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MEETING TEACHERS' NEEDS: REACHING LITERACY THROUGH GRAMMAR *in* INDIGENOUS SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Many teachers and teaching assistants report that they lack an understanding of Standard Australian English grammar and that this hinders their work with Indigenous students who are learning English as a second language. This paper reports on the success of an accredited professional development strategy in Far North Queensland. This strategy is not based on out-of-context grammar lessons but promotes the idea that grammar is best learnt in communicative and collaborative classrooms which value fun and visual performance. The grammar activities are also embedded in current strategies for the teaching of literacy. This kind of professional development can reinvigorate teachers' practices in order to increase literacy outcomes in Indigenous schools.

■ Introduction

A key commitment of the Partners for Success policy (Education Queensland, 1999) is to provide professional development for teachers to ensure that all Indigenous students achieve a high level of proficiency in Standard Australian English (SAE) in the primary years of schooling. The policy explicitly recognises that Indigenous students in urban, rural and remote areas of Queensland may not speak SAE as their first language or their home discourse. Within the framework of this policy a partnership has developed between the Indigenous Education and Training Alliance (IETA) and the School of Education, James Cook University (JCU). Modules of professional development with university accreditation have been offered to in-service teachers across Far North Queensland. This paper reports on the development and success of the first of these modules, *How English works*.

How English works is the introductory module of a series of four professional development modules. The module attempts to meet teachers' needs for professional development through a focus on teachers understanding certain features of SAE grammar, such as simple and complex clause structures, and the relevance of these features for the development of English literacy with Indigenous students. It promotes the idea that SAE is best learnt in the context of rich community and wider community discourses and texts, and through regular classroom focus and practice. For teachers, its learning is also linked to current strategies for the development of English literacy. Furthermore, the presenters demonstrate that the use of SAE can be promoted through a communicative and collaborative classroom within a climate of trust and of supported participation. The module uses what is currently known about teaching SAE literacy to Indigenous students and shaped it into a two-day workshop.

The provision of professional development for teachers of Indigenous students raises many issues and challenges. It is disturbing that in the report *PD 2000 Australia* (McRae et al., 2001) the authors note that a disproportionate number of schools (18 of the 26) that claimed *not* to have a professional development program had enrolments of Indigenous students. This means that teachers of Indigenous students, including Indigenous community teachers, are less likely to be provided with professional development than their mainstream counterparts. The

report identifies the combination of "practical ideas" and "big ideas" which challenge teachers' thinking as what teachers typically want from professional development (McRae et al., 2001, p.136) and states that there is a general preference by teachers in the mainstream for workshop approaches which provide opportunities for interaction with colleagues. The report does not reflect some of the issues that teachers of Indigenous students and Indigenous community teachers are likely to consider important. It is the aim of this paper to address some of these issues, including the importance of having presenters experienced in working with Indigenous peoples whose style, work samples, ideas and discourses are accessible to teachers of Indigenous students and who consider Indigenous educational perspectives as integral to their approach.

Method

The authors of this paper acted as both presenters of the professional development module, and as participant researchers. Delivery of the module in face-to-face mode relied heavily on travel, resources and access to participants and so it is appropriate that the same small group of presenters who delivered the workshops also shared responsibility for the conduct of the evaluation. Participant research is often the basis for targeted projects within Indigenous contexts for these strategic and pragmatic reasons. This was recognised in the government report on Indigenous education *What works?* (IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team, 2000b).

A combination of field methods, including participant observations, interviews, work samples, photographs and written evaluation questionnaires was used to collect the data. Records were kept concerning the way each workshop was designed and delivered in each location, how many participants were involved and which schools they came from. Field notes of significant interactions between individual presenters and participants were also noted, as were the roles certain participants played in the conduct of the workshop. Presenters monitored participants' engagement with the activities and often used this information in the presentation of later tasks. Work samples were analysed to determine each participant's progress and level of understanding at different intervals. Each participant was also required to complete a written evaluation in response to a questionnaire at the conclusion of the workshop. After each session of the workshop, the presenters reflected and evaluated participant engagement, the general level of understanding and sophistication about the use of SAE grammar that was reached and the appropriateness of the level of discourse being used in the workshop by both participants and presenters.

