

Local Language Link-ups: Developing regional networks for Aboriginal languages in NSW

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Introduction

Since the release of the NSW *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* in 2003, support to implement it has been provided to schools and community groups across the state. By 2006 there were 46 operating Aboriginal language programs in NSW, most implementing the syllabus, and another 25 schools had carried out some Aboriginal language activity (Munro et al 2007). The key education agencies involved have worked collaboratively and strategically to support this level of activity. In the first instance support from the Office of the Board of Studies NSW (the Office) has been through intensive support for individual school–community teams. The next strategic step naturally required a language-specific approach, particularly in view of the *On-country Protocol*. This report describes both the series of collaborative workshops developed in 2007 to encourage the establishment of regional networks for specific languages in local areas and, more importantly, the evaluations from school and community participants, which suggest this approach should be ongoing.

The *On-country Protocol*, which informs much of the support provided to Aboriginal language activity in NSW, is a central aspect of the *Local Language Link-up* workshops. The *On-country Protocol* says that the Aboriginal language taught in any particular place should be the language for that country, the on-country language. For example, in Parkes and Forbes the language of instruction is Wiradjuri because these schools are in Wiradjuri country. This protocol is in place to ensure respect for the intricate connections between language, country and identity in Aboriginal society. Applying this protocol does not exclude off-country language programs but they require a more extensive procedure to gain approval and endorsement from the Aboriginal communities – both from the language group whose country they are on and from the language group of the language to be taught. In the initial instance all attempts should be made to develop an on-country Aboriginal language program.

After the release of the *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* in 2003 staff at the Office created and released syllabus support documents, all of which can be downloaded from the Board of Studies website (<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au>). In 2005 two new support positions were created. One was the Aboriginal Languages Consultant in the Curriculum K–12 Directorate’s Languages Unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). This position provides curriculum support and professional development to DET schools. The other position was a Senior Education Officer in the Aboriginal Curriculum Unit of the Office to assist schools and communities across NSW implement the syllabus.

During 2004 and 2005 an intensive model of assistance was developed by Office staff and another Education Officer position was created. The assistance involves Office staff carrying out individual workshops in up to 6–8 sites in each term to assist school–community teams to develop teaching and learning programs in their Aboriginal language course. In Term 3 of each year a three-day Sharing Workshop has been held where all the participants gather to share their experiences. Often this is the first time participants have had the opportunity to learn from others and see Aboriginal languages taken seriously by support agencies. By 2006 it was noted by staff that these individual intensive activities began to have a ripple effect to other Aboriginal community members or schools in the same town or region. This is very much the intention of Aboriginal language reclamation¹ programs within NSW.

Linguists and educators at both the Office and DET who worked closely and regularly with school Aboriginal language programs quickly realised that, in order to work effectively, there was a need to target their support to language-specific groups. An informal working strategy was developed in 2005 for their work with the stated aim of developing strong regional language networks. The working team’s strategy included the following points:

¹ All language programs in NSW are reclamation programs. To a greater or lesser extent, knowledge of language has been lost in all the different language areas of NSW. As a consequence, those involved in language programs have to rely on historical sources and written or sound archives to supplement whatever speaker knowledge remains. In many areas, knowledge of the local language is severely depleted, placing constrictions on the extent and nature of language programs.

- There is a need for regional networks for the different languages, based at a school or language centre. There could be language network teams, including teachers, language teachers, community members, tutors and linguists from schools that teach that language. The schools would benefit from pooling skills and resources as every school finds it difficult to develop language resources, fund linguists, upgrade the skills of tutors etc alone.
- There is a need to find ways to fund language network teams rather than individual schools. It is inefficient and indeed unworkable for training and curriculum support to be provided from a central location to schools on an individual basis. It would be far more efficient and effective for that to be provided to language network teams and for team leaders to be funded and trained to provide support locally.
- In many areas networks are already in place because those involved in more advanced language programs have already discovered their advantages. These informal arrangements need to be acknowledged and the benefits that people derive from working in this way need to be disseminated.

The Workshops

In 2007 a new series of workshops was developed under the title of *Local Language Link-up* workshops. There were three workshops, as follows:

1. *Wiradjuri Sharing Workshop* held in Parkes on 6 and 7 March 2007
2. *Dharawal/Dhurga Sharing Workshop* held in Sanctuary Point on 29 and 30 May 2007
3. *Dhurga Sharing Workshop* held in Mossy Point on 18 and 19 September 2007.

Each workshop was collaboratively organised, funded and facilitated by staff of the Office, DET and the Catholic Education Commission. Aboriginal Education Officers from the following dioceses were involved in the respective workshops: 1. Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese, 2. Wollongong Diocese, and 3. the Canberra–Goulburn Diocese.

