



## **Report on school-based Aboriginal language program activity in NSW during 2006**

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**Curriculum K–12 Directorate  
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### **1 Introduction**

A database of government schools with Aboriginal language programs was initially established in mid-2005. At that time there was a list of 25 schools that had been funded that year by the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AETD), as well as a partially overlapping list of 8 schools which had been part of an Australian Government Quality Teaching Project under the auspices of the Languages Unit of the Curriculum K–12 Directorate. In addition there was a growing list of schools that various sources, including the Aboriginal Curriculum Unit of the Office of the Board of Studies, had reported as having a language program.

Over the following months the database was expanded and refined as information became available but during 2006 it became increasingly clear that there was a need for a more comprehensive database that would provide baseline data on schools in NSW with Aboriginal Language Programs. In addition to listing the schools and the languages taught, there was evidently a need for information about student and staff numbers, how programs were funded and more explicit information about the nature of the particular programs. This was necessary partly because of increasing interest Australia-wide in Aboriginal language programs in NSW. Both the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Office of the Board of Studies received numerous requests for information about the programs.

In late 2006 all of the schools where there was believed to be an Aboriginal language program were contacted and a member of the language team was invited to answer a short telephone survey. The results have now been collated into this report. The database, which contains information about all schools known to have Aboriginal language programs, whether they are government, Catholic or independent schools, will be updated annually.

This report, and the database upon which it is based, is the result of a collaborative effort by personnel in the Curriculum K–12 Directorate and the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate in the Department of Education and Training and the Office of the Board of Studies. Aboriginal languages in NSW are fragile. Of the 70 or so spoken at the time of the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 many are remembered only in fragments. Even those which were spoken widely in living memory tend to be only partially documented and remembered and so it is helpful for those involved in reintroducing children in NSW to their languages to work together and share their knowledge and resources. For this reason, those responsible for working with Aboriginal Languages in the Department of Education and Training and the Office of the Board of Studies have been working together, so that all the schools in a language area can be included in workshops, resource production and professional development.

## 2.1 Languages and number of schools

In 2006 there was a total of 46 schools in NSW with a known operational Aboriginal language program. Of these schools 25 operate in primary, nine in secondary and three in central schools (see Table 1). Table 2 shows the number of programs by language. Furthermore, 41 programs operate in the Government sector, four in the Catholic and one as an Independent (see Table 3).

Table 1: Aboriginal language programs 2006 by year and stage

School type	Years	Stage			
Primary	K–6	E1–3	15		
		K–4	E1–2	3	
		2–5	2–3	1	
		2–6	2–3	1	
		K–2	E1–1	2	
		K–3	E1–2	1	
		3–6	2–3	1	
		4	2	1	
			<b>TOTAL PRIMARY</b>		<b>25</b>
	Secondary	7	4	2	
		7–8	4	1	
		8	4	2	
		9	5	2	
		10–12	5–6	1	
		12	6	1	
			<b>TOTAL SECONDARY</b>		<b>9</b>
Central	K–10	E1–5	1		
		K–12	E1–6	2	
		<b>TOTAL CENTRAL</b>		<b>3</b>	
Other *				<b>9</b>	
		<b>TOTAL ALL SCHOOLS</b>		<b>46</b>	

\* 4 schools in initial phase and therefore not teaching plus 5 schools unable to provide data.

Table 2: The number of Aboriginal language programs by language in 2006.

<b>Language</b>	<b>No.</b>
Bundjalung	8
Dharawal/Dhurga	5
Dharug	1
Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay	9
Gumbaynggirr	4
Ngiyampaa/Ngemba	2
Dunghutti/Thungutti	4
Wadi-wadi	1
Wangkumarra	1
Wiradjuri	10
Various	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>

Table 3: The number of Aboriginal language programs by education sector in 2006

<b>Sector</b>	<b>No.</b>
Catholic	4
Department of Education and Training	41
Independent	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>

There are also a further 25 school programs that have either lapsed, expressed interest or run one-off language related projects. These schools highlight the many difficulties schools and communities face in running a long-term language program, including the lack of support that has been available. They are maintained on a sub-database because they may reinvigorate or generate a program in the future.

