



Australian Government
**Department of Education,
Science and Training**



Investigation into the Current Provision of Indigenous Language Programmes in Australian Schools

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Project Team

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Project Advisory Group

Representatives from:

- Australian Government
- Australian Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL)
- State/Territory government jurisdiction
- Non-government jurisdiction
- Australian Primary/Secondary Principals Associations
- Deans for Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities
- MCEETYA Languages Education Working Party

- One of a suite of projects funded by DEST under School Languages Programme to support implementation of *National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008*
- Contributes towards the achievement of the objectives of the *National Plan* listed for:
 - Strand 2 (Teacher Supply and Retention)
 - Strand 3 (Professional Learning)
- Forms first phase of support for Indigenous language programmes in schools

Project Tasks

Literature review

Mapping exercise

Case studies of good practice

Evaluation of Master-Apprentice model

Recommendations

Literature Review

Comprehensive review of national and international research on Indigenous languages and Indigenous language programmes in schools

Context: key references include:

- State of Indigenous Languages in Australia 2001
(McConvell & Thieberger, 2001)
- National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005
(AIATSIS/FATSIL)

State of Indigenous Languages in Australia - 2001

- A decrease in the numbers of Indigenous people speaking Indigenous languages
 - 100% in 1800 to 13% in 1996
- About 55,000 speakers of Indigenous languages in Australia
- Number of Indigenous languages and percentage of speakers have continued to fall in the period 1986-1996, accelerating over the ten years
- Of 20 languages categorised in 1990 as 'strong', 3 should now be regarded as 'endangered'

Language Endangerment Indicator

There is a trend in most Indigenous languages for knowledge of language to be proportional to age

Age	Strong	Endangered (early stage)	Seriously endangered	Near extinct	Extinct
0-19	speak	don't speak	don't speak	don't speak	don't speak
20-39	speak	speak	don't speak	don't speak	don't speak
40-59	speak	speak	speak	don't speak	don't speak
60+	speak	speak	speak	speak	don't speak

McConvell & Thieberger, 2001

National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005

- Of an original estimated 250 Australian Indigenous languages, only 18 are now 'strong'
- 3 or 4 of these are moving into endangerment
- About 110 languages still spoken by older people but are endangered
- Communities possess many of the elements required to keep Indigenous languages strong or to reclaim them

Mapping

- State/Territory policies and practices
- Numbers, types of programmes
- Training, professional learning options, teacher preparation courses/units

Indigenous Language Education Programs 2000

State or Territory	School	Post-school
NSW and ACT	13	5
Northern Territory	37	3
Queensland	5	1(?)
South Australia	62	3
Tasmania	0	0
Victoria	1	0
Western Australia	40+	4(?)

Mapping Exercise

Challenges:

- Types of Indigenous Language programs
- State/Territory system differences in record keeping

Australian Indigenous Languages Framework

<i>AILF categories</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Defining characteristics (AILF)</i>
First Language Maintenance		All generations full speakers
Second Language Learning		Non-speakers learning as L2
Language Revival	Language revitalisation	Generation of (older) speakers left; children likely good passive knowledge
	Language renewal	Oral tradition but no full speakers; children likely little or no passive knowledge
	Language reclamation	No speakers or partial speakers; relying on historical sources to provide knowledge
Language Awareness		Non-speakers learning about the languages where it is not possible to learn and use the language; vestiges only; documentation poor

Mapping of School Programs

Key personnel asked to provide information about:

- Language, type of program, student numbers/levels
- Rationale and policies
- Staffing – generalist/LOTE teacher, Indigenous teaching assistant, community volunteers, etc
- Training and professional learning opportunities
- Resourcing –staffing, materials, training
- Sustainability
- Quality

Case Studies

- Nominated by jurisdictions
- Six case study sites
- Sites to reflect diversity of programs
- Selected on criteria relating to:
 - student outcomes
 - recognition by the community
 - documentation
 - sustainability

Mapping of Training/Courses

Australian universities and TAFES asked to provide information about:

- Courses/units – e.g., aims, content, staffing, commencement year
- Students and student outcomes
- Sustainability
- Quality

Master Apprentice Model

Applicability of a foundation project, operating through the New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre, that is based on aspects of the Masters-Apprentice' model used in the US and Canada

Recommendations

Formulation of recommended actions to be undertaken to improve sustainability and quality of Indigenous language programmes delivered in Australian schools as part of a *second phase* of the Project

State of the World's Indigenous Languages

- Over 50% of world's 6000 languages are endangered
- 96% of world's 6000 languages spoken by 4% of world's population
- 90% of world's languages not represented on the Internet
- One language disappears on average every two weeks
- 80% of African languages have no orthography

UNESCO (2006). *Endangered Languages*.

Why Indigenous Languages?

Internationally...

- State of emergency—Indigenous languages in crisis
- Evidence that Indigenous language learning positively impacts educational achievement
- Language learning strengthens families & communities
- Indigenous language and culture learning positively correlates with school retention
- Brings Indigenous worldview to the participants, & world
- Reconciliation—counters centuries old injury and subjugation of Indigenous peoples, their cultures and languages

Gabrielle Stong (2006). *Funding Native Education Programs*.
The Education of American Indians - Promoting Successful Programs and Strategies.

Nationally...

Australia's Indigenous languages have a unique place in Australia's heritage and in its cultural and educational life. For Indigenous learners, they are fundamental to strengthening identity and self-esteem. For non-Indigenous learners, they provide a focus for development of cultural understanding and reconciliation. The choice of which Australian language should be offered requires careful negotiation with Indigenous people. It also requires recognition of protocols related to language ownership, language maintenance and revival; and acknowledgement of the cultural connections and contexts of languages within Australian Indigenous communities.

The loss of any language comes at enormous cost to its speakers. . . . the problem is acute. Precisely because they are indigenous, there are no language reinforcements available elsewhere, no other motherland, where children can return to hear the heritage language spoken or see it written. For indigenous people, when a language is lost, it almost certainly cannot be retrieved as a mother tongue.

Teresa McCarty, Diné Educator and Scholar, University of Arizona

Each language is a unique tool for analyzing and synthesizing the world, incorporating the knowledge and values of a speech community... Thus to lose such a tool is to 'forget' a way of constructing reality, to blot out a perspective evolved over many generations

James Crawford, Linguist 1994

Classroom based language instruction can never be the sole source of serious language revitalization . . . language revitalization must also have strong components in the broader community and in the home.

Leanne Hinton, Creator of Master/Apprentice Model of Language Acquisition

Quality Constraints and Sustainability

- Systemic/jurisdictional support
- People
 - Presence of a ‘passionate’ driver
 - Teachers, Aboriginal Education Workers and volunteer workers
- Community support and involvement
- The ‘politics’
- Funding
- Professional development, training, and other forms of external support

