DIGGING DEEPER
Insights into the Performance of Aboriginal Students

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Monitoring Standards in Education

- Established in 1990
- Assessed all learning areas at least once
- A wealth of data on the performance of students in Western Australia
- Subgroup performance analysed
The Western Australian Context

Primary: 10404 Aboriginal students
/about 1400 in each year level - 7% of population/

Secondary: 4955 Aboriginal students
/about 1400 in yr 8, less than 300 in yr 12 - about 6% of population/

Differentially distributed across the State
/smaller districts have higher percentages of Aboriginal students/
Assumptions About Inclusivity

Poorer performance by Aboriginal students is an artefact of a lack of engagement and lack of connection, rather than a true measure of ability.
PRODUCING INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT MATERIAL

- Critiquing of materials prior to panelling and trialling
- Representation by Aboriginal Education Branch at all panels
- Trialling materials with students from Aboriginal backgrounds
- Include materials that provide positive representations of Aboriginal people and their experiences
Assumptions About Inclusive Assessment Practice

- Unbiased and reflect a student's actual knowledge
- Respect and accommodate diverse background experiences
- Provide cultural affirmations

'culturally appropriate' versus 'within students' experience'
Some examples ....

• Reduce Your Use

• Francis Rings

• Gifts

• Archie Roach
And some that were hotly debated......

Frog Prince

Piano

Accidentally..
What the Data show….

- Lower participation rates than expected in both sample and population testing programs
- Significantly lower performance in all learning areas
- Higher attrition rates of those Aboriginal students who commence the assessments
- Texts or contexts that reflect more closely on Aboriginal experience hold them in the test longer
What the Data show...cont

- Inspection of differential item functioning (DIF) doesn’t necessarily confirm assumptions about what is ‘inclusive’ or ‘exclusive’

- No observable pattern of better performance on texts that representations of Aboriginal experience
Patterns in Genre

Very inconclusive in written texts

Viewed texts
Animated texts
Cartoons
Interprets a character's feelings in poem - In the end, how does the poet feel about what happened?

*Accidentally*

ONCE — I didn’t mean to, but that was that —
I yawned in the sunshine and swallowed a gnat.

I’d rather eat mushrooms and bullfrogs’ legs,
I’d rather have pepper all over my eggs
than open my mouth on a sleepy day
and close on a gnat going down that way.

It tasted sort of salty,
It didn’t hurt a bit.
I accidentally ate a gnat and that was it!

MAXINE W. KUMIN
Recognises foreshadowing in a narrative: What words in the description of the rat suggest that it could be alive?

Mum looked at the word zough and frowned. ‘Bill can’t spell for nuts,’ she said. ‘I think he meant tough or maybe rough.’

‘That doesn’t make sense,’ I said.

‘Bill never makes sense,’ said Mum. ‘Fancy giving you a dead rat for your birthday.’

The rat stood there stiff and still inside a little glass dome. Its mouth was open in a sort of snarl.

‘It’s cute,’ I said. ‘Uncle Bill always gives me great presents.’

Mum gave a snort. ‘Bill’s up in Darwin getting into all sorts of foolishness. He knows we’re dead broke. And what does he give you? Shoes? Books? A new school uniform? Something useful? Not on your Nelly. He gives you a stuffed rat, for heaven’s sake.’

‘I like him,’ I said.

‘I like him too,’ said Mum, ‘But I’m glad he’s in Darwin and we’re down here in Melbourne. Fancy giving you a dead rat. He probably got it for nothing.’

I could understand why Mum wanted me to have clothes for my birthday. Life was tough for her. She had been working hard. Too hard. She needed a holiday and I was trying to arrange it. All I had to do was get three thousand dollars for the two of us to go to Surfers Paradise. I had been saving for two weeks and already had one dollar fifty. Only two thousand, nine hundred and ninety-eight dollars fifty to go.
The Mysterious Thylacine
A very special corpse

Scientists are unsure whether there are any thylacines left in Australia.

In October 1966, David and Jacoba Lowry spent many hours exploring caves in the mallee country west of Eucla in Western Australia. One morning, they came across a deep, narrow hole going straight down into the earth. With great care, they climbed to the bottom and discovered a large cave, its floor littered with the remains of countless animals and birds.

They moved carefully between small stalagmites, using their torches to explore the rest of the cave. At the very back, covered by a fine layer of dust and salt, was the dried-out body of a large animal. Its coat was grey-brown; broad, dark stripes ran across its back and its pointed head, eyes and whiskers looked like a dog’s. They had found a rare Tasmanian tiger or thylacine.

The Lowrys carried ‘Old Hairy’, as they named him, back to Perth. They hoped the tiger had just died and that their discovery might prove the animals still existed. But tests showed the body was about 4600 years old. It had been amazingly preserved by salt and the cool, even temperature of the cave.

Aboriginal rock painting of a thylacine, Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory.

Infers meaning from a caption: The text suggests that thylacines are probably...
Infers from several pieces of information: The community is made up of.....
Australia’s Indigenous Students in PISA 2000: Results from an International Study
Lisa De Bortoli
John Cresswell

Some findings
The Learning Environment

Assumption that student’s achievement affected by attitudes and beliefs about school.

- classroom climate
- sense of belonging
- teacher support
- teacher-student relationship
Sense of Belonging at School

- Aboriginal students more positive sense of belonging in their school
Teacher-Student Support

- Aboriginal students higher than OECD average

- Slightly lower than the mean for the non-Aboriginal students
Teacher / Student Relations

- lower level of agreement than non-Aboriginal students (mean of 0.08 and 0.17 respectively)

- correlations with achievement on teacher-student relations scale very low. (reading literacy - $r = 0.09$)