

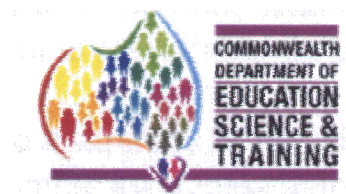
# **A Research Report**

on

## **An Assessment of Programme Component Activities**

(National Indigenous English  
Literacy and Numeracy Strategy –  
NIELNS)

prepared for



Study No. 02/05/3182

September 2002

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## **Executive Summary.**

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### **Setting The Scene.**

The challenges faced in relation to the education of indigenous students in Australian schools should not be under-estimated.

Such challenges and the barriers to improving educational outcomes (and, hence literacy and numeracy levels) cannot really be looked at in isolation as many factors to do with the home and parental environment, as well as cultural aspects impact upon the educational experience for such children.

Some of the major background factors include:

- low self-esteem.
- low expectations of success (and perhaps a low value placed upon education and schooling itself).
- absenteeism.

- starting behind at primary level and in the transition to secondary school.

Often poor education experiences among indigenous parents lead them to resist involvement with the local schools which their children attend.

## **Literacy and Numeracy.**

It is a truism to suggest that schools and parents rate satisfactory levels of literacy and numeracy as fundamentally important to opening up the world of learning.

This is the case for all students and, whilst indigenous students are often over-represented in the poorer-performing sector as regards literacy and numeracy, and deserving of special attention and emphasis in this respect, schools volunteer that they are often not the only disadvantaged sub-groups within the school community.

Specific programmes or initiatives related to improving literacy and numeracy among indigenous students are not widespread (dependent to some extent upon the relative proportion of aboriginal students at a particular school). Such programmes tend to be general and, as such, not exclusive to indigenous students.

Other activities and initiatives for indigenous students are, however, prominent but their literacy and/or numeracy focus might be more implicit or incidental.

## **The NIELN Strategy.**

This strategic initiative was quite well-known by name although exact details of what major aspects constituted the strategy were somewhat hazier, eg. that ASSPA was a major part of the strategy.

When prompted with the major thrust of the strategy and what it was trying to achieve, all target audiences were supportive and endorsed the direction although at the same time often recognising that **implementation** was another matter and that enormous change could not be expected...

- within a short time frame.
- without an integrated approach where other agencies servicing the needs of indigenous communities realised they could also make a contribution to educational improvement and achievement.

The slogan **'Write Your Future – Make School Count.'** Was generally regarded as sound and appropriate to the aims of the strategy although it was not widely known nor recognised.

## **The Magazine 'Deadly VIBE'.**

**This publication projected an extremely positive image across all target audiences:**



- **well liked and well-read by students.**
- **endorsed and praised by teachers and principals and parents.**

The magazine is widely regarded as compelling reading and the current format requires little, if any, change other than keeping the content fresh, interesting and contemporary.

It manifests a large range of positive attributes which are detailed within the body of the report. Suffice to say here that some of the key strengths of Deadly VIBE relate to:

- **its aspirational tenor and positive featuring of indigenous role models.**
- the quality format and high production values.
- the variety of visual and copy content.
- the high interest level of the subject matter.
- the ability to span age levels (upper primary to adult) and command interest equally from both sexes of reader.
- interactive components of the magazine (contests, puzzles and so on).

Its focus upon success is widely mentioned.

*“good for indigenous kids to see what aboriginals in our  
society can achieve.”*

Not only does the content have ‘something for everybody’ but many students claimed to read all or most of the magazine which is a testament to its interest level for them.

**Distribution issues offer some room for improvement in that some schools either do not receive the publication or the few copies disappear quickly – often out of the school.**

### **Deadly VIBE and the NIELN Strategy.**

The specific features included within the magazine in relation to literacy and numeracy objectives under the strategy are well-known and do attract attention. It is recommended that these continue and that themes of interest to students will dictate the level of involvement with them.

In greater detail...

- whilst interest is high, relatively few students actually are motivated to enter contests and competitions associated with certain of these sections.
- some consideration could be given to better promotion of these – and the types of prizes within the magazine itself.

The **effectiveness** of the magazine can be measured in a number of ways and on various levels...

- It is highly successful in gaining attention and interest from indigenous students and helping to boost self-esteem.
- The high level of readership (due to the nature of the content) must assist literacy development to some extent.
- Students do become involved with the magazine and they do obtain pro-school and positive education messages from it.
- It is used both formally (in the classroom context) and informally at schools and teachers are forthcoming about crediting the magazine with at least some favourable impact upon literacy, and, to a lesser extent, numeracy.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations.**

This section is amplified within the body of the report but the most prominent findings bearing upon future direction for the magazine are as follows:

- The favourable response to the magazine and its impact upon literacy and numeracy activities among readers indicate strongly that it is a valuable vehicle in relation to the NIELN strategy.
- When informed of the DEST sponsorship, agreement that it should continue was universal.
- No other magazine (or other communication channel) was felt capable of replicating the benefits and advantages offered by Deadly VIBE.
- Whilst all the above is highly positive, some further suggestions to maximise the effectiveness of the magazine would include:
  - examining the issues relating to distribution (to schools and within schools).
  - perhaps subtly promoting the magazine better to students and staff.

- maintaining the visits to schools by the magazine and leveraging the value of these further.
- considering extending the 'Deadly VIBE' branding to encompass stand alone literacy and numeracy 'products'.

In summary, Deadly VIBE has established a real niche and achieves some tangible effect upon willingness to read and become involved in the magazine content. In any future orientation, meddling too much with what is seen as a highly successful formula could be very risky whilst there is still the opportunity to sharpen its literacy and numeracy impact.

*“Our people have the right to a good education. Our children need the skills, experiences and qualifications to be able to choose their futures. Our communities need young people coming through with the education and confidence to be effective leaders. We need young people who can be advocates of our people, able to take their place in Australian society and business and still keep their culture strong.”*

(supporting statement from indigenous Australians)

## Background

The Commonwealth government's National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) is aimed at improving educational outcomes for indigenous people in Australia.

