



## Australian First Nations Peoples snapshots

### Connection through community



Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures priority

#### Relevant organising ideas –

##### Culture

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. (OI.5)

##### People

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' family and kinship structures are strong and sophisticated. (OI.8)

### Australian First Nations Peoples learning support officers and language teachers

In the Digital Technologies in focus project, Australian First Nations Peoples school learning support officers (education assistants and language teachers) held an important place in schools. Highly respected members in community, they are a consistent voice and a constant in the school; a significant part of the education team.

Teacher and principal knowledge of local students and communities was integral to the development and implementation of successful strategies for implementation of the Australian Curriculum: Digital Technologies. In some disadvantaged schools, where there was often high staff turnover, education assistants provided continuity as a critical source of this knowledge. This was particularly the case at schools with high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Students were able to form connections with the education assistants who were often members of their community who understood the local cultural ways of knowing, thinking and doing.

Many schools included their education assistants in professional learning (PL) activities, such as the CSER MOOC and face-to-face and online workshops conducted by the curriculum officers. These staff members, who live locally and are the constant in schools, may assist in sustaining the use of digital technologies.

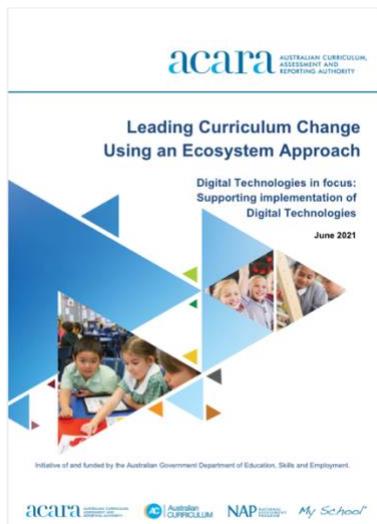


Figure 1: DTiF evaluation report: *Leading Curriculum Change Using an Ecosystem Approach – Digital Technologies in focus: Supporting Implementation of Digital Technologies – June 2021*  
[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/about/](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/about/)

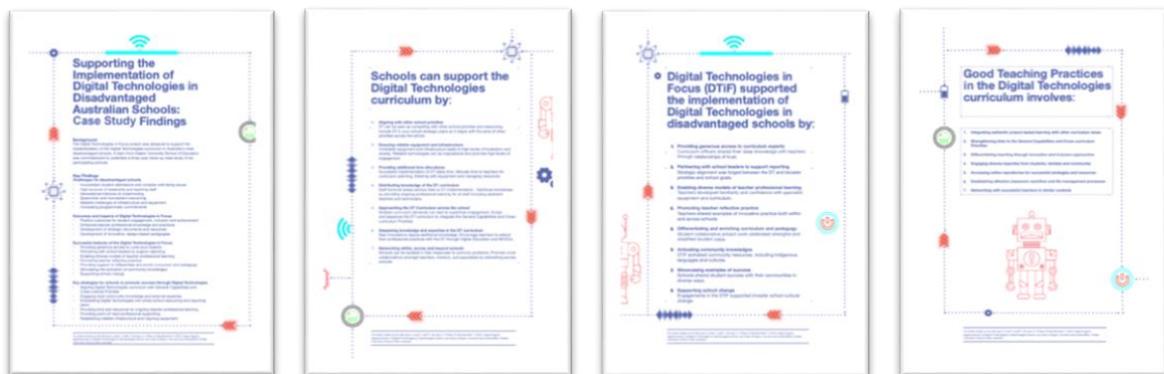
One school reported on the importance of including education assistants in PL: “By targeting PL for teaching staff in the use of ICT we have also seen an increase in confidence in ICT use by teaching staff and also education assistants.”

Curriculum officers commented on the value of including education assistants in staff training, as learning partners for teachers and students. Many education assistants were enthused by using ScratchJr and Book Creator for story writing and saw the value of using them in language with students.

Data analysis for the DTiF evaluation report revealed that schools need to be agile when responding to specific contextual circumstances, including the essential role of education assistants as a point of continuity where staff changes are high.

Deakin University produced an external evaluation report of the DTiF project and 4 infographics highlighting findings. It presented key strategies for schools to promote success through Digital Technologies. These include:

- aligning Digital Technologies curriculum with general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities
- engaging local community knowledge and external expertise
- distributing knowledge of the Digital Technologies curriculum by providing ongoing professional learning for staff including education assistants and technicians



Figures 2–5: Deakin University infographics from the external evaluation (Printable resources)  
[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/about/](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/about/)

## Snapshots of DTiF schools

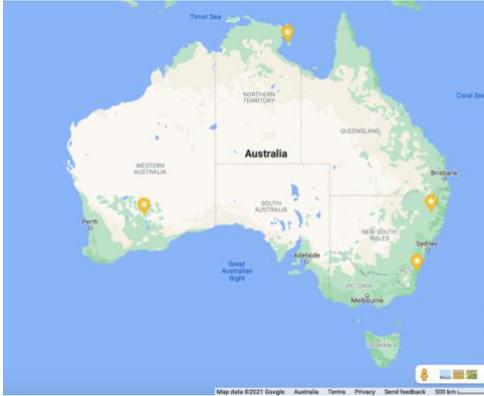


Figure 6: Map of Australia showing 4 locations referenced in the snapshots

The following snapshots detail ways DTiF schools rely on the expertise of Australian First Nations Peoples education assistants. The first snapshot shows the valuable way in which education assistants in 3 DTiF schools are supporting student learning, particularly as the students learn new ways of incorporating Digital Technologies through literacy. Dee Taylor, teacher and proud Dunghatti woman, co-authored this section as she shares a sense of community in her school at Casino West Public school.

