

**LANGUAGE & CULTURE PROGRAMS IN NSW:  
THE VIEW FROM CENTRAL AUSTRALIA**

March 2002

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## **Background**

In Central Australia Aboriginal languages – though threatened – are still mostly relatively healthy and being transmitted to children, though none-the-less older people worry about the erosion of their traditional language. It is only to the north, in the Barkly region, that we find situations that approach the situation in NSW, with some languages having no active speakers remaining, and all the others with declining numbers of speakers and transmission breaking down (Hoogenraad 1994). However, there are certain aspects of our experience that I believe will prove useful to implementing successful language and culture programs in NSW.

Over the last three years Aboriginal education in the NT has gone through a crisis, but out of this crises a number of developments have led, not to despair but to a revival of hope and some exciting new directions. It began in 1998 with a review of all NT government departments. In Central Australia, just over 40% of Aboriginal children had been in official Bilingual Education programs in 11 of the 58 Aboriginal schools. One result of the review was the announcement by the NT Minister for Education & Training that "... bilingual program will progressively make way for the development of ESL programs" (the Honourable Peter Adamson 1998).

The decision to phase out bilingual programs was part of a wider review of education. This had highlighted the abysmally low levels of English language and literacy being achieved by most students in Aboriginal schools. As a result, Senator Bob Collins was commissioned to carry out a review of Aboriginal Education for the NT Government in 1999. Although bilingual education was specifically omitted from his terms of reference, he found that as a result of the Government's 1998 announcement "many people in the communities affected ... wanted to talk about nothing else" (Collins 1999:119). As a result of strong protest at the community level, only two government schools lost their programs in Central Australia: the remaining 9 schools were allowed to continue to run 'Two-Way Learning' programs (Collins 1999:125-127, 130), albeit under stringent assessment of outcomes not applied to so-called "English-only" programs in Aboriginal schools (Czernezkyj 2000; see Hoogenraad 2001 for a more detailed discussion).

The protest was most marked in the four major Warlpiri communities. They all maintained their programs, though renamed Two-Way Education programs. They had the advantage of being united through the "Warlpiri Triangle", which enabled them to coordinate their protest, so that even the smaller and weaker programs were protected.

As well as Aboriginal education, most other aspects of education in the NT were reviewed, and this led to the development of a new NT Curriculum Framework, which has been trialed in a range of

schools for the last year. It was developed as an inclusive curriculum, and because the NT has a large Indigenous population – some 40% of the school population, and rising – it therefore has an Indigenous Language and Culture curriculum. It is expected that the Minister of Education will approve this new Curriculum Framework soon, and the next layer of the Curriculum, which will detail its implementation, is currently being developed. I will return to the NT Curriculum Framework below.

And finally, we have a new Government, and though it has an exceedingly large deficit to deal with, and therefore little hope of spare funds for new developments, it has a very positive and open attitude to Aboriginal education. This has allowed the NT Department of Education – now become the Department of Education, Employment and Training – to take a much more creative approach to Aboriginal education. Though this had been initiated by the Collins Review (1999), it had been somewhat hampered by an entrenched view in the Government towards Aboriginal education which was not conducive to rethinking past attitudes and practices.

I begin by reporting on an initiative in Central Australia to provide a philosophical basis for Aboriginal education within the wider education system.

### **A special place for Aboriginal Education**

In Central Australia, where the language and culture of most communities – though adapting – is still the traditional language and culture, there is a very immediate reason for teaching the local Aboriginal language and culture through the education system, formulated as follows in the first two objectives of Warlpiri-patu-kurlangu Jaru Inc, a Warlpiri organisation dedicated to supporting:

- (a) appropriate education for Warlpiri children, in order that they will grow up to be fully participating members of their own Warlpiri culture and society as well as of the wider Australian society;
- (b) appropriate professional development, education and training of Warlpiri adults, in order to advance Warlpiri involvement in all aspects of the governance and development of their communities.

This places the teaching of local language and culture firmly within the educational context of fitting children and adults to be well adjusted and productive members of their own society, which in this case is a dual one: mainstream Australian and the local Aboriginal culture and society. It places the teaching of local language and culture squarely within the main function of education, to reproduce society and contribute towards stability and orderly change. It recognises that today, unlike the past, Aboriginal people live in two cultures, or as they say, “Two-Way”, under two laws (see Hoogenraad 2001 for further discussion).

