Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Guide to developing Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students –
A professional learning resource

January 2011

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Background, context and purpose

The Closing the Gap (CTG) — Expanding Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Programs for Indigenous Students Australian Government 2008 budget measure provided funding to develop professional development support to assist teachers to prepare and maintain Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in every year of schooling up to Year 10.

The Australian Government arranged research into good practice in the use of ILPs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to develop a package of professional development resources based on their findings. The research findings indicated that that the term 'Personalised Learning' was more appropriate than the term 'Individual Learning' which can imply learning in isolation to others.

This document is to assist teachers and schools to deliver effective personalised learning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Personalised learning focuses on working with each student, in partnership with student's parents or carers, to develop a plan that reflects the student's goal and current capabilities and includes specific learning targets.

The following 'Guide to developing Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students – A Professional Learning Resource' outlines and identifies emerging good practice principles and key factors for success, and will shortly be distributed to schools in hard copy and is available on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website.

- The guide reflects emerging good practice in using Personalised Learning Plans with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and includes an outline ofkey values that underpin personalised learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;

- principles for implementation;

- factors that contribute to success;

- personalised learning approaches being used by schools;

- strategies for engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and strengthening the relationship with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and parents; and

- teaching strategies that have been found to be useful for personalising learning.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan commits all schools to involve the families of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students, teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island education workers in developing personalised learning strategies for these students from first year of schooling to year 10. Each state/territory will be reporting against this annually.

The Australian Government acknowledges that some education providers in both the Government and non-Government education sectors are already using 'Personalised Learning Plans'. This resource aims to add to the resource base available to teachers to establish Personalised Learning Plans for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and in doing so assist education providers with the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan.

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What is personalised learning?

Personalised learning recognises the individual strengths, needs and goals of students and that schools respond to these differences and learning by tailoring to meet each student's needs.

Personalised learning is based on the expectation that all students can learn at the same level, provided the appropriate conditions are created. It involves a commitment to identify each student's learning needs, then designing and applying the curriculum, guidelines and assessment so all students can achieve high standards. These personalised approaches to teaching and learning to address identified gaps may include individual, small group or whole class instruction. It is the core work of teachers.

Discovering and nurturing individual talents, as well as identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge and skills, is crucial to personalised learning. It requires sound, precise information on student achievement, targeted attention to specific needs, and regular monitoring and reviewing student progress to ensure high expectations and successful outcomes for all students.

Some teachers and school systems across Australia use 'individual learning plans', considering them to be the same as personalised learning plans. This guide focuses on 'personalised learning' and not 'individual learning', which can involve learning in isolation from others. In many education systems, individual learning plans are developed specifically for students with disabilities or identified learning difficulties.

Personalised learning assists the development of all students, building on their personal strengths and identifying areas of learning where students can be extended or accelerated.

While factors that affect student learning are also identified, the belief is that, given the right teaching and learning conditions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can achieve the same standards expected of all students.

What are Personalised Learning Plans?

Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) are an active process; not a static product. They are usually developed by teachers, mostly in consultation with students and parents, to identify, organise and apply personalised approaches to learning.

To develop PLPs, teachers start with assessment and diagnosis of a student's learning. Teachers gather other data about the student, including patterns of behaviour and attendance; attitude to school (do they like it or not); social skills; family background; and cultural understandings. This is all collected and further discussed during a meeting with the student, their parents/family and other support people.

In developing the PLP, specific learning goals are identified and clear strategies put in place to support students to meet the agreed goals. The plan may also consider and deal with issues in the student's background and school context that are affecting their learning. This may lead to other goals focused on personal growth, social skills and cultural achievements. There is a section on goal setting in the electronic material.

The central focus of the PLP process is:

- identifying what students already know, what they need to do to reach or exceed mainstream standards, and how best they can do it

- setting clear targets against key learning, and if appropriate, behaviour and attendance outcomes

- developing and applying curriculum appropriate but personally targeted teaching and learning strategies to communicate knowledge and key skills and deal with different paces of learning

- monitoring, reviewing and revising each student's learning goals and procedures to achieve them

- working to undo barriers to learning, whatever their causes, including fostering the best possible conditions for learning with the help of parents, families, support staff and community agencies.

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Teachers use personalised approaches to learning that could involve a variety of teaching strategies including whole class, small group and individual or one-on-one tuition.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should be offered challenging and demanding learning linked to the results of mainstream curriculum outcomes. However, some may need different educational approaches, varying levels of teacher support and extra time to achieve unbiased results. That is the reason for the personalised learning plan.

Key values underlying personalised learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Where personalised learning methods have been applied for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using PLPs, the following key values have emerged.

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can perform at levels commensurate with the general population[1].

2. Respecting and valuing:
   - cultural differences
   - each student's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge
   - each student's responsibilities and obligations within their community
   - each student's sense of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity underlines PLPs and personalised approaches to learning.

3. PLP learning goals are targeted against key mainstream learning outcomes.

4. PLP processes include family involvement and respects parents and caregivers as the first educators of the students.

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[1] There is a commitment to excellence and high standards through personalised learning. There is also a strong rejection of 'deficit theories' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational achievement.

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Implementation principles

Both research and work to date in Australia revealed several key principles that support the development and implementation of PLPs. These include the following.

- The *process* of developing and applying the PLP is more important than a written product.

- Where age-appropriate, students play an active role in the development of PLPs and their voice is clearly represented in the plans.

- Learning goals are personally important and useful for the students. They are linked to students' interests and objectives.

- PLPs are easily understood by students, parents and family members.

- Teaching and learning strategies are specifically identified to achieve each targeted outcome.

- Teaching strategies and resources for personalised learning are culturally and linguistically inclusive.

- Student's progress towards their learning goals is assessed and reviewed regularly.

- Data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' learning growth are collected at the individual, class and school group level.

- Information about the student's progress towards their learning goals is made available to students and parents and, where appropriate, to the wider school community.

- The local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is involved in the development and implementation of personalised approaches 2.1

- Professional learning support is provided for teachers so they are confident in initiating dialogue with students and engaging them in the process.

- Identified time is provided for teachers to engage with students so PLPs are not simply 'a timetable of subjects'.

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2   Where there is no single or recognisable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the local area, it is appropriate and necessary to explore and assess, with parents and student, the cultural links and roots that are important to the student's family life.

