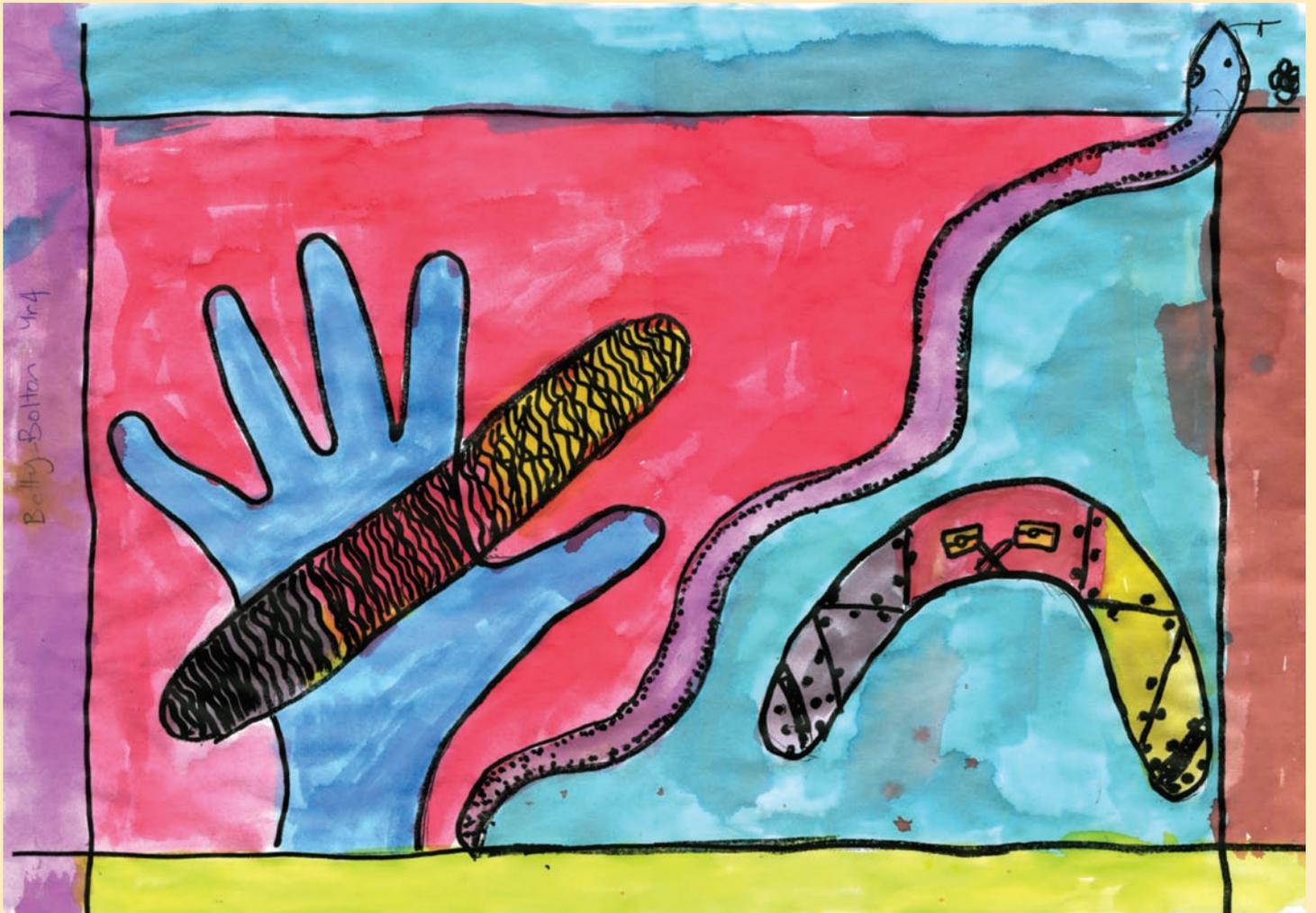




Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations



Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools

A Way Forward

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Foreword

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are the first languages of this continent. This status, and their unique value in the world's languages, makes it imperative for them to be learned, taught, used, and protected from their current state of endangerment. School programmes have much to contribute to the health and vitality of Indigenous languages. *Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools: A Way Forward* is concerned with documenting the quality of these programmes, and suggesting concrete ways forward for schools and Indigenous communities developing them.

