Introduction

Indigenous (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) culture within Australia holds a unique and important position. It is one of the most ancient, ongoing cultures in existence. The values and beliefs embedded in this culture are intricately interwoven into the Australian landscape. All students have diverse needs with respect to assessment practices. Given the unique culture of Indigenous Australians and the on-going effects of oppression and injustice, special attention is needed to provide learning and assessment practices that best enable Indigenous learners to achieve their aspirations. Special recognition of the educational needs of Indigenous people have been articulated both at the national and state levels.

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) has identified a continuing need for access to and participation in vocational education and training (VET) by Indigenous people in its national strategy for 2004 - 2010, *Shaping Our Future*. This strategy identified achievements over the past decade and clearly expressed ‘what still needs to be done...’ over the next six years in the VET system. Although the participation and access for Indigenous learners has improved since 1992, outcomes for this group are still well below those of other graduates. The Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky MP, launched *Wurreker* (message carrier) in July 2000. This state government initiative established a partnership with the Koorie community for the planning and delivery of Koorie TAFE training. This initiative highlighted the need to involve Koorie people in decision-making related to vocational education and training.

Assessment practices in vocational education and training involve processes steeped in cultural assumptions. As assessors, we should not assume that the assessment process is devoid of ‘culture’ when, in fact, there are clear cultural assumptions underpinning the entire process. [1][The very act of requiring ‘evidence’ as proof (of competence) stems as far back as ancient Greek culture and the trial of Socrates.]

It is with this view in mind that these guidelines have been developed, so that the assessment of our Indigenous students is appropriate and valid.

To achieve this, programs within the TAFE Portfolio of the University should consider the following guidelines when assessing Indigenous students:
Use Appropriately Qualified Indigenous Assessors Whenever Possible and Practicable

Where Indigenous assessors are not available, consider selecting assessors who:

- demonstrate an understanding of the history of Indigenous people, and how cultural history can impact on the assessment process
- recognise how the backgrounds of individual students and the communities in which they live impact on the assessment process
- are prepared to allow time to develop a relationship of mutual respect with students as individuals. (All the evidence suggests that Indigenous students are unlikely to perform at their best if this relationship has not been established, or if they perceive that the assessor is a person ‘in authority’.)
- demonstrate empathy for students from diverse backgrounds.

Use Assessors Who Understand and Can Apply the Concept of Reasonable Adjustment

Using alternative methods and practices simply demonstrates flexibility in the assessment process, and recognises the principles of equity. At no time does ‘reasonable adjustment’ imply or cause a diminishing of the integrity or standard of the competency.

Many Indigenous students may feel apprehensive and confronted by the ‘formal’ assessment process, so wherever possible, assessment should be on-going, and recorded and discussed as part of the regular work/study day.


Some of the ways that reasonable adjustments may be made are by:

**Negotiating Assessment Arrangements with Individual Students or Groups of Students**

- Ensure negotiations take place in a comfortable environment for the candidate
- If conducting a formal assessment ‘event’, identify other events or commitments that may influence its timing (e.g., funerals)
- Put alternative arrangements into place if there are unexpected delays for the assessment event
- Check assessment events (timing, etc) just prior to the agreed time

**Providing Information to the Candidates in Ways That Respect Communication Styles, Preferences and Levels of Confidence**

- Use plain English and avoid jargon
- Ensure information is understood
- If relevant, read printed information to the candidate and ensure understanding
- Where appropriate, use graphics to communicate and support text
- If requested and appropriate, offer to record oral responses to questions
- Encourage candidates to ask questions
- Explain technical language and any unfamiliar concepts
• Allow sufficient time for the assessment process to proceed at the pace required by candidates

**Providing Feedback Sensitively and in Ways That Maintain the Confidence of the Candidate**

• Give feedback in a familiar and comfortable setting
• Allow plenty of time so that the session is not rushed
• Ensure candidate is confident to ask questions (a support person of her/his choice might attend)
• Where a candidate is not yet competent:
  • Begin by focusing on positives (what has been achieved?)
  • Identify strategies for achieving competence in the future
  • Use feedback as a learning opportunity
• Ensure the candidate understands her/his right to challenge the assessment outcome and knows the process for this
• Ensure the candidate understands the provisions for reassessment.

Please refer to the University Statement on Reconciliation:

http://www.ballarat.edu.au

**Please Note**

These guidelines were compiled as a part of a 2003 ANTA Reframing the Future project.

They underwent wide consultation [including the University Aboriginal Education Centre and the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG)] and were informed by research beyond the project parameters.