Developing and implementing PLPs at whole-school level

The following section provides practical advice on how to develop and implement PLPs at the whole-school level. It has been gathered from school leaders and teachers who have participated in the development of this guide.

There is no one best-way to develop PLPs in a school, but the approach outlined below contains details from case study schools that worked for them.

Advice is designed from a **whole-school perspective** seen as the most effective way of moving to personalised learning. If teachers are 'going it alone' they may need to modify some details, but they will still be relevant.

Having supportive school leadership, an implementation and coordination (management) team, and teachers who are committed to Closing the Gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is important.

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Initiation (school leadership team)

1. Establish what system or sector support is available for the development, implementation and review of PLPs.

2. Establish with staff the reason for using PLPs. Ensure alignment with:

   a. key principles and values for personalised learning

   b. school strategic plan

   c. sector and school priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

3. Provide a clear base for using personalised learning and PLPs. Emphasise the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) commitment to Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

4. Consult with the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community or communities about the PLP.

5. Assess the development and implementation of personalised learning as a project to be managed (for example, establish a trial, starting implementation in certain Year levels or faculty areas).

Development (PLP project management team)

6. Develop a project plan that includes timelines, roles, resources and key tasks, and identifies stakeholders inside and outside the school (such as Indigenous Education Workers, the school's literacy and/or numeracy coordinator, representatives of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community and parents or caregivers).

7. Examine personalised learning in practice in other schools to help development of your school approaches. This can include:

   a. going to schools that have already implemented PLPs.

   b. exploring PLP implemtation strategies used in other schools. As a starting point, you might like to make contact with similar schools or those of specific interest to you.

   c. gathering PLP templates. These may be available from other schools or be provided by specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education programs and guidelines available in your education system.

8. Gather resources for teachers to develop and implement PLPs, such as:

   a. diagnostic tests

   b. processes for and examples of developing specific learning goals

   c. specific teaching and learning strategies, especially for literacy and numeracy. For example, you might access instructional strategies and programs such as First Steps, Accelerated Literacy and Count Me In Too.

9. Organise school structures and allocate resources and time for the development and implementation of the PLPs. This would include:

   a. identifying leadership, coordination and support roles

   b. working with teachers to establish their role

   c. clarifying and establishing timetable requirements

   d. clarifying the PLP process and add to current school assessment and reporting processes. Don't duplicate, but substitute wherever possible to keep workload manageable

   e. aligning PLPs with other operations and programs, including student services, special needs support and accelerated learning or extension programs

   f. establishing culturally appropriate procedures for communicating with parents and students.

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10. Provide opportunities for teacher professional development with sessions on the following topics:

    a. cultural awareness

    b. implementing diagnostic tools, and the analysis, recording and reporting of data

    c. setting specific learning and other appropriate enabling goals

    d. how to run a PLP meeting with students, parents and other support people

    e. targeted teaching and learning practices

    f. managing personalised instruction in classrooms.

11. Establish data to assist PLPs, including:

    a. templates and tracking sheets

    b. processes for recording information at the individual and class level.

12. Inform teachers, students and parents about arrangements and procedures.

Implementation (teachers)

13. Collect information on each individual student, including:

    a. progress against state/territory learning outcomes, standards or benchmarks in all curriculum areas

    b. progress on system-wide assessments, including NAPLAN

    c. a diagnostic analysis of numeracy and literacy skills

    d. an analysis of attendance and behaviour patterns.

14. Identify SMART learning goals that will address gaps in student learning and improve student learning. (See Appendix E for an explanation of SMART goals.)

15. Prepare possible strategies parents, students and teachers can use to address learning goals. Where possible and appropriate, support others to prepare for the meeting.

16. Organise and run the first round of meetings. Assist parents and family members, students, support staff, and any other appropriate people attending the meetings.

17. Conduct the PLP meeting for each student. Focus on:

    a. breaking the ice and building relationships

    b. reviewing the student's progress to date, emphasising the positive nature on which future learning can be built

    c. emphasising that you expect the student to learn and demonstrate their capacity by highlighting some complex things they have already learnt. These might be cultural relationships, language, or other aspects of the student's life that they have learnt to negotiate or carry out with some skill

    d. establishing targeted mainstream learning goals with the student and parent, emphasising that these are no more complex than things already learnt by the student

    e. identifying strategies that each person can use to achieve the goals

    f. recording outcomes on the plan.

18. Where necessary, find other suitable teaching and learning strategies to best deal with the student's needs and achieve the agreed learning goals in the school or classroom.

19. Decide which direct teaching and learning strategies are most suitable to deal with the student's agreed learning goals.

20. Arrange any additional support that may be needed.

21. Add the targeted teaching and learning strategies to class practice.

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Monitoring and review (teachers and PLP project management team)

22. Continue to monitor student progress towards specific learning goals using informal observations and formative assessments to update strategies. Set new learning goals if required.

23. Administer the second phase of student assessment to establish student achievement against the learning goals. Gather information about success of other enabling goals.

24. Hold the second PLP meeting. These meetings are frequently held with ongoing assessment and reporting periods to avoid duplicating work. Focus on:

    a. giving feedback against goals

    b. seeking feedback from parents and students about the process and achievements

    c. establishing the next learning goals to extend student achievement

    d. agreeing on strategies for meeting new goals, including those for the teacher

    e. recording outcomes of the meeting on the PLP template.

25. Collect and record data on individual and class achievement against PLP learning goals in a central school or system database.

26. Undertake periodic reviews of the process using quantitative and qualitative data to assess the effectiveness of the PLP process. If necessary, modify the PLP process.

Success factors

Success factors listed below have been shown to be supportive of the effective and efficient implementation of PLPs. These are operational considerations and ensure the values and strategies are rendered successful.

While not all factors may be present in the PLPs implementation in every sample school, they have all been found to form a sound network to support implementation.

- There is whole-school ownership of and commitment to PLPs.

- Strong school leadership starts, drives and provides ongoing support for the school community developing and implementing PLPs.

- Teachers are committed to Closing the Gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- A range of formal and informal diagnostic assessment tools is used to profile each student and to inform the development of their learning goals.

- Specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) learning goals are well understood.

- Targeted teaching strategies are developed to support students in meeting their learning goals.