For Indigenous families, parents and communities, school programmes have both high cultural and high educational value. Schools have a crucial role in supporting the delivery of these programmes by Indigenous languages teachers. Long-term, sustainable programmes involve schools and communities working together as active leading partners. These partnerships recognise and enhance the capacity of community members to develop and pass on their language and cultural knowledge, to build on their teaching skills and to develop quality resources for their programmes.

While in all locations successful language programmes are underpinned by local commitment, in some locations programmes are fortunately able to also access community language and cultural centres which are able to provide specialist support and resources. However this support is delivered, it is essential for local communities and their schools to have access to quality advice, strategic resources and the capacity to build language learning networks.

Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools: A Way Forward acknowledges that quality programmes can operate effectively in the broad range of language revival and maintenance situations. It is critical that quality programmes be developed to cater for the wide diversity of language environments for Indigenous people in all parts of Australia.

Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools: A Way Forward is an evidence-based approach and hopefully heralds a renaissance of Indigenous languages reclamation and learning across Australia. It is hoped that this report will be the practical and positive impetus needed to enhance the quality and effectiveness of those programmes. If it can achieve this, then it will make a welcome contribution to future directions for Indigenous languages programmes in schools.

Kevin Lowe
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Executive Summary

The national project which is the subject of this report is directed towards strengthening the quality of Indigenous languages programmes in schools. The purpose of the project is to provide a snapshot of the current national situation in Indigenous languages education in Australian schools.

The target groups to benefit from the Project are:

- teachers and speakers of Indigenous languages who are delivering programmes in Australian schools and those wishing to deliver such programmes;
- Indigenous and school communities wishing to introduce, improve or expand the delivery of Indigenous languages programmes in their schools; and
- policy makers and programme officers from State and Territory education jurisdictions wishing to introduce, improve or expand the delivery of Indigenous languages programmes in their schools.

The (former) Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) contracted the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to undertake the project. It is one of several national projects funded through the Australian Government's School Languages Programme (SLP). These national projects support the implementation of the *National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-08*, developed through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). The *National Statement and Plan* was endorsed by all Ministers of Education in March 2005.

The *National Statement and Plan* affirms the value of all languages, including Australia's Indigenous languages.

The Indigenous languages project is the first phase of support for Indigenous languages programmes delivered in Australian schools. The outcomes will inform further action undertaken at a national level.

The project should also be seen in light of several other national policies and current developments.

First, the project supports implementation of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (AEP), which was instigated in 1990 and which continues to form the foundation of all Indigenous education programmes. One of the national goals enunciated in the AEP is "to develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages."

Second, the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000 (Amended 2005), which provides the legislative basis and appropriate funding for Indigenous education programmes, notes that "developing programs to support the maintenance and continued use of the languages of Indigenous people" (p.5) is

one of a number of strategies aimed at achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Indigenous people.

Third, current discussions regarding the development of a National Curriculum provide a timely forum for considering the place of Indigenous languages in school curricula.

Finally, this project is particularly pertinent given the intention of the Australian Government to become a signatory of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007) which reaffirms the right of Indigenous peoples to have access to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Methodology

To achieve the project aims, and to develop a set of recommended actions to be undertaken to improve the sustainability and quality of Indigenous languages programmes delivered in Australian schools as part of a second phase of the Project, we undertook the following tasks:

- a) a comprehensive literature review of existing national and international research on Indigenous languages and the delivery of Indigenous languages programmes in schools;
- b) a comprehensive mapping exercise to document:
 - current State and Territory policies and practices relating to Indigenous languages in Australian schools;
 - numbers and types of Indigenous languages programmes currently being delivered in schools in each State and Territory and how these are staffed and funded; and
 - the range of training and professional learning options and/or teacher preparation courses available to teachers and speakers of Indigenous languages in each State and Territory to enable them to deliver such programmes in schools;
- c) an analysis of existing models of teacher preparation and/or training and professional learning for those involved in, or wishing to become involved in the delivery of Indigenous languages programmes in schools, and an evaluation of their relevance and applicability to the Australian context. This evaluation focused on a consideration of the applicability of a foundation project, operating through the New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre, that is based on aspects of the Master-Apprentice model used in the US and Canada; and
- d) six case studies of examples of good practice of Indigenous languages programmes in schools reflecting different settings.