### **This initiative has goals which centre upon:**

- **raising school attendance;**
- **providing pre-schooling opportunities;**
- **training teachers with appropriate skills and cultural awareness in order to be effective, along with the use of effective teaching methods; and**
- **instituting transparent measures of success in order to assess the accountability of schools and teachers.**

The essence of this sensitive and far-reaching program could be summed up as:

- *co-operation and co-ordination* - Commonwealth and state / territory administrations.



- *involvement*
  - local communities, schools, parents and teachers.
  
- *commitment*
  - indigenous communities and parents.

A range of activities have been used to increase awareness of the educational aspects of NIELNS, including...

- the Indigenous Ambassadors' programme, and
- **literacy and numeracy competitions and editorials in DEADLY VIBE magazine.**

This magazine – and the evaluation of its effectiveness in relation to the goals of the NIELNS program – was the subject of the proposed research.

## The Key Research Objectives.

The principal information needs for this study can be identified as follows...

1. To provide an analysis of the distribution and readership of the magazine **Deadly VIBE**.
2. To determine attitudes and views about the suitability of using this vehicle to convey NIELNS messages to relevant target audiences.
3. To evaluate whether competitions and editorial copy is an effective way of promoting knowledge / understanding of the NIELNS:
  - initiatives
  - slogan
  - messages.
4. To identify how appropriate / valid that slogan and key messages are for each target audience.
5. To assess to what extent the content (eg. editorials and competitions) impact school attendance.

- 6.** To determine how elements within the Deadly VIBE magazine contributed by DEST have influenced (or otherwise) knowledge, understanding and attitudes to the NIELNS initiative among all key primary and secondary target audiences, i.e.
  - principals
  - teachers
  - indigenous communities, students and their parents.
  
- 7.** To provide DEST with recommendations upon:
  - the value for money of the present Departmental contribution / sponsorship of the Deadly VIBE magazine.
  - whether that sponsorship is to the advantage of the Department or not.
  - whether other publications could be used effectively (either as well as Deadly VIBE or substituted perhaps for it), to
    - ... reach target audiences
    - ... carry NIELNS messages.

## The Method.

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The major part of this research was conducted using a **qualitative** research design because...

- much of the thrust of the study was **exploratory** and a relatively unstructured format for the research enabled spontaneous issues to surface as well as permitting the moderator / interviewer to probe areas of relevance for the client organisation.
- so many of the objectives depended upon a physical sighting of the Deadly VIBE magazine itself, that the research needed to be conducted **face to face** with respondents having the opportunity to read, identify and comment (at leisure) upon all relevant components of the publication. This was especially true for non-regular readers of Deadly VIBE.

### **Qualitative Component.**

The conduct of this phase used relevant techniques suitable for the various target audiences, as follows:

- Paired depth interviews with primary indigenous students (one on one interviews could be more threatening).
- Mini-group discussions (3-5 students) with secondary indigenous students.
- Depth interviews (one on one) with other secondary audiences:

- principals
- teachers
- parents
- ASSPA Committee personnel.

Our suggested qualitative sample consisted of

- 10 paired interviews (primary students).
- 8 mini-group discussions (secondary students).
- 47 executive depth interviews
  - teachers
  - parents
  - ASSPA committees.

Geographically we see the sample being split as follows:

**Paired Interviews:**

	Syd No.	NSW rural No.	North QLD* No.
<b>Primary Students</b>			
- male	2	1	2
- female	1	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

**Mini-Group Discussions:**

	Syd No.	NSW rural No.	North QLD* No.
<b>Secondary Students</b>			

- male	1	1	2
- female	1	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>



**Executive Depth Interviews:**

	<b>Syd No.</b>	<b>NSW rural No.</b>	<b>North QLD* No.</b>
<b>Secondary Audiences.</b>			
Principals:			
- primary schools	2	2	2
- secondary schools	2	2	2
Teachers:			
- primary schools	2	2	2
- secondary schools	2	2	2
Parents of indigenous students	4	4	6
Members of ASSPA committees	3	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>

\* centred on Rockhamptom and surrounding area.

**Quantitative Component.**

We conducted a total of 90 interviews with **secondary students**.

Most of these interviews were conducted by telephone with a small number (13) being conducted face to face to augment the sample.

The questionnaire used can be found in the appendix at the back of this report.



**Group Discussion**



**In-Depth Interview**

## **CONSTRAINT**

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**Group discussions** and **executive depth interviews** seek to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively precise or absolute measures. By reason of the size of the groups and sample, the special recruitment methods adopted and the study objectives themselves, it is clearly understood that the work is exploratory in nature. Clearly the findings are not projectable to any larger population. They should be viewed, therefore, in a qualitative rather

than quantitative frame of reference and as being directional only.

**The Report In Detail.**

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**Introductory  
Note.**

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Whilst this study had the potential to be far-ranging (and, indeed, gathered much information about challenges and solutions to general educational outcomes for indigenous students), we are mindful of the objectives of this project which were focused upon:

- the principles behind the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.
- **the relationship of these principles to the magazine 'Deadly VIBE' and the value of continued sponsorship of this publication by DEST.**

Other than relevant background comment, we shall confine ourselves to the above parameters for this report.

## **Challenges To Achieving Satisfactory Educational Outcomes For Indigenous Children.**

**It is easy to underestimate the challenges faced in relation to the education of indigenous children.**

These cover the full spectrum of environmental, health, cultural and even psychological issues. Whilst not all indigenous students suffer or are penalised by such factors to the same extent, it is easy for others to generalise upon this basis.

Although their situation may be different in important respects, and indigenous children tend to be over-represented in the poorer-performing categories as regards the level of literacy and numeracy, there are those within the principal and teacher sub-group who claim that certain other culturally and linguistically diverse groups are also disadvantaged in their own way – and themselves deserve special attention.

**It is too simplistic to look at challenges and barriers to satisfactory educational outcomes (and, hence, literacy and numeracy levels) in isolation as a number of factors can often co-exist or impact upon each other.**

In this context, the following are all regularly mentioned by both indigenous and non-indigenous respondents to this study. They are presented in no particular order:

- Shyness and low self-esteem. Often indigenous students are struggling to feel positive about themselves and their social and educational future.