It might be observed that this view of education – Two-Way education – is in fact applicable everywhere in modern large scale nations. Education has to deal with the reality that everyone is a member of a local community and at the same time a member of the larger nation state. In particular, for Aboriginal children and adults, with their own distinct heritage, the objectives can be adapted as follows:

- appropriate education for Aboriginal children, in order that they will grow up to be fully participating members of their own Aboriginal culture and society as well as of the wider Australian society;

- appropriate professional development, education and training of Aboriginal adults, in order to advance Aboriginal involvement in all aspects of the governance and development of their communities.

I suggest that these would be fruitful objectives to adopt for Aboriginal education in NSW, provided we have an appropriate definition of what constitutes “the community”.

### **What constitutes “the community”: Regions of Affiliation**

Note that the above objectives place the responsibility for the local aspect of Aboriginal education squarely where it belongs, with the local Aboriginal community. But we need to be very clear about what we mean by “community” in this context. The Aboriginal communities of Central Australia are a modern phenomenon, and today Aboriginal people continue to be highly mobile, though within well-defined regions (see eg Warchivker et al 2001). In Central Australia we are currently developing an alternative notion to “community”, which is the “Language Region” or Region of Affiliation. This is built on the observation that the most effective unit of organisation for Aboriginal education is **not** the school at a community level, but rather groups of communities and peoples in those communities that are affiliated through a shared common language or traditional language affiliations, ‘tribal’ and family affiliations, a common history, and frequent inter-community visiting and mobility.

The idea comes from the “Warlpiri Triangle”, an annual meeting of Warlpiri people involved in education. This grew out of kinship links between Warlpiri people working in Warlpiri schools and professional links that began to develop between educators – Warlpiri and non-Warlpiri – working in these schools. This has proved a very powerful idea, and the Warlpiri Triangle has now incorporated as the Warlpiri-patu-kurlangu Jaru.

The Warlpiri region is well ahead of the rest of Central Australia on all measures of local involvement in education, including for example the number of trained local teachers. When Zania Liddle – then coordinating mentoring and professional development for Aboriginal school staff – and I began to wonder how this success could be replicated elsewhere, we decided to do so by promoting the notion of organising in Language Regions. Appendix A is the Questionnaire we used on the second consultation trip (Liddle & Hoogenraad 2000). As a result of those consultations, three additional Language Regions have now formed: the Western/Central Anmatyerr, the Aranda Circle (Eastern/Central Arrernte & Western Arrarnta), and the Alyawarr, Eastern Anmatyerr & Kaytetye. We expect that in the next half year two or three more Language Regions will have their first meetings: Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara & Southern Luritja, and the Western MacDonnell Pintupi/Luritja.

### **Regional meetings**

The Regions meet at least once a year. It is absolutely essential, that these Regions of Affiliation are self-defining, as they don’t make any sense if people are not delighted by the idea of working together. The first meeting this year, the inaugural meeting of the Alyawarr, Eastern Anmatyerr & Kaytetye, had over 100 participants, camping at Apungalindum, a small outstation on Utopia. They decided that though they were three separate language groups, they would continue to meet together as they are entwined through intermarriage and through co-residence on several of the participating communities.

The meetings always keep a balance between the following five components:

- **Sharing:** Reports from each participating community's school and other programs, linguists working in the region, and others involved in relevant language work, such as publishing of materials.
- **Learning Together**, such as learning to read and write the language(s), team teaching, learning to analyse children's language, etc.
- **Working Together** to develop materials, lesson plans, programs, curriculum, etc that can be used right across the region.
- **Issues and Solutions:** Discussing issues and formulating solutions, including for instance how to write the language(s), appropriate education for children and adults, how to get schools to work together, etc.

This balance is important, because this way the discussion of issues arises out of an understanding of what each community is attempting to do, and out of working and learning together. So far, each of the meetings has worked, and worked very well, almost right from the beginning of the first meeting. Participants are so engaged that they often start early, fail to stop for morning or afternoon tea, and work late, particularly when working on materials or learning a relevant skill. (Copies of Reports of recent meetings are available on request: please contact Robert Hoogenraad on 08 89 517 030).

