

# Talking each other's Lingo: The *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* and its role in Language Revitalisation in NSW\*

Kevin Lowe

Inspector, Aboriginal Education, NSW Board of Studies

and

Anna Ash

Linguist, Many Rivers Language Centre, Nambucca, NSW

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## Abstract

The primary impetus for the development of the *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* by the NSW Board of Studies has been the vision, gathered through wide consultation, of Aboriginal people reviving Aboriginal languages. It has been acknowledged that if schools are to play a role in local language revival they would need the assistance of a centrally developed language curriculum, which the *Syllabus* provides. The objectives of the *Syllabus* focus not only on developing communicative competence in an Aboriginal language ('Using Language') but also involve students in comparative language studies with other Aboriginal languages, ('Making Linguistic Connections'), as well as embedding culture as an integral part of studying an Aboriginal language ('Moving Between Cultures'). This paper aims to show how the *Syllabus* and its implementation can play an active part in language revitalisation by encouraging students to engage in using and creating language for everyday use. The *Syllabus* is also grounded in recognition of the interdependence of language, culture, land and identity and thereby satisfies Aboriginal protocols and cultural requirements in relation to language.

## About the authors

Anna Ash is a linguist who has worked on NSW languages, particularly Gamilaraay-Yuwaalaraay. At the time of the initial writing of this article, Anna was a Project Officer with the Aboriginal Curriculum Unit at the Office of the Board of Studies. Subsequently she has been appointed as the Manager/Linguist with the newly established Many Rivers Aboriginal Language Centre, based at Muurrbay Language Centre at Nambucca Heads, NSW.

Kevin Lowe, a Gubbi Gubbi man, is an Inspector in the Office of the Board of Studies with responsibility for Aboriginal Education. He has had extensive education experiences in schools, TAFE and universities, as well as management of many significant education programs for Aboriginal students. He has been the Deputy Chairperson of the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL), the peak advocacy body for Aboriginal community language programs, and is currently a NSW delegate to this committee.

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## 1. Introduction

There has been a widespread belief that most NSW Aboriginal languages are ‘dead’ languages with few, if any, speakers and limited linguistic resources. This belief led to a perception within the broader community that it was impractical to devote what are limited resources to their revitalisation<sup>1</sup>. However, recently there have been many positive developments in Aboriginal language revitalisation in NSW, with several NSW languages undergoing significant revival due to the work of committed Aboriginal communities working with linguists and teachers. Aboriginal people are now learning their languages in communities, schools, TAFE colleges and Aboriginal Registered Training Organisations and several universities, and developing invaluable resources such as dictionaries, learners’ guides and CDs. This growth in language revitalisation activities is supported by the state-wide report *Strong Language Strong Culture* (Hosking et al, 2000), which forcefully challenged the notion of ‘dead’ languages in NSW.

Correspondingly, Aboriginal people in NSW have recently found that government agencies are willing to support their long-held aspirations to revive and maintain traditional NSW languages. In large part, this has been a result of small but sustained successes in some languages and increased pressure from Aboriginal communities seeking to reclaim access to their ancestral languages. In recent times these successes include the Wiradjuri, Gumbaynggirr and Gamilaraay-Yuwaalaraay dictionaries and other associated language resources such as CDs, as well as increased interest by communities in establishing language centres (Bourke, Newcastle, Sydney and Nambucca) and community language programs in diverse locations such as Narrandera, Hilston, Lightning Ridge and Wyong.

Some government agencies have accepted the challenge of supporting these efforts by beginning work with local communities in this long-term project. In particular, schools are potential sites for collaborative action between governments and

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion in Amery (2001, pp 18-27) discussion on ‘dead or extinct’ languages as defined by most linguists, as opposed to the very different claims of local Aboriginal people of their sleeping but surviving languages.

Aboriginal communities. One of the reasons for this support is the experience of many Indigenous communities in Australia and overseas, which has shown that effective and sustained school-based language learning contributes significantly to language revitalisation (Hinton 2001(b) p 7; Amery 2000, pp 153-177). To this end, the NSW Office of the Board of Studies (Board of Studies) has worked with Aboriginal communities to develop the *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* (the *Syllabus*) and is supporting its implementation in schools.