*“often they need a real boost.”*

*“self-respect and respect for others does underpin the learning environment.”*

This can translate into an inability to accept positive comment about achievement in certain cases.



- Low expectations of educational success, mentioned not just among non-indigenous cohorts and teachers. This can be an amalgam of their home or community situation and can be developed at an early age...

*“kids are set up as failures before they come to school.”*

- Allied to the above issue is a perception that the traditional “white Anglo” school model is less appropriate for many indigenous students. Under-achievement then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

*“there is the belief in some quarters that they will underachieve.”*

This, in itself, can translate into a less solid commitment from some indigenous students and their families.

*“that it’s ok to drop out, ok to have a few days off.”*

- There is often a lower recognition of the importance of education (and thus of school) among certain parents and communities.

This can be compounded by poor educational experiences for indigenous parents and lower aspirations, often based upon lack of employment.

*“if the only role models are welfare recipients, education can lose its meaning as a way of delivering a job.”*

- Cultural and family commitments often mean that indigenous children are very mobile (moving schools fairly frequently in some cases, even within a year). Such commitments also negatively impact attendance levels which teachers often claim is disruptive to achievement and makes school more “incidental”.
- The home situation and environment for numbers of indigenous children is often not conducive to support what is occurring at school. This factor has numerous dimensions from single parent families to health / nutrition problems and even abuse of varying types.

This often translates to a lack of stability overall.

*“we try to check that they’ve had some breakfast to help them concentrate – how can they learn when they are hungry?”*

*“often our kids don’t get enough sleep because of what’s going on at home.”*

*“overcoming the social and economic disadvantage always faced by aboriginal people and families.”*

Such basic needs as a quiet time and place to complete homework and resources such as reading materials at home, can be scarce.

- **One of the key problems faced is engendering involvement of aboriginal parents and local indigenous communities within the school.**

*“(many) still don’t fully appreciate that school is meant to be a friendly place where they feel welcome.”*

**Apart from lack of “connection” with schools or a feeling of intimidation, parents may suffer low literacy levels themselves or have had a poor schooling record.**

*“from years ago, the whites have got all the control. School was where you were dominated by white people.”*

*“school itself was not a great success for many of our (indigenous) parents.”*

- There are more obvious and specific influences as well upon effective educational outcomes, eg.

- high levels of absenteeism among indigenous students.
- poor retention levels at high school – especially to Years 11 and 12.

*“we had three students (in Year 12) at the beginning of the year but two have now dropped out.”*

*“the absentee rate is frightening but our retention rate is worse.”*

- Disengagement. This is a frequently-used term to describe a sad situation that occurs at some high schools. Pressure points appear to be at the transition from primary to secondary school and after the Year 8 or Year 9 period. Some indigenous students at this time can find it awkward to keep up and so their relationship with school (and thus attendance) can become more tenuous.

The above issues are undoubtedly already well-known and many have directly influenced aspects of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy (NIELN) Strategy.

**Yet they do provide a suitable backdrop for the scope of the task to be addressed by the strategy and the length of the time frame for widespread improvement.**

Two aspects emerge upon which the majority of respondents agree:

- there is no one particular 'solution' but rather a variety of approaches that need to be pursued.
- the need for a co-ordinated, integrated and concerted approach where all agencies involved in indigenous welfare and community liaison work together and recognise the fundamental importance of a broad range of other factors upon educational outcomes.

*“it’s no good just providing education solutions, we have to go back and look at the whole picture.”*

*“the greatest urgency is for aboriginal people to feel confident and part of the school; to be motivated to achieve those things (to enable them) to be empowered in society.”*

*“teachers all need to be aware of how education hasn’t worked in the past for this group.”*

With regard to **solutions** which can improve educational outcomes for indigenous students, suggestions were many and varied and there was consensus that there would be no "short term fix".

Consistent attention will need to be paid to the issues surrounding education for such children by successive administrations.

Some suggestions involved addressing the teaching component, others to focus upon the students themselves and others to assist in relation to parental involvement and the home environment. In reality, it will be an amalgam of all these.

More specifically, there was mention, spontaneously, of:

- pre-primary school education.
- intervention and specialist teaching / attention for students encountering difficulty.
- ensuring, as far as possible, that children, particularly at primary school, do not fall behind.
- more culturally sensitive use of recognition of unique skills that aboriginal children may have and their interest and involvement in

things they might like and are good at (such as sport) to carry positive messages about the school experience and the importance of school / education.

- raising the status of educational achievement.

## Literacy and Numeracy.

**It is a truism to suggest that literacy and numeracy are of fundamental importance to boosting educational outcomes.**

*“unless the students are reasonably literate the door to other learning will remain closed.”*

Basic levels of **literacy** (particularly) and numeracy are also considered vital to students being able to educate themselves (ie. read reference materials and research topics) both at high school and in later life.

DESPITE THE GENUINE CONCERN AND EFFORT ON THE PART OF STAKEHOLDERS AT THE “COALFACE” (ie. PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, INDIGENOUS AIDES) TO CONCENTRATE UPON LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN RELATION TO ABORIGINAL STUDENTS, SCHOOLS ALSO SEE SUCH SKILLS AS IMPORTANT FOR **ALL** STUDENTS (INCLUDING MANY OTHER CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE AUDIENCES WHICH ARE THEMSELVES OFTEN DISADVANTAGED).

It was often reported that indigenous children begin school behind other students in terms of their literacy levels and fell behind further as they progress through the school system.



*“many (indigenous students) start here (ie. primary school) without even the literacy fundamentals.”*

*“some of them (at high school) are three to five years behind in terms of literacy level when they arrive.”*

*“what is needed is more intensive work at primary school level.”*

**Despite the above, there appear to be relatively few dedicated literacy and numeracy programmes in schools surveyed for indigenous students.**

This can depend upon the proportion of indigenous students within the school (eg. where a substantial minority or even a majority of the students are from indigenous backgrounds, then more dedicated attention is able to be paid to the issue).

There is reasonable penetration of specific literacy and numeracy programmes as such (eg. Reading Recovery, Count Me In and Links to Learning) in which relevant indigenous students are included / represented, but they are general (ie. for all students who can benefit from them) and not exclusive to indigenous students.