## **2.2 Current activity and organisational focus**

School activity varied from one half hour per fortnight to four periods per week in schools running the 100-hour mandatory language study programs. There were four schools running the 100-hour program. However, the great majority of schools held classes once a week. Two schools were running pilot programs: one primary and the other a high school. A few schools withdraw students for the class but generally all the students in a class study the language in primary school, usually meeting HSIE outcomes. Many high schools are moving towards running 100-hour mandatory programs.

## **2.3 Numbers of students**

The numbers of students learning an Aboriginal language must be seen as a conservative estimate at this stage. As previously mentioned there are nine schools in our survey that are either researching to run a program or have not provided data at this stage. There are also 25 other schools that have exposed their students to an Aboriginal language to some degree in the past and neither of these are represented here.

Table 4: The number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in 2006

<b>Students</b>	<b>No.</b>
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1,356
Non-Indigenous	3,553
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,909</b>

### 3. Employment and teams

#### 3.1 Numbers of Aboriginal people employed or involved in the programs

There are many Aboriginal people employed as staff in the various education sectors that are involved in Aboriginal language programs. In addition to Aboriginal members of staff, there are numerous Aboriginal community members also employed to work on Aboriginal language programs. In fact it is a priority that employment opportunities are created for Aboriginal community members in school-based Aboriginal language programs. Questions will be refined in future years to represent more clearly numbers of staff involved, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, numbers of community language teachers employed and numbers of community member volunteers involved.

At this stage what we can present are numbers of Aboriginal people employed in the program, (either already on staff or employed externally and either part-time, casual or full-time) and numbers of community members involved (either paid or volunteer, including committee members). Both, once again, must be seen as conservative estimates.

Table 5: The number of Aboriginal people employed or involved in 2006

Aboriginal people employed	59
Community member volunteers involved	109
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>

#### 3.2 Teams

Most of the schools responding to the survey listed a number of members of the school language team although in a couple of instances the Community Language Teacher was also a teacher at the school and worked alone. In cases where the Community Language Teacher is not a trained teacher, a classroom teacher is required to be part of the language team, to attend the lessons and assist with programming. The *NSW Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* is designed, as are all the other language syllabuses, with the underlying assumption that they will be used by a teacher with training in language-teaching methodology. In some high schools and central schools a Languages teacher is part of the team but this is not always the case. In a few instances, schools listed language researchers as part of the team. In some cases these are senior community members, in others Indigenous or non-Indigenous linguists.

In addition to school-community teams, survey respondents named Aboriginal language and culture centres and other community organisations which have supported their work on school programs during 2006. These organisations are listed in Appendix A.

#### **4 Issues: successes and difficulties**

Some of the main measures of success include the following:

- organised performances in language helping raise the profile of the school and the language.
- recognition of an Aboriginal language as the school's language for the 100 hours mandatory study
- development of good teamwork.

Some of the main difficulties included the following:

- difficulty of maintaining continuity, either because of staff leaving or fluctuations in the student population
- lack of stable funding
- the need for more expertise and resources.

For more detailed responses please see Appendix B.

#### **5 Overview/conclusions**

This report is an important step in building a comprehensive picture of school-based Aboriginal language programs in NSW schools. School staff and community members across the state have graciously given their time to respond to questions about their programs. Only by gaining information about the programs, is it possible to plan appropriately for the future. This is an early stage in compiling data about school programs but already there are some issues that stand out.

The most obvious is that there are very many languages and a wide range of program types. The three languages for which the most schools have language programs are Bundjalung with eight, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalayaay/Yuwaalaraay with nine and Wiradjuri with ten (please refer to Table 2). Thus, even the NSW languages with which large numbers of people identify are taught in fairly small numbers of schools. The other languages are taught in four schools or fewer. This presents special challenges. There are few opportunities to benefit from economies of scale so it is essential to find ways to maximise any opportunities that exist, the most obvious being the development of language networks of schools that can share resources wherever possible.