For each workshop two local school–community language program teams, one primary and one secondary, closely collaborated as mentor schools. Forbes North Public School and Parkes High School were the mentor schools for the first workshop. Broulee Public School and Vincentia High School mentored the second and third workshops. All schools within the vicinity and across the sectors were invited. The average number of participants was approximately 50, which included classroom teachers, members of school executives, Aboriginal educators, Aboriginal community teachers and members,

and linguists. The agendas for each of the workshops are included in Appendices 1–3 to show the type of content provided.

The title *Local Language Link-up* reflected the workshops' aims. The term 'local language' was used so that non-Aboriginal people could also develop an understanding of the *On-country protocols* for Aboriginal languages. Non-Aboriginal people, particularly in rural and regional areas, have developed a strong 'local' identity. It was hoped that using the term 'local' in the title would help them to embrace an awareness of, and respect for, the language(s) that also belonged to that country. The term 'link-up' was used to reflect a regional network for participants to get together and share resources. The primary aims of the workshops were:

- to provide opportunities to learn more of and about the language
- to provide content that would challenge all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, from community members to principals
- to provide a supportive environment where Aboriginal community members could share their knowledge with linguists and teachers
- to provide practical advice and support to develop an Aboriginal language program
- to encourage participants to create or develop their own regional networks.

Due to the nature of Aboriginal language reclamation, it is particularly challenging to overcome the lack of experience with and knowledge of Aboriginal languages. Therefore an underlying aim of all activities is to raise people's awareness of, and confidence in, working with Aboriginal languages.

Summary of Evaluation Forms

At the end of each workshop, evaluation forms were completed by participants.

Rhydwen adapted the standard DET workshop evaluation form for this purpose.

Questions were posed in order to collect the following four main types of information:

1. Personal and professional particulars
2. Professional benefits
3. Language learning/teaching benefits
4. Suggestions for future professional development.

A brief overview of the responses is presented here, along with particular findings that have implications for future professional development requirements in this field.

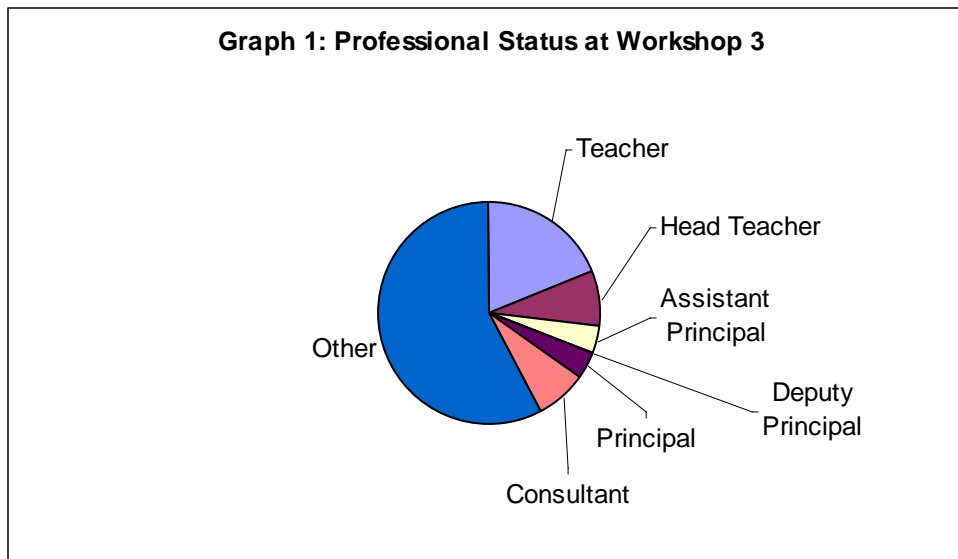
1. Personal and professional particulars

The questions asked in this section were:

- In which education system are you employed?
- How long have you been teaching?
- Professional status?
- School/institution in which you are currently working?
- EEO information
- How did you find out about this professional development activity?