However, this is not to suggest that schools are not involved in a wide range of activities specific to indigenous students or in which such students take a leading role – which often may have a valuable literacy and numeracy “spin off” although not principally designed for this purpose. Examples of such facilities or activities discovered included:

- NAIDOC Week related functions, activities and festivals.
- general programmes and camps, 'buddy' retreats, men's and women's business sessions (often with community elders).
- homework centres for indigenous students within the school campus.
- dedicated 'ASSPA rooms' with an array of resource materials.
- aboriginal studies curriculum components.
- specific 'aboriginal / indigenous celebration days'.

More specialised learning-related initiatives included mentoring (unspecific literacy and numeracy focus) and tutoring / in-class tutors (more specific literacy and numeracy focus).

Two other issues are relevant in this context:

- **there is an acknowledged greater focus upon literacy generally in schools – for all students – than there is upon numeracy.**
- there are some differences in attitude and “community connection” between indigenous families living in urban and decentralised locations respectively.

## **The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS).**

**The majority of those respondents with some direct educational responsibility or involvement (eg. principals, teachers and indigenous aides) were either aware of the NIELN strategy or claimed to be aware of it by name.**

However, such individuals were not very familiar with the component elements of that strategy, eg. few connected ASSPA with the overall strategy (or the magazine Deadly VIBE with it).

Awareness and knowledge of the other elements linked to the strategy was sporadic and vague, ie. for initiatives and assistance such as:

- ATAS
- IEGAS
- IESIP
- SRPs

ABSTUDY was much better known and some within the research sample had current or past awareness or knowledge of **mentoring** and **tutorial assistance** but

- not necessarily by the correct programme name.
- NOT IN TERMS OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF SUCH INITIATIVES TO THE STRATEGY (NIELN) ITSELF.

It is important to remember that there are quite a number of organisations (both at State and Federal levels) addressing or attempting to address the needs of indigenous families and communities. This, and the fact that the names and responsibilities of departments and programmes tend to change regularly, which can be a confusing element, as well as some bureaucratic access difficulties in certain isolated cases.

*“took me ages to find out how to get some funding for in-school tutoring help.”*

(principal)

Whilst the relationship of some of the component parts with the strategy itself may be tenuous, there was evidence of NIELNS posters in several of the schools visited.

In order to obtain some prompted response to the broad thrust of the NIELN strategy, respondents were shown an information card (see Card A as stimulus material in appendix at back of this report).

Reactions to the direction and content of the strategy were positive and supportive and many schools with significant indigenous student populations claimed that, due to their recognition of the importance of the elements and sensitivity to the needs of aboriginal students, they were already pursuing many of the aims explicit within the strategy.

Of **most interest** were the aspects related to:

- lifting attendance rates.
- addressing learning, health and nutrition problems.
- providing pre-school opportunities.
- teacher-training and teacher resource issues.

Despite the high level of support for the aims encompassed by the strategy, this was matched by recognition that the successful implementation of such objectives would not be easy and would take time, given the practical and environmental difficulties referred to earlier in this document.

*“you probably have to accept that you can’t solve everything.”*

*“you need to look at each one and fund it adequately, make it long term and instigate co-ordinated action between (all relevant) governments and agencies.”*

The **slogan** which underpins the theme behind the strategy – **‘Write Your Future – Make School Count.’** was generally considered suitable by most respondents (including indigenous parents and ASSPA representatives).

Virtually none of our respondents was aware of this slogan on a spontaneous basis, but adult response indicated clearly...

- what it was seeking to convey / encapsulate.
- that it covered both the literacy and numeracy messages.
- that the connection is made between school and the future.

*“it does make school important.”*

*“there is emphasis upon the individual as well as the school.”*

Younger (primary level) and some high school students did not fully grasp the meaning / intent of the slogan and, for some teachers, this could reduce its effectiveness to a degree.

*“a bit artificial.”*

*“sounds a bit white.”*

*“too adult - not kid speak or all that child-friendly.”*



## **The Deadly VIBE Magazine.**

There was generally very little awareness of other magazines or media (whether it be newspapers, magazines or websites), which students, or others, could identify as being specifically directed toward indigenous youth.

There was isolated mention of the comic magazine “Streetwise” and the Koori Mail newspaper which some parents mentioned and which was available in several schools. However, students are generally not attracted by or involved with the Koori Mail which is a combination of a newspaper and classified employment advertising reference source.

**The first point to be made about the Deadly VIBE magazine refers to distribution which occurs variously from school to school and consequently, availability and readership levels differ from school to school.**

Key features / findings as they relate to the **distribution** of Deadly VIBE are as follows:

- Usually (but not always) copies are received into the school via the ASSPA Committee structure.

- This means that dissemination within the school (and the ultimate location of copies) can be problematic. Some are given to individual students to take home, others are taken home by adults (ASSPA Committee members), others may be given to class teachers to look at and use, others may be placed in school libraries (rarely) or Koori / ASSPA resource rooms within the school.
- Number of copies varies as well (most schools receive 10-15 copies) which can restrict the usage of the magazine.
- Some schools either don't receive the publication at all or part of the school (eg. primary or secondary where both are adjacent) will receive it, whilst the other part may not.

**One consequence of this situation is the relative lack of back issues properly catalogued or kept in libraries or other resource centres within schools.**

Teachers and students both felt that access to past issues for classroom work, projects or just general interest would have been valuable given the favourable opinions held universally about the magazine.

