

Bilingual education - guidelines

Curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification: early childhood to Year 12 policy

The Department of Education and Training (department) is committed to improving education outcomes for every child and student in the Northern Territory (NT) by optimising curriculum provision, using evidence-based curriculum planning, delivery and assessment practices, and ensuring integrity in all reporting and certification obligations.

The Curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification: early childhood to Year 12 policy (CARC policy), sets out the mandatory requirements for all NT Government schools and approved services in the delivery of curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification.

Bilingual education

Bilingual education is a culturally responsive, two-way learning approach that uses both Aboriginal languages and English as languages of instruction for teaching the Australian Curriculum. It reflects the Northern Territory Learning and Teaching Model (NTLTM) by placing Aboriginal students' culture, language and identity at the centre of explicit, evidence-informed, and inclusive teaching.

This whole-school approach may be used in communities where an Aboriginal language, including contact languages such as Kriol, is the main language spoken at home and is already taught as a learning area at school.

Bilingual education is guided by the five domains of the Cultural Responsiveness Framework and 10 key elements.

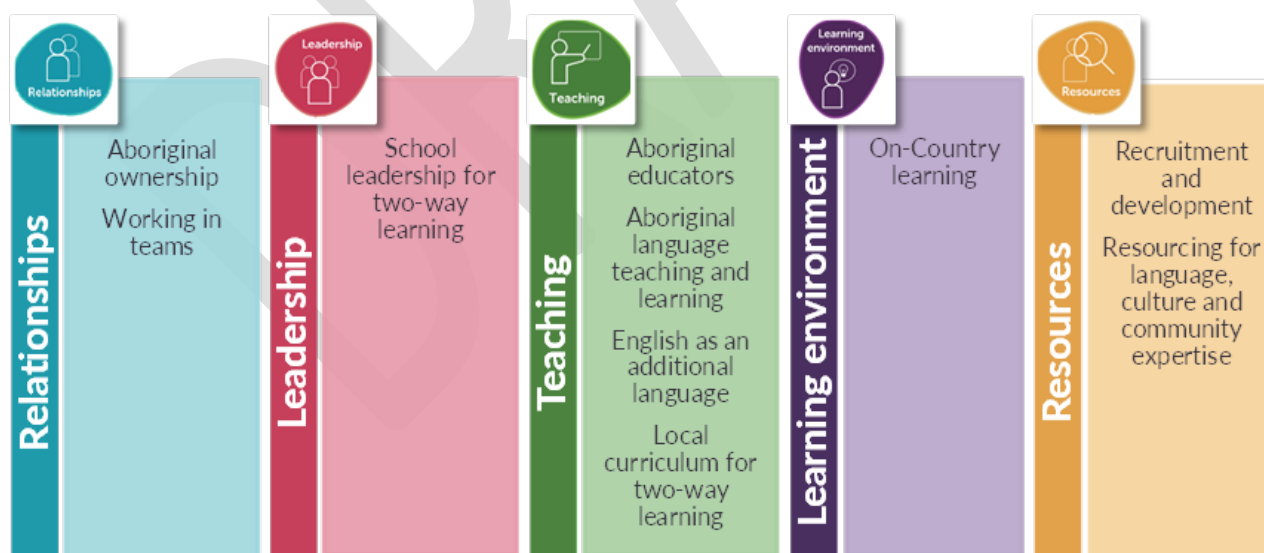


Figure 1: Cultural Responsiveness framework - domains and elements

As required by section 6.3.3. of the CARC policy, schools delivering bilingual education must also refer to the Bilingual education program statement.

Through bilingual learning and teaching, schools:

- provide explicit instruction in both Aboriginal languages and English to build strong foundations for literacy and numeracy
- create pathways for students to achieve the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training
- strengthen and maintain Aboriginal languages and cultures
- develop strong partnerships with their community by embedding Aboriginal languages and ways of knowing, doing and being, into school processes.

Relationships

Culturally responsive schools foster positive participation, communication and interaction between staff, Aboriginal students, their families and the local Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal ownership

School Improvement Tool: Domain 9 - Building school–community partnerships

Aboriginal communities lead bilingual education in partnership with schools. Elders, language custodians and families hold the authority for how their language and cultural knowledge are taught. This authority includes Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), which protects the rights to control how languages, stories, songs and knowledge are recorded, used and shared.

Shared decision-making with Elders, families and Aboriginal staff strengthens programs, builds accountability and drives ongoing improvement. Bilingual programs formalise partnerships through transparent, ongoing consultation, bilingual program agreements and shared governance processes that uphold community decision-making and improve student learning and wellbeing.