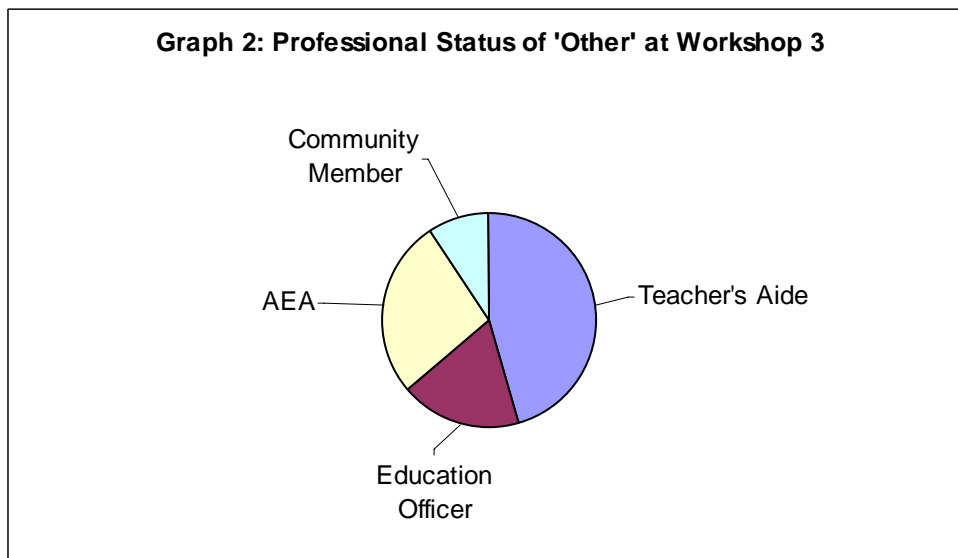
On average, across the three workshops, approximately 60% of participants were working in the government school sector and 30% in the Catholic sector. This aligns with the representation of the sectors in most regions. In all workshops the teaching experience of participants ranged from *Not Applicable* to *0–16 or more years*. Notably, in each workshop approximately 30% of participants had 16 years or more teaching experience.

The evaluation forms for the first two workshops had the following options for professional status: *Teacher, Head Teacher, Assistant Principal, Deputy Principal, Principal, Consultant* and *Other*. On average, approximately 50% of participants in the first two workshops in Parkes and Sanctuary Point indicated that they were *Other*.



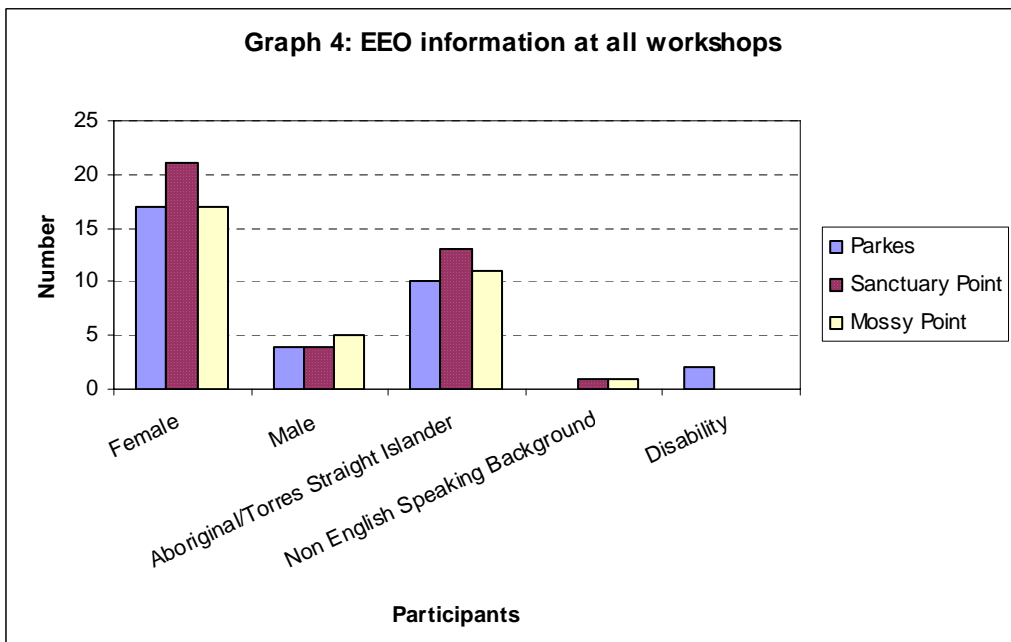
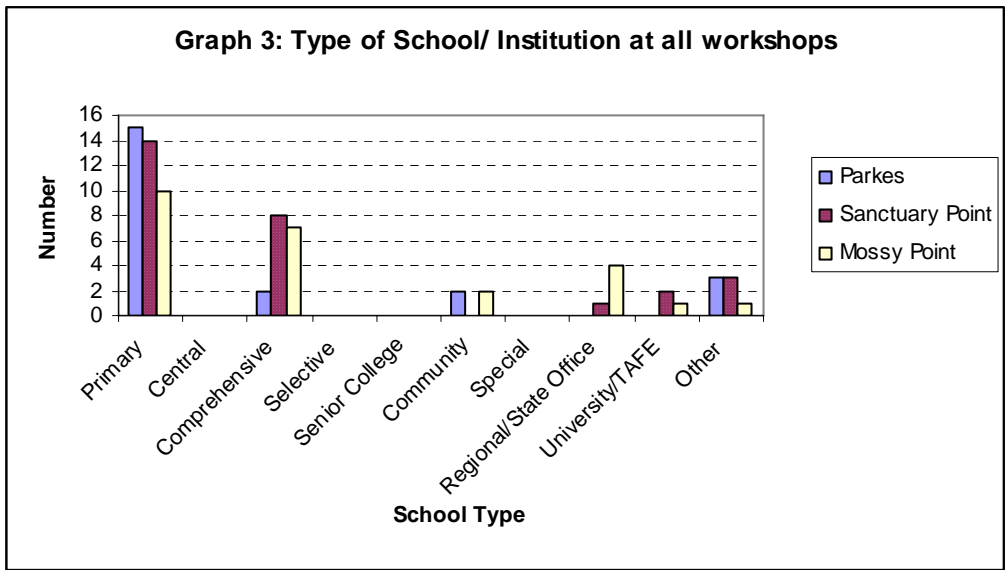
(thanks to Rob Freilich for help with formatting this and the following graphs)