Key findings and recommendations

Review of the Literature

In 2005, the authors of the *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report* concluded that the situation of Australia's languages is very grave and requires urgent action. Of 250 known Australian Indigenous languages, it was found that less than 20 could be considered as strong; however, three or four languages of these languages were showing signs of moving into endangerment because they were spoken only by small groups of people, most of whom were more than 40 years of age.

Currently, many Indigenous communities are working hard to maintain or revive their languages. Within schools, also, there is increasing activity related to the teaching of Indigenous languages.

There is considerable variation across the States and Territories in current policy and practice related to Indigenous languages programmes in schools. Some states have strong policy documentation; several have none.

Major issues pertaining to Indigenous languages that are reiterated in recent relevant national literature include the following.

- There will need to be a range of Indigenous language programme types depending on the situation the language is in now (e.g., strong or endangered).
- Community input and control over language programmes is essential.
- There is not consensus about whether Indigenous languages belong in the school *as well as* in the home and community.
- Learning an Indigenous language can enhance a range of social and academic outcomes for all students.
- Trained staff are critical to any language programme. Wherever possible, it is desirable to have Indigenous language teachers deliver programmes in schools. These teachers need appropriate training.
- There must be practical national support and resourcing for school language programmes.
- There is a need for greater coordination of Indigenous languages programmes at the national level. A national agency could provide advice on such issues as the practicalities of establishing a language programme, developing appropriate resources, training teachers, and networking amongst personnel involved in Indigenous languages programmes.

Indigenous Languages Programmes in Schools: The Current Situation

Over 16,000 Indigenous students and 13,000 non-Indigenous students located in 260 Australian schools are involved in an Indigenous language programme. Most of these students are located in government schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales, and South Australia. Each of these states receives strong systemic support for their programmes in terms of one or more of:

the provision of curriculum documentation and resources; initial teacher preparation; and ongoing teacher professional development and support.

More than 80 different Indigenous languages are taught.

About 28% of the programmes are first language maintenance programmes¹, and include bilingual programmes undertaken by students in the early years of schooling and throughout their schooling.

About 12% of programmes are second language learning programmes, whereby a language is taught to learners in the Languages area of the school curriculum. In this type of programme, students have little or no assumed knowledge of the target language.

About 50% of programmes are language revival programmes. Such programmes include language revitalisation (about 28%), whereby the language is still spoken by a small group of older speakers within the community; language renewal (about 4%), whereby the language is no longer spoken in its full form but there is sufficient linguistic heritage within the community to develop a language programme; and language reclamation (about 18%), whereby there has been a break in the transmission of the spoken language but there is sufficient evidence from archival material for language reconstruction and learning.

The remainder of the programmes (about 10%) are language awareness programmes, whereby the little bits that are known about a language are

¹ **Types of Indigenous Languages Programmes**

First Language Maintenance	Students are first language speakers of the language. These programmes extend and develop students' language skills and may include the development of specialist skills such as interpreting and translating. They may be conducted as transition to English programmes for students in the early years of schooling.
Second Language Learning	A strong language is taught to a wide range of learners (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in the Languages area of learning — in much the same way as non-Indigenous languages are. Students have little or no assumed knowledge of the target language.
Language Revival	A general term that covers three subtypes:
Revitalisation	The language is still spoken by a small group of older speakers within the community. These language programmes aim to extend the use of the language into the younger generations of speakers. Indigenous students within these programmes will have considerable passive knowledge of the language.
Renewal	The language is no longer actively spoken 'right through' or in its full form, but there are Indigenous people who actively identify with the language. Sufficient linguistic heritage remains within the community to develop a language programme.
Reclamation	There has been a break in the transmission of the spoken language, but there is sufficient evidence from historical documentation and archival material for language reconstruction and learning.
Language Awareness	The little bits that are known about a language can be incorporated into another area of learning (e.g., Studies of Society and Environment), but are not enough for sustained language learning. The focus is on teaching <i>about</i> Indigenous languages and on exploring socio-historical issues. Communicative fluency or competence is not a goal.

incorporated into another area of learning. The focus is on teaching *about* Indigenous languages and on exploring socio-historical issues.

Teacher Preparation and Ongoing Professional Development

School personnel and community members who are involved in the development and teaching of Indigenous languages programmes are diverse in terms of their language proficiency and teaching experience. School language programmes vary considerably from first language maintenance programmes to general language awareness programmes.