The development of the *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* by the Board of Studies is currently at the vanguard of developments in support of the NSW government policy. The *Syllabus* follows the New South Wales *Aboriginal Languages Framework K–10* (Board of Studies 2001), which was developed as part of a response by the Board to the *Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (AGPS 1991). Both publications recognise that school-based programs can play a significant role in reinforcing a positive sense of Aboriginal identity for students and that linguistic differences among Aboriginal nations or language groups are a major determinant of their identity. Walsh (2003, p1) explains:

Fundamentally language revival is an act of group identity. In New South Wales, for instance, a particular Indigenous person could identify as an Aborigine and as a Koori but has said that he only really identified as a Gumbayngirr when he began reclaiming his language.

In NSW, the distinctiveness of belonging to country through language identification has recently been accepted more broadly through a raised mainstream interest in the many contemporary manifestations of Aboriginal identity, expressed through Aboriginal culture, dance, theatre and the visual arts. This sense of identification that many Indigenous Australians have with a living language significantly contributes to a feeling of social cohesion and knowledge. Jeannie Bell, a Gubbi Gubbi/Butchulla linguist, describes the value of language revival for urban Aboriginal people in the following way (2003, p164):

It's often very difficult to make people understand what it means for urban Murri people to know our language has survived and is still accessible to us. Our language is fragmented, and maybe some of it is forgotten, but what's

survived is very precious to us, and it's very powerful. To be able to ask what does this mean in our language, or to be able to say to kids in a classroom, here are fifty words you can use – that's really important. It's taken me a long while to understand the strength of it. It's an essential part of our being. It's like our Aboriginality, which is like a religious thing, a spiritual thing. Well, language is part of that.

In developing the *Aboriginal Languages K – 10 Syllabus*, the Board openly acknowledged that it was not just adding to its already extensive suite of languages syllabuses, but was also openly 'supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal communities in the revitalisation of their languages' (*Aboriginal Languages K – 10 Syllabus* 2003, p 5) and was playing an active role in a long term educational project that aimed to see the reclamation of many of the state's Aboriginal languages. To achieve this, the *Syllabus* had to be constructed around sound linguistic theories, strong second language acquisition teaching and learning practices, and embedded cultural values taught throughout the program.

The remainder of this paper seeks to show how the *Syllabus* aims are being realised within schools through their engagement with communities in the teaching of sequential and cohesive language programs.

## **2. What is Language Revitalisation?**

### *Defining the task and common terminology*

A range of terms has been used to describe the variety of efforts made by Indigenous peoples, both in Australia and elsewhere, in the reclamation of their languages. While the aspiration of many communities in NSW is to hear their languages being spoken again (Hoskins et al 2004, *Winangaylanha Dhayn-gu Gaay: Understanding Aboriginal language* esp. paper by Gary Williams) the reality for the vast majority of Australia's Indigenous languages, is that they have been largely silent or muted for generations (Hoskins et al 2000).

Aboriginal languages of NSW fall along a language revitalisation continuum, from a small number of languages (eg Gamilaraay-Yuwaalaraay, Gumbayngirr and

Wiradjuri), that have developed resources and a small but growing number of speakers to support teaching and learning programs in both school and adult learning environments, to those where significant language research leading to significant resource development would be required before similar programs can be mounted (eg Bundjalung, Ngiyampaa and Barkindji). A third group of NSW languages unfortunately have very limited potential to develop significant school-based programs as they were inadequately recorded to enable extensive reclamation (eg Yitha Yitha).

Though there are some languages within the state which are widely supported and in a relatively healthy state, all NSW languages are acknowledged as needing immediate and on-going support to sustain even small programs that aim to improve access and use of language. In NSW, there are no communities where an Aboriginal language is known by a critical mass of its adult population or even where the language can be heard to be fluently spoken unrehearsed.

Notwithstanding this, there is a growing number of programs which have potential to breathe life into long dormant languages. The critical tasks required to sustain the recovery of languages have been described as processes of ‘language revitalisation’ and/or ‘language reclamation. In Amery’s (2000) book on the reclamation of the Kaurna language of the Adelaide Plains, he developed a hierarchical description of language programs based on factors such as the number of fluent speakers, access to quality language resources and the work required to develop effective language materials. In his discussion, Amery differentiated a focus, and provided a outline of each, describing the elements that might be found in programs developed to support each language state.