The evaluation form was therefore modified for the third workshop in Mossy Point to include the following extra categories: *Community Member*, *Aboriginal Education Assistant*, *Teacher's Aide* and *Education Officer*.



Therefore, we can posit that approximately 50% of participants across the board were either *community members* or *Aboriginal educators*. Of the other school-based categories the highest numbers present were *Teachers*.

As Graph 3 shows, participants from primary schools were the most numerous, but the extent of their dominance varied across the three workshops.



Graph 4 shows that the majority of the participants were women and over 25% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

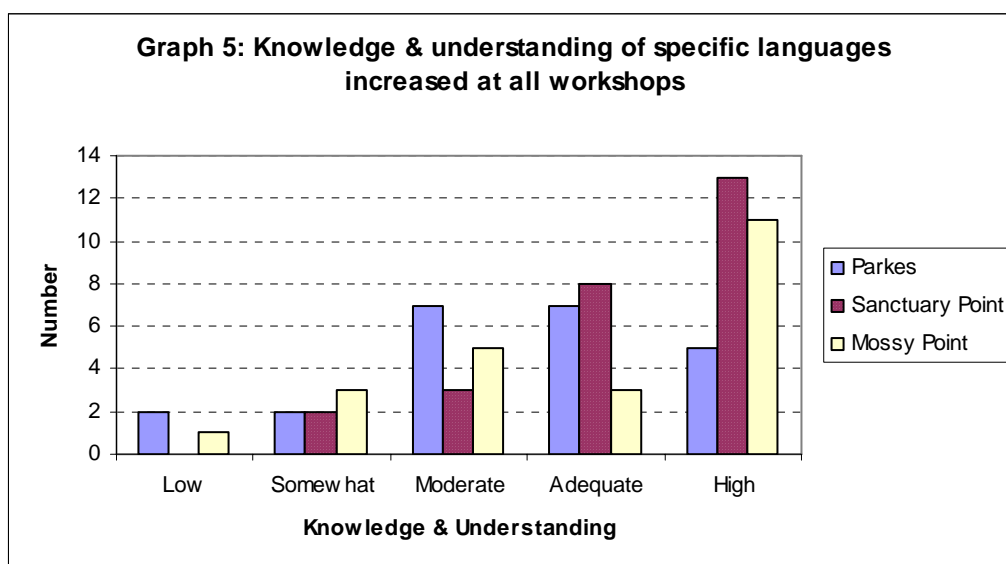
In summary, the majority of the participants were women. Thirty percent of participants had 16 years or more teaching experience and most were working in primary schools in the government sector. Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal educators were well represented at each workshop.

2. Professional benefits

The questions asked in this section were:

- Has your knowledge and understanding of _____ Language increased?
- Have your professional skills improved?
- Has your professional confidence increased?
- Has your capacity to improve the learning outcomes of your students increased?
- Do you believe your teaching/professional practice will change?

As Graph 5 shows there was a difference between the Wiradjuri workshop and the subsequent Dharawal and Dhurga workshops in response to the question about increasing knowledge of the language. This may have been because participants at the Wiradjuri workshop already had a higher level of language knowledge prior to the workshop. Dhurga is at an early stage of reclamation and therefore participants would have had less opportunity to develop knowledge of the language. An alternative explanation could be that the language content was better presented in the latter two workshops than in the Wiradjuri workshop. However, a comment on one of the evaluation sheets to the effect that prior to the workshop the participant's knowledge of language had been very low, suggests the former explanation may be valid.



A similar trend is evident in terms of participant responses to the questions about the workshop increasing the capacity to *improve student outcomes* and whether *teaching/professional practices will change*. Overall the responses in both categories

were largely favourable but the high ratings were fewer in the Wiradjuri workshop than in the Dharawal and Dhurga workshops. Approximately 75% of participants rated the workshops as high, adequate or moderate in terms of improving *professional skills* and increasing *professional confidence*.

In most categories in this section there was a small percentage in each workshop who indicated a *low* response. This suggests that while the majority of participants benefited from the professional learning there were a small number who did not. There might be a few reasons for this: it may be that a particular participant type was not targeted during the workshop or perhaps the workshop design was not challenging enough for some people.