**As will be seen in the balance of this section, attitudes to Deadly VIBE are highly positive, so it is important to get it into the hands of the target group.**

**At present, its distribution could be improved and this is some handicap in terms of realising the potential the magazine appears to have.**

**Initial** reactions to the mention of the magazine were revealing...

**Parents, principals, teachers, aides.**

*“kids see it as a bit of a grown-up magazine.”*

*“it’s a great magazine – the kids really like it and identify with it.”*

*“so important that there is a magazine (for aboriginal students) that doesn’t look second-rate.”*

*“shows kids what they can achieve – and what kids like them can achieve.”*



*“Improve? I don’t really think it can – I like how it is now – the balance now.”*

*“they’ve hit the mark with regard to content relating to Aboriginal stars.”*

*“it’s a magazine to interest all ages and both sexes and is of interest to adults as well as kids.”*

*“it’s great for kids. I don’t read it but I use it in class and the homework centre. I’ve used it in Year 4 in units on identity and personality.”*

*“shows you what’s going on outside of our community.”*

*“You know, until I read this magazine, I didn’t know there were this many successful Aboriginal people.”*

**(Mother)**

*“it’s inspirational more than anything.”*

**Students.**

*“I like how they speak to other kids – the interviews with kids.”*

*“non-aboriginal kids also read it at our school.”*

*“it’s nice to know what other people (like me) think and feel.”*

*“I think it’s a great magazine.”*

*“makes you focus and be really proud.”*

*“it’s good because it’s really fun and a nice change from normal school learning.”*

*“I like how they show black people who have made it. It encourages you to try.”*

*“it’s pretty good – I like almost all of the stuff that’s in it.”*



*“Good for Aboriginal kids to see what they can achieve.”*

*“Deadly VIBE makes you think that there’s all these famous Aboriginal people out there and if they can do that then why can’t I?”*

In greater detail, all audiences were able to point out a range of benefits they associated with Deadly VIBE.

<b>Principals, teachers, teacher aides.</b>	<b>Parents, students.</b>
<p data-bbox="395 712 746 792"><i>“I love the positivity of the magazine.”</i></p> <ul data-bbox="336 875 807 1339" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Well set out.</li><li>• Good interviews.</li><li>• Quality presentation.</li><li>• Includes articles and activities.</li><li>• Content is appropriate, interesting.</li></ul> <p data-bbox="387 1424 754 1458"><i>“something for everybody.”</i></p> <p data-bbox="405 1509 737 1588"><i>“kids really do like to get this magazine.”</i></p>	<p data-bbox="946 712 1362 745"><i>“good mix of music and sport.”</i></p> <p data-bbox="938 797 1374 875"><i>“fabulous – I like to try and read all of it.”</i></p> <ul data-bbox="914 958 1398 1496" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy to read.</li><li>• Good / great pictures.</li><li>• Posters.</li><li>• A good name for a magazine.</li><li>• Features famous aboriginal people.</li><li>• Includes stories about other children / teenagers.</li></ul>

The positives surrounding the publication could be summarised as follows:

- good visual / content mix
- high production values

- well laid out format (includes variety)
- length of articles is appropriate
- POSITIVE TONE

*“upbeat”*

- sport, music, entertainment focus
- the name of the magazine
- the fact that it is free
- the use of colour
- features encouraging activities.

**There is little doubt that, among all audiences, two of the key advantages associated with Deadly VIBE are:**

- **the focus upon success and the depiction of positive role models for aboriginal students and indigenous people in general.**

*“shows that indigenous kids can do anything.”*

*“not as though they get splashed over other magazines.”*

- **the finding that aboriginal children clearly related to the magazine because it contained articles, pictures and content which are of genuine interest to them.**

The magazine contained such a variety of topics which were entertaining that it was impossible to identify any respondents, even adults, who could not find something they wanted to read about.

Many of the articles are so compelling that some students who were clearly struggling to read parts of them still persisted. (In this respect, the magazine seems able to achieve its objective of encouraging reading among the target group.)

**Another prominent factor in its appeal is that the indigenous audience sees it as their magazine, ie. they know that content will be of interest – and be genuinely entertaining as well as positive.**



The magazine projects a number of aspects which make it unique as a publication other than the fact it is specifically aimed at an indigenous audience. These aspects include:

- the blend of content.  
*(sports, entertainment, personalities, news, activities)*
- the diversity of people included within the pages.  
*(both famous personalities and other, ordinary children)*
- the aspirational / inspirational focus referred to previously and emphasis upon achievement.
- the ability to span age groups.  
*(from upper primary through high school / teenage years to adult interest)*
- the equality of appeal to both sexes.
- the capacity to **involve** readers with quite a deal of content within each issue.

## **Specific Literacy and Numeracy Content Within The Magazine.**

The magazine is obligated to carry a number of features / activities which bear upon the objectives of the NIELN strategy. These include:

- **Helping Out.**
- **Taking An Ambassador To School.**
- **Writing It Up.**
- **Vibetime.**
- **Solid Score.**
- **I'm On The Web.**

All these features were relatively well-known and recognised. As may be expected, interest is variable, depending upon the topic and the person featured in those which use personalities to convey the 'message' (eg. Helping Out, Take An Ambassador To School).

**There is considerable interest in visits to schools by well-known indigenous role models and sporting heroes, and the schools visited by Deadly VIBE praised and remembered those occasions.**

It would be a recommendation of this study that visits by the magazine to schools be continued and extended. This is not only providing a 'personal

face' to the magazine but is a source of distribution and fun (giveaways and so on).

### **Writing It Up and Vibetime.**

These sections were of interest to students as well (often with younger children), however, their involvement with them was more passive than active, ie. reading and completing puzzles but not necessarily expressing interest in sending entries into the magazine.

The same tended to apply to other competitions featured in the publication.

One strategy worth exploring would be to examine the nature of the prizes offered and the way they were promoted. Some were unaware that there were prizes. Some suggestions provided included:

- sporting clothing or equipment.
- some arrangement to meet or communicate with sporting personalities.
- a makeover or fashion clothing (for girls).
- video games.

As prizes stand, items like T-shirts are of appeal but perhaps not motivating enough.

With respect to **Uncle Pete's Vibetime**, the incorporation of the games and puzzles component into the magazine (as in the August edition), will have a positive effect upon the extent to which it is noticed and young readers become involved with it. At present, it looks like an afterthought, like a subscription form stapled in and insubstantial and lacking in colour.

If it was dressed up to look more attractive and perhaps slightly expanded, we believe this would boost interest in this section.

### **Solid Score.**

Awareness of this component of the magazine was somewhat lower although when prompted with it, students realised quickly what it was about and the prize(s) were appealing to some.