Amery sees language reclamation occurring in an environment in which language ‘...is no longer spoken and little is known orally within the community’ (2000, p 17) and so where language is being re-learnt from material previously recorded. The adoption of a tighter definition of language revival as provided by Amery and in *Reviving Languages* (1999, p 19) may provide some greater clarity in understanding the processes of language revival. Linguists and socio-linguists such as Amery and others have looked to define and differentiate a hierarchy of language knowledge and

activities in relation to these terms. Language revitalisation is the term adopted by the *Syllabus* to describe the multiple tasks in communities and schools that support the development and teaching of Aboriginal languages in NSW. This is in line with the notions of language work described by Hinton (2001(a), p 5) who simply defined *language revitalization* as the ‘processes that lead to the re-establishment of a language which has ceased to be spoken.’

The *Syllabus* defines language revitalisation within its Aims where it states that:

For Aboriginal students the aim also includes increasing self-esteem through an enhanced understanding of their linguistic heritage and an ability to communicate in (an) ancestral language(s); assisting them to obtain skills in language revitalisation that can be used to enhance long-term cultural revival in their local Aboriginal community; and increasing the links between schools, student learning and community language revival in their local Aboriginal community. (2003, p 14)

The *Syllabus* holds that the study of languages will enable Aboriginal students to strengthen the cultural dimensions of their Aboriginal identity and to learn more about their communities. Additionally, a Kindergarten to Year 10 (K–10) language program will in most cases require the development of resources to underpin local revitalisation of languages and cultures. By developing an understanding of the linguistic similarities among the Aboriginal languages of NSW, the *Syllabus* will enable students to actively participate in the work needed to support language revitalisation.

### **3. The *Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus* for NSW**

The *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* aims to provide clear and unambiguous directions into previously uncharted territory, melding community ownership, language pedagogy, linguistic principles and practices in one document, which potentially can cater for all the Aboriginal languages of NSW. Extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities during its development has ensured their input on such matters as language curriculum and pedagogy; language ownership and protocols; links between language, culture, and identity; and acknowledgement of the variety of

language situations across NSW. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous linguists and teachers were involved in the writing of the outcomes-based *Syllabus* to ensure that it is appropriate to NSW Aboriginal languages.

The outcomes and content of the *Syllabus* are built on the same objectives that underpin all NSW Languages syllabuses. These are: *Using Language*, where students develop stage-appropriate communication skills in one Aboriginal language; *Making Linguistic Connections*, which involves students comparing the nature of languages as systems; and *Moving Between Cultures* in which students extend their knowledge and understanding of the inter-relationship between language and culture (Board of Studies 2003, p 15). The development of the *Syllabus* has been firmly based on considerable research on language acquisition and language learning pedagogy. While the teaching of Aboriginal languages is in its infancy and requires a unique approach, gains have been made through learning, borrowing and adapting approaches to teaching and learning used other languages programs. This has provided a head start for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in NSW.

These objectives underscore a central tenet of effective school-based language development: that there is a relationship in language revitalisation projects between language learning, culture, identity and linguistics.

The *Syllabus* legitimates the essential requirement of Aboriginal peoples to have both a place and a voice in school programs that address issues of language, culture and history. In his discussion on bicultural education, Harris notes (1994, p 152, in Stiles 1997, p 7) that in creating a space for Indigenous language and culture in schools, ‘the first culture far from remaining static – expands, innovates, evolves, and re-enacts the old, the inherited, the source of roots, claims, and identity’.

#### **4. How the *Syllabus* encourages Language Revitalisation**

It is critical for the sustainability of school-based programs that Aboriginal language teachers fully engage with contemporary language pedagogies when developing

teaching programs based on this *Syllabus*. From the onset of the *Syllabus* development project, it was acknowledged that the *Syllabus* should be seen as a a languages course and that it support aspirations of community to reclaim and maintain their languages in forms that allow for actual communication (see the Board of Studies Aboriginal Languages K-10 consultation reports which involved three mandatory consultation processes throughout the development of the *Syllabus*, including approximately 40 meetings and over 200 survey responses from teachers, communities and key Language and linguistic bodies). These reports, written at key milestones in the *Syllabus* development project, reinforce the recommendations found in the NSW ATSIIC report on the status of NSW Aboriginal languages (Hoskins 2000) and McKay's report (1996) on the maintenance and development needs of Indigenous language programs. Both reports highlight the link between long-term reclamation and maintenance of languages and the development of effective language programs based on the *Syllabus*.

