



Aboriginal Languages



Newsletter

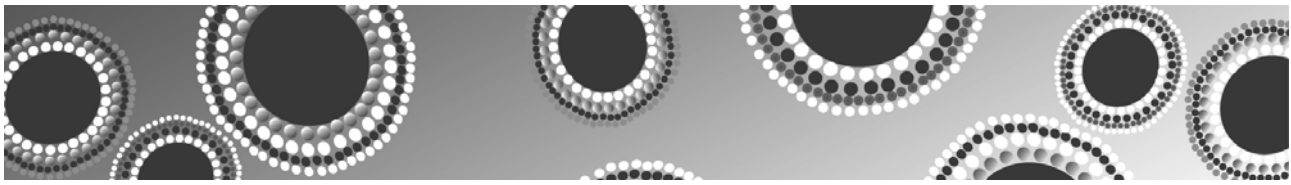


Chris Sarra at the Pedagogy in Practice conference in Newcastle

Contents

Message from the editor	2
Workshops	3
Armidale workshop	3
Language programs make a difference	3
Awabakal makes it onto Triple J	4
Book news	5
Researching Aboriginal placenames	6
Competition	7





Aboriginal languages newsletter

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back for 2006! I hope you all enjoyed the summer break. I was lucky enough to go to the Pedagogy in Practice Conference, jointly hosted by the University of Newcastle and the NSW Department of Education and Training. A highlight was a keynote address by Dr Chris Sarra, Director of the Institute for Indigenous Leadership in Education and Development based in Cherbourg, Queensland. Chris was Australian of the Year in 2003 and Queenslander of the Year in 2004 when he also received a 'Deadly' Award for his contribution to Indigenous education.

Chris spoke about his school motto, Strong and Smart, when he was principal at Cherbourg where he reduced absenteeism by 94%. He spoke passionately of arming students with both intellectual and spiritual tools. He said there are three things to know about teaching Aboriginal children:



High expectations!
High expectations!
High expectations!

Chris made it clear that, as educators, we may need to change. In his words: 'If you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got!' If you want to learn more about Chris' approach you can read the transcript of an ABC Australian Story in which he featured at <http://www.abc.net.au/austory/content/2004/s1212753.htm> or get a copy of the video *Strong and*

Smart from the Australian College of Educators www.austcolled.com.au

I have met many of you now, and hope to meet many more of you this year when I visit schools or when you attend workshops and conferences. I know that some of you will be coming to Sydney to study at times during the year—don't forget to let me know when you are in town. I look forward to working with you.

Let's have high expectations in our Aboriginal languages programs, for ourselves and our students. Let's make them deadly!

Warm wishes to you all for 2006,

Mari

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To the best of my knowledge, the web sites and books listed on the following pages contain no controversial materials or links. However, it is always best to check these for yourself before recommending them to students.



Workshops

Teaching Methodology workshops were held in Bathurst and Armidale last year. If you missed out on a Teaching Methodology workshop, and would like to do one, let me know and if there is sufficient demand we can schedule one for 2006.

Armidale workshop

The Aboriginal Languages Teaching Methodology workshop held at Armidale was another success if the smiling faces are any indication!



Many of you have now done the Teaching Methodology workshops and so, this year, the focus will start to move towards language-based workshops. At this stage, this will only be possible for the languages with a number of speakers and an established, community-approved writing system. The aim is to help those of you who are teaching in schools across the state to build the capacity of language networks in your region.

There will still be a place for conferences and workshops that bring people from different language groups together, to explore ideas and share teaching ideas.

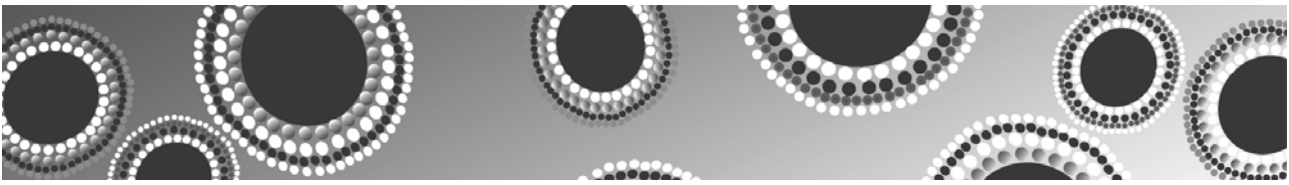
Participants at the Armidale Teaching Methodology workshop

A language program really makes a difference

Do Aboriginal language programs improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students? Peter Stewart, principal at Wilcannia Central School, claimed they do when he made an unexpected appearance at the Teaching Methodology workshop in Armidale in November. In 2004, his first year at the school, there was no longer an Aboriginal language program but in 2005, things changed when he introduced one. Whereas in 2004, approximately 12% students were suspended, in 2005 there were no suspensions between the beginning of March and the beginning of November. There was a 25% increase in school attendance across the entire primary school and a significant decrease in violent incidents.