This paper reports on seven workshops which were provided over a six month period for more than 200 participants. Typically participants were invited to attend the workshops after schools received information explaining the program of professional development brokered by IETA. In two cases, the school principal cleared the way for all teaching staff to attend. In some workshops the majority of participants were Indigenous and from remote communities. In others, there were Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff from a variety of rural and urban schools. Locations varied from urban (Cairns) and rural communities (Mt Isa) to remote locations in the Torres Strait (Badu) and Cape York (Kowanyama). Each of the 12-hour workshops was arranged differently in the various locations to suit the needs of participants. In general, the workshops spanned a Friday and Saturday, utilising some student-free days. In their evaluations, participants were asked about their interest in pursuing other modules in the series provided by IETA. Most responded positively. All of the participating teachers and schools have engaged in other professional development modules in the series brokered by IETA (Fostering English Language in Kimberly Schools (FELIKS) and Walking, Talking Texts) as a result of their positive experiences in *How English works.*

All three presenters have previously worked with Indigenous students, one in the Northern Territory, one in Western Australia, and the third in Queensland and all three have teaching, research and professional development responsibilities with JCU. All three have also been teachers and consultants to schools and education departments. Two are lecturers from the School of Education, JCU, and the third is the Professional Development and Training Manager from IETA. The presenters bring a breadth of experience to the module. They intentionally use narratives from their teaching in Indigenous schools and from their experiences as second language learners. They also appeal to the powerful emotional link between language and identity and suggest the sense of powerlessness, confusion and inability to act that can confront second language learners in cross-cultural situations.

The presenters' approach to the content of the workshops contributed to the research strategy. There was an emphasis on providing opportunities for practice and reflection, on moving from an understanding of simple to more complex grammatical constructions within the contexts of discourse genres and texts and on using knowledge of grammar as a focus for planning literacy activities within units of work. This approach was designed to support the participants to move towards a position where they were confident in using grammatical terms (such as noun phrases, verb phrases, past tense, conjunctions, phrases of context, reference) in their professional interactions. The approach allowed the presenters to gauge the gains participants were making in their understanding, confidence and ability to apply the professional development in SAE in planning literacy activities.

▓ Presentation of findings

Lack of understanding of SAE grammar by non-Indigenous teachers

Our fieldwork suggests that many Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers lack an understanding of the linguistic structures of English and that this hinders their work with Indigenous students. Recent graduates often know that genres, registers and discourses differ in their grammatical features but are unable to engage Indigenous students in language learning. They know discourse genres differ but they cannot make the differences explicit nor can they engage with issues surrounding second language acquisition and development. More experienced teachers typically think of grammar as punctuation or as out-of-context grammar lessons which focus on the elements of structure and the parsing of sentences. They know that a student's home discourse is different from theirs but they are unable to engage students about it or understand the social and personal issues surrounding language choice. Both groups are typically not informed about the way Australian languages, creoles and Englishes differ from SAE and what this can mean for the development of school-based literacy. Furthermore non-Indigenous teachers are often reluctant to engage Indigenous students or Indigenous teachers or assistants about questions relating to the social use of the two codes within communities.

Based on the analysis of their written evaluations, it is clear that the non-Indigenous teachers who participated in *How English works* saw the combination of "big picture" ideas and "practical" ideas they could use on Monday morning as the most useful, as has been suggested by McRae et al. (2001). They appreciated learning the metalanguage of SAE at the same time as appropriate pedagogy to teach it. One teacher described the course this way: "It was great to participate in a course that taught the metalanguage of English and how grammar can be taught in a context." The presenters' approach also resulted in the increased engagement of participants in learning about grammar: "I loved the learning environment you developed. I felt very safe in having a go and I know I have learnt more as a result." Some of these teachers also expressed an increased appreciation of how their current practices failed to take account of the significant difficulties Indigenous learners and Indigenous teachers face. For one participant: "(It) gave me a better understanding of difficulties for some Indigenous teachers expected to teach SAE." Another wrote: "It will change my whole approach to teaching, speaking to my students and how I behave in the classroom."