### **Why Regionalisation?**

You will have noticed that I have said nothing yet about the big issues; curriculum, materials, training, etc. This is because our experience has been that many schools and communities have tried to start programs, but few have been successful for very long. And they have generally foundered because they all need support, and support is nigh on impossible to provide for each program one at a time. It is simply too inefficient. While on the other hand, as I will now show, a whole region working together is possible to support. It becomes more efficient, cost effective, and it is also more fun. And there is strength in numbers: each community and school on its own is weak, but together they are formidable. When the previous NT Government decided to cut Bilingual Education programs, the Warlpiri Triangle protested and argued as one, and non of their four schools lost their program (they were just renamed Two-Way Education, so that the government could save face). Not even the small and unsuccessful Warlpiri programs were cut.

Although your situation in NSW is very different from ours in Central Australia, I believe that you too will find this idea useful, and not too difficult to implement. What it requires is for one or two people to visit each place, no matter how small, in order to put the idea to the local communities: in some of the larger places we had to have two or three separate meetings to talk to everyone. Then they need to do the follow up, to discover how people want to meet – with which communities. You can adapt the questions Zania Liddle and I used (see Appendix A, from Liddle & Hoogenraad 2000). You will also need a map with all of the places marked on it. Then on the basis of this information those same people can organise the first meetings, and those meetings can decide if they indeed cohere as a group, or decide how to re-group.

The NT Department of Education, Employment and Training is backing this process of developing Regions of Affiliation and has supported the meetings with IESIP funds. We also ask ASSPA Committees, VEGAS (DEST), and ATSIC to provide funds for these meetings, so the cost is shared

around. And both Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) and the Central Lands Council (CLC) have been very supportive.

Before going on to discuss what NSW might learn from these Regions of affiliation and the outcomes of their meetings, I return to the new NT Curriculum Framework.

### **The NT Curriculum Framework and the Indigenous Language and Culture Learning Area**

The NT Curriculum Framework is inclusive along several dimensions. Within one integrated framework it provides for the full range of learning from Early Childhood to Year 12; it provides for students with special needs, including ESL; it also provides for the major cultural groups in the NT, including both migrants and Indigenous students. And for Indigenous students it provides for the different situations, ranging:

- from communities where the traditional language is the first language and children need to learn English as a second or foreign language (this includes substantial populations living in towns);
- through communities where Kriol or Aboriginal English is the first language and children need to learn English as a second language, but the community may also want their children to learn their traditional language (again, this includes substantial populations living in towns);
- to Aboriginal children in towns and some bush communities who speak English or Aboriginal English as their first language, but whose parents may also want them to learn their heritage language or another Aboriginal language as a second language. This also provides for other children to learn an Aboriginal language as a “foreign” language: as a LOTE (Language Other Than English).

The first two situations are covered by the Indigenous Language and Culture Learning Area, which has two versions: a Language Maintenance version is not of particular relevance to the NSW situation, but may be of interest, as it is well developed. The Language Revival version is of obvious relevance, but is still in need of further development. However, it is the structure and content of this Learning Area that is of greatest interest.

The Indigenous Language and Culture Learning Area was developed by a team of people, including Aboriginal staff from Aboriginal schools – Teachers and Literacy Workers – Teacher/Linguists and Linguists, and Curriculum Writers. They decided that children should develop or learn the language through the medium of Aboriginal knowledge. So the curriculum has three Outcomes components:

- a) Content Outcomes are organised under the three strands of People & Kinship; the Natural Environment; and Country & Land. These Content Outcomes are cross-linked to mainstream Learning Areas such as Science, SOCE, Technology, so that Aboriginal students can attain Outcomes in mainstream Learning Areas through learning their own cultural knowledge in the Content Outcome Strands of the Indigenous Language and Culture Learning Area.
- b) Language Outcomes are organised under the four strands of Listening, Speaking, Reading & Viewing, and Writing. These parallel the four strands of the English (as a First Language) and ESL Learning Areas.
- c) Finally there are Language Developmental Outcomes, which attempt to specify in fairly broad terms Outcome Indicators for the development of functions and structure of language that children should attain at each developmental level.