Participants in the *Local Language Link-up* workshops are much more heterogeneous than in most professional development workshops. In almost every category, there would be some people who had considerable expertise and others with little or none. For example, trained language teachers and members of the school executive might feel they were already skilled in many areas regarding professional conduct while Aboriginal community members might feel they were more skilled in other areas covered by the workshop. Further research might be required to determine how to make improvements in satisfying all the participants.

3. Language learning/teaching benefits

The questions asked in this section were:

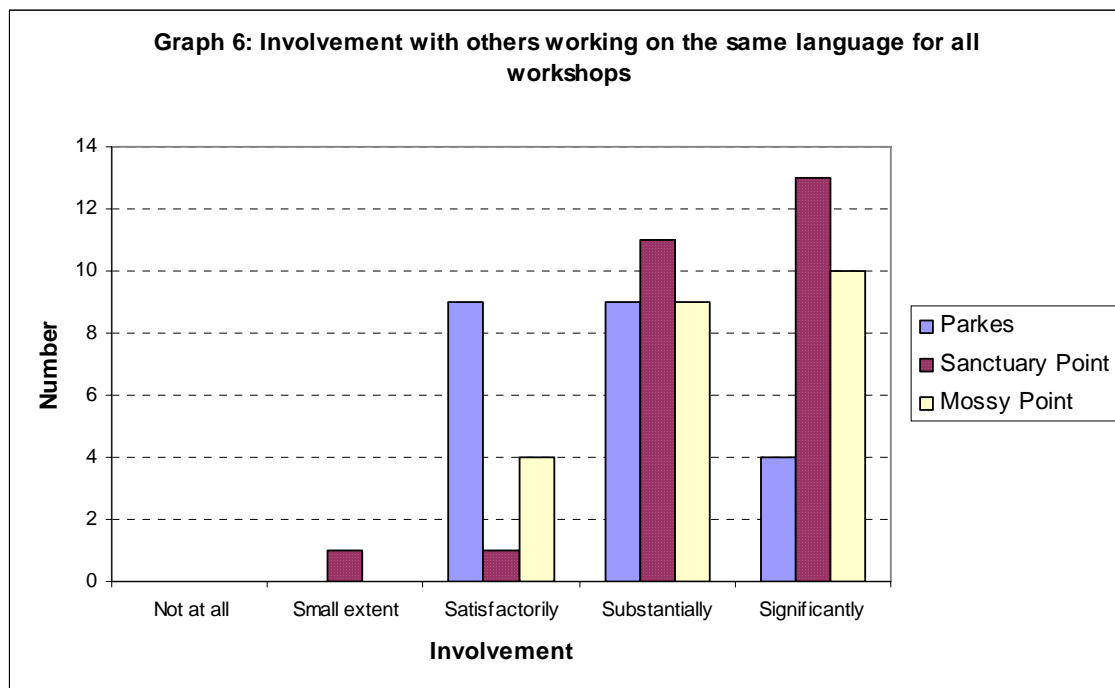
- Has your understanding of language learning been enhanced?
- Has your understanding of developing teaching resources been enhanced?
- Has your understanding of what is involved in developing a school language program been enhanced?
- Has your involvement with others working on _____ Language been enhanced?
- Has your understanding of the roles of different language team members been enhanced?

Considering the final paragraph in the previous section it is noteworthy that the results for this section of questions saw only one response in the *not at all* category. One respondent in the Mossy Point workshop did not benefit at all in terms of enhancing

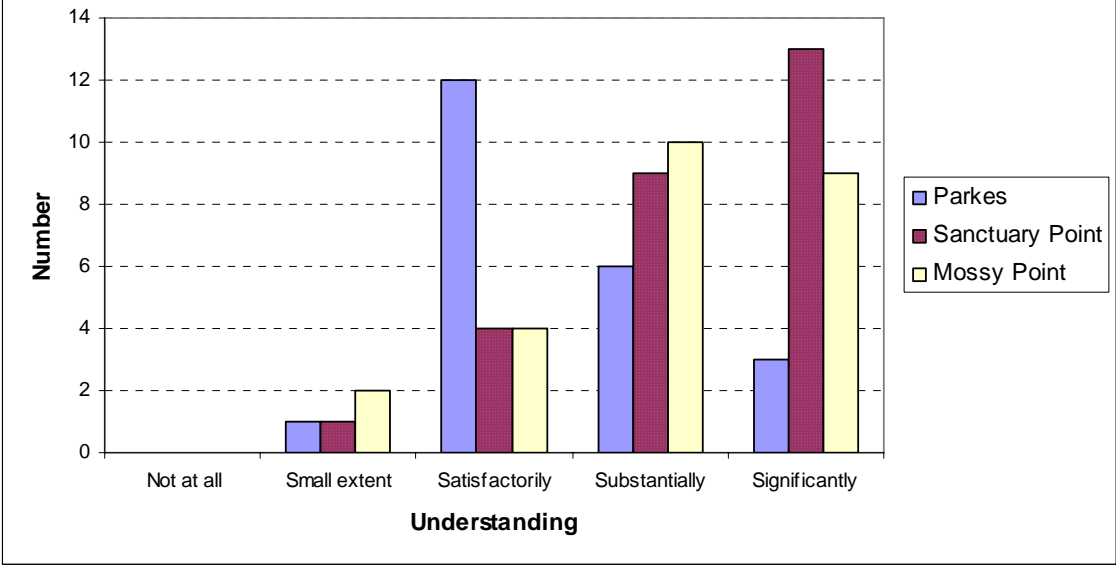
their understanding of developing language resources. We can say therefore that 99% of respondents benefited from the workshop content on language learning and teaching. This is a positive outcome from the workshops as it was a central aim from the outset.