Lack of understanding of SAE grammar by Indigenous teachers

Many Indigenous teachers and teaching assistants report that they had to strive to understand the linguistic structures of SAE and had little support from their teachers when they were students. One example that stands out is the Indigenous teacher who offered to explain to the workshop participants the role of "that" in a complex sentence. She claimed: "'that' signals what comes after, it's, like – in the future." When "that" is used to introduce a complement clause after the use of the present tense such as "The teacher knows that the children will be tired after lunch", then the teacher's explanation of "that" as indicator of future time seems to fit. However, there are many instances where this explanation is not adequate, such as when the past tense is used: "The teacher knew that the children were tired after lunch." The teacher explained these other examples as being exceptions to the rule that she could not quite understand.

A second or third language is difficult to learn when teachers are unable to identify for students the patterns of grammar that occur within it. Students then must work through the patterns of grammar for themselves, devising their own explanations for any complexity. Sometimes this results in misconceptions about the relationship between structure and meaning. An Indigenous participant put it this way: "We need to know the know-how of what we write and say."

An analysis of the Indigenous teachers' written evaluations reveals that the most useful aspect was the approach of the presenters which allowed opportunities for participants to be actively and physically involved in a highly supported environment and to practise what they were learning. Sessions where they experimented with word order and with applying grammatical concepts in order to link sentences into paragraphs were highlighted. Participation led to the development of confidence so that the Indigenous teachers felt they were more able to be involved in the planning of classroom literacy activities. "Actually doing the activities" and "confidence building" were recurring positive responses from the Indigenous participants.

Reluctance to engage with grammar

Many teachers at the beginning of the workshops expressed a reluctance to engage with grammar and viewed grammatical terms as too specialised for use in the P-10 classroom. Teachers' lack of motivation and lack of confidence in engaging with grammar is due partly to their negative attitudes built up from past experiences. It is also due, however, to a lack of understanding of the role grammar plays in assisting learners to develop meaning in discourse. Where English-based creoles or dialects of English are spoken it is important to recognise that much of the vocabulary is derived from spoken English. However, the creole or dialect achieves much of its distinctiveness through the use of phonemic, grammatical and pragmatic structures derived from Australian Indigenous languages.

This distinction is often new for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, some of whom think that

Indigenous students speak English in a limited way "with lots of gaps". For example, they may say that the verb "to be" is missing or there is no "s" to indicate plurals. It goes unrecognised that the gaps are mainly predictable and relate to the way the dialect or creole is patterned on other languages. The presenters engaged participants in explaining the differences between SAE and the local English variety that was spoken. They also used published work, *Aboriginal English in the courts: A handbook* (Queensland Government, n.d.) and *Features of Torres Strait Creole* (Shnukal, n.d.) to explore these differences. The published material allowed participants to use a reference for working their way through the differences and for later planning sessions.

Discussion about the development of English-based creoles and Indigenous dialects of English led to a better understanding of the role of the two codes in Indigenous community life. It linked the teaching and learning of SAE with the bigger issues of identity and power and prompted an Indigenous participant to write:"Glenda showed me an understanding side of how my children and my people feel and because I can switch into both cultural and SAE context, I forget how my people must really feel." In the approach used in the module, the teaching of the grammar of SAE is embedded in a context of Indigenous empowerment and better access and control of interactions within Australian social institutions.

Developing routines of classroom interaction

One of the ways in which the presenters engaged participants in the active learning of grammatical patterns was to promote the use of classroom routines as a basis for practice. These interactions involve making the patterns of English grammar audible and visible to students at the same time as involving them in the construction of classroom activity. This is in recognition that the practice of form related to meaning is an integral part of second language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). For students whose home and community discourse is not SAE, the authors argue that it is essential practice that can only be provided within the classroom. If students are not actively participating in classroom routines of interaction in SAE, they may have nowhere else to practise it.