Overall, the professional learning opportunities for people wishing to teach an Indigenous language in a school are limited. One state education department offers an *Aboriginal Language Teacher Training Course*. Participants graduate and are eligible to register as an Aboriginal Language Teacher. They develop skills in programme planning, resource development, teaching strategies and language proficiency. Some education jurisdictions offer ongoing and focussed professional opportunities (e.g., regional and school-based workshops) for school staff teaching Indigenous languages.

Teacher training courses in Indigenous languages teaching are practically non-existent in universities. Only one university has a dedicated course on Indigenous languages teaching. A small number of universities provide a linguistics course in Indigenous languages, but these do not prepare people for teaching in schools. Some teaching degrees include a component (either compulsory or elective) that deals with Indigenous cultural awareness, including issues related to language.

A number of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions offer courses to teachers and potential teachers of Indigenous languages. These courses span several categories, including Indigenous language courses specifically for teachers, language conversational experiences, and general certificates for Indigenous teaching assistants.

Some Indigenous Language Centres support school language programmes by providing resources and professional learning opportunities for teachers. In some cases, staff from the Centres are involved with schools, either through the direct teaching of language or by supporting school personnel in their teaching.

Master-Apprentice Model

The Master-Apprentice model of language learning and teaching was developed in California in the early 1990s as a way of saving Indigenous languages in that state. The approach aims to preserve or revive a language by pairing a speaker of the target Indigenous language (master) with younger members of Indigenous communities (apprentices) who want to learn their language of heritage.

A form of the Master-Apprentice model is being trialled in two NSW schools. The schools teach the two related languages Ngiyampaa (Hillston Central School) and Ngemba (Brewarrina Central School).

The model is informally applied in other schools in Australia where an Elder who speaks the target language works with a younger member of the community who teaches in a school classroom setting.

Greater attention could be given to using the Master-Apprentice model as one way of preparing Indigenous language teachers for the future. The model could be more effectively applied if greater formal support from education departments in the States and Territories were given; this could be, for example, in the form of payment to Elders (masters) for their time and for a time allowance for apprentices to work with Elders on developing their language skills. This is particularly important in states such as South Australia, which have no Language Centres to support this type of work.

The development of strong links between education jurisdictions and Indigenous Languages Centres is likely to lead to a more successful implementation of the model in the Australian context. Endeavour Language Teacher Fellowships, provided by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), could be made available to support development and application of the Master-Apprentice model to Indigenous language teaching in Australia.

Case Studies of Good Practice

Case studies were conducted in six schools from a range of settings including those in metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Language programmes in the schools ranged from revival language programmes, second language learning programmes, and first language maintenance programmes (Bilingual or Two Way Learning programmes).

Schools were selected from a list of schools recommended by key personnel in education jurisdictions as having a strong reputation for maintaining good practice in Indigenous languages programmes.

The case study schools all demonstrated a combination of a number of the following features.

- The language programme is embedded in the total school programme; there is whole-school planning to develop an integrated approach to teaching the target language.
- Students are actively engaged through the use of trained staff who use sound pedagogical approaches in the classroom.
- teachers have access to a wide range of resources that have been specifically developed to support teaching and learning in the target language.
- Teamwork is promoted and there is a shared commitment to the language programme; teachers and assistant teachers are equal partners, and there is two way mentoring and learning.
- The critical importance of induction into the culture of the school and involvement in relevant professional learning opportunities for non-qualified teachers is recognized and acted on.

- The critical importance of understanding the cultural backgrounds of Indigenous students and the links between language, culture and self-identity is recognized and acted on.
- Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives are valued by the school community.
- Teachers draw on the insights, knowledge, and experience of community members.
- Literacy skills in the target language are transferred to English language learning.
- A Master-Apprentice type model is promoted whereby first language speakers of the target language work with younger novice speakers to develop their language skills.
- There is strong systemic support for the language programme in terms of syllabus documentation, curriculum planning, provision of resources, ongoing training workshops for teachers and teaching assistants, and the facilitation of networking.
- Good use is made of multi-media language resources.
- The school principal provides strong leadership in building the language programme and ongoing support for its maintenance.
- Members of the language team – including teachers, linguists, teaching assistants, community advisors – have a passion to build a strong and sustainable programme in the school.

Key Principles and Recommendations

The recommendations of this report should be interpreted in light of six key principles for Indigenous languages education in schools.

Key Principles

Key Principle 1

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first people of this country and their languages are unique to it. The capacity to learn these languages and support their reclamation and long term maintenance as strong and viable languages is of great significance to both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Australians.