#### **4.1 In the implementation - team building**

The title of this paper, 'Talking each other's lingo', does not refer only to the fact that through programs developed and taught as a consequence of being able to access structured language programs based on the *Syllabus*, students will learn to speak and use Aboriginal language and gain knowledge and skills about their community and culture. To develop these opportunities, local language revitalisation and teaching projects will also need to develop a sustainable coalition of groups and individuals with diverse skills, knowledge and expertise, who focus on the common purpose of supporting a broad and complex language revitalisation program. The roles of people in such teams have been described as follows (Amery 2000, p 165):

A team approach is vital in the teaching of a language reclamation program, at least in the early stages, until there are trained Nunga teachers with an in-

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depth knowledge of Kaurna. Senior secondary Kaurna programs were introduced through the teaming of language specialists with a trained teacher and linguist. Ideally the Nunga language specialist performs much of the teaching of the program. They should be the ones who ‘call the shots’ and bear the primary responsibility for what is taught and the way in which it is taught. The classroom teacher’s role is administrative, organising excursions etc. and planning the lesson beforehand with the language specialist. The teacher should provide support and training to facilitate good teaching practice. The role of the linguist is to assemble the language materials, to evaluate and interpret them, to put them into a more useable and accessible form where appropriate, to assist in the preparation of resources for the language programs and to support the acquisition of Kaurna by the language specialists.

Walsh (2003, p 2) also observed that language revival is a long process that requires input from several groups. In establishing a program the support of a linguist is important in assisting the community/school to discover what is known of the Aboriginal language.

The development of a successful school-based Aboriginal language program is a complex process requiring the combined efforts of the local Aboriginal community, the school (and in particular supportive principals and teachers) and those with knowledge of Aboriginal linguistics. In some cases the group may be formalised as a ‘Language Network’ of interested individuals or it may be based on another organisation such as the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). Evidence from successful and sustainable language programs strongly indicates that a team approach is required to ensure the long-term success of a program. The *Syllabus* and the accompanying support documents (see bibliography) recognise the need to develop a strong on-going partnership and focus collaborative action between community, teachers and those with linguistic knowledge in the establishment of a long-term program.

In NSW language programs, this process will inevitably involve interpreting historical records, and in some cases audio recordings. Projects will draw on partial speakers and ‘rememberers’ of the language to contribute to the stock of local language

knowledge. In these cases, linguists can aid the collection, collation and interpretation of language resources.

Aboriginal communities are acknowledged in both the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' *Aboriginal Languages Policy* (2005, p 5) and *Syllabus* (2003, p 9) as being the owners of their language, and as such remain the source of authority with whom schools must negotiate, both prior to and during the implementation of a school-based Aboriginal language program. Although some communities may appear to be dislocated, with many families living away from their traditional country, they are all seen to have an interest in the revival and maintenance of their languages.

In seeking the guidance of Aboriginal communities through their language custodians, schools can ensure that key decisions in the implementation of a school-based program are made in each community's interests and with their approval. It is a clear aim of the *Syllabus* to empower communities to take a substantial role in its implementation and to assert their co-ownership of resultant programs and materials. In moving to establish a language program, schools have been strongly advised to initiate wide consultations within the community. These meetings should canvas all local concerns and determine both the community's and the local school's commitment to developing a language program. It is the firm view of key language stakeholders that there must be on-going discussion and collaboration between parents, community and schools in making key decisions on the language program. However there may sometimes be occasions when consensus may not be possible, and in this situation schools will only be able to move forward on the advice of key community stakeholders.

#### 4.2 'Using Language'

The *Syllabus* objective 'Using Language' aims to assist 'students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for effective communication in Aboriginal languages, applications of these languages in the world today and the ability to access and appreciate the variety of language texts' (2003, p 15).

Providing students with the chance to learn to communicate in one of the many Aboriginal languages of NSW was the primary purpose for the development of the

*Aboriginal Languages K – 10 Syllabus*. In developing the *Syllabus* the Board aimed to provide a sound basis to structure sequenced and cohesive language programs that facilitated effective language learning.

The Aboriginal Languages syllabus is similar to all other languages syllabuses developed in NSW in its form by embedding language and linguistic knowledge and skills as well as effective language teaching methodologies that emphasise communicative competence. While the current K–10 syllabuses explicitly acknowledges an equal significance and interdependence of between all three syllabus objectives, there is a wide understanding that the *raison d’être* for learning languages in schools is to gain an intellectual enrichment through achieving a level of spoken and written proficiency in another language and, in doing so, develop a deeper understanding of the world (*Framework for Languages K–10*, 2001).

Developing student proficiency in a language other than their first is derived from the capacity of the education system to provide a meaningful and engaging language education. The pedagogy that currently underpins languages education is widely known as ‘communicative language teaching’ (CLT).