'It's cool to go to school' is a theme with more attraction for younger children (and primary school or junior high school is where regular attendance behaviour is best inculcated).

Older students with poor attendance records are, however, less likely to be persuaded by this contest-based approach, however it should continue to

be included as motivation to attend school is seen as important by educators and parents alike.

## **I'm On The Web.**

Awareness of the Deadly VIBE website was variable, as is penetration of computers and access to the internet **at home** for indigenous children.

Those who had visited the website were well aware of the content there and generally impressed...

*“there’s heaps there.”*

*“CDs, games, things coming up.”*

We believe this could be promoted more strongly and coupled, where possible, with some access time **at school**.

The **health and medical section** had more interest for adults (and mothers, especially) than children, but was seen as a relevant and valid aspect for inclusion within the magazine.

Health and nutrition messages could perhaps best be reinforced with **students** if included as part of a story that interests them, eg. a sports start advocating the role of nutrition or a healthy lifestyle in order to perform better.

The **August 2002** edition of Deadly VIBE contained some new features:

- Deadly Wes (an aboriginal superhero).
- Wanda Woman (a type of supermum).
- Vibeschool (an expanded Vibetime-style learning feature incorporated into the magazine format).

On the basis of respondent reaction, all these inclusions have the potential to attract further interest and boost involvement with the magazine content.

There is little doubt that the specific sections designed to positively impact literacy and numeracy are of interest to and are accessed by large numbers of student (and other) readers.

**However, greater involvement (particularly in entering contests or competitions) could be promoted through a combination of:**

- **re-examining the prize mix.**
- **greater encouragement, assistance and classroom emphasis (eg. among teachers and indigenous aides) coupled with some follow up.**

As the 'enter and win' format is itself appropriate to boosting literacy and numeracy skills, perhaps it deserves a little more formal classroom attention.



## Improvements In Relation To Deadly VIBE.

THE CURRENT FORMAT AND CONTENT MIX OF THE MAGAZINE IS COMPELLING AS IT IS AND LITTLE CHANGE SHOULD BE CONTEMPLATED.

It would be risky to meddle too much with a successful recipe and relatively few consistent suggestions for improvement were proffered by respondents.

The following is a list of some of the more common ideas put forward but should not be interpreted as weaknesses within the current format but rather opportunities for consideration for the editorial team if looking to boost variety.

<b>From girls...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fashion topics.</li><li>• Makeover competitions.</li><li>• Star signs.</li><li>• Movie reviews.</li><li>• Personal lives of</li></ul>

<b>From boys...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jokes section.</li><li>• More puzzles and games.</li><li>• A comic strip.</li><li>• A quiz (about well-known aboriginal people).</li></ul>

entertainers.

- Letters to the editor (already included).
- Poetry competitions.
- More posters (Deadly VIBE covers?).
- More on local / other Australian schools.

*“kids like to read about other kids.”*

- More posters (especially action / sporting).
- Colouring-in section (primary students).
- Free CDs.
- More upon the NRL.
- More music-related content.

**The key finding here is that “more of the same” is what the target audiences really want and the blending / integration of learning / literacy messages within the format without compromising the interest and appeal of the magazine is a particular strength of this publication.**

## The Effectiveness Of The Magazine.

There are a number of dimensions to an evaluation of the magazine's effectiveness...

- as a publication in itself.
  
- in relation to the NIELN strategy
  - in promoting literacy and numeracy principles.
  - in relation to the strategy itself.

Taking these in turn, the following is evident:

**As a publication** targeted at the indigenous audience, Deadly VIBE has been highly successful in gaining the attention and interest of aboriginal students and in helping to boost self-esteem. It has developed a format with wide appeal which stimulates involvement with a high proportion of its content. This is already a considerable achievement.

**In relation to the promotion of literacy and numeracy**, there is evidence to suggest that its contribution is positive and potentially could work even harder if certain distribution issues are addressed.

Whilst its direct influence can be hard to ascertain (as it may be imperceptible to students)...

- it must have some positive effect if they read the articles and become involved in the interactive sections as most do.
- teachers were more forthcoming about this aspect and often credited the magazine with having a significant effect on **literacy** primarily.

**It should also be recognised that even small gains for which the magazine may be responsible are considered to be real achievements.**

If greater involvement in reading regularly is stimulated by the magazine then there will be some literacy benefit. Impact upon **numeracy** is more difficult to judge although successful completion of numerical puzzles and games will boost facility with at least some mathematical principles.

A revealing and positive aspect of the **learning value** of the magazine was the extent to which certain teachers use the publication in the **classroom context**.

*“use it as a resource in our units on identity.”*

*“look at it across a number of levels – the artwork,  
the genre, the writing.”*

*“it’s part of the research upon the aboriginal studies course.”*

It is clear that in schools the magazine is used both formally and informally (available during ‘free time’, in homework centres / ASSPA or Koori rooms). Distribution (sufficient copies in schools) and location in libraries will help further.

Parents recognise it as an adjunct to learning and a valuable resource and often wistfully remark...

*“when we went to school we didn’t have  
anything like that.”*

**In relation to the NIELN strategy itself**, the main impact of Deadly VIBE is with its literacy and numeracy focus rather than spelling out explicitly the aims and objectives of the formal strategy. This is a far more **implicit** message as the vast majority of indigenous readers don’t connect the magazine with the Federal Government or even with the Department of

Education, Science and Training. Whilst it obviously includes much of learning value, it is not positioned as an educational tool per se.

Although any link or mention of the NIELN strategy by name is very low key within the magazine, all audiences understood the relationship of its content to the broad thrust of the strategy. ASSPA is a very visible, active and tangible 'connecting tissue' between indigenous communities and schools and appears an appropriate focus for channeling of messages in relation to the strategy together with direct contact with schools via principals.

**The future role of Deadly VIBE** should be determined by its popularity and its effectiveness as well as the opportunities for improving distribution and making the publication work even harder in relation to its NIELNS aims.

**All audience members included in this study were highly supportive of the continuation of the magazine and would also endorse any sponsorship of it by DEST.**

The target audience undoubtedly like the magazine, are **attracted** to it and prepared to become **involved** with it (and its content) and feel better about themselves in the process.