These Indicators were difficult to specify, as we didn't have any substantial research on the acquisition of Aboriginal languages, though research in the USA and elsewhere suggested that linguists have good intuitions about developmental stages in the acquisition of a language that they have researched thoroughly, on the basis of the complexity of their linguistic descriptions (David Wilkins, pers com, 2000). The ordinary fluent speaker of a language, on the other hand, is notoriously poor at describing what is simple and what is complex about their own language.

Although the Curriculum Team that developed the NT Curriculum Framework say that it is a single, simple, integrated framework to replace the complexity of separate and competing curricula for each Learning Area, as a non-teacher I do find it complex, and I know trained Aboriginal Teachers find it complex. But the basic ideas behind it are simple and laudable. Not only is it inclusive, as I have explained, but it is developmental: the levels in the framework are deliberately not linked to age or grade levels, to allow children to develop at the rate that is appropriate to their situation and ability.

And the Indigenous Language and Culture curriculum provides for teaching students the knowledge they should know as good citizens of their own culture and community without separating that from the overall development of knowledge; it provides for normal language development, placing listening before speaking, listening and speaking before reading, and reading before writing; and it provides a mechanism for ensuring that students have learnt the functions and structures appropriate to their stage of language development, either acquiring it as their first language, or learning it as a second language.

### **Implementing the Indigenous Language and Culture curriculum**

Having said all this, a word of caution. It is one thing having a good Curriculum Framework, it is quite another to implement that in real live classrooms, with real live students, by real live teachers. The old Bilingual schools had some precedent, but not much. The models of Bilingual education they had worked under emphasised the learning of initial literacy in the vernacular and initial instruction in the vernacular, then transferring to English: the so-called Transfer model. And even initial literacy and instruction in the vernacular were often not attained in practice.

Aboriginal teaching staff had always understood Bilingual to mean Two-Way, with the children learning both ways, local Aboriginal and English language and knowledge across the curriculum. They understood that education was not just about literacy and language development. They understood that children develop their language – and literacy – skills through learning about their world and their culture. And sometimes they managed to teach in this way, but there was no curriculum in place to ensure that this was achieved systematically (see Hoogenraad 2001 for further discussion of these issues).

Non-Bilingual schools – the majority of Aboriginal schools – have in most cases no precedent at all except for the sporadic and transitory “grassroots Language & Culture” programs described in Hoogenraad 1994. But whereas in the early 1990s I observed that it was nearly always local Assistant Teachers doing Bachelor College Teacher Training who initiated these programs, the situation today is that Assistant Teachers hear about this possibility by word of mouth, so that there is an ever-increasing pressure for support. In Hoogenraad 1994 I described the need for support for such nascent programs, and why they can't be sustained without support. In summary, this is because:



- Being a fluent speaker of a language, or knowing a skill or being knowledgeable doesn't make you a teacher of that language or that skill or knowledge. Otherwise there would be 10 million teachers of English in Australia, and anybody would be qualified as a teacher of some knowledge or skill. But teaching an arbitrary and fairly large group of children in a formal context, whether in a classroom or out bush, is a skill that has to be learnt, whereas teaching family, one to one or one to a few, is something all humans do naturally.
- It is very difficult to teach a class without using literacy, because community members do not generally accept a school program as valid unless it uses literacy, and also because it is very difficult to plan a lesson – let alone a term's or a year's work – orally, without writing. This implies that the teachers of Indigenous Language and Culture programs need to be literate in the vernacular.
- It is quite impossible to sustain a developmental program over weeks, months and then years without a quite detailed plan – not a Curriculum, which is far too general, but a Syllabus.

Because the core mainstream Learning Areas have been taught for a century or more, and new Learning Areas have been taught for decades, and there have been teams of people developing textbooks, teaching plans and materials, there is a sort of collective knowledge of how to sustain a developmental program over the 12 years of schooling. Most teachers take this for granted, and don't really reflect enough to realise that this is simply not the case for Indigenous Language & Culture programs.

(Actually, it is clear that when most mainstream teachers come to teach in a remote Aboriginal community, they too are lost without a plan for this very different situation. They too flounder in trying to teach the children Maths, English and all those other familiar subjects in this radically different situation.)

- It is quite unreasonable to expect Aboriginal teachers to develop a syllabus and make materials for their Indigenous Language and Culture program. Not only is teaching a full-time job, but both developing a Syllabus and making materials require specialist skills, which most teachers cannot be expected to have.

