relevant reading, collect samples of children's writing and listen to speech patterns.

FELIKS begins with some real life examples of miscommunication between speakers of Kriol or Aboriginal English and SAE. In Kriol, for example, someone might call you a 'liar', meaning you tricked them or you are pretending. In English, the same word has a substantially different meaning. Another example might be when a Kriol speaker refers to a ripe piece of fruit as 'cooked' whereas an English speaker would immediately think of cooked fruit as being processed by heat.

The professional development course has been welcomed enthusiastically by staff in all schools where it has been presented. It provides teachers with an explanation of the communication difficulties they find in the classroom and also gives direction for them to follow when teaching SAE. The emphasis on code switching, using socially appropriate language, and on recognising the children's English based speech as a genuine language or dialect have been the special features of FELIKS and these account for its success to date.



Errors and Omissions:

The editors wish to point out that the title of the Book Reviewed in Volume 22 No 3 was printed incorrectly on the Contents page. The correct title of the Book edited by Stephen Harris and Merridy Malin is Aboriginal Kids in Urban Classrooms, Not Aboriginal Kids in Urban schools. This error occurred during the production of the journal was in no way the fault of the author.