Expectations

- Aboriginal leaders, Elders and families are active partners, providing permission and authority for the use of language and contribute to goal setting, progress reviews and shaping improvement plans.
- Agreements are co-designed, reviewed and used to guide continuous improvement in teaching and learning.
- Consultation and feedback processes are transparent, inclusive and evidence informed.

Working in teams

School Improvement Tool: Domain 5 - Building an expert teaching team

Domain 8 - Implementing effective pedagogical practices

Strong bilingual programs are built on teamwork. Aboriginal language-speaking and English-speaking educators share responsibility for student progress, using collaboration and reflection to strengthen practice and outcomes.

Expectations

- Each class has a bilingual teaching team with shared roles and clear accountability for student learning.
- Schools provide time for teaching teams to plan, teach and assess together, using evidence and data to evaluate for impact.
- Teaching teams access professional learning that supports collaboration, strengthens the use of both languages, and aligns with school improvement goals.

Leadership

Culturally responsive schools have leaders who develop and sustain a school-wide focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students.

School leadership for two-way learning

School Improvement Tool: Domain 1 - Driving an explicit improvement agenda

Principals and school leaders lead bilingual education by embedding Aboriginal authority, language and culture into the school improvement agenda. Leadership is shared with Aboriginal Elders, educators and the community, and decisions are guided by evidence and local knowledge. School leaders use data to inform school-level decisions, interventions and initiatives, and to support ongoing monitoring, evaluation and improvement. They communicate school improvement to the school community in ways that are meaningful and culturally appropriate.

Expectations

- Bilingual education goals and actions are included in the Annual School Improvement Plan.
- Aboriginal staff and community members participate in school decision-making processes.
- Leaders use evidence and data to evaluate progress and communicate results in culturally appropriate ways.

Teaching

Culturally responsive schools have high expectations for Aboriginal students and teach in ways that enable them to reach their full potential. The NTLTM provides the evidence-based framework for explicit teaching in both Aboriginal languages and English.

Aboriginal educators

Aboriginal educators who speak the language of the program bring linguistic, cultural and local expertise to every classroom. Their professional growth is central to improving bilingual education quality and outcomes.

Expectations

- Aboriginal educators are supported through structured induction, accredited training, mentoring and leadership opportunities.
- Aboriginal educators have regular time to plan, assess and reflect with their teaching team.

- Aboriginal educators access ongoing professional learning that links directly to school improvement priorities.
- Schools prioritise experienced Aboriginal educators to lead Early Years teaching and learning in the program's Aboriginal language.

Aboriginal language teaching and learning

School Improvement Tool: Domain 8 - Implementing effective pedagogical practices

Domain 7 - Differentiating teaching and learning

Effective Aboriginal language teaching is explicit, sequenced and continually refined through evidence and feedback. Teaching draws on students' linguistic and cultural knowledge to build literacy, identity and confidence. Strong alignment between Aboriginal language teaching and other curriculum areas ensures students can transfer and apply their knowledge across languages and learning areas.

Expectations

- Teaching teams use the NT ILC First Language curriculum pathway and the ILC monitoring tool to plan, assess and report on student learning in an Aboriginal language. Refer to the [Aboriginal languages reporting and monitoring – procedures](#).
- Teaching teams use student data to inform instruction and reflection for school improvement discussions.
- Teaching teams target explicit literacy and oral language development in Aboriginal languages and connect these skills to learning goals across subjects.
- Teaching teams regularly review evidence of impact, draw on research, and refine pedagogy to improve student outcomes.
- Teaching teams create classrooms that are language-rich, culturally safe environments where students feel confident to use and develop their first language as a foundation for learning.

English as an additional language teaching and learning

School Improvement Tool: Domain 8 - Implementing effective pedagogical practices

Domain 2 - Analysing and discussing data

Highly effective English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) teaching is evidence-informed, systematic, and responsive to student progress, building on students' first language knowledge as the foundation for English learning. Teachers plan and adapt instruction using English and students' first languages to build comprehension, fluency and confidence. Regular collaboration and feedback cycles refine practice and maximise student learning outcomes.

Expectations

- Teaching teams use the Australian Curriculum: English and the NT EAL/D Learning Progressions to assess, monitor and plan for language proficiency and achievement.
- Teaching teams report and assess using the NT Assessment and Reporting Schedule for all national and systemic assessments. The following exceptions apply:

- Bilingual schools must screen students using the Year 1 Phonics Check within 12 months of beginning English literacy teaching, if not in Year 1.
- Bilingual schools must monitor students against the EAL/D learning progressions for listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Teaching teams analyse student progress data to set clear learning goals, adjust instruction and share effective strategies.
- Teaching teams engage in regular feedback cycles to evaluate the impact of teaching on language development.
- Teaching teams teach explicitly to develop students' understanding of how language works across the curriculum.
- Teaching teams create classroom environments that build students' confidence as English learners, valuing effort, persistence and first-language knowledge as tools for learning.