- Collaboration takes place with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers, school support staff and other relevant community agencies to plan for and support learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- Time allocation is provided for development of PLPs.

- Implementation of PLPs is included in ongoing work of teachers and not seen as an add-on or extra duty.

- There is provision of initial and ongoing professional learning support and resources for teachers in developing and applying personalised approaches and PLPs.

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Appendix A

Background to developing this guide

All Australian governments (state, territory and Commonwealth) have committed to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by 2018. The Australian Government is implementing a set of programs, specifically to support teachers, schools and education systems across Australia improve education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One of these programs provides support and professional development aids to assist teachers and schools develop and use personalised learning with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 1 to 10 of formal schooling.

All school systems and sectors in Australia agreed in 2008 to the then Ministerial Council Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs recommendation, contained in *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008*:

...ensure that schools, in partnership with parents/caregivers, deliver personalised learning to all Indigenous students that includes targets against key learning outcomes and incorporates family involvement strategies.

This commitment to implement personalised learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was subsequently reflected in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Education Action Plan* that the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs endorsed in April 2010. Action 21 of the Plan requires:

Schools will involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers in the development of personalised learning strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the first year of formal schooling to Year 10 to support improved educational outcomes…

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Appendix B

How can personalised approaches to learning contribute to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

While the research indicates that no one practice alone will improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes and that an all-round style is needed, personalised approaches through PLPs can make a positive contribution.

Central to this is the commitment to use assessment to update design and delivery of targeted teaching and learning strategies. This *process of seeking and interpreting evidence…to decide where learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there…*is known as 'assessment for learning'.

International research has shown that using assessment for learning strategies can produce significant and often substantial learning gains for underachievers.

There are several elements of personalised learning and development and implementation of PLPs have contributed to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The most significant factor in improving student outcomes is the quality of teaching and learning. This is supported by a substantial body of international and national research.

A key feature of PLP implementation is the provision of professional development, resources and ongoing support for teachers designing specific teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially to target literacy and numeracy. The electronic guide provides access to information about professional learning for teachers.

Close involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in their child's education has long been recognised as vital to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes. The process of developing the PLP with parents and identifying plans they can put in place to support their child's education will strengthen the link between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, the school and their child's learning.

Commitment to high expectations promoted through PLPs emphasises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that they are capable of achieving high standards. The achievement of high expectations also requires teachers and schools to provide the necessary education support and conditions for students.

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Appendix C

Key initiatives and approaches implemented by case study schools

While use of PLPs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is in early stages, some common ground rules are generally agreed across schools. These include establishment of:

- Clear and unequivocal values that insist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students perform at levels commensurate with the general population.
- Common mechanisms and approaches to:
  - assess and report on the learning and learning needs of each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student
  - monitor and respond to the behaviour, attendance and engagement of each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student.
- Staff provision to support professional learning so that teachers:
  - understand the cultural, linguistic and personal bases that form the background for each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student
  - are able to incorporate personalised learning and its planning into their daily routine
  - can work in collaboration with support staff, other professionals and families to plan for and support learning attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Monitoring, review and intervention structures to measure and ensure progress towards Closing the Gap.
- Teacher-time to 'handover' to new teachers the performance results of PLPs when students leave a school, when the school year ends, or when a teacher is transferred.

At school level, a variety of approaches has assisted the development and implementation of PLPs.

School values, structure and organisation

- A strong management structure and organised process, including the integration of PLP development and monitoring process into the planning, assessment and reporting practices at the school.
- Timetable restructuring to allow teachers and students time for planning and review of PLPs and the focus of specialist staff on PLP support.
- The focus on fostering and valuing diversity as a key value at the school, providing whole-school support for personalised learning.

Dedicated support resources

- The appointment of an Indigenous Education Worker (IEW).
- The appointment of a learning support coordinator and access to local university support to train and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tutors.
- The use of a program-specific literacy and numeracy coordinator for the school.
- The vital use of specifically trained tutors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to provide phonetics development, with the school making use of the professional development available through such programs as Accelerated Literacy.

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Professional learning

- Access to the school's student support services team to provide professional learning support for teachers on goal development and run support meetings with parents.

- Comprehensive system and school support for professional learning in approaches or programs that foster personalised learning, as provided in Accelerated Literacy.

Community relationships and cultural understanding

- A focus on building community relationships.

- The development of and focus on, a cultural standards framework.

- The provision of Certificate 4 TAFE training in cultural awareness for teachers.

- The visual display of cultural awareness activities and goals in classrooms.

Packaged support

- Home resource packs for parents.

- Development of a package on how to create, implement and evaluate PLPs.

- Providing information sessions for parents so they can better understand the purpose of personalised learning plans, and participate effectively in the process.

Professional development methods used by schools to support development and implementation of PLPs

Evidence from case-study schools suggests that providing staff professional learning to support the development and implementation of PLPs needs to be considered as part of a wholeschool teaching and learning planning process. Often personalised learning is driven by a change leader in the school. However, where it is additional to other school professional training, it tends to risk both sustainability and teacher workload issues. In addition, the whole school and community support required to implement personalised learning may not be available. Professional learning considerations need to ensure that teachers:

- understand the cultural, linguistic and personal bases that form the background for each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student

- are able to include personalised learning and planning into their daily routine, including use of diagnostic tools to address literacy and numeracy needs and computer-based, attendance monitoring systems to improve attendance and behaviour

- understand education strategies for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' literacy and numeracy skills, including access to ongoing support (such as coaching or mentoring from specialist district or program-based teachers) and access to a range of best practice literacy and numeracy teaching resources, and

- can work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff, other professionals and families to plan for and support learning skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

A range of professional learning options and resources exists around Australia to support the development and implementation of PLPs, both at system and district levels It is worth noting that many approaches to professional learning are part of other initiatives, and some are unique to a state or territory or sector.

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Appendix D

Strengthening relationships between schools and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and families

Close involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in their children's education has long been recognised as vital to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes. The process of developing the PLP with parents strengthens the link between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, the school and their child's learning. The identification of strategies parents can put in place to support their child's education fosters a commitment to high expectations for their child's learning.

Equally important to a successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education program is a whole-school acknowledgement, celebration and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and the establishment of active partnerships with local elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members where possible.