As another aim of the workshops was to develop regional networks, which require people to share resources and work together to some extent, the high response from participants to the question about involvement with others was another positive finding. As Graph 6 shows there was an overwhelmingly positive response to this question.

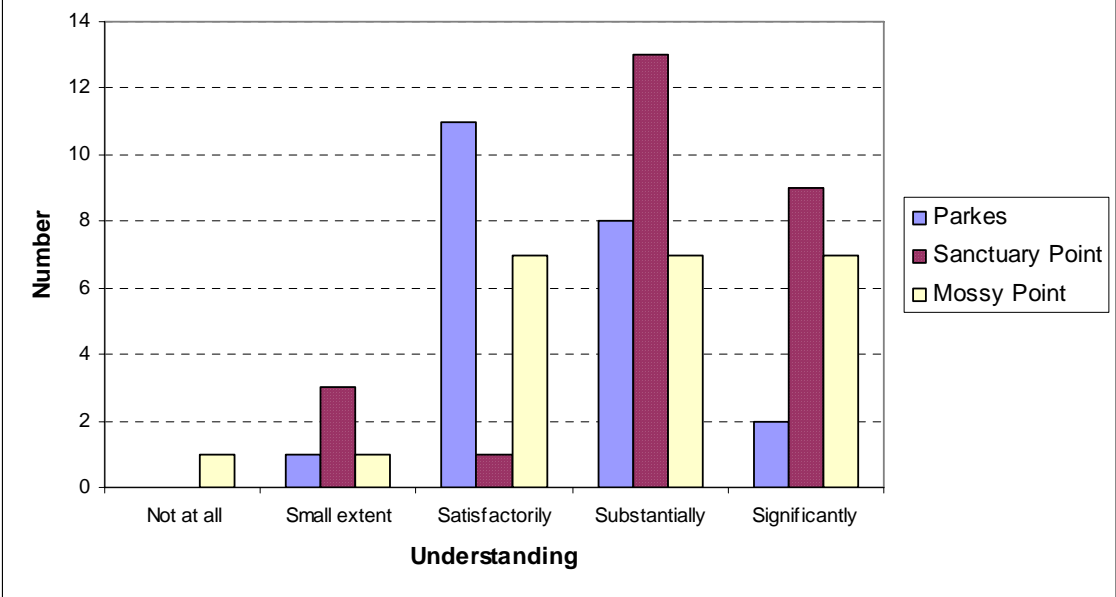
Finally, it appears that the other central aim of the workshop, to provide practical advice and skills in developing Aboriginal language programs, was also successful. To the last question, the response was also high.