Several ways of building and negotiating a routine of interaction were demonstrated, including beginning the day with practice in sentence construction to students taking over the conduct of lessons involving group work and reporting back. To begin the day with a familiar routine to engage children, students can start with the same sentence each day, for example, "The big, black dog sat on the floor" constructed simply from the elements: "noun group + verb group + phrase of context". Grammatical patterns are practised by the routine of "teacher says" (models) and students respond as a chorus. Alternative words are substituted for different parts of speech so that the students can build vocabulary while maintaining the sentence pattern. For example, students or teachers can substitute alternative adjectives for "big" such as "large", "angry", "hungry", "mangy" through to sophisticated terms such as "ravenous" or "confused" or "slobbering". Students can substitute alternative phrases of context for "on the floor" such as "beside the fire", "underneath the car", to the more complex such as "hidden in the rear passenger foot-well under a discarded blanket". Students can discuss alternative past tense verbs for "sat", such as, "slept", "ate", "watched", "whimpered"; and discuss how a preposition such as "on" may change when the verb changes ("watched *from* the floor" or "barked *through* the fence"). The "dog" can become a "bird", a "dingo" or a "shark". Students' understanding can be supported by the use of quick sketches on the board as the dog's (bird's, dingo's, shark's) expression, colour or actions change.

Other sentence routines, such as, "I walked (ran, raced, rode my bike) to the shop and I bought some bananas (bread, yoghurt, ice-cream)", lend themselves to role play and dramatisation as a further motivation to practice. Teachers can begin by providing their own substitutions to clarify the patterns and can then accept students' suggestions as the students build confidence and ability in this routine.

Typically, teachers move students from simple constructions to increasingly more sophisticated ones. Different sentences replace familiar ones, with a frequency based on students' level of skill. Initially sentences should be similar to a known pattern, but then show increasing variation. Variation can include changing the preposition as part of a phrase of context or asking for an adjective of number (five) or an adjective of colour (red), or asking for an auxiliary verb phrase to be used, for example, "was standing" or "had sat".

An important feature of this strategy is to use the predictability of the "routine" (Peregoy & Boyle, 1993, p. 49) to build classroom interactions. Teachers always point to each word, for example, "the huge, black dog ... the angry, black dog ... the friendly, black dog ..." as they model the sentence, then point again while students repeat. Starting with the same sentence each day provides a secure environment for students to speak out, contributes to developing reading fluency and developing a sense of emphasis and intonation based on the teachers' modelling. This type of activity also supports students to develop skills in "linking sounds between words" (Gibbons, 1991, p. 93). With time, students should take over the teacher's role in modelling the text, while another student gestures for taking turns in speaking (the alternation between teacher and students). The teacher can retain the role of writing on the board for early writers and be replaced by more confident writers later.

For many teachers attending the workshops, this activity made explicit the high number of grammatical considerations that can be captured in a quick, highly focused and routine activity that promotes oral language

development and supports development in both reading and writing. In our experience a high level of student participation and enthusiasm can be anticipated. The take-up of this strategy was very high and it featured in the written evaluations. Most reference was to the way teachers can prepare Indigenous students to be active participants in their own learning. The next day, when we returned to some of the schools, we could hear the children engaging in the routines we had presented to the teachers and negotiating new sentences with them.

Harder to accept for some non-Indigenous teachers was the idea that students could be supported to take over the classroom routines associated with the management of groups. Presenters modelled the way gestures and routine instructions could be used by students to signal a change in activities and to allow for group sharing and discussion. Classroom routines provide many opportunities for students to practise SAE for a variety of purposes. Having students take them over is vital in the promotion of communicative competence in SAE and practice in its pragmatic functions (how to run meetings, how to organise groups, how to give instructions, how to summarise where there are different opinions, etc). None of the Indigenous teachers thought this was unachievable. In fact they were excited by the ideas and had not seen this kind of strategy demonstrated before. Presenters always remained close to the participant responsible for giving instructions or feedback to offer prompts and encouragement where necessary. They also often chose a participant who had been especially quiet and reticent during activities to take over the class. The participants were encouraged to begin with simply giving a signal for a change of activity, moved on to using language constructions suggested by the teacher and finally to deciding on and using their own expressions to give instructions or feedback.

Making grammar visual and active

One of the challenges in teaching grammar is providing highly supported activities which encourage student participation. One of the activities in this workshop is to have five participants face the class and each hold up a card which indicates an element of a sentence."Number", "adjective","noun","verb"and"phrase of context"are used initially. Participants then stand in the order they decide these elements should take and build sentences by each saying a word or words appropriate to their element. For example, the participants in one of the workshops said "15", "shiny", "fish", "swam", "into the net." In this way, participants use their knowledge of English patterns to make adjustments to the words they add to the sentence, based on what has been said before.