The following strategies have been found to be effective in **acknowledging and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture**.

- Engage the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to provide local role models and mentors for students.
- Invite elders to drive or participate in cultural awareness programs, or to welcome visitors to country at important school events.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn traditional and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, music and arts.
- Celebrate NAIDOC Week.
- Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material in the library and display artefacts and murals around the school grounds.
- Fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and acknowledge country at school assemblies and events.

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The following strategies have been found to be effective in **building partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**.

- Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members are represented on school boards and planning committees.
- Conduct an orientation program for potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinder and preschool enrolments or new enrolments and their families.
- Hold introductory and PLP meetings with parents or family members either offsite or outside, away from an office or classroom environment and ask whether the family would prefer the meeting to take place with an elder or another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff member.
- Ensure staff members receive professional development on how to conduct an effective PLP meeting.
- Provide training and development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members such as the Reading 2 Learn tutoring program and the School as Community Centre approach.
- Ensure the school is involved in activities in the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community such as cultural exploration partnerships with the local university and environmental projects.
- Establish a formal Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Agreement with the local community which is a regularly reviewed commitment between the school and the community to support their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and encourage them to attend school.
- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members are employed as teachers, aides, front office administration and other non-designated positions around the school.
- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members receive relevant training needed to assist them in the role in the personalised learning process.

The following strategies have been found to be effective in **promoting understanding**:

- Ensure the school is involved in activities in the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community such as cultural exploration partnerships with the local university and environmental projects.
- Give students opportunities to use home language, Noongar or Koori and Standard Australian English (SAE) at school and teach them when to appropriately use each code.
- Ensure students know the traditional nation, language and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups that inhabited the local area and invite local Elders to talk about local history and cultures.
- Participate in Reconciliation Day and NAIDOC Week activities.

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Appendix E

Setting learning goals for the Personal Learning Plan

Setting specific learning goals targeted at improving student knowledge, understandings and skills in key curriculum areas underlines the personalised learning process and development of PLPs. Setting high standards and expectations are critical if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are to achieve the educational outcomes of which they are capable.

Where teachers use diagnostic assessments to determine personally challenging but appropriate learning goals, and achievement of the goals is supported by appropriate education strategies, the goals become powerful drivers for improvement.

In contrast, having standards or expectations that are too low can result in poor or limited progress, and a widening of the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes. Similarly, having goals that are set purely on the basis of student interest and preference in non-academic areas can lock students in to less-than-adequate outcomes from their schooling.

Of equal importance is that teachers, students and parents have a sense of urgency in meeting these goals. These specific learning goals must be time-based so students can progress at a rate that will allow them to achieve outcomes on the same level as other students.

Long-term goals

Setting long-term goals for students to achieve at the end of a school year or stage of schooling is a common practice in Australian schools. All state and territory curriculum documents and syllabuses outline curricular-based learning outcomes, essential learnings or learning standards that students should achieve on completion of key stages in their schooling.

While these are key milestones in achievement, they are seen as too far removed to provide motivation for many young learners. There are many pathways to travel towards the milestones. Consequently medium-term and short-term goals are needed to keep learning on track and up to speed.

Medium-term goals

Learning outcomes, essential learning or learning standards in curriculum documents are often broken down by teachers into more precise outcomes or standards (medium-term goals) that students are required to achieve at the end of a unit of work, term or semester.

Most state and territory curriculum and syllabus documents provide assistance to teachers in this process by identifying more precise learning outcomes, key stages, progression points and/or indicators of learning. These are used by teachers when developing outcomes for work units.

While vital in tracking progress towards key milestones, such medium-term goals are often outside the range and ability of a student's thought processes as they proceed through schooling. Nearer targets and goals are appropriate for student motivation, guidance and direction.

Short-term, specific learning goals

In developing PLPs, these end-of-unit, term or semester outcomes are broken down further into more specific learning goals. These short-term learning goals are very specific, *short-term indicators of knowledge, understandings and skills* that a student will need to get on their journey to completing end-of-unit, term or semester outcomes. They are the steps in the pathway on the journey through the curriculum milestones.

While information from school reports and results in school, state or national assessments and tests can inform the development of specific learning goals, comprehensive diagnostic assessments frequently offer more detailed data to establish more precise targets.

These assessments often identify specific gaps in student knowledge, understanding and skills that must be dealt with for them to achieve unit or term outcomes or objectives (medium-term goals). On the other hand, they may identify areas of strength and require teachers to develop learning goals that will accelerate a student's knowledge.

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Teachers also consult other teachers and support staff, as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their parents, when developing these specific learning goals. For example, some enabling goals (cultural, personal, family, social, etc) may need to be set so the students can access the learning.

In summary, short-term, specific learning goals are *precise indicators of knowledge, understandings and skills* that build towards achievement in unit or term outcomes (medium-term goals), which are in turn developed from overarching learning outcomes, essential learning or learning standards (long-term goals) in state and territory curriculum documents.

If the gap is to be closed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement, it is vital that these specific learning goals are linked to mainstream educational standards.

Typically, PLPs require teachers to use learning goals that are **SMART**. The acronym SMART stands for goals that are:

Specific	Learning goals have a degree of precision so teachers target particular knowledge, understandings and skills along the learning journey.
Measurable	Learning goals can be assessed by teachers using a variety of informal and formal assessment tools. These can include: questioning, observation, short tests (oral and written), moderated samples of student work, diagnostic tests and more formal school assessments.
Agreed	Teachers, students and parents have a role in the development of learning goals. While teachers will use diagnostic information to develop goals they should negotiate these goals with the parent and students at the PLP meeting.
Realistic	Learning goals should stretch students but must be achievable. In addition, teachers should not develop too many goals. The number will vary according to, the needs of the student, the type of learning and the stage of schooling. A primary student may have only three or four learning goals for a unit of work, while a secondary student may have two or three goals in some or all learning areas.
Time-based	Targets should be set for achieving learning goals to motivate students and move them towards *Closing the Gap* in outcomes. There should be a balance between realistic targets that students can achieve and stretching students so they fulfil their capabilities.

Once goals are reached, teachers should record their achievement and work with the students, and parents if possible, to establish new goals. This can be done at the next PLP meeting but is often done before as students achieve specific learning goals. Teachers then set new goals so that they can meet or exceed end of unit, term or semester learning outcomes. PLPs are dynamic processes and should not be held captive to procedures.