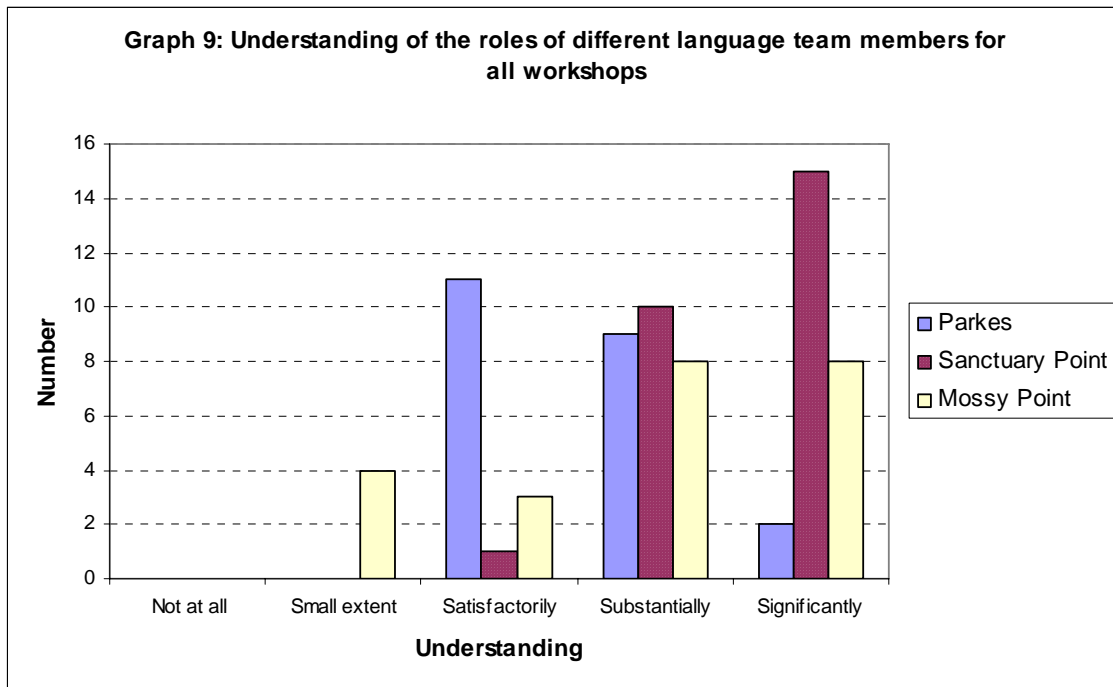


Graph 7: Understanding of what is involved in developing a school language program for all workshops



Graph 8: Understanding of developing language resources for all workshops

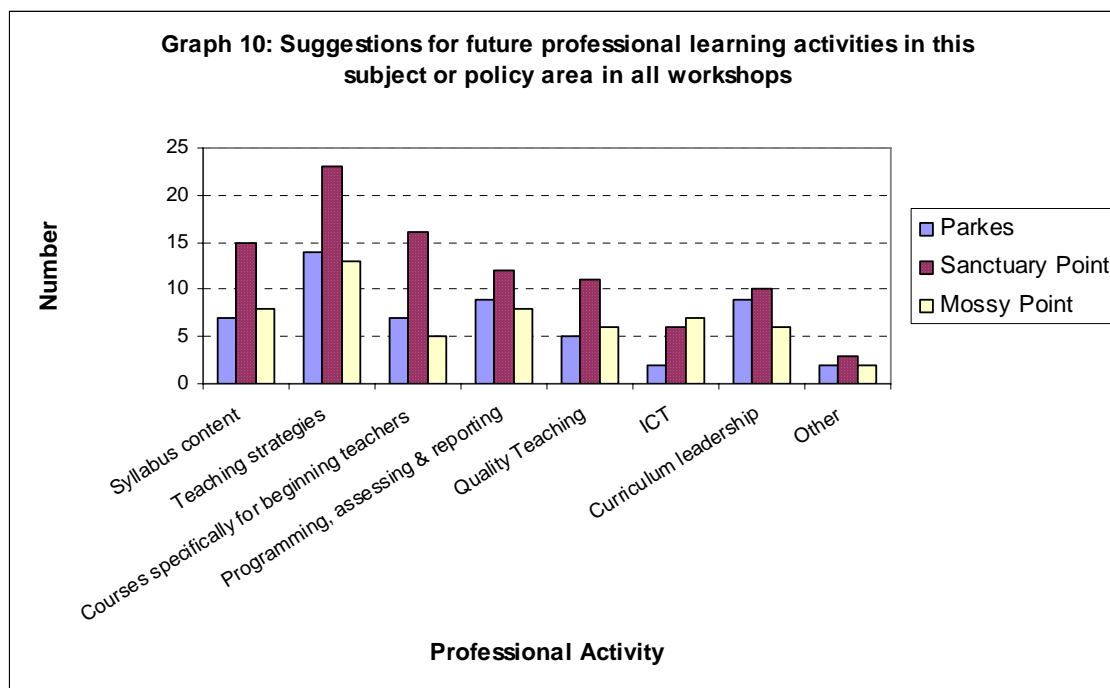




We can confidently say that participants understanding of language learning, of developing language resources and understanding of what is involved in developing a school language program, was enhanced in a *satisfactory, substantial* or *significant* manner.

4. Suggestions for future professional development

In this section of the questionnaire participants were asked for suggestions for future professional learning activities in this subject area.



Graph 10 clearly provides directions for future workshops. In order of preference, the suggestions for future profession learning activities are:

1. Teaching strategies
2. Programming, assessing and reporting
3. Syllabus content
4. Courses specifically for beginning teachers
5. Curriculum leadership
6. Quality Teaching,
7. ICT
8. Other.

At the end of the Wiradjuri workshop suggestions about other professional development included a request for resource-making days with other schools in order to share resource-making ideas. Following the Dharawal/Dhurga workshop one member of the school executive expressed a desire for more knowledge on what to teach and another suggestion was for language lessons for adult learners.

Conclusion

Evidence suggests that the strategy of providing support to regionally based groups working on the same Aboriginal language is effective. One form of evidence is the strongly positive evaluations of the workshops. More evidence is that in all the areas where sharing workshops have been initiated, there is some ongoing interaction between participating schools. Moreover, increasing numbers of schools are initiating language programs and they now seem to assume that they will be able to get advice and support from other schools in the same language area.