In the above example, the number "15" requires the noun to be plural, and the verb "swam" suggests a preposition of location, such as "into". Teachers can increase the complexity of the activity by adding new participants who have more elements to add to the

sentence. An "article" ("the, a, these"), "another adjective" (next to the existing adjective, or next to the noun in the phrase of context), an "adverb" (in front of or after the verb) are examples. Auxiliary verbs ("was verb" and "has verb") which cause participants to use patterns such as "were going", and "has jumped" can also be added.

This activity demonstrates in a highly visual and active way how English sentences are patterned from a simple base of word order and how the elements are structurally related. Since they are related, they can force change. The activity requires teachers to make explicit their implicit knowledge about grammatical constructions. Many of the participants said it was the first time that they had engaged in an activity where they had to explain the patterns of SAE. For example, some had to explain to others how a verb must be in agreement with its subject ("a single fish *swims* but many fish *swim*"). Others had to explain how a choice of word can be affected by what precedes it (if the article is "a" then you must use the words "single" or "lone" for the number). Direct participation in the activity enabled teachers to experience its potential for the development of English language skills. Participation also emphasised that unconditional support of teachers, such as moving along the student line to provide words if students were hesitant and providing gentle correction for students' attempts, was essential. Additional activity refinements to further support students were made, for example, providing expanding lists of words on the back of the cards for students to use (on the back of the preposition card, list words as students use them, such as "under","over", "through","before"). Participants also suggested colour coding noun groups, verb groups and phrases of context for learning support students who need even more assistance.

The activity is designed to build participants' confidence in using the metalanguage of grammar to work with simple discourse and texts. The presenters use the book *Tucker's mob* (Mattingley, 1992) as a resource. Participants are asked to use simple sentences to describe what is happening in the classroom pictured in the book ("Two girls are watching the turtle in the water tank", "The teacher is reading to some children on the mat"). The discourse that is established is related to the early genres of labelling, comment, description and report and forms an essential link in the development of students' understanding of the elements of English sentences, the Who? What? Where?

In taking these ideas further, the text *Flozzie the mossie* (Rotary Club of Cairns, Sunrise, 1996, p. 12) was used as a resource for making explicit ways to link sentences with reference to time. Teachers wrote a sentence describing one of the four stages in the development of a mosquito. Their first two sentences ("Eggs are laid in water" and "Wrigglers hatched after two days") were combined into one ("Eggs are laid in

water and two days later, wrigglers hatch".This activity requires manipulation of tense (use of either past or present tense for both verbs) and of pronouns for reference ("the wrigglers" become "they") in later sentences when the final stages of the life cycle are worked into a paragraph.

Conjunctions such as "afterwards", "and then", "before","at the same time","prior to this" are signalled with the use of a coloured card. When the joining of sentences is modelled in front of the class by students and teachers so that students see and hear the changes that occur as a result of grammatical choice, complex sentences become accessible to learners of a second language or dialect. In response teachers felt energised to support their students to move from simple to more complex discourse in SAE, something they generally find difficult.

Another activity for working with texts was adapted from the work of Brian Gray (Rose et al., 1999). In this activity phrases of context become the focus. Presenters demonstrate how moving the phrase of context to the beginning of a sentence and extending it builds atmosphere for writing narrative. This simple manipulation is understood as one of the first signs that students can manipulate SAE for their own effects and is highly valued by teachers of English. Similarly texts are used to show how established writers often put the most important information at the end of the sentence in English. For Indigenous participants, in particular, this was new and highly significant information."I never knew how to teach a sentence or a paragraph! I now understand the components and structure involved which is fantastic."

Teaching the grammar of genre in a culturally relevant context

Helping children create their own Big Books is widely accepted as an effective strategy for learning and of particular importance in Indigenous contexts for motivating students to read. Through revisiting this familiar strategy with a focus on developing confidence in using SAE, teachers apply and further confirm their understanding of SAE in a literacy context within the workshop.