Enabling goals

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, other barriers may limit their success in education. These include attendance, physical and mental wellbeing, access to resources, behaviour or a lack of connection between education and their culture. When developing the PLP, goals are set to address these issues.

Enabling goals might focus on overcoming lateness to school, addressing fractional or partial truancy, ensuring that the student has a nutritious breakfast and a good night's sleep, amending the impact on concentration of dysfunctional family life, addressing health issues that prevent access to learning or supporting drug rehabilitation. They may involve ensuring that parents value mainstream academic achievement and passing on that valuing to the student. They may be connecting the student to a future employment pathway, a mentor, a coach or a tutor.

However, it should also be noted that alternative or interest-based goals that sometimes appear in programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may not be appropriate for a PLP. Goals that entertain, goals that have little to do with academic achievement, or goals that claim to be culturally-based but are more appropriate leisure-time pursuits may not be suitable for a PLP.

Often such goals lead to outcomes that lock Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students out of levels of academic achievement the same as mainstream students. They may look culturally appropriate, may be based on student interest, may foster engagement, and may be based in life skills.

Nevertheless, the key test of their suitability in a PLP is whether the other goals bring about the learning goals set in the plan. It is always the learning goals that should be the focus of the PLP.

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Negotiating learning goals

Negotiating goals with students

Giving students opportunities to reflect on their learning and on themselves as learners is a good first step to engaging students in the process. Always start with a discussion about the student's strengths and talents, acknowledging their successes. While not the only or even the key determinant of the goals, ask students to identify subjects they enjoy, areas of interest and their aspirations for the future. It is important to also ask students to identify areas where they feel they need more help or assistance. Some of this reflection may be done before the PLP meeting, so students are prepared to express their views. It is an important part of the learning process, so don't be afraid to devote class time to it.

From this discussion, teachers can identify knowledge or skills students may wish to explore or, more importantly, need to acquire if they are to pursue areas of interest or to achieve their life and career goals. The teacher should link this knowledge and skills to mainstream curriculum outcomes or standards and identify specific learning goals the students will need to achieve.

At the PLP meeting try to avoid educational jargon. Keep the language simple so that the student can make meaningful contributions. Focus on strengths and build towards the goals—not on deficits.

It is important to ask the student, particularly if they are in secondary school, to identify any barriers to their learning, such as lack of access to resources or issues with attendance, health, part-time employment and behaviour. Work with the student and their parents to develop enabling goals that will support the achievement of their learning goals.

Negotiating goals with parents

At the PLP meeting always ask the parents what they would like their child to achieve at school in the short (this term), medium (by the end of the year) and long term (on completion of primary/secondary school). Invite them to comment first on their child's strengths as a person and as a learner, before asking the student to comment and then offering your contribution.

Link their comments with your specific knowledge of the student's longer term and specific learning needs, with a focus on goals that will allow the student to attain outcomes that are at a level that is commensurate with their individual ability and the wider student population. Don't just aim for achieving national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy; have high expectations, especially if the student has identified talents.

Work with the parents to determine any barriers to learning. Be sensitive in your approach. Try to encourage them to identify possible reasons for poor attendance, behaviour and issues with physical and mental well being if these are an issue. Concentrate on strategies for dealing with these barriers rather than on the issues themselves. Work with the parents to develop enabling goals.

As with the student, try to avoid educational jargon in the discussion. Keep the language simple so that the parent can make meaningful contributions.

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Appendix F

Teaching strategies useful for personalising learning

Personalised learning is not an entirely new concept. Many teachers have been using aspects of personalised learning in their classrooms for a number of years. What is new is the use of a structured and systematic approach to personalised learning to make rapid improvements in learning outcomes, in this case for a particular group—our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In the past, some teachers have attempted to address the education needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by differentiating the curriculum. Many accept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may achieve a different level of success. Unfortunately, lowering expectations only increases the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes.

Personalised learning is based on the premise that all students, regardless of their ethnic, cultural and social background, can achieve learning outcomes the same as the wider school population. Therefore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should be offered challenging and demanding learning linked to the achievement of mainstream curriculum outcomes. However, they may need different educational approaches, varying levels of teacher support and extra time to achieve equitable outcomes. That is the basis of personalised learning.

What does personalised teaching and learning look like?

Personalised learning does not mean individualised learning where students work 'on their own'. Personalised learning uses a variety of class structures, teaching and learning strategies including direct and explicit instruction, wholegroup teaching, smallgroup inquiry or problembased work and, at times, one-to-one tuition. Personalised learning may also mean withdrawing students for short periods to work with specialist staff or tutors to develop and practise specific knowledge, skills and understandings.

However, it is vital that this work is linked directly to the achievement of mainstream classroom outcomes. To achieve this level and depth of knowledge and understanding, personalised learning requires Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to participate in the social construction of meaning. In other words, they need to participate in discussions and study that keep them with mainstream students. Expansion of their personal base of understanding and exposure is a vital element in linking their current ambitions and expectations to those of mainstream Australia.

Characteristics of high-quality personalised learning

High-quality teaching and learning targeted at meeting the needs of each student lies at the heart of personalised learning. In the United Kingdom, where they are well advanced in the implementation of personalised learning, educators have identified the following key characteristics for what they term as *quality first teaching*.

The characteristics of quality first teaching[3] in a personalised approach are:

- *highly focused lesson design with sharp objectives*

- *high demands of pupil involvement and engagement with their learning*

- *high levels of interaction for all pupils*

- *appropriate use of teacher questioning, modelling and explaining*

- *an emphasis on learning through dialogue, with regular opportunities for pupils to talk both individually and in groups*

- *an expectation that pupils will accept responsibility for their own learning and work independently*

- *regular use of encouragement and authentic praise to engage and motivate pupils.*

Lesson design

Effective planning and lesson design are vital when implementing personalised approaches to learning. Typically, lesson design for personalised learning will include many of the following elements that are 'core business' for teachers.

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3   Personalised Learning: High Quality Teaching and Learning Department of Children, Schools and Families, United Kingdom.

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Introductory phase

In this phase teachers:

- capture the attention or interest of all learners with a stimulating activity
- explain the purpose, objectives or outcomes of the lesson
- place new learning into the scheme of current work
- link new learning to each student's prior knowledge (for example, through discussion).