Other effects included an increase in parental and community involvement in school activities and fewer students transferred to Broken Hill for their secondary education.

Not only did the Aboriginal language program help students and parents but staff benefited too. Wilcannia is an 8 point school and in 2004 all but one eligible staff member applied for a transfer. In 2005, only one person applied to transfer and stress leave applications were down.



Barkindji language program team

Wilcannia, on the Darling River, is in Barkindji (also known as Paakantyi) country. Indeed Barkindji refers to people who live on the Darling River, literally, 'belonging to the river' and included people who speak a number of related dialects.



Wilcannia Central School

What is the meaning of the language name of your language? Many languages in Victoria and NSW are based on the word for 'no' in that language, translating literally as 'no-having'. For example Gamilaray in which *gamil* means 'no' and *-araay* is the 'having' suffix. Other examples are Yuwaalaraay and Wiradjuri. Is yours one of these? Prior to the arrival of Europeans, many Aboriginal languages had no name and many took the word for 'people' as the language name, for example Tiwi and Nyungar.



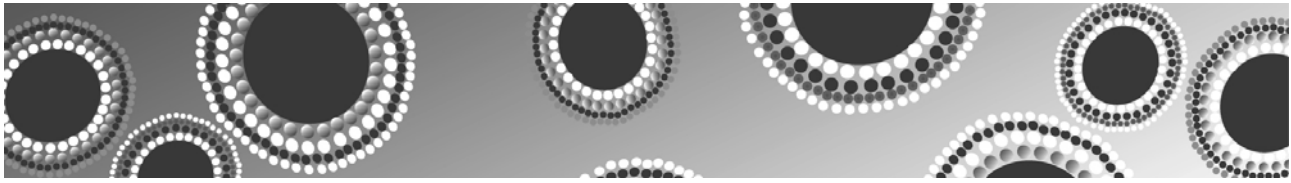
Awabakal makes it onto Triple J

Local Knowledge, a NSW Hip Hop band, has recently released a CD called *Blackfellas*. The title track includes what must be one of the first NSW languages to feature on Triple J. The Newcastle-based band comprises; brothers Abie and Warrick Wright, Joel Wenitong and Jay tee, who won a Deadly Award for the Best Band of 2005. Daryn McKenny, manager of the Awabakarl Culture and Resource Centre (ACRA) described how the part of the track that is in Awabakal, was composed by Abie while he was working with Daryn at ACRA.



Abie told me there was a huge amount of interest in the language on the track. 'People are wanting to know what the lyrics mean. Non-indigenous people are asking too. I say the language has not been spoken fluently for a hundred years but we're bringing it back into everyday life.' And what do the lyric mean? In Abie's words, 'Everyone is invited to come along and dance and sing and basically have a party'.

Currently there are no Awabakal language programs in schools or TAFE and Awabakal, a language that was long regarded as extinct, appears on national radio entirely as a result of community-based action. In the early to mid nineteenth century, Lancelot Threlkeld documented the language of the few Aboriginal people still living in the Lake Macquarie region. He lamented that, during the time he spent undertaking this task, almost all the speakers of the language had passed away. Now the reclaimed sounds of Awabakal can be heard once more.



Book news

There have been some requests for reading lists on Aboriginal languages. Here is a short list of books about Aboriginal languages in general as well as some others that may be of interest. Information about books dealing with specific NSW languages will be available on the website shortly.

Books about Aboriginal languages

Dixon, R.M.W. 1980 *The Languages of Australia* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Probably the standard textbook for anyone studying Aboriginal languages, this is also a good introduction to Aboriginal languages for the general reader. It is important not to be put off by the more technical sections, because this is not intended only as an academic text but as a guide for the lay reader too. That being said, it's a thick book, the writing is small, it looks daunting.

More accessible are two books with the same title:

Blake, B. 1991 (2nd ed) *Australian Aboriginal Languages* University of Queensland Press, St Lucia
Yallop, C. 1982 *Australian Aboriginal Languages* Andre Deutsch, London

These are both good introductory books on Aboriginal languages. Colin Yallop's book is far more detailed about the grammar and contains interesting and useful information on kinship but Blake's has some material that can easily be adapted for use in language awareness classes in the school. Unfortunately both these books are now out of print but may be available through specialist second-hand outlets.