The communicative approach to languages education, which largely developed out of an amalgam of earlier language teaching approaches, has been shown to expand students’ language learning potential by achieving the goal of creating ‘communicative competence’ at a much earlier stage of language acquisition. The communicative approach underpins all current language syllabuses in NSW with an implied pedagogy which looks to develop language fluency by concurrently learning to use the language as well as learning the language itself.

The benefits of CLT have been described as providing teachers with the pedagogical means to develop ‘real life’ communication skills with students in ways that allow them to generate unrehearsed language use.

However while CLT underpins language curriculum, it is essentially a generic and non-specific approach to classroom practice. The development of communicative learning and teaching practices requires effective practitioners to develop a variety of

approaches that encourage language learners to take up and use the language from the very earliest stages of their learning. There is a wide number of pedagogical skills that underpin the use of CLT and how it can be used in the teaching of second and subsequent language acquisition. Teachers in Aboriginal languages programs are being encouraged to adopt this approach and apply them to their everyday language teaching situations. It is hoped that, over time, a body of work will be developed, become available to demonstrate best practice language teaching, and be adopted into the emerging Aboriginal languages pedagogy.

### 4.3 'Making Linguistic Connections'

For NSW Aboriginal communities, the endangered nature of their languages has implications for implementing and sustaining successful language reclamation programs. The *Syllabus* was constructed around the elements of effective language pedagogy and sound linguistic principles to support the development of appropriate and sequential language programs.

While the notion of effective language pedagogy is embedded throughout the *Syllabus*, the objective *Making Linguistic Connections*, in particular, relates to the linguistic aims of the *Syllabus*, stating that 'Students will explore the nature of languages as systems by making comparisons among Aboriginal languages, English and other languages leading to an appreciation of the appropriate use of linguistic structures and vocabulary' (*Syllabus* 2003, p.15).

While the function of this objective is to provide the grammatical forms to construct meaningful discourse within school-based Aboriginal languages programs, it plays a further critical role. A key reason for emphasising the significance of linguistic principles within the *Syllabus* is that, for most NSW languages, there are few well described systems of grammar, with many programs having access to at best a 'sketch' grammar (a working grammar that allows initial language revitalisation to occur while research goes on).

The dearth of linguistic resources for most of the languages of NSW severely affects attempts by schools to support a language course. The question of whether resources

can be developed weighs heavily on many Aboriginal communities, who have often expressed a concern whether their languages could once again be used across generations for everyday communication (Amery 2000, p 18).

One response to this issue has been for communities to defer the introduction of any program in their language until sufficient knowledge and resources are available to resource it. Alternatively, it is possible for an off-country but well documented language to be introduced and taught while linguistic research is undertaken to support the re-establishment of the local on-country language.

An example of this approach is provided by Worawa Aboriginal Independent College in Victoria, which commenced a school language program by teaching an 'off-country' language. The College, which is situated within Yorta Yorta nation, in consultation with Elders, initially taught Yolngu Matha, a Northern Territory language. This program survived for five years while a joint project with Monash University and the community worked to consolidate the Yorta Yorta language resources into a dictionary. In 2003, Aretha Briggs, an Aboriginal teacher at the school wrote:

The teaching of the non-local Indigenous language that is spoken fluently on a daily basis, introduces students to Australian Indigenous language rules and concepts that exist right throughout Australia. Students who have never spoken or heard an Indigenous language spoken become familiar with these rules and concepts and are able to practise using them in their local target language. Students become very excited to see that the same rules and concepts exist in their local target language and become confident with using them in their own local language. Students have been able to create basic language resources in their own local language and use them with younger age groups, which has been contributing to the revival of their local language (Briggs 2004).

The rationale behind this is the hope that such activity will provide impetus for local language reclamation projects, with the eventual outcome being the development of sufficient resources for their own local language. In discussing Aboriginal language programs in South Australia, Amery (2002, p.14) noted:

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A frequently recurring theme has been that a Pitjantjatjara program has often acted as a catalyst for the later introduction of local languages in South Australian schools... The teaching of a 'strong' language, such as Pitjantjatjara, can boost peoples' confidence and serve to motivate, as well as impart familiarity with and understanding of Australian languages.