References

Munro, J, Parolin, E, Poetsch, S & Rhydwen, M, 2007, 'Report on schools-based Aboriginal language program activity in NSW during 2006'. Board of Studies NSW website, Sydney. <http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/resources/languages>

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NSW AECG and NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004, *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education*, NSW DET, Sydney.

Local Language Link-up: Dharawal and Dhurga Sharing Workshop

Sanctuary Point Youth and Community Centre,
34 Paradise Beach Rd, Sanctuary Point

May 29 and 30, 2007

Agenda

Day 1

- 9.45 Acknowledgement and Welcome to country – Helen Pussell,
Mitch Martin and Wendy Brown
Introductions and welcome to the workshop - Jennifer Munro and
Mari Rhydwen
- 10.00 **Learning Dharawal and Dhurga: Example lessons**
Facilitators – Helen Pussell and Susan Poetsch
- 11.15 MORNING TEA
- 11.30 **Getting a school-based Aboriginal Language program off the
ground**
Presentation by Jennifer Munro
The Vincentia experience
The Broulee experience
Discussion and worksheet
- 12.30 LUNCH
- 1.30 **Bringing the country alive with language**
Introductions –Wendy Brown, Jennifer Munro and Mari
Rhydwen
Jervis Bay Primary School – The Junior Ranger Program
Frances Bodkin – Seasons in a botanic garden
Vincentia HS and Broulee PS – Looking at country in the
teaching program
- 2.30 Guided walk at Booderee National Park Botanical Gardens
and/or community discussions with Wendy Brown
- 6.00 Workshop Dinner at The Sanctuary Restaurant, 4 Paradise Beach
Rd, Sanctuary Point

Day 2

- 9.30 Warm up activity
Susan Poetsch
- 9.45 **Curriculum issues specific to Primary & Secondary**
K-6 schools -with Jennifer Munro and Broulee PS
7-10 schools -with Mari Rhydwen, Susan Poetsch and
Vincentia HS
- 10.30 MORNING TEA
- 11.00 **What can we know about Indigenous place names?**
Interpreting early sources from the Ulladulla and Moruya
areas
Dr Harold Koch
Australian National University
- 11:45 **Bringing archival materials and community knowledge**
together in language reconstruction
Jutta Besold
Broulee PS and Vincentia HS linguist.
Australian National University
- 12.30 LUNCH
- 1.15 **Singing a language alive**
Using song and dance in a language program-Jennifer Munro
Performance by the Vincentia High Dance and Didj Group
Songs from Broulee Public School
Discussion
- 2.30 Close

Local Language Link-up: Dhurga Sharing Workshop
The Oaks Ranch and Country Club, 238 Old Mossy Point, MOSSY POINT

September 18 and 19, 2007

Agenda

Day 1

- 8.30 Coffee on arrival
- 9.00 **Acknowledgements and setting the scene**
Jennifer Munro, Mari Rhydwen and Kerrie Hogan
- 9.30 **Welcome to Dhurga country**
Local Community Elder
- Aboriginal community Language Program
Iris White, Kerry Boyenga and Waine Donovan
- 10.30 MORNING TEA
- 11.00 **Introduction to Language Revival**
- 11.15 **Coming and going: Greeting people in Dhurga**
Muriel Slockee, Tom Slockee, Bob Slockee and John Harris
Boomerang Centre, Mogo
- 11:45 **Bringing archival materials and community knowledge together in language reconstruction**
Jutta Besold
Broulee PS and Vincentia HS linguist.
Australian National University
- 12.15 LUNCH
- 1.15 **Getting a school-based Aboriginal Language program off the ground**
Presentation by Jennifer Munro
The Vincentia experience
The Broulee experience
- 2.15 **Group discussion**
- 3.00 Close
- 6.00 Workshop Dinner at The Oaks Restaurant, 238 Old Mossy Point Rd, MOSSY POINT

Day 2

- 9.00 Warm up activity
Waine Donovan
- 9.30 **Teaching and Learning Dhurga: Example lessons**
Facilitators – *Jeff Ward and Gary Worthy*
Waine Donovan and Kerry Boyenga – The sounds and letters of Dhurga
Mitch Martin and Karen Lane – Using a team teaching approach
Jutta Besold - Pronouns
- 10.30 MORNING TEA
- 11.00 **Quality Teaching**
Mari Rhydwen
- 11.30 **Curriculum issues specific to Primary & Secondary**
K-6 schools -with Jennifer Munro and Broulee PS
7-10 schools -with Mari Rhydwen and Vincentia HS
- 12.30 LUNCH
- 1.15 Visit to Broulee Public School for performance by students

Creating a Dhurga teaching and learning network: **Discussion**
- 2.30 Close