Nathan, D. (ed.) 1996 *Australia's Indigenous Languages*. Adelaide, Wakefield Press for the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia.

This is a more recent introductory book, especially designed with teachers and learners of Aboriginal languages in mind. It is quite accessible to the non-linguist and is full of colourful photographs and illustrations and comes with a CD. Unfortunately it is not available through booksellers but if you are interested in getting hold of a copy please contact me.

Language revival in NSW

Thieberger, Nicolas (ed) 1995 *Paper and Talk: A manual from reconstructing materials in Australian Indigenous languages from historical sources* Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press

This book is an accessible and fascinating introduction to the how of language reconstruction. When early settlers first wrote down the indigenous languages of Australia they were not trained and wrote the language as they heard it, which was often not how it really sounded. This book explains how linguists use old records to help them to work out how languages that are no longer actively spoken, would have sounded. It also explains how the grammar of those languages can be reconstructed, rather as old material artefacts are. Since almost all NSW languages are in need of some reconstruction, this is a very useful book for anyone involved in NSW language work.

Understanding Aboriginal culture

Dingo, Sally 1997 *Dingo: the story of our mob* Sydney, Random House

A couple of women who were working for the radio station at the Murri site at the Woodford folk festival, who had both married to Aboriginal men, told me that Sally Dingo's book had really helped them to make sense of the world they had married into. They recounted how the marriage of another woman, who had also been married to an Aboriginal man, had failed because she had misinterpreted his behaviour and that of his family. When she read Sally Dingo's book she was amazed to find it echoed her experience. 'I couldn't



make sense of what was happening. I often thought his family were being rude to me but I didn't understand how things worked differently in their culture.' She concluded that if she'd read the book earlier, her marriage may have survived.



If the book could save marriages, it might help some cross-cultural misunderstandings in the classroom too. Written by the journalist wife of the actor Ernie Dingo, it really does explain how, and why, non-Aboriginal people so often misinterpret Aboriginal people's attitudes and behaviour. It is also an interesting and entertaining read, so it is a way of learning that is fun—as all learning should be of course. It is highly recommended for non-Aboriginal teachers who work with Aboriginal colleagues and students. Kooris too might find it interesting to see how the misunderstandings with whitefellas arise, even, or perhaps especially, with well-intentioned ones!

Your recommendations...

If you come across books or articles that you have found helpful, please submit a short review along with all the details of title, author and publisher and share the information with other Aboriginal language teachers around the State.

Bookshop

If you have trouble getting hold of the books you need Cornstalk Bookshop has been selling second hand and rare books about Australian Aboriginal issues for 25 years. They carry a stock of approximately 2,000 books on the subject. They have a shop in the Sydney suburb of Glebe but most of their business is conducted by mail. Books are sent to all corners of the globe, including remote areas of Australia. Single books or collections are sold. Library needs are catered for.

Business is conducted by mail, telephone or the internet. Payment can be made by cheque, cash or credit card.

All the stock is listed on the web page at www.cornstalk.com.au

Other contact details are: phone (02) 9660 4889 fax (02) 9552 2670 email books@cornstalk.com.au

Street address: 112 Glebe Point Rd. Glebe. NSW 2037

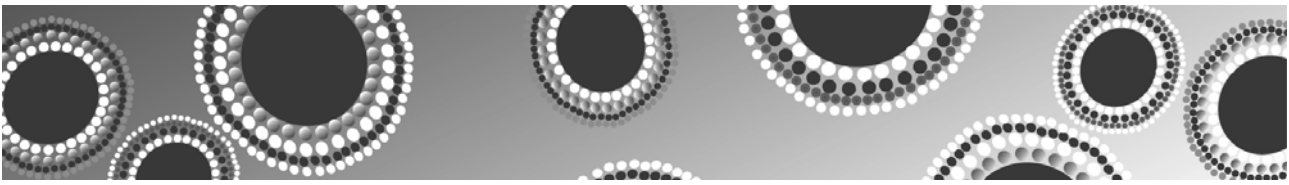
“Researching Aboriginal Placenames” course

Placenames are an important and very noticeable part of all Aboriginal languages in NSW. They are often included in dictionaries of Aboriginal languages, for example the Gumbaynggirr Dictionary (Murrumbidgee Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, 2001) and the Gamilaraay-Yuwaalaraay-Yuwaalayaay Dictionary (IAD Press 2003).