Teaching and learning phase

Teachers draw on their repertoire of education and teaching strategies to:

- structure the teaching cycle or lesson as a series of distinct stages or steps
- select the best educational and organisational approaches to meet learning outcomes and cater for individual learning needs. This could include one or more of the following strategies:

    a) explicit teaching of concepts to the whole class, explaining, modelling and introducing new concepts

    b) effective questioning techniques to monitor the progress of all students

    c) group work on different tasks where the teacher focuses on assisting one group to develop specific knowledge skills or understandings

    d) group work on similar tasks where the teacher moves around the class and provides differing levels of support to needs or focuses of the various groups. (In this form of group work, students are given specific roles such as leader, scribe, timer, etc to ensure maximum involvement)

    e) paired work to allow the teacher to target specific peers to learn from each other

    f) individual work to allow the teacher to assess progress and target specific individuals.

- recap at the end of each phase or step and make links to previous and future phases or steps to ensure consistency in learning.

Reflection and review

At the end of an important step, stage or lesson the teacher:

- uses assessment for learning strategies such as strategic questioning, success rubrics, peer feedback and student self-assessment to monitor progress and inform future learning
- reviews key concepts and foreshadows future learning.[4]

Effective questioning

Effective questioning is an important strategy teachers use to find out whether students have gained knowledge and understanding and to support or reinforce new learning. In personalised learning, teacher questions are a deliberate and planned activity. The number, quality, timing and distribution of questions are all very important.

Ideally, teachers should use more 'open' (requiring explorative answers that open up discussion) than 'closed' (requiring 'yes/no' type answers that close off discussion) questions. They should pose questions that cover a range of cognitive demands from 'lower order' knowledge and comprehension, to 'higher order' and more complex analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Teachers should avoid asking too many questions and give students sufficient time to answer and for others to explore the implications of their answers.

How teachers respond to questions is also important in personalised learning. Being open to a range of responses, using incorrect responses to tease out or prompt correct responses and offering positive feedback are all techniques that foster student learning and allow teachers to assess exactly what their students know.

Repeating what students say in their answers or rephrasing it can undermine the student, suggesting that it is only the teacher who can be right about the answer. On the other hand, helping the student to articulate, explore and clarify the answer is part of reflective listening. Reflective listening is an important skill in questioning.

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4   Developed from a teaching sequence in Personalised Learning – a Practical Guide produced by the Department of Children, Schools and Families, United Kingdom.

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Modelling

For many years, teachers have used modelling, demonstrations and scaffolding as ways of supporting and enhancing the learning and development of new knowledge. In personalised learning, effective modelling of new knowledge is important if students are to progress as learners. It is even more essential when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to provide very clear models of new concepts or skills.

Many literacy programs have explicit information on modelling or scaffolding knowledge.

Personalised approaches for teaching literacy and numeracy learning

In order to 'Close the Gap', it is vital that the development of specific goals for literacy and numeracy are a focus in the PLP. Recently, much valuable work has been done developing and implementing effective teaching through literacy and numeracy programs, many specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There was evidence in the case studies that many of these programs and methodologies are contributing to improved outcomes. A number of schools and teachers in the case studies make effective use of the personalised approaches from these programs in their teaching methodologies and instructional strategies.

Literacy programs

Accelerated Literacy

Accelerated Literacy (AL) is a specialist literacy methodology designed to accelerate the literacy development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to age-appropriate or higher levels. The approach uses age-appropriate texts and a structured teaching cycle to provide students with the foundations and a developmental program for literacy learning.

On entry, students are frequently profiled using a range of assessment tools. The ongoing use of these tools provides teachers with opportunities to use information about individual student performance to aid their planning.

While AL has a structured teaching cycle, teachers are encouraged to move in and out of various stages according to the learning needs of individuals or groups of students in particular classes. Questioning techniques used in the study also provide teachers with a tool for assessing student understanding of particular concepts, so teachers can revise and remodel particular ideas and skills with students.

AL offers teachers significant professional development opportunities. A range of support materials is also available.

First Steps

First Steps, developed by Edith Cowan University, includes a comprehensive literacy program that covers the four areas of the English curriculum: oral language, reading, writing and spelling. The program has detailed training maps for each area, that provide a global statement and precise indicators for six phases of literacy learning from pre-literacy to accomplished. (There is also a First Steps program that covers mathematics.) A set of comprehensive texts is available to assist teachers in linking assessment with targeted teaching and learning strategies. These are valuable resources and professional training is available for teachers wanting to apply personalised approaches to learning through this program.

Bound for Success

Bound for Success curriculum documents developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools in Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands have used *First Steps* as a basis for their English scope and sequence document. An electronic individual learning plan (ILP) toolkit has been developed as part of the *Bound for Success* program.

Teachers use a range of diagnostic assessments, observations and class work to determine each student's literacy level on the First Steps diagnostics maps on the toolkit. They then select indicators from the map to set specific learning goals for individual students. These goals are linked to a range of teaching strategies, and support activities that teachers can use to design and apply personalised approaches. The toolkit also provides teachers with strategies for monitoring student progress against learning goals and a section where student learning can be recorded or uploaded.

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Getting it Right

Getting it Right is a targeted strategy which provides additional specialist personnel, professional development and support to government schools in Western Australia. The strategy is designed to improve literacy and lead to greater parity of literacy achievement across all student groups, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, ESL students, boys and students in rural or remote communities.

Specialist literacy and numeracy teachers are appointed to work in classes with colleagues to support ongoing improvements in literacy and numeracy. Teachers identify literacy and numeracy needs, and collaborate to plan, model and apply the most effective strategies. An evaluation of the program by ACER found that:

...the use of data to set challenging but realistic targets for improving students' achievement in literacy or numeracy has been a most useful aspect of the strategy. The process...enables schools to monitor their progress, to celebrate achievement, and to adjust teaching programs where necessary
(ACER 2005 p.127).