While the focus of the *Syllabus* is to provide communicative language learning, it also provides an impetus for communities to revitalise local Aboriginal languages. It motivates the development of long-term partnerships between communities, schools and those with linguistic knowledge of Aboriginal languages. These partnerships, which primarily support the community's efforts to revive language, will be enhanced when appropriate consultation processes and protocols are used. In all stages of learning, students are required to work closely with teachers and local language custodians as they move through their language studies. In particular, students in Stages 4 and 5 (Years 7-10) are challenged to be involved in long-term processes of language revival through meeting the Stage 5 *Making Linguistic Connections* outcomes (Objectives 5.MLC.2, 5.MLC.3 and 5.MLC.4 especially), and are guided to produce a range of texts in Aboriginal languages that could be added to the much needed body of language resources in their local languages.

A further area of activity for the *Syllabus* is to ensure that students acquire sound knowledge of the principles that support language revitalisation, which can then be applied to their own specific community language contexts. By assisting students to progressively meet the *Making Linguistic Connections* outcomes, the *Syllabus* aims to promote both language communication commensurate with the availability of language resources, and to help students acquire skills in language revitalisation that can be used to enhance long-term cultural revival in their local Aboriginal community (Board of Studies 2003, p 14).

Students who successfully complete the elective Stage 5 course will be enabled to appreciate the complexity of Aboriginal language systems and describe the interdependence of language and Aboriginal culture. With this knowledge and skills, students can continue as lifelong language learners, thus becoming an essential link to the next generation of community language teachers.

#### 4.4 'Moving between cultures'

The *Moving Between Cultures* objective in the *NSW K–10 Languages Syllabus* allows students to build on their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures (both continuing and ancestral) and the relationships between those cultures. In developing a growing awareness of this cultural and linguistic heritage, students will gain an appreciation of the interdependence of Aboriginal people's connection to land, language and culture (*Syllabus 2003*, p 15).

The *Syllabus* is constructed on the principle that the three syllabus objectives are equal and interdependent so that teaching programs will include outcomes and content from each objective. It is envisaged that the inclusion of local cultural outcomes would be highlighted, as programs were developed to teach local/regional languages. The embedding of the outcomes from this objective has helped to allay fears held by Elders and community members who had expressed concerns that their languages could be taught without meaningful engagement with local cultural custodians or contexts.

As also identified in Amery's work on the Adelaide Kurna language (2000, pp 220 – 229), the *Syllabus* consultation meetings confirmed an often-expressed view that a well-developed language program would provide a strong focal point for an emerging Aboriginal cultural renaissance and provide a significant vehicle for language students' and community self-esteem and empowerment.

Cultural studies are an area of highly contested meaning, overlaying cultural identifications and variable impact that cultural allegiances may have on whole communities and individuals. The *Syllabus* traverses this potentially fraught territory by providing opportunities for students to explore personal and community constructions of traditional and contemporary culture in ways that facilitate a deeper understanding of language. In doing this, it respects and privileges community elders by providing them with a key on-going function in providing the local cultural foundation and context to the language program, even though they themselves may only have limited capacity to speak it.

The embedding of cultural outcomes throughout each stage of learning provides students with the knowledge and skills to deepen their understanding of the cultural mores of their local communities and, over the entirety of the course, equip them to make comparisons with contemporary Aboriginal as well as broader Australian cultures.

## 5. Conclusion

The implementation of the *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus* is one step in helping to support the revitalisation of NSW Aboriginal languages. It has strong foundations in community consultation, language pedagogy and linguistic principles. It aims to respond to the aspirations of Aboriginal people to reclaim their languages, and for their languages to be given the respect they deserve. This syllabus, which joins the suite of languages developed by the Board of Studies, provides the basis for a coherent and sequential language program for students commencing school in Kindergarten up to completion of the School Certificate in Year 10. It has already provided the impetus to a growing number of communities who have commenced the implementation of language programs in conjunction with their schools. According to a report by the Koori Centre (2005, p 24) there has been an increase since 2000 of schools provided with funds and/or direct curriculum assistance to teach an Aboriginal languages course from 7 to 54 and an increase over the same period from 3 to 10 languages being currently taught in schools.

The growing number of school-based programs is testament to the aspirations that many Aboriginal communities in NSW have had in wishing to reclaim their languages. The *Syllabus* has provided a ‘breath of life’<sup>2</sup> for many community language programs that until now have struggled. Now community language learning has a very clear purpose of providing foundational language learning and

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<sup>2</sup> A term that has been borrowed from a innovative language revival program sponsored by the Advocates for Indigenous Californian Language Survival. (<http://www.aicls.org/>)

linguistic skills to underpin community language programs in appropriate community-centred cultural contexts to support intergenerational learning.

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