Now this possesses a problem, because the required skills and the means of acquiring them are both in short supply, and unlike the mainstream, where there are millions of students to cater for just in Australia alone, we are here trying to cater for relatively few students for each language. So we have to find economies in other ways. The Language Region meetings in Central Australia have provided us with some ideas on how to tackle this, and we will now look at these by going through each of the five components of a typical Language Region meeting, as outlined above.

### **Sharing: Reports from the grassroots on what is already being done**

Schools that have had Bilingual programs come to these meetings with materials and examples of their children's work to show. But some other schools also come with materials, perhaps less impressive, and often done in English because they cannot write their language, but none-the-less showing that they have been trying in their own right, usually with no or minimal support. This is not merely an affirmation of intent: it is also inspirational to those who have done nothing yet. It provides ideas, and evidence of what can be achieved.

For instance, one small Alyawarr outstation school had produced two books in Alyawarr with the help of a teacher and a linguist. The assistant teacher who brought these books showed us that she had begun to learn to read Alyawarr, convincing others that it is possible to learn to read the language. In another instance, a book in English shown off earlier in the meeting was translated into Arrernte with the help of a linguist, after he had introduced Arrernte literacy. These may seem like small gains, but they show what is possible through cooperation.

The meetings are also an opportunity to broker the sharing of materials and programs. A school fortunate enough to have the resources and knowledge to develop a program in Arrernte was able to offer their materials to other schools without these resources. This also begins to alert participants to what they need to learn first to use existing resources, and then to produce additional resources. They can begin to map a pathway, and negotiate how they might make the journey in the company of others intent on the same goal.

Finally, by asking linguists and others who have done relevant work to come and report, participants are alerted to materials that are already available, and can begin to discuss how they might be utilised. This might include discussing how to adapt the materials for use in school programs, and also how materials for one language can be adapted for another. The message here is: beware of re-inventing the wheel, so find ways of advertising what has been done and what is available.

### **Learning Together and Professional Development**

I believe that there are really just three areas of professional development that are required for successfully developing and delivering Indigenous Language and Culture programs.

The first is developing literacy in the vernacular. One thing is very clear: if you cannot already read and write, this is going to be nigh on impossible to achieve, but if you are already good at literacy you will learn this quickly, provided you have an open mind about how the vernacular is written. People who argue with the accepted orthography (way of writing the language) have great trouble in learning, those that accept it learn quickly. The irony is that, in our experience, people who barely speak the language but are already very literate (in English) typically learn this much faster than those who are fluent in the language but have very poor literacy.

In developing literacy learning programs for the vernacular, remember that it is best taught by someone who understands the basis for the orthography – usually a linguist, and that learning to read is much easier than learning to write. And once you can read the vernacular well, you will be more or less able to teach yourself to write it. The other thing about learning to read the vernacular first is that as a teacher you will be able to start using existing resources, and as long as you stick to the familiar words and phrases that are in that material, you will be able to write for the students.

At the meetings we have an introduction to literacy in the vernacular, to convince participants that this is a skill that they are able to acquire. To organise further learning, we try to use existing accredited courses, available through BIITE (Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education), so that the course can be funded through the regular channels. This means organising a group of ten or more people to take a course together, and finding a place and time when the maximum number of people can attend together. This usually means doing such a course in one or two week blocks.

The second kind of professional development is learning to teach and learning to develop language materials. In the NT, this is almost exclusively through BIITE, who have a number of different kinds of training programs available, all aimed specifically at Aboriginal people. These including full

teacher training, training as an assistant teacher, and linguistic and language training. The meetings are an opportunity for BIITE to explain their courses to the whole meeting, but also by talking to individuals and small groups about their particular needs. So the meetings are a recruitment opportunity for course providers, and a chance for participants to discover what is available. BIITE courses can also include a language learning component (which many students in Central Australia can pass through recognition of prior learning): in NSW all such courses should obviously include a language learning component.

BIITE also encourages its students to attend these meetings, and often has lecturers present to assess students, as active participation can be counted as course-work. BIITE also provides the organisers with funds to support the attendance of these students.