Literacy coaches

Similarly, in Victoria, schools are supported in the development and implementation of personalised approaches by coaches who work with teachers in classrooms to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Numeracy programs

Count Me In Too

Count Me In Too is a program designed to help teachers broaden their knowledge of how children learn and apply their mathematical knowledge of number. Each student is assessed at the beginning of each school year and teachers plot their current mathematical thinking and strategies against a learning program. Teachers use this program to plan teaching activities to move students to the next stage. The program offers a range of activities for students to do each lesson, with opportunities for ongoing assessment, so teachers can redirect learning activities where required.

The *Count Me In Too: Indigenous* project aims to investigate teaching features that support effective numeracy learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from preschool to Year 2. The project focuses on the professional development of teachers but is also very community focused, valuing the input Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support personnel in the school can bring to the project.

QuickSmart

QuickSmart, developed by the University of New England, is designed to address both literacy and numeracy outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students. It provides tuition and support to students who are currently experiencing difficulties in these areas by increasing their automatic recall of well-learned information. This frees up their working memory, allowing students to undertake higher order mental processing tasks.

First Steps in Mathematics

First Steps in Mathematics is designed to support teachers as they assess, plan and apply strategies to improve mathematics learning of all primary students, particularly students at risk of not achieving their education potential. The program provides teachers with training maps that allow them to diagnose, plan, implement, and evaluate their students' learning experiences in four strands—number, measurement, space, and chance and data.

In summary, whole-school literacy and numeracy approaches that provide comprehensive professional learning support and resources for teachers and allow for personalised approaches have been shown in the case studies to offer sound conditions for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

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Appendix G

Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Engagement is believed to be so important it has been used in the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs paper *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* to frame the five domains for recommended action. Engagement in learning is critical to academic achievement and providing students with the understanding, knowledge, skills and confidence to move on to training, employment and higher education. It fosters in students a sense of belonging and self-worth.

What Works research outlines a brief summary of reasons for non-attendance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The reasons are diverse—boredom, transience, consistent failure, other more pressing responsibilities, peer influence, bullying, or being 'too cool for school'. The message is, if you're going to work on attendance issues, find out what is really going on. Don't make assumptions.

Poor attendance can be a visible symptom of a situation that needs tackling from a larger and more holistic perspective.

The three central areas for action by schools which have been successful in engaging students are:

- cultural recognition, acknowledgment and support
- development of requisite skills
- building adequate levels of participation.

Clear and successful strategies under these domains include the following:

- Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching personnel, parents and community members in all aspects of the schooling process is seen as critical for cultural understanding and recognition.

- Collaborative planning and choice of appropriate teaching material helps to ensure that learning activities are relevant to students' experiences, their current needs and interests. Such approaches provide meaning and purpose to what students are learning.

- Support is demonstrated through the provision of staff professional development training in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and lifestyle.

- Further acknowledgement is evident through respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. This includes recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patterns of conversation. It also includes recognition of the fact that Standard Australian English (SAE) is not the first language or dialect of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Such a culturally inclusive approach allows for skills development in the use of SAE as part of the learning process, switching between Aboriginal English and SAE when needed.

- Support is also acknowledged through recognition of the benefits of an explicit teaching or learning style and early intervention strategies to ensure the necessary literacy skills in the early years of schooling.

- Recognition of the importance of focusing on the learning needs of the individual student is critical. However, this does not mean addressing student choice without guidance. For example, in many instances student activity and fun are curtailed to focus on academic success, which is the priority. While not always steering students towards vocational courses in secondary school, some specific nationally available courses have proven effective.

- The development of problem-solving and negotiation skills to help students identify alternative behaviour choices is often used.

- Use of computers allows students to feel in control of their learning situation by working at their own pace and level.

- Provision of a safe, secure school environment, characterised by good teacher/student relationships is welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and free from racism.

- Empowerment of students is important. Allowing them to be involved in making real decisions in the learning process through planning lessons together with teaching staff not only makes learning more meaningful but also builds relationships.

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Appendix H

Frequently asked questions

Q1   Why are we doing personalised learning and developing PLPs?

Work on personalised learning in the USA and United Kingdom indicates that it is key in addressing persistent gaps in educational achievement between different social, ethnic and cultural groups.

Central to the personalised approach is commitment to using assessment to inform the design and delivery of targeted teaching and learning strategies. International research has shown that using assessment for learning strategies can produce significant and often substantial learning gains and that these gains are realised for poor achievers. Also pivotal is the establishment of appropriate learning goals. Teaching and learning strategies to support attainment of those goals are also important.

PLPs are recognised as an effective tool for ensuring implementation of personalised approaches as they are about a dynamic process, not a static product.

Q2   Why is this approach being focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

MCEETYA, the Australian Government and many state and territory jurisdictions are committed to Closing the Gap in educational achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Educators recognise the potential of personalised approaches to improve outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and different cultural, ethnic or social groups.

Nevertheless, personalised learning is not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Many schools have chosen to develop and implement PLPs for all their students. They realise that precise goal setting, targeted instructional strategies, and regular progress tracking can benefit all students.

Q3   How do I engage staff in developing and implementing PLPs and personalised approaches?

The following have been found to help when engaging staff about personalised learning:

*   Explain the Australian Government and your jurisdiction's position on Closing the Gap and provide teachers with data to stimulate discussion about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student achievement at your school.

*   Give staff information about potential benefits of using personalised learning approaches and PLPS with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It is important to identify how PLPs can link with and strengthen existing strategies and programs.

*   Set up a group to develop an implementation plan based on emerging good practice. Give staff the option of trialling the development and implementation of PLPs with a particular group or in a certain subject areas, with a system for monitoring and evaluating outcomes.

*   Ensure staff are given adequate time, resources and professional support for developing and implementing PLPs. It is always wise to discuss such proposals with school union representatives and ask them for feedback on the professional learning support teachers require.

Q4   What is the difference between an ILP (IEP) and a PLP?

In the definition used for this guide, individual education plans (IEPs) or individual learning plans (ILPs) are developed specifically for students with disabilities or identified learning difficulties. They are often developed by special education teachers with specialist support personnel and may include parents and others in the planning. They are very much focused on provision of specialist support, resources or appropriate teaching strategies. ILPs are often associated with curriculum modification and, on occasions, outcome adjustment, recognising that the learner may not be able to perform at a corresponding level in the overall population.

Personalised learning plans (PLPs), on the other hand, are developed with the expectation that the child can learn at the same level as the general population, provided the conditions for learning are created. Gaps in student learning are identified and personalised approaches to teaching and learning, which may include individual, small group or whole-class instruction, are targeted to address those gaps.