In this session participants critically examine a Big Book written by the presenters to support them in identifying those grammatical constructions which are likely to make the text difficult for Indigenous speakers of Australian languages, English-based creoles and dialects of English.The session is built around the topic of Irukanji (a stinging jellyfish) endemic to tropical waters and a word of local origin in Cairns. This topic was chosen because it was supported by a variety of local, informational texts (a *Torres Strait News* article about health risks and *Cairns Post* articles about a lifesaver-led rescue). It also fulfils the requirement for "increased cultural relevance" of curricula "to students'

lives, interests, contexts and culture" which is promoted in the report *What has worked (and will again)* (IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team, 2000a). Participants are asked to identify confusing uses of grammar as they read the text. For example, the scientific use of the singular classification name for a species "Irukanji is the name ..."; the use of "Irukanji" as a plural on the next page "Irukanji <u>are</u> found along the coast". Another example is the use of the superlatives in "the biggest Irukanji are only 2cm long" and the use of the modal verb "can" in scientific writing,"Irukanji can sting. Irukanji can live in the ocean. Irukanji can be up to 2cm long". Also identified is the use of the imperative in instructions,"Swim in safe waters. Avoid swimming from December to May. Wear stinger-resistant clothes"; and finally, maintenance of a linguistic pattern in the use of dot points,"Scientists are

- inventing how to make nets with smaller holes,
- discovering how to predict Irukanji migration,
- researching how some turtles seem unaffected by jellyfish stings".

Participants are also shown an electronic version of the Big Book, using information and images from the University of Melbourne's Venomous Creatures web site (University of Melbourne, n.d.). This activity emphasises the value of students writing and shaping a collaborative, informational text.The workshop also demonstrated the technique of taking a digital photo of a participant simulating nausea and vomiting, and inserting this into the presentation, amid great laughter! Including images, such as students' drawings, charts and role plays (when dressed as doctor and patient and pouring vinegar onto the patient's skin), was encouraged. In one region, the students had recently completed work on the island's economic mainstay of breeding horses and their Indigenous teacher could immediately see the potential of using the digital camera and Power Point software to create electronic Big Books to further support students' literacy development.

The final session of the workshop gives participants the opportunity to work collaboratively as they apply their understanding of grammar to develop curriculum. The topic of Irukanji is maintained, as it integrates a wide range of concepts appropriate for primary students to understand, including the science of jellyfish and of stings, the social effects of dangerous marine animals, personal safety and health education. It also provides opportunities for students to develop their skills of reading for information and writing in specific genres.

Participants form small groups and use newspaper articles related to Irukanji as a resource for planning a writing task. They choose one of the following: a recount of a boy's story of being stung; a procedure for how to treat a sting; an exposition to call for more

government support for research or an explanation of how nematocysts (stinging cells) are triggered. Teachers are asked to link their plans for writing a particular genre with a Reading Strategy taken from the First Steps reading resource (Western Australian Department of Education, 1997, pp. 59-88). They are asked to choose a strategy they could employ to support students to engage with the reading of the newspaper texts in order to write one of the genres above. For example, if the aim is to support students to write a recount, the use of Story Maps or Flow Charts is productive. An exposition is supported by the use of the Three-level Guide and Notemaking Strategies.

Participants reported that linking reading strategies to specific writing genres was a novel and powerful planning activity. They identified the grammatical considerations of the selected genre (Derewianka, 1990). For example, they noted how recounts are based on the past tense and use the first person pronoun; how both recounts and procedures often use conjunctions of time or location and procedures use the imperative form of the verb; how expositions may have a high proportion of modality, "Tourists shouldn't go swimming" or "Councils should not close beaches" and how they use signal words to show causal links between ideas, "if we do not … then, as a result".

Participants are then asked to consider additional features of grammar which might impact on the success of Indigenous students in the writing of these genres, for example, choice of preposition, sentence inversion for questions, signalling past tense, using auxiliaries to express a continuous event. Participants also write a model of the expected finished text, in order to recognise the grammatical considerations of the genre, using simple constructions "It is dangerous to swim with stingers", "The council has put up signs to warn tourists", or at a sophisticated level, "The recent increase in beach closures in Cairns has caused local businesses to lose most of their off-season income".