There is a difference between the needs of primary and secondary programs. Teaching strategies that work successfully with unself-conscious six year olds may not be so effective with adolescents. There are also numerous timetabling and curriculum issues specific to each. It is vital to find out not only which languages are being taught, but also which stages of the syllabus are being taught, so that support can be directed where it is most needed (please refer to Table 1). Aboriginal language programs offer a way to meet the mandatory requirements of 100 hours of language study for the School Certificate in a culturally relevant way for many students in rural areas. Thus they have the potential to be a significant part of the high school curriculum.

Several of the difficulties that are encountered across a number of schools suggest a number of interrelated problems that need addressing systematically. For example, several schools spoke of difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, lack of resources and remoteness from access to support. It may be that, if teaching resources were more readily available and funding for programs more predictable, the difficulties in retaining staff may be eased. It is

for these reasons that there is a need to plan strategies to support programs and for this, it is vital to obtain good information on which to base them.

This report documents the information we currently have about school Aboriginal language programs in NSW and will form the basis of ongoing planning and development to inform and guide all the people who are members of school Aboriginal language teams, or who help to support those teams.

## **Appendix A**

### **Language and culture centres and other relevant organisations**

Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative  
465 Bellwood Road, Via Nambucca Heads, NSW, 2448  
Phone: (02) 6569 4294  
Fax: (02) 6569 4295  
Email: muurrbay@westnet.com.au  
Chairperson: Ken Walker

Many Rivers Aboriginal Language Centre  
c/o Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative  
465 Bellwood Road, Via Nambucca Heads, NSW, 2448  
Phone: (02) 6568 5695  
Fax: (02) 6569 4295  
Email: MRALC@westnet.com.au  
Co-ordinator: Anna Ash

Muda Aboriginal Corporation  
PO Box 363, Bourke NSW 2840  
Tel: (02) 68 721233  
Fax: (02) 68 721228  
Email: muda@lisp.com.au  
Contact: Greg McKellar

Yoorana Gunya Family Violence Healing Centre Inc  
18 Spring St., Forbes NSW 2871  
Phone: (02) 6851 5111  
Fax(02) 6851 6860  
Email: ygunya@westserv.net.au

Barriekneal Housing & Community Ltd  
Lot 8 Opal St., Lightning Ridge NSW 2834  
Phone: (02) 6829 0356  
Fax(02) 6829 1260  
Email: bkneal@ceinternet.com.au

Dharriwaa Elders Group  
37 Wee Waa St Walgett NSW 2832  
Phone: (02) 6828 2619

Gnibi: College of Indigenous Australian Peoples  
Southern Cross University  
PO Box 157  
Lismore NSW 2480  
Phone: (02) 6620 3955

Local and Regional AECGs,

Local Land Council

Yuin Women's Group

Narromine community group

Wollongong community consultative group

Kelso Community Centre

Stan Grant Snr – through training, language course and materials.

Gamilaraay language network of people working in school programs.

## Appendix B

### Comments from survey results

Successes	Difficulties	Issues
School performances around the state have helped raise profile of school and language program	Staffing -finding tutors or community members willing and available to teach the language	funding
Elder running language program for the community	Breaks in teaching the program due to lack of language teachers or tutors	staffing
Team work	Continuity of program from year to year because of -teacher availability -funding	continuity
Regional networks	Training of community members and language tutors	Resources -availability -production of -accessibility -development
Project schools with BOS. Examples of team work to produce a Stage 4/5 program	Ongoing training for tutors and community members	Programming -how to program within school context -long-term programming -whole school -working with COGs -working with syllabus -support for schools on how to program and meet syllabus requirements
Aboriginal Language is considered the school's LOTE program	Professional development	Inclusion on school report of Aboriginal language program
	Access to people with particular expertise in -teaching languages -programming -cultural knowledge to assist in planning a school program	Transient population that can influence the number of students in the program
	Funding -access to funding -availability -continuation	Student numbers to offer a Stage 4 or 5 program
		Face-to-face support
		Continuity of this support as a relationship builds up between BOS/DET/school/community
		Development of language across the Stages
		Setting up a program

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-which students? –background or both</li><li>-mode –whole class?</li><li>Withdrawal?</li><li>-length of lessons</li></ul>
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