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In addition, PLPs seek to identify areas of learning where students can be extended or accelerated. While factors that affect student learning are also identified, the assumption is, given the right teaching and learning approaches and conditions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can achieve the standards expected of all students.

Q5   How will I find time to do PLPs for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

Teachers will need time to have initial meetings with parents and this should be allocated by the school. However, the application of personalised approaches, monitoring student achievements and reporting on the achievements at subsequent meetings with parents should be included into school assessment and reporting processes. PLPs should be the 'way to do things', not an 'add-on'. It is important to identify what the PLP process can substitute for and to integrate it with school work so teachers are able to work smarter—not harder or longer.

Schools that have successfully implemented PLPs often have regular professional learning sessions after school or built into the school timetable. They use these sessions to provide appropriate professional development opportunities for teachers, including sessions on:

- using diagnostic assessments to set appropriate learning goals
- designing appropriate teaching and learning strategies for personalised learning, and
- cultural awareness workshops, in particular on conducting PLP meetings with parents.

Q6   How do I engage parents, especially those who have limited English skills and limited experience of engaging with a school?

The following have been found to help when engaging parents and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about personalised learning:

- Invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents to a barbeque or celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture or students' work at the school and inform them about the PLP project at this event.
- Enlist the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and assistant teachers to help you provide more detailed information about PLPs to parents.
- Getting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's support for PLPs is also important. Explain the PLP process to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and ask for their support to present the PLP project to the community and encourage parents to be involved in the process.
- Start the PLP meeting by talking about the positive aspects of their child's schooling. This builds connections and trust. Use simple language and avoid educational jargon. Where appropriate, have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff involved in the PLP meetings to explain or translate concepts to parents.
- Use local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models and successful sports people to support the project at the school.

Q7   How do I determine specific learning goals for my students?

Short-term, specific learning goals are precise indicators of knowledge, understanding and skills that build achievement in unit or term outcomes (medium-term goals). They should be SMART goals—*specific* so that the teachers and students know precisely what has to be learnt; able to be *measured*; *agreed* upon by the teacher, student and parent; *realistic* so students can achieve them and *time*-based so the student and teacher have a clear target to aim for.

Q8   How do I best engage the students in this process?

Giving students opportunities to reflect on their learning and on themselves as learners is a good first step to engaging students in the process. Schools have found that it is wise to always start with a discussion about the student's strengths and talents, acknowledging their successes. Ask students to identify subjects they enjoy, areas of interest and their hopes for the future. It is also important to ask students to identify areas where they feel they need more help or assistance.

From this discussion, teachers can identify knowledge or skills students may wish to explore or need to acquire if they are to pursue areas of interest or to achieve their career goals. The teacher should link the knowledge and skills to mainstream curriculum outcomes or standards and identify specific learning goals the students will need to achieve. Try to avoid educational jargon in the discussion; keep the language simple so the student can make meaningful contributions.

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It is important to ask the student, in particular if they are in secondary school, to identify any barriers to their learning, such as lack of access to resources or issues with attendance, health or behaviour. Work with the student and their parents to develop enabling goals that will support them to achieve their learning goals.

Q9   How do I manage the process if I am using PLPs with 25 students?

Keep PLP forms as simple as possible and only record essential information. Many schools include the PLP process in their ongoing assessment and reporting cycles, so the PLP is not an add-on or extra work but rather a more focused approach to using assessment in teaching practice. Ensuring alignment of current special support or extension programs is another way of using existing school resources to support students in achieving their PLP learning goals. The use of an electronic portfolio in upper primary or secondary schools, where the PLP is managed by the student, can greatly reduce the workload for teachers and encourage increased student ownership of the process. Allocate time in classes for students to reflect on their learning and work with teachers to develop possible learning goals and strategies for meeting the goals.

Q10   How can I effectively develop and implement a PLP and personalised approaches to learning in a secondary school?

In secondary schools, often each teacher will provide input to the development of the PLP by working with students before the PLP meeting to identify specific learning goals for that particular subject area. This information is usually gathered by either form or homegroup teachers, who then organises and conducts the meeting with the students, parents and other relevant personnel. Form or home-room teachers then report back to subject teachers on the agreed outcomes from meetings.

Some schools choose to have specific goals developed only for certain subject areas, such as English, mathematics and other learning areas that either need attention or are crucial to the student's life and career goals. A number of secondary schools use electronic PLPs. Students manage the PLP and each teacher has access so they can work with students in individual classes to set goals, design and apply instructional strategies and monitor progress.

Q11   How do I implement personalised learning when students are at different levels?

Careful lesson design can assist in the effective implementation of personalised learning for students with a range of achievement levels. It is important that all students, regardless of levels, are exposed to explicit teaching, modelling and/or scaffolding. If the teacher talks through their methods and objectives as they model or scaffold, it often supports less able students to understand new concepts and skills.

Careful use of questioning can be used to reinforce and monitor different levels of learning. Use low-order questions at first but move to higher-order questions for more depth. Group work on similar or different tasks, where the teacher focuses on assisting one group to develop specific knowledge skills or understanding, is another useful strategy. However, ensure students are allocated specific roles in their group to keep them on task.

Paired work to allow the teacher to target specific individuals and individuals to learn from each other is also an effective method. If specialist support is available, withdrawing individuals for short periods of time to work on particular skills can also be effective.

Q12   How does a personalised approach link to transition plans?

Most jurisdictions have mandated that all students from Years 8 or 9 on should have a transition plan that outlines their future ambitions, career goals and possible learning pathways for achieving these goals. These plans offer valuable information for teachers and students developing PLPs and some schools refer to the transition plan when developing the PLP or vice versa. Other schools have integrated the two processes and develop the PLP and transition plans together.

Whatever process used, it is important that each plan's purpose is clear and crucial elements in each are not compromised. The PLP has very specific learning goals, whereas a transition plan may have more generalised career goals. PLPs have specific instructional strategies for meeting the learning goals and identify ways of measuring achievement against those learning goals. On the other hand the transition plan usually outlines the subjects, qualifications and experiences required for various career pathways, work experience opportunities and reports, and revised career goals or pathways in light of student achievement.

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