Aboriginal teachers and Education Assistants, Elders, linguists and language workers and researchers were among the people who participated in the “Researching Aboriginal Placenames” course held 5-9 December 2005.



Teachers from Coonabarabran, Lightning Ridge and Parkes, at the “Researching Aboriginal Placenames” course. Mark Breitkopf, Rhonda Ashby, Virginia Wake, Suellyn Tighe



The course included sessions on geographic information systems, archival research, oral history and linguistic analysis. It was organised jointly by the NSW Aboriginal Languages Centre (located at Tranby Aboriginal College in Glebe in Sydney), the Australian National Placenames Survey (at Macquarie University) and the Geographical Names Board NSW.

Some schools incorporate placenames lessons into their Language classes. For example, in a unit of work about Gumbaynggirr Land, Aboriginal Languages students at Bowraville Central school, together with the art department, created a very large and colourful map. The map showed Gumbaynggirr country, related and neighbouring languages and significant places. Students used their dictionaries and community experts to learn about local placenames, their meanings and/or cultural significance. This unit of work appears in the support documents and CD-ROM which accompany the K-10 NSW Aboriginal Languages Syllabus. The "Researching Aboriginal Placenames" course was arranged as a follow-up to a series of twelve workshops held in regional centres of the state between June 2004 and May 2005 and supported by the DAA and the federal Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts.



Aboriginal theme drawing/painting competition

In the last newsletter we asked for designs with an Aboriginal or Aboriginal language theme in black and white or in colour (but which may be reproduced in black and white) for headers/borders on stationery (as on the cover of this newsletter), book covers, CD and video covers and labels.

Students were invited to submit designs that can be used for all or any of these purposes.

We received a few entries but many of them were pale pencil or coloured-pencil drawings and unsuitable for reproduction. Others did not come with permission forms so we are unable to use them. If, during the coming weeks, you wish to submit more student artwork that might be suitable for use in DET publications, please do.

Aim: to conduct activities which integrate the study of Aboriginal languages within other Key Learning Areas such as Visual Arts or Design and Technology. It may also allow students to conduct research on the Internet into Aboriginal art and culture.

Prizes: any student whose designs are chosen for regular use on our publications will receive a small prize.

The competition is open to Aboriginal language classes K–12.

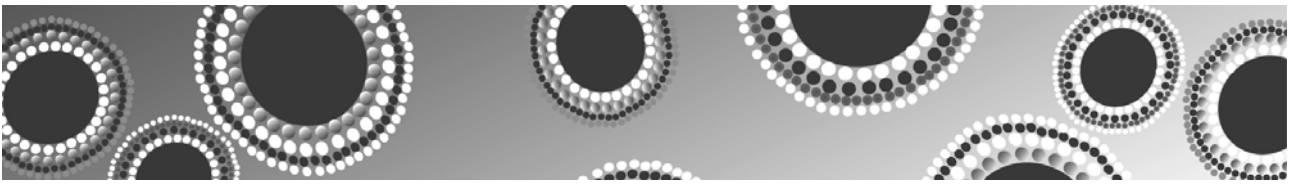
The artwork can be on paper in any medium, pen and ink, crayon, watercolour, ochre, charcoal etc and may be in black and white or in colour. If it is in colour, the artist should be aware it may be converted to black and white format in publications.

The following information must be clearly written on the back of each submission:

Name of student Name of school Name of teacher Year of student

Entries should be sent to: Mari Rhydwen, Aboriginal Languages Consultant, Curriculum K–12 Directorate Private Bag 3, RYDE NSW 2112

A permission to publish form must be attached to each illustration (see last page of this newsletter).



Attention: Aboriginal Languages Consultant

Permission to publish students work in print or Internet documents

Student/work details

Given name: Family name:

School: Age:

School year: Date:

Student permission

I,, do/do not (delete one) give permission for my photo and/or work to be reproduced in perpetuity in publications by the Department of Education and Training.

I do / do not (delete one) give permission for my photo and/or work to be posted in perpetuity on the Department's web sites. I understand that the web sites will be accessed via the Internet.

Signature: Date:

Parent/caregiver permission

I,, do/do not (delete one) give permission for the above student's photo and/or work to be reproduced in perpetuity in publications by the Department of Education and Training.

I do/do not (delete one) give permission for the photo and/or work to be posted in perpetuity on the Department's web sites. I understand that the web sites will be accessed via the Internet.

Signature: Date:

Please note: Both student and parent/caregiver permission is required
Signed permission slips should be returned to your teacher