One kind other kind of training opportunity should not be overlooked. As a result of working with linguists, some younger people have decided to do a Degree in Linguistics. So far, in Central Australia, these have always been through the University of New England's External Studies program. So far, these students have continued to work with the linguist, in a sort of apprenticeship or mentoring arrangement, but in NSW other arrangements must be possible. The meetings are potentially also a recruiting opportunity for Linguistics courses, and for Linguists looking for suitable co-workers.

The final kind of professional development is team teaching and working in partnerships. It takes a lot of time to train as a literacy worker, as a teacher, or as a linguist, and even learning to develop deep literacy in the vernacular, sufficient to use it actively to develop materials and lesson plans, takes a lot of time. So meanwhile, it is necessary to work in teams, with trained teachers, linguists, and others. Working in a team requires very special skills. The main one is being able to see the other person's point of view, and learning to appreciate – and not underestimate – the special skills that they bring to the team. It is a very good idea to invite non-indigenous people who you may need to work with to these meetings, for two reasons. The first is that they can see you working in an environment that is of your making, working with your own people. The other is that you can then both take part in team teaching or “partnership” workshops, in which you can confront each other with the problems of working together, and resolve these problems. As a corollary, since you are unlikely to be able to bring together all the people who may later work together in teams, you will need to plan workshops that can be organised in your workplace, or by bringing people from a number of workplaces together, at a later date.

Later, when these meetings have been happening for a while, you will be able to add additional professional development activities which combine working and learning together, such as analysing students' work in the language, to discover recurrent patterns of errors so that you can adjust your teaching strategies, or learning how to edit texts in the language. These opportunities will become obvious as you work and learn together.

### **Working Together: Producing materials and plans**

The Warlpiri have been cooperating for over two decades to produce materials, and have more than 500 titles now – mostly school readers – and some 90 Warlpiri school songs. These materials were developed by partnerships between linguists, teacher/linguists, Warlpiri literacy workers, and senior Warlpiri people over the last two and a half decades. Some of the other languages have almost no materials yet, and no language has enough spread over the full range of what is needed to sustain

interesting and full programs. This is a daunting situation, especially given the paucity of people with the required skills to remedy this situation.

The first way to use the meetings is to bring together all the available materials on the language or languages represented at the meeting. It is a good idea to physically have (copies of) all the materials there, so as to give everybody a chance to assess them, and also to act as a goad to people's memory: they may remember resources they had forgotten about. It is then also an opportunity to catalogue all the resources, or to update available catalogues.

The next thing is to make materials: the most obvious are compiling word lists for teaching from available sources, making simple books (perhaps using taped or transcribed stories) with illustrations, and charts and other classroom materials. The emphasis must be on materials that can be widely used, ideally right across the Region represented at the meeting. One model that we are developing is the use of "templates", developed for one Central Australian language, and then adapted to others. This is based on the fact that it is far easier (and less prone to "translation errors") to translate materials from one Centralian language into another than it is to translate from English. But it also means that the same layout and illustrations can be re-used.

For instance, the Western/Central Anmatyerr designed a (monolingual) Children's Picture Dictionary at their first meeting, based on the alphabetically arranged Macquarie Children's Dictionary. But they decided to arrange theirs in themes. Subsequently about 500 pictures were found or created, and Jenny Green, a linguist who is working on an Anmatyerr Dictionary worked with senior and younger Anmatyerr people to get the word and a short sentence for each picture. By the way, a consequence of this work was that the younger people, who had done a short introduction to Anmatyerr literacy at the meeting, significantly improved their literacy through this work. The Picture Dictionary is now almost ready to publish.

But then it became obvious that we could use the pictures, arranged in themes, to make picture Dictionaries for other Centralian languages, and that is now happening. This can be done much more rapidly and at a lower cost for subsequent languages because all of the framework has already been developed, but also because quite a few words are close, if not the same, from one language to another (they are, as linguists would say, "cognates").

Having learnt this lesson, we will now do this with other resources too. This has also created a new opportunity for IAD Press, a Central Australian publishing house which has produced some of the best Aboriginal language dictionaries, books and other publications, aimed not so much at Aboriginal people out bush as the general market interested in publications on Aboriginal topics. They are now attending the meetings, and developing publications aimed specifically at Central Australian Aboriginal people, to help promote literacy. These also include materials aimed at very early childhood pre-literacy practices, such as Alphabet colouring books and jigsaws in the vernaculars. Again, it may be possible for NSW to use the same idea. If so, it would help if there was an Aboriginal Publishing house that could develop the expertise in producing such materials.