Students also obtain pro-school messages from it.

Furthermore,

- there is very little, if anything, that could be substantively improved with the current format.
- no other magazine or communication channel is felt capable of replicating the benefits and advantages and image of Deadly VIBE.

- any other attempt to launch another such publication would be very expensive and would need considerable promotion as it would be 'starting from scratch'.

At present, Deadly VIBE appears the ideal vehicle in relation to the NIELN strategy but its impact and effectiveness could still be improved.



## Quantitative Component.

### About this study component.

A total of 90 telephone and face to face interviews was conducted upon a random basis to strength the statistical basis for some of the qualitative research findings.

Sample details were as follows:

	<b>No.</b>
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>90</b>
Victoria	19
New South Wales	28
Queensland	26
NT/WA	17
Male	45
Female	45
Age Group:	
under 15 years	49
16	19

17	19
18+	3

The key findings from this component of the research were as follows:

	%
<b>Awareness of Deadly VIBE:</b>	
Unprompted	31
Prompted	30
Total	61

	%
Usually read... some, most or all of the magazine	73
Ever entered competitions	13
Completed puzzles	55
Overall Opinion:	
- very good	32
- quite good	68
Improvements:	
- ok as it is	35
- don't know	20
Aware of literacy and numeracy focus – yes	43
Does in fact help literacy and numeracy:	
- both	64

- reading	17
- either	9
- don't know	11

## Conclusions and Recommendations.

This evaluation has enabled us to make some observations about the role of the magazine and suggest some guidance for future direction in relation to it.

- In the overall sense, it is evident that **primary school** is a very important stage in the quest to improve school attendance and inculcate better literacy and numeracy levels among indigenous children.

Distribution and effectiveness of Deadly VIBE at this level (particularly upper primary) is an important objective.

- Teacher training and in-service attention to the requirements in relation to indigenous education (and the NIELN strategy) are critical.
- ASSPA is currently and potentially an important focus / element of the strategy – especially in relation to parental involvement in schools.

And as far as the magazine 'Deadly VIBE' is concerned, the following is suggested...

1. Examine distribution options to maximise coverage within limits.

Whilst it is appreciated that a copy can't be made available to **each** indigenous student, there is a need to perhaps formalise better distribution both **to** schools and **within** schools, ie.

- some schools with indigenous students evidently don't receive the magazine.
- copies delivered to schools often disappear quickly.
- library copies could be valuable.
- some retention of back copies for reference would be wise.

ASSPA Committee contacts could be the suitable channel for organising the suggestions above.

- 2.** Some promotional options could also be valuable in relation to the magazine, eg.
  - posters sent promoting the cover or feature articles. These could be displayed at schools in certain months.
  - a brief teacher information guide both
    - ... alerting them to Deadly VIBE and its content
    - ... introducing how it can be used, where appropriate, in a classroom context.

It can only be a benefit to boost awareness of the magazine among teaching staff (and not just those sensitive to indigenous education issues).

- 3.** The further promotion of visits to schools by the magazine would result in a greater focus and higher profile for the publication as well as an enhanced opportunity to boost its NIELNS credentials.
- 4.** The further development of the Deadly VIBE website and promotion of it as a resource for in-school use would similarly extend the influence of the magazine.
- 5.** Avoid meddling too much with an established, relatively familiar and successful format for the magazine. Whilst the content must be kept

fresh and varied, the fact that the magazine drew little, if any, criticisms is itself revealing.

- 6.** Consideration should be given to the development of stand-alone literacy and numeracy products, branded Deadly VIBE and based perhaps upon themes and personalities associated with the content of the publication.

We envisage such things as 'learning packs' or even curriculum materials. For specific literacy and numeracy emphasis we'd imagine puzzle packs, brain-teasers or comprehension aids along this line.

- 7.** Some thought could also be given to monitoring entry levels to contests to evaluate the appeal of certain types of contest and prizes offered. The intention here would be to try to stimulate greater active vs. passive interaction with this component of the magazine.
- 8.** The current 'obligatory' NIELNS components have the potential to continue to work effectively provided the content remains interesting, fresh and contemporary.
- 9.** Avoid making the tone or content of the magazine too 'heavy' or overtly political. Any greater 'government feel' would jeopardise



some of the current appeal, although education, health and agency (eg. Centrelink) messages are all fine.

- 10.** Any impetus to change the magazine in any substantive way should be rebuffed. One of the key virtues of the current format is the magazine's ability to appeal to both younger and older students as well as adults. It is important that this breadth of appeal and audience reach remain.



**Appendix** Discussion Guides and  
Questionnaire.

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## **An Assessment of Programme Component Activities**

(National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy – NIELNS)

Discussion / Interview Guide

### **Principals, ASSPA Committee Members, Teachers and Parents.**

*Introduce self and outline broad purpose of research. Ensure respondent understands confidentiality of response. (Orient discussion topics appropriately between individuals where relevant.)*

- When considering what challenges are faced in relation to education for indigenous community members, what comes to mind first?  
*(Explore fully)*
  
- From your particular perspective, what stands out as having the greatest relevance /urgency in this respect?
  
- Do you perceive there is a particular strategy being pursued by the Federal government in this area?
  - If so – are you aware of the name of that strategy?
  - If not – have you ever heard of NIELNS?

**[SHOW CARD A]**

- What are you aware of in regard to elements which may be being pursued under such a strategy?
  - What, particularly, is occurring in your area / locality / school / community?
  
- What is your reaction to what you've read on that card?
  
- To the extent that you know / are aware (eg. principals may be more aware)....
  - How desirable is such a strategy?
  - How realistic is it, do you feel?
  - **What do you see as the particular barriers to achieving objectives included within the strategy.**
  
- What more, if anything, would you like to be done in this field (eg. to parents – for your children)?
  
- Thinking now about publications produced with particular appeal to young indigenous students, which (if any) of these are you aware of?

**If 'Deadly VIBE' not mentioned, ask:**

- Are you aware of a magazine distributed to indigenous students called 'Deadly VIBE'?
- ... If yes – what is your opinion of it? (*Probe fully*)

... To what extent do you feel this is a useful communication / literacy tool?