Local curriculum for two-way learning

School Improvement Tool: Domain 6 - Leading systematic curriculum implementation

A local curriculum for two-way learning creates opportunities to connect Aboriginal and Western knowledge. It reflects the NTLTM by recognising students' cultural and linguistic knowledge as the foundation for new learning.

It connects learning to Country, language and community with other learning areas in the Australian Curriculum and provides a scope and sequence for learning through all stages of schooling. It includes subjects from the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the Learning on Country program.

Expectations

- Schools consult, co-design and regularly review the local curriculum with Elders and educators to ensure themes are culturally appropriate and relevant.
- Schools ensure curriculum plans explicitly connect Aboriginal knowledges, the Australian Curriculum and relevant system priorities.
- Schools induct staff in the local curriculum.

Learning Environment

Culturally responsive schools build environments that are welcoming, inclusive and reflective of Aboriginal community aspirations. Bilingual education environments affirm Aboriginal identity and belonging through the purposeful inclusion of Aboriginal languages, cultures and knowledge systems in curriculum design and learning experiences. Classrooms are language-rich environments that provide clear distinctions between languages.

On-Country learning

School Improvement Tool: Domain 3 - Promoting a culture of learning

Country is a rich resource for Aboriginal students' first language learning. It provides opportunities for students to develop language knowledge through explicit teaching and connects them to culture and place.

It strengthens belonging and engagement and is recognised as a key part of student learning and wellbeing. On-Country learning is guided by cultural authorities and engages families and communities as partners in learning.

Expectations

- Teaching teams plan opportunities for students to learn on-Country as a rich resource for explicit teaching of Aboriginal languages.
- Teaching teams co-design learning opportunities with Elders and Aboriginal educators, respecting local protocols.
- Teaching teams connect On-Country learning across the curriculum and bring Country into the classroom.
- School staff respect cultural protocols when creating classroom displays, materials and activities, and when recording and using language.
- School staff follow risk-management practices when planning On-Country learning.

Resources

Culturally responsive schools target resourcing to optimise education outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Recruitment and development

School Improvement Tool: Domain 5 - Building an expert teaching team

Recruiting and supporting skilled staff ensures bilingual programs are strong and sustainable. Bilingual schools ensure that all staff understand the school's bilingual approach to teaching and learning and engage in professional learning that builds expertise in two-way learning and supports a culture of continuous improvement. The [Bilingual education program statement](#) outlines the expectations for staffing bilingual programs.

Expectations

- Schools ensure their recruitment and workforce planning directly support bilingual and school improvement goals.
- Schools induct all staff and provide ongoing professional learning in bilingual education, cultural responsiveness and local ways of working.
- Schools use evidence-informed professional learning and evaluate its impact.
- Schools allocate funding to sustain staffing, including specialist positions.
- Bilingual program leaders: teacher-linguists and two-way learning coordinators, participate in learning networks with other bilingual schools.

Resourcing for Language, Culture and Community expertise

School Improvement Tool: Domain 4 - Targeting school resources

Schools delivering bilingual education allocate funding and resources that recognise Aboriginal staff, Elders and Aboriginal languages and knowledges as integral to quality education. The Bilingual Education program statement outlines the expectations and constraints for resourcing a bilingual program.

Roles and responsibilities

Refer to section 9 of CARC policy for roles and responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities specific to bilingual education are below.

Principals and school leaders

Principals and school leaders must:

- oversee program delivery, staffing, budgets and reporting within school improvement processes
- lead consultation with families and Elders, implement culturally responsive practice through the NTLTM, and ensure staff receive induction and professional learning aligned to school priorities
- employ and support specialist staff, including Aboriginal team teachers, teacher-linguists, and literacy workers
- allocate resources and funding for staffing, Elders' payments, resource production and on-Country learning.

School staff

Bilingual program leaders - teacher-linguists and two-way learning coordinators must:

- coordinate school-wide approaches to bilingual teaching and resource development informed by department policies, guidelines and advice available in eLearn and the Policy and Advisory Library.

Educators must:

- work in bilingual teaching teams where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators share responsibility for planning, teaching, assessment and classroom management
- plan, teach and assess in Aboriginal languages and English applying the NTLTM, and using the NT Indigenous Languages and Cultures curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, and the NT EAL/D Learning Progressions
- participate in joint planning, reflection and professional learning to strengthen the use of the NTLTM.