In doing this work of developing materials, it has been essential to have the help of linguists and related specialists: from the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD)'s Central Australian Dictionaries Program (CADP), and from a number of Bible Translation projects (SIL, FRM, etc). These people have established close partnerships with Aboriginal people, especially senior people,

but also with younger literate people, so they can work very productively together when the occasion arises.

I would suggest that in NSW it will also be possible to use such existing partnerships, and to develop new ones, by inviting linguists to the meetings. The issue of how materials can be efficiently produced and published also needs to be addressed, especially if the notion of using “templates” for materials is taken up.

### **Issues and Solutions**

There are broadly speaking two kinds of issues that arise at these meetings: those that are internal to the language group or between closely related language groups, the others are with non-Aboriginal, groups and with agencies. These require rather different handling.

Internal issues should as far as possible be delayed till late in the meeting: we try to raise most issues on the last day. This is because it is easier for people to resolve difficult issues if they have first established relationship through working and learning together. This minimises the likelihood of grandstanding or pettiness. It is also necessary to have a mechanism to break deadlocks: this can be as simple as agreeing to disagree: eg about how to spell the language. It is very important for someone at the meeting to be disengaged enough to spot such issues that, though important, are less important than harmony. Perhaps we are lucky, or perhaps Centralian Aboriginal people have good mechanisms for resolving or avoiding overt intra-group conflict, or perhaps keeping issues till late in the meetings avoids conflict, but I can think of only one disagreement at one of these meetings, when senior Warlpiri women told young women working in the schools off for dominating a discussion with their knowledge and opinions about education.

With the external issues, participants need to believe that raising issues will lead to resolutions. The issues have been very varied and broad, ranging over attempts to close valued programs, closure of small schools, failure to fund valued projects, how to influence the selection of suitable non-local teaching staff, the provision of local secondary education, training opportunities, and recently, how to get greater local involvement and control over education.

To reach resolution of such issues you really need a representative of the appropriate agency present, someone able to answer complaints and issues authoritatively and willing and able to take the issue up and attempt to resolve it. Over the last year or so, as the idea of these Language Region meetings has spread and therefore become more significant, we have been fortunate in having some very significant people attend the meetings, typically on the last, “issues” day, including at the last meeting a senior adviser to the Minister for Education, Employment and Training, and the Attorney General who is also the Minister for Central Australia and the local Member. But senior DEET staff have also been important, and have been able to resolve school issues. In some cases these observers have even raised significant issues themselves, in order to put them up for discussion.

One issue is often discussed in small groups, most typically during “team teaching” workshops, and has also often been raised with me in schools by Aboriginal staff. This is the problem of the non-local teacher who does not provide time or space in the timetable for any local Aboriginal component. The argument is typically that there is no time because of the demands of the mainstream curriculum. The issue is a subtle one, because when confronted, the teacher will often make a slot in the timetable available, but it is typically unsuitable, or it disappears when the time comes. Other conflicts arise if the local Aboriginal teachers don’t turn up on time.



Ironically, the same teacher might be very proud of their use of non-local Aboriginal materials, such as “Dreamtime” stories originating elsewhere in Australia. They truly appear to believe that they are thus catering for the special cultural needs of their Aboriginal students. I believe that the problem is ultimately one of teachers, especially primary school teachers, being used to total control of the classroom and of what is taught. It is a real and genuine problem for them to relinquish that control. This is also apparent in team teaching situations: the classroom teacher finds it difficult to relinquish the teacher role, and become the assistant in the Indigenous Language and Culture sessions.

There are two parts to the solution, and both are necessary. First, the education system must sanction the teaching of Indigenous Language and Culture, and sanction its teaching by local Aboriginal people, who may not be trained teachers. They should clearly establish the local ownership of these programs. They must clearly define the role of the classroom teacher in this, who should be present in the classroom under duty of care legislation in the NT, and I would assume also in NSW. In any case, they are often needed to help teach the class, albeit in the role of an assistant teacher. I would suggest that the teacher’s role in Indigenous Language and Culture programs needs to be established at the time they are appointed where practicable.