The second snapshot details the sharing of bilingual teaching and learning resources for students in the Goldfields of Western Australia using ScratchJr and how important the language teachers are to students, especially through remote learning. The snapshot also details how Mogo Public School in New South Wales used visual programming to digitise cultural stories told by community members.

### Snapshot 1 – The value of school learning support officers

Drummond Memorial Public School is located in Armidale, New South Wales on the Traditional Lands of the Nganyaywana People and Anaiwan People. The focus of their DTiF project was building teacher capacity through a literacy-based STEM initiative. Students investigated engineering themes through a novel study and designed and built their own model wind turbines. Students tested the efficiency of their wind turbines by collecting and analysing data through the use of micro:bits. A handful of students failed to see the connections between the story they were reading and the local wind turbines and became disengaged in the learning activities. Aboriginal Education Officer, David Widders, gathered the class in front of him and drew connections between the work they were doing and the work of David Unaipon. The text below is from a transcript of Drummond Memorial Public School's [STEM Illustration of practice](#) on the Australian Curriculum website and shows how David was able to engage the students with culturally relevant details and make connections for the students:

So yeah, David Unaipon and we talked about him inventing the helicopter blades, remember that last year? And it's all come from the design of what? Can you remember? The boomerang. Yeah. Have a look at the shape of that and how it sort of starts down low here, builds up here, thicker in the middle and cuts back down around the back. Just as an idea of how you can shape your windmill blades.

When you look at Aboriginal people being here in Australia, how long have we been here? 65,000 years. So, if you're sitting around for 60 odd thousand years, you're going to be sitting there and they're doing a lot of practice on things and maybe throwing them. Are they coming back? So, there would have been a lot of prototypes. They would have experimented quite a fair bit, no doubt, like all scientists do.



Figure 7: David Widders shows the boomerang to students in Years 5 and 6

Once students saw the relevance which was taught to them in a culturally responsive way by a member of their local Aboriginal community, they were able to make connections and understand the learning context.

Casino West Public School is a small rural school on the New South Wales Far North Coast, located on the Traditional Lands of the Bundjalung People.

Dee Taylor, class teacher from the school and proud Dughatti woman shared the following snapshot:

We have approximately 220 students and currently, over 60 per cent of our jarjums are Aboriginal. We aim to raise our Aboriginal students' academic achievement and engagement by providing authentic connection between their culture and our school community.

At Casino West we begin our Aboriginal language and culture sessions from preschool and continue to integrate them across all key learning areas through the entire primary curriculum. We believe that through the implementation of cultural pedagogy and the employment of Aboriginal staff members inclusive of our Aboriginal education officer, 3 teachers and multiple student support liaison officers, we provide our students with a deep sense of belonging, connection and identity and in turn build their capacity to feel valued and a part of our school. We work alongside our Aboriginal tutors to include their perspective into our curriculum schoolwide. We show respect and follow Aboriginal protocols by firstly consulting with our Aboriginal community because we value their sense of ownership and acknowledge them as the knowledge holders.

Since our involvement in the DTiF project all support staff have been involved in professional learning and content application. It was essential that the ICT Strategic Plan, implemented as a result the DTiF project, highlighted collaborative practice and built on all staff capabilities to maintain respectful relationships, make meaningful impact and continue to support student learning and inclusivity. It is our belief that when our staff and children feel valued and included they are more likely to engage in developmental activities, enjoy being a member of our school community and become teachers as well as learners.



Figure 8: Casino West Public School logo



Figure 9: Aboriginal education officer, Uncle Shane working with a class.

## Snapshot 2 – The value of language teachers

CAPS Kurrawang Primary School in the Goldfields region of Western Australia is an independent school managed by the local community. The school is on the Lands of the Wangkatha People. The school's DTIF project question was: 'How to implement Digital Technology during the course of learning about the Wongutha language and culture?' The aim of the project was for students to use the Wongutha language and culture to produce a digital product to share with the community.

The school was also keen for students and staff to communicate a Welcome to Country message in the Wongutha language and gain confidence in sharing with community.

The school had been through a series of challenges including:

- difficulties in obtaining staff
- no teachers of the Wongutha language
- low student attendance.

