**Cambridge English B for the IB Diploma: Teacher resource**

**Audio scripts**

**Audio track 10**

**Host:** On our show today, we’re going to talk about education and Indigenous people. It’s a sensitive topic but one that needs to be discussed. It was ten years ago that the Council of Australian Governments created the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy, or NAPLAN, as it’s known. NAPLAN is a set of tests that measure reading, writing and arithmetic skills in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Children take these tests all across Australia, including the remote parts of the bush. And that’s where test scores are lowest. Indigenous peoples have been failing these tests categorically for the past ten years. It’s not a secret. But the question is, what can we do about it? To help me answer this, I have Tom Anderson in the studio. He’s a leader of the Euahlayi tribe in the Gumilaroi nation. I hope I pronounced that correctly, Tom.

**Tom:** Close enough, Micaela.

**Host:** Ha, ha, Thanks Tom and thanks for joining me in the studio.

**Tom:** Thank you for having me.

**Host:** Tom, I’m just going to come out and ask the big question: why are Aboriginal children failing these tests?

**Tom:** Well to be frank, these children have more pressing problems than these tests. We’re talking about families with depression, alcoholism, domestic violence, crime – you name it, we’ve got it. We’re talking about remote towns with abandoned buildings, bars on shop windows and no proper schools.

**Host:** So you’re saying that the poor scores are due to the context, which is not exactly conducive to learning.

**Tom:** No, to say the least, it’s not. In fact, it’s quite the opposite: there’s no place for school in these young people’s lives. They don’t see the point of it. You know, we have teenage girls deliberately getting pregnant to collect the government’s $4,000 bonus. And school is the last thing on their minds.

**Host:** It sounds rough. But what I wonder, is this an Aboriginal problem or a rural problem?

**Tom:** It’s both. It’s a rural Aboriginal problem. Look, eighty-five per cent of Aboriginals live in the cities. Many families work hard at working-class jobs. But it’s the ones living in remote places with the worst socio-economic problems. They’re the ones with the most extreme issues.

**Host:** What do you say to those who look to schools and education as the answer to these problems? I mean, shouldn’t schools be promoted as the way out of this mess?

**Tom:** I think we need to take a step back and look at the big picture. First of all, test scores have actually made small improvements over the past years. Dropout rates have slightly decreased. Look, I don’t want to sound pessimistic here, but we have to ask ourselves: Does it even matter? Despite small improvements in school, crime has gone up. Youth unemployment has gone up. Drug abuse is at its highest rate ever.

**Host:** So why is that? Why is education not improving the lives of the aboriginal people?

**Tom:** Well what do you want to hear? The frequent answer is that the children are not applying what they’ve learned. But I can tell you that their curriculum is so far removed from their daily lives. School is asking them all the wrong questions.

**Host:** How do you mean?

**Tom:** Literally, these NAPLAN tests have nothing to do with their reality. We’re measuring these students with the wrong stick.

**Host:** So how *should* we test these students?

**Tom:** I don’t know why we need to test children at all. I think we should focus on educating them instead.

**Host:** Isn’t the one a demonstration of the other?

**Tom:** In a colonial system, yes. You have tests to see who’s who in the pecking order for careers and salaries. But what we need is good knowledge and understanding of how the world works, so that we can live in harmony with it and each other.

**Host:** Can you explain what you mean by that?

**Tom:** Sure, I have a vision for Aboriginal schools. But I’m not sure it’s the kind of thing the government would fund.

**Host:** Perhaps they’re open to suggestions.

**Tom:** OK, so in my typical Aboriginal school, the day would start outdoors, at the bank of a river or under the shade of a tree. Study tracks. Ask questions like, what bird, what animal, what insect made this mark? Train the powers of observation. Show children what is out of place in their surroundings. Teach them Aboriginal languages. And have Elders do it, because they have the cultural knowledge that’s disappearing.

**Host:** I thought there were already initiatives to preserve Aboriginal languages.

**Tom:** We’re not talking about ‘preserving’ Aboriginal languages. It’s not like they belong in a museum for white people to see. I’m talking about letting them live and flourish. And they’re not flourishing, because the funding for language education is not reaching the right people.

**Host:** Where is the funding going exactly?

**Tom:** In the pockets of local government. That’s why we need private sponsors to make my vision for education work.

**Host:** And do you think that you could find sponsors for classes on bushcraft?

**Tom:** I honestly don’t know of any yet. But to be clear: our schools wouldn’t be all about bushcraft. We would have classes on the three Rs too. And there would be computer skills, English, natural sciences and Aboriginal Australian history.

**Host:** That doesn’t sound too revolutionary.

**Tom:** There would also be woodwork, metalwork and farming, because these are the skills that our young people and the villages need. I want graduates who can build a fence. We need young adults who are capable of cooking a meal, who can mind kids and know their cultural background. But they should also be able to formulate arguments and understand how the white system ticks, so that they can survive in it and beat it.

**Host**: Well, *that* certainly sounds more revolutionary to me.

**Tom:** And a revolution is what we need. We don’t need higher NAPLAN scores, we need kids who know their rights so we can end these inequalities and end the suffering in rural Australia.

**Host:** Is it not possible to have it both ways? High test scores *and* equal rights? Does one have to exclude the other?

**Tom:** Look, as I’ve said, NAPLAN is Westist, Testist and Bestist. I don’t know why we are still talking about them after they’ve clearly not worked for Aboriginal children for over ten years. Shouldn’t we be able to decide how to measure the successes of our own people? Shouldn’t we be able to define success for ourselves for that matter?

**Host:** Well these are big questions, certainly. And now may be a good time for reassessing the kinds of assessments that we administer. But I wonder how open the Ministry of Education would be to different tests for different people. Isn’t equality what you’re trying to promote here?

**Tom:** Being equal does not mean being the same. Diversity should be encouraged.

**Host:** Are you proposing a kind of ‘separate but equal’ system?

**Tom:** I’m not proposing a ‘system’ at all, and certainly not one that smacks of apartheid. I’m simply proposing that schools serve their communities, not an exam board. Let’s not put words in each other’s mouths.

**Host:** I didn’t intend to.

**Tom:** OK, good.

**Host:** Tom, I’d like to thank you for offering your vision of Aboriginal education.

**Tom:** I hope one day it can become a reality.

**Host:** It’s been most enlightening, talking to you today.

**Tom:** Thank you for having me.

**Host:** Next up, we talk to a teacher whose students have some of the highest scores in the country. We find out what the secret is behind her success.