**[SHOW COPIES OF 'DEADLY VIBE' MAGAZINE.]**

**Ask All**

- Flicking through it, tell me your impressions of the magazine?  
*(Explore fully)*  
*Probe as follows...*
  - What stands out to you about it most?
  - What do you like best about the publication?
  - And least, what do you think could be improved with respect to it?
  - What would you like included in the magazine which isn't there now?
  
- Briefly tell me what you feel about some individual aspects of the magazine, eg.
  - Helping Out.
  - Taking An Ambassador To School.
  - Writing It Up.
  - Uncle Pete's Vibe Time.
  - Solid Score.
  - I'm On The Web.

There is a slogan for encouraging literacy and numeracy among indigenous students.

**[SHOW SLOGAN – “Write Your Future - Make School Count.”]**

- What do you think of this slogan? (*Explore fully*)
  - Does it mean anything to you?
  - Does it mean anything to the students?

- For an overall assessment, what do you think of the magazine?  
*(Probe fully)*
  - Is 'Deadly VIBE' distributed to your school?
    - ... If so – how well is it received / widely is it read?
    - ... Who reads it / likes it best?
      - Why do you think that is?
  - Would you like 'Deadly VIBE' distributed to your school?
    - ... If not – why not?
  
- Do you believe the 'Deadly VIBE' magazine is an effective way of promoting knowledge, understanding and messages about literacy and numeracy needs of indigenous students?
  - Why do you feel that way? *(Explore fully)*
  - Do you believe it affects...
    - ... classroom involvement?
    - ... school attendance?
    - ... other objectives under the strategy?
  
- Should 'Deadly VIBE' continue to be sponsored by the Federal Education Department (ie. DEST)?
  - If so – why?
  - If not – why not?
  - Could other publications perform the job better?
    - ... If so – which ones?



- What other media / communication channels could be helpful?
  
- Finally, what do you see as the barriers faced by 'Deadly VIBE' in achieving its objectives for the Department? (*Explore fully*)

## Card A

### **The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.**

- Aimed at improving education outcomes for indigenous people.
- **Objective is that indigenous people can reach comparable levels of literacy and numeracy to other Australians and should be given every opportunity to do so.**
- The strategy encompasses:
  - the involvement of local communities, schools, parents and students.
  - co-operation between the Federal and State governments.
  - co-ordinated action within the federal government across relevant portfolios.

Because of a number of factors, indigenous students do not presently achieve educational outcomes at similar levels to other students.

The key aspects of the strategy include:

- Lifting school attendance rates.
- Addressing hearing, health and nutrition problems.
- Providing pre-schooling opportunities.
- Training sufficient teachers effective in indigenous communities.
- Using effective teaching methods.
- Facility with English but not at the expense of their own culture.
- School must enable indigenous students to feel secure and welcome.

**Write Your Future – Make School  
Count.**

## **An Assessment of Programme Component Activities**

(National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy – NIELNS)

Discussion / Interview Guide

### **Students.**

*Introduce self and outline broad purpose of research. Ensure respondent understands confidentiality of response.*

- Today, I'd like to start by asking you about school?
  - How do you like school?
  - What do you like most about it?
  - And what, if anything, do you like least about it?
  
- How generally, do you think indigenous kids feel about school?
  - What are the issues / difficulties they face?
  - How would they like school to be different for them (or for you)?
  
- Do you know that the government is interested in helping indigenous kids to become more literate / numerate?
  - Do you care about this?
  - Why yes / why not?

- Does your school have anything special...
  - targetted / directed to indigenous kids at your school to help their education?
  - to help indigenous kids with literacy and numeracy?
    - ... If so – (*Probe*)
    - ... If not – do you think it should have?
      - If so – what might that be? (*Explore as fully as possible*)
  
- In what ways are indigenous kids different from others / what is special about them?
  
- Do you get any magazines / publications at your school that are directed at young indigenous people?
  - If yes – which ones are they?
  - If not – would you like to get such publications?
  
- Has anybody heard of a magazine called 'Deadly VIBE'?
  - What do you think of this name?
  - **Has anybody ever seen the magazine 'Deadly VIBE'?**
    - ... If yes – what did / do you think of it? (*Probe fully*)

**[SHOW COPIES OF 'DEADLY VIBE' MAGAZINE.]**

**Ask All**

- Flicking through it, tell me your impressions of the magazine?  
(*Explore fully*)

*Probe as follows...*

- What stands out to you about it most?
  - What do you like best about the publication?
  - And least, what do you think could be improved with respect to it?
  - What would you like included in the magazine which isn't there now?
- 
- Briefly tell me what you feel about some individual aspects of the magazine, eg.
    - Helping Out.
    - Taking An Ambassador To School.
    - Writing It Up.
    - Uncle Pete's Vibe Time.
    - Solid Score.
    - I'm On The Web.
  
  - Do you get involved / read / interact with any of these parts of the magazine?
    - If yes – which ones and why?
    - If not – why not?

There is a slogan for encouraging literacy and numeracy among indigenous students.

**[SHOW SLOGAN – “Write Your Future – Make School Count.”]**

- What do you think of this slogan? (*Explore fully*)
  - Does it mean anything to you?
  - Does it mean anything to the students?



- For an overall assessment, what do you think of the magazine?  
*(Probe fully)*
  - Is 'Deadly VIBE' distributed to your school?
    - ... If so – how well is it received / widely is it read?
    - ... Who reads it / likes it best?
      - Why do you think that is?
  - Would you like 'Deadly VIBE' distributed to your school?
    - ... If not – why not?

**If receive / seen 'Deadly VIBE', ask:**

- I'd like to ask you, would you recommend that they keep producing and sending out this magazine?
  - If yes – why?
  - If no – why?

**Ask All:**

- Do you think this way of communicating with young indigenous people is effective / worthwhile? *(Probe)*
  - If yes – why?
  - If no – why not?
  
- Finally, would you like to see anything in its place – or as well as 'Deadly VIBE'?
  - If yes – what might that be / what would it include / say / show?
  - How could it be better than 'Deadly VIBE'?



**Write Your Future – Make School  
Count.**