Second, team-teaching workshops need to occur before a Language and Culture program begins. I would go so far as to say that without this, an Indigenous Language and Culture Curriculum is of limited value. These workshops need to be run by people who specialise in this, and the workshops need to confront both parties with the real and recurring issues without trivialising or stereotyping them. But they also need to establish the excitement of team-teaching across the cultural divide, the excitement of learning new skills from the other, and teaching them new skills in return (Graham 1999).

### **Governance**

The Warlpiri-patu-kurlangu Jaru incorporated in March of 2001. The elected Committee carefully maintains representation of all the member communities, including Warlpiri people living as significant minorities in other communities and towns such as Alice Springs. They meet by teleconference to share ideas and discuss issues. This has proved so effective that all the new meetings are now electing representative committees to meet by teleconference. Potentially, such a committee can become part of the governance of Aboriginal education in a Region of Affiliation: a sort of Regional School Council or ASSPA Committee.

A further development which we are planning for this year is to hold a Central Australian Aboriginal Education Forum, with representatives from each of the Language Regions. Previous attempts to set up such a forum had no mechanism for selecting delegates other than by appointment – typically by the Government or by some other agency. Now we have a way of making the forum representative.

### **Summary: is there anything in our experience that is of value to NSW?**

Clearly our situation in Central Australia is very different to NSW. Most significantly, apart from the few towns, Aboriginal people are a clear majority – and typically the overwhelming majority – in most communities. None-the-less, there are still very few local trained Aboriginal teachers, so education is still largely delivered to local Aboriginal children by non-local teachers, who effectively control that delivery, no matter what the policies and rules of the Department are.

I would say that our experience points to the following conclusion. It is very important to have an Indigenous Language and Culture Curriculum that is part of the established curriculum. But it should be quite simple, avoid prescription, and providing only broad guidelines. Above all, it needs to establish the legitimacy of the Program.

However, this will be of very limited value without a number of other initiatives. These include:

- Training programs for teaching and on language work specifically aimed at local Aboriginal people. This implies an Aboriginal training authority or college similar to BIITE in the NT.
- A training policy which might amongst other things set a target for local trained Aboriginal teachers by Region of Affiliation (as outlined above): I would say that a worthwhile target would be that the proportion of local trained Aboriginal teachers should match the proportion of Aboriginal students.

The policy should also address how training is funded and delivered in a situation of relatively small student numbers over relatively large areas.

- There is a need to co-opt people with established expertise – in teaching, in developing syllabuses and lesson plans, in developing materials, in linguistic work, etc – to work in partnership with local Aboriginal people, at least over the extended period while they become fully trained and experienced.
- There needs to be a workable mechanism for developing syllabuses and materials. I do not know of any way of doing this effectively school by school or community by community, so this implies some sort of Regional organisation relevant to the production of language materials: whether these are called Language Regions or Regions of Affiliation is immaterial, but it needs to be clearly established that these are highly unlikely to correspond to existing regions, such as government regions.

And then, the Aboriginal people within such Regions need to commit themselves to working together.

- There needs to be an organisation or unit that can effectively and efficiently produce and publish resources, where possible on the “template” model described above. Though such a unit would need to be subsidised, it should look widely for funds, including the sale of the materials they produce.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that in Central Australia Aboriginal people involved in schools are excited most by the prospect of teaching their own language and their own valued knowledge to their children. In the end, this is its own reward.



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# **Appendix A**

## **Arandic Schools Communities Consultation**

26/11-8/12/200

Conducted by Zania O & Robert Hoogenraad, IEB

### **Aboriginal Staff & Community Members: Your Ideas**

#### **Questions**

- 1 Do you think the idea of forming an “education network” of Aboriginal people and others involved in the education of your children is a good idea?
- 2 On the map, put a line around the schools/communities that you – the local Aboriginal staff and community members – would want to cooperate and work with to further your own professional development, to develop common materials and curriculum for use in the schools, and to share additional resources for the schools.
- 3 Who from this school/community should go to such “education network” meetings? (Make a list of people.)
- 4 Draft a simple Agenda for the first meeting: the things you think should be done or talked about.
- 5 When, and where (what community/school) do you think the first meeting should be?
- 6 Anything else you want to say? (Write on back of this page)