Key Principle 2

Ownership of each Indigenous language belongs to a group of people who are its custodians; their language should only be taught in schools with their agreement.

Key Principle 3

School languages programmes are not sustainable unless they are developed and presented in partnership between the school and the owners of the language being taught.

Key Principle 4

Learning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in the English language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive activities.

Key Principle 5

The primary responsibility for maintaining, revitalizing, or rebuilding Indigenous languages does not rest with schools, although schools may have an important role to play.

Key Principle 6

The most successful school language programmes will flow from a collaborative approach involving Indigenous communities, Indigenous Language Centres, linguists, schools and teachers.

Recommendations

The following 15 recommendations are made with a view to supporting the *National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008* as well as supporting the maintenance, revitalization, and rebuilding of Australia's Indigenous languages.

Recommendation 1

That DEEWR and State and Territory education departments support the maintenance, revitalization, and rebuilding of Australian Indigenous languages by creating opportunities for students to learn an Indigenous language as part of the Australian Government School Languages Programme.

Recommendation 2

That where there are ten or more students in any one school who speak an Indigenous language as their first language, they be given the opportunity to continue to learn that language either as part of the school's language programme or as part of a bilingual education programme.

Recommendation 3

That teacher education departments in universities be encouraged and funded to develop Indigenous language units within undergraduate, post-graduate, and/or professional programmes.

Recommendation 4

That universities and TAFEs offer scholarships for the training of Indigenous language teachers as part of their scholarships programmes.

Recommendation 5

That preservice Indigenous teachers, and in particular preservice early childhood and primary school Indigenous teachers, be provided with an opportunity to train in the teaching of their language of heritage. This training might be undertaken at other institutions or organizations such as TAFE institutions and Indigenous Language Centres. Credit should be granted for such undertakings.

Recommendation 6

That DEEWR and State and Territory education departments provide incentives (e.g., scholarships, fee support, and time for study) to inservice teachers to retrain as Indigenous language teachers.

Recommendation 7

That each State and Territory education department develops a strategy for training Indigenous language teachers. Possible strategies should include consideration of the WA model of preparation of Indigenous language teachers (Aboriginal Language Teacher Training Course); courses offered by Indigenous Language Centres; and courses offered in the TAFE context.

Recommendation 8

That individuals who do not have initial teacher qualifications but who have successfully completed a recognized course of training in Indigenous language teaching be recognized as language teachers and receive all the benefits that normally accrue to a qualified teacher, including salary.

Recommendation 9

That career pathways for Indigenous languages teachers be established within State and Territory education jurisdictions. The establishment of ongoing Indigenous languages teaching positions within schools will provide improved employment conditions for individuals and will enhance the sustainability of school programmes.

Recommendation 10

That a dedicated percentage of the School Languages Programme funds be targetted for Indigenous languages. A system of accountability should be developed that requires States and Territories to report on how funds have been used for Indigenous languages programmes. School Languages Programme funds

should be allocated on a triennial basis to enhance the quality and sustainability of programmes.

Recommendation 11

That DEEWR allocate funding from its Digital Education Revolution to support school Indigenous languages programmes. In keeping with the aims of the Digital Education Revolution, this funding should be used for the development of online curriculum content, conferencing facilities, teacher professional development, and community engagement.

Recommendation 12

That MCEETYA fund a position within DEEWR for a national coordinator of Indigenous languages programmes in schools.

The role of this person will be to promote the development of sustainable Indigenous languages programmes in schools; to facilitate networking of those involved in Indigenous languages teaching across States and Territories; and to be involved in policy coordination across government departments, in keeping with the whole-of government approach to Indigenous affairs. In particular this will involve working with DEEWR; the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts; the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and State and Territory education departments.

Recommendation 13

That schools develop appropriate procedures (including sufficient time for consultations) to enable the school and the Indigenous community to work together to reach decisions on the teaching of Indigenous languages including decisions regarding the language to be taught and how the programme will be implemented.

Recommendation 14

That schools develop appropriate procedures for developing relationships with Indigenous Language Centres to enable the sharing of expertise and resources, and to strengthen the cultural context for their Indigenous languages programmes.

Recommendation 15

That the current movement towards the development of a National Curriculum be seen as an opportunity to develop a national curriculum framework for Indigenous languages. Any national curriculum framework must take account of local contexts and ensure that local cultural knowledge is embedded in each Indigenous language programme.