Curriculum officer, Dee Poole worked with the school and ran a range of classroom lessons to lift the Digital Technologies knowledge and understanding and ICT skills of students and staff. The lessons were integrated in their approach to ensure that all learning was easily transferred across the CAPS Kurrawang learning priority areas. Staff had regular Digital Technologies conversations with Dee to further develop their content knowledge and looked at how they could include Digital Technologies into their lesson planning.

Dee worked with the Wongutha language teachers and showed them how to use ScratchJr and Book Creator to teach language. As there was a shortage of teachers, using these technologies allowed the teachers to support more students remotely. The language teachers sent ScratchJr and Book Creator files out via email to teachers across Goldfields schools so that everyone could engage with learning Wongutha. Recently, the school song was learnt by staff and students in Wongutha language. The community is pleased that local First Nations Australian contact teachers are ensuring there is a local language focus.

The design process has been used as part of a Science project that has assisted students to develop personal skills. Students have learnt to work collaboratively and student team leaders assisted other students. They have been working on a whole school project to design a sensory garden. This involved mathematical planning, scientific investigation and the design process along with good collaborative skills.

The staff have commented that school attendance has improved and student numbers have increased dramatically. Students are now learning some key words and phrases in Wongutha language. They are also gaining confidence and pride in their learning which is evident in the high levels of attendance.

The learning and integration of the Wongutha language and culture is successfully occurring at CAPS Kurrawang. Two-way learning connecting Western approaches to Wongutha cultures, particularly in Science learning has been introduced. Students are using a range of digital technologies to support this. They have learned many Wongutha words and short phrases and are regularly connecting the language to their Western learning.



Figure 10: Example of Scratch Jr interface used to record lessons in Wongutha language

The school plans to continue using digital technologies for staff and students to create and learn. Staff are going to work with students to create an animation or video that shares their language skills with others and becomes a learning resource for new students.

Students are developing digital stories in Wongutha to share online, in senior centres and with [Wangka: Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre](#).

Mogo Public School is a small school in the south coast region of New South Wales on the Lands of the Yuin Nation. The school has a strong Aboriginal Education program which includes mandatory cultural units for each class, with special focus and cultural days throughout the year. Dhurga, the local Aboriginal language, is taught across the school and at the local Mogo Pre-school. In 2019 the school employed an Aboriginal education officer (AEO). The role of the AEO at Mogo Public School is to liaise with the local Aboriginal community, support students in all areas of their school life, and provide support for all staff in cultural awareness and embedding Aboriginal Education across all learning areas.

During the DTiF project, Curriculum officer, Kim Vernon, worked with the school and helped the students to digitise the cultural stories they had written. This has inspired staff to incorporate Digital Technologies into their teaching and learning programs for other learning areas. Students in the upper grades have continued to develop their coding skills and have created cultural stories in Scratch. This example tells the story of how the red-bellied black snake got its name: [scratch.mit.edu/projects/407512910/](https://scratch.mit.edu/projects/407512910/)

The school plans to maintain contact with community to develop a Dhurga language app.

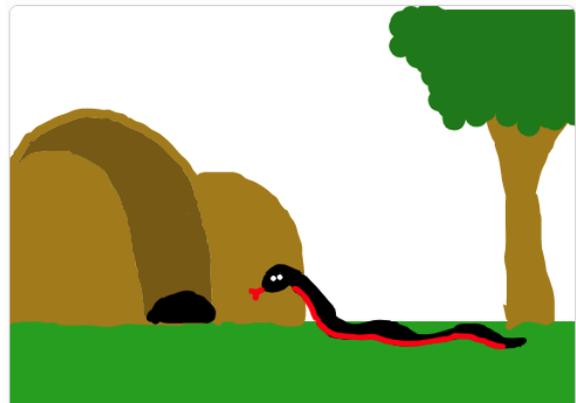


Figure 11: Example of Scratch version of the story 'How the red-bellied black snake got its name'

Credit: ashlynnmogo

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## Resources

DTiF evaluation report 2021 and Deakin external evaluation (click on Evaluation and reporting ribbon)

[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/about/](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/about/)

Drummond Memorial Public School STEM Illustration of practice

[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/stem/illustrations-of-practice/drummond-memorial-public-school-years-5-and-6/](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/stem/illustrations-of-practice/drummond-memorial-public-school-years-5-and-6/)

## Useful links

Background on David Unaipon (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this website contains images, voices and names of deceased persons.)

[aiatsis.gov.au/explore/david-ngunaitponi-unaipon](http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/david-ngunaitponi-unaipon)

CSIRO Two-way Science [www.csiro.au/en/education/programs/indigenous-stem-education-project/science-pathways-for-indigenous-communities/resources](http://www.csiro.au/en/education/programs/indigenous-stem-education-project/science-pathways-for-indigenous-communities/resources)

Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre [wangka.com.au/](http://wangka.com.au/)

Narragunnawali early years and primary resources (free to join and log in)

[www.narragunnawali.org.au/curriculum-resources](http://www.narragunnawali.org.au/curriculum-resources)

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