Aboriginal Educators, including Aboriginal Team Teachers must:

- bring cultural authority, first-language knowledge and community connections to the classroom and to school-decision making.

Literature production supervisors and literacy workers must:

- develop culturally appropriate resources in the Aboriginal languages of the program.

Department of Education and Training

Early Years and School Services division must:

- provide policy, resources and support that ensures bilingual education is delivered consistently with the NTLTM

- provide coaching and advice to schools, regions and systems
- coordinate professional learning and resources
- oversee changes to bilingual programs.

Schools division must:

- provide advice and administrative support to schools and assist principals with community engagement and compliance.

Strategic and Business Services division must:

- allocate and communicate annual budgets to schools with bilingual programs.

Definitions

Refer to section 11 of CARC policy for a list of definitions.

Term	Definition
Aboriginal educator	A qualified Aboriginal teacher or an Aboriginal Team teacher who speaks students' first language.
Bilingual education	An approach guided by the Northern Territory Learning and Teaching Model that uses both an Aboriginal language and English as languages of instruction across the curriculum.
Bilingual program leader	An ST1 or similar who is employed to lead and coordinate the teaching and learning program for Aboriginal languages across the school. This may also include EAL/D. Commonly referred to as teacher-linguists or two-way learning coordinators.
Elders and language custodians	Community members who hold authority to make decisions on how communities want Aboriginal languages and knowledges taught, shared and used in schools.
English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D)	The identifier for students who are learning to speak English.
Home language (L1)	The language a student speaks at home and in their community.
Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)	The rights of Aboriginal people to control how their languages, cultures and knowledges are recorded, used and shared.
Local curriculum	A curriculum co-developed by schools and communities that integrates local Aboriginal knowledges, cultures and languages and other contextualised opportunities with the Australian Curriculum.
Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures curriculum (NT ILC)	The NT curriculum framework for teaching Aboriginal languages and cultures.

NT EAL/D learning progressions	A tool for assessing student proficiency in English and planning instruction for learners who speak another language or dialect at home.
On-Country learning	Learning that takes place On Country under the guidance of Elders, grounding students in cultural knowledge and connecting classroom learning with place.
Two-way learning	A method of education that brings together Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems, valuing both equally in classroom and community learning.
Year 1 Phonics Check	A mandatory assessment of early English literacy, applied in Year 1 or within 12 months of beginning English instruction in bilingual schools, whichever occurs first.

Related resources

Refer to section 10 of CARC policy for a list of related resources. Resources specific to Bilingual education are below.

Policies and frameworks

- Keeping Indigenous Languages and Cultures Strong Plan - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/category/6519>
- Northern Territory Learning and Teaching Model - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/teaching-and-learning/pedagogy/northern-territory-learning-and-teaching-model>
- NT Culturally Responsive Framework - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/supporting-staff/workforce-support/cultural-responsiveness-framework>
- Bilingual Education program statement - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/6458>
- Aboriginal languages reporting and monitoring – procedures - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/curriculum>
- Northern Territory Assistant Teacher Professional Standards - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/media/file/12277>

Related programs

- Families as First Teachers - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/early-childhood-education-and-care>
- Learning On Country, Northern Land Council - <https://learningoncountry.com/>
- CSIRO, Two Way Science, An Integrated Learning Program for Desert Schools, <https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/7949/>

Relevant eLearn pages

- Aboriginal Languages - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/teaching-and-learning/programsother/aboriginal-languages>

- Bilingual education - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/teaching-and-learning/pedagogy/bilingual-education>

Other resources

- AITSL guide to team teaching - <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/improve-practice/how-to-guides/collaborating-and-team-teaching>
- Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property - <https://www.artslaw.com.au/information-sheet/indigenous-cultural-intellectual-property-icip-aitb/>
- Legal deposit - <https://www.library.gov.au/services/publishers-and-self-publishers/legal-deposit>
- Protocol for using First Nations cultural and intellectual property in the arts - <https://creative.gov.au/first-nations-arts/protocols-for-using-first-nations-cultural-and-intellectual-property-in-the-arts>

Acronyms	Full form
CARC	Curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification
EAL/D	English as an additional language or dialect
ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
ILC	Indigenous languages and cultures
NT	Northern Territory
NT ILC	Northern Territory Indigenous languages and cultures
NTCET	Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training
NLTLM	Northern Territory Learning and Teaching Model
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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2	August 2022	Quality Standards and Regulation – Operational Policy	Administrative amendments to align roles and responsibilities to the structural alignment in effect from 1 July 2022, including NTG template and minor formatting
3	December 2025	Teaching and Learning Services	Edited to align to new department and divisional names and government template. Aligned to school improvement tools and new frameworks of Cultural Responsiveness and bilingual education.