Following is an example of the type of curriculum plan participants produced in response to the activity. It demonstrates the integration of grammatical concerns with current strategies and practice in a way that is explicit and therefore can be monitored.

Exposition genre:

Use the newspaper article to develop a reasoned argument with evidence of the need for local council to act on the threat of Irukanji to local businesses. This could be either a written argument or presented as a role play of a local business action meeting.

First Steps framework:

Students use notetaking to extract information using headings of "the problem", "actions of council", "effect on tourists", "effect on business".

Grammatical considerations:

- Signal words for cause and effect: "since", "therefore", "because".
- Pronouns: start with "I" statements ("I think the government should …") and edit to delete to reduce use of first person pronouns ("The government should …").
- Pronouns for reference: track terms and reference "tourists" and "they".
- Plural for verb to be: "jellyfish are", "people are", "shop keepers are".
- Auxiliary verbs: "has threatened local businesses"; "has put up signs".
- Adjectives and adverbs: "a complete lack of action", "it was totally destroyed".

Some participants were not familiar with the First Steps strategies but were able to find this important resource on bookshelves in all schools, even the most remote. Others found the linking of the strategies to thinking about the teaching of SAE grammar the most valuable aspect of the workshop. For several experienced teachers the workshop links were very clear and they found them refreshing. As one participant put it:

The most useful thing was reviewing the grammar and highlighting exactly how this is so confusing to the students. Building on this with analysing text (we had never done this before) to looking specifically at how to incorporate First Steps processes in developing written work with students. We found this all very enlightening and thought provoking as to what we do in the classroom.

Conclusion

The Partners for Success policy in Queensland has stimulated the provision of professional development for teachers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, working with Indigenous students. The workshop module *How English works* meets the needs of teachers to develop their knowledge and confidence for teaching English literacy by promoting the use of a metalanguage for SAE and an awareness of the features of SAE that prove most alien to Indigenous second language or dialect learners. The workshop also meets teachers' needs by embedding any new understanding in practice-oriented activities that emphasise the value of negotiated routine linked to active and visual strategies to develop more sophisticated uses of SAE.

Finally, the workshops meet the teachers' needs by engaging them in co-operative planning activities, incorporating current, often familiar teaching strategies which can lead to the monitoring of outcomes. Such an approach depends largely on the experiences and abilities of the presenters to establish an environment in

which participants feel safe to try and to make mistakes and where the presenters create a positive, successful atmosphere. The importance of the style of presentation is summarised by the following Indigenous participant in her written evaluation:

> I felt that this workshop was fantastic in how it was presented which made it easier for me to understand and link to the classroom and also improve "personally" my own difficulties with SAE and teaching it. This was very useful to me on a personal and professional level. Thank you very much. I hope to be in more of these workshops as I've always felt if I master SAE, then empowerment is given to my own people and this helps the transition from community to mainstream.

Professional development can change the way many participants view their students and their capabilities. One very experienced participant sent the following comment to the presenters via email the day after the workshop she attended:

> To have a professional team of presenters with the background knowledge and the practitioner credibility making explicit the practices and modelling the strategies, from the inclusive and supportive to the whiteboard marking.
>
> Reminded me of the many positives of my practice, helped me revise and will help me clarify ways that I might use to tackle some of this year's challenges. I will look further into First Steps, and I am confident that I will be able to improve my approach to assisting students with English grammar, unpacking texts, and creating own texts.
>
> In fact, I thank you all for plumping up my passion for what I do!

Often the effect of professional development suffers from a lack of follow up and take-up. This is not the case with *How English works* since it is an introductory unit in a series of four – all reinforcing the differences between SAE and Australian languages, creoles and Englishes and ways of developing literacy through a focus on rich language experiences and an attention to form and meaning. Indigenous participants who recently undertook the fourth unit as a unit of formal study with the School of Education, James Cook University, were impressive in their ability to report and reflect on their own literacy practices and the school's literacy program and to discuss how new strategies might be incorporated into existing practices and the value of doing so. Some of these participants have been supported by IETA to become presenters of professional development themselves. In the next mapping of professional development programs in schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students, the results in Far North Queensland should reflect participation in the joint project.

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