



Aboriginal Languages

Newsletter



STORIES ABOUT LANGUAGE

Murray Butcher (above) a Paakantji man from Wilcannia and Aunty Edna Watson (left), a Dharug Elder, are among two of the people who have been filmed for the new web-based Stage 4 resource currently being developed for Aboriginal languages by the Languages Unit at Curriculum K-12

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Aboriginal Languages newsletter

Dear colleagues,

One of the great joys of this work is the opportunity to travel around the state visiting people in schools and communities. It is through these visits that I learn what is happening with language education around the state and discuss ways to better support school programs. A couple of years ago I visited one school where the community language teachers told me about the disruptions and relocations that had been imposed on Aboriginal people in their area which had led to the extensive loss of knowledge about the local language. I was surprised that they had never spoken to their students about it and sorry to hear that they thought they were not supposed to talk to the students about such matters because they were cultural, not language, issues.

It is virtually impossible to learn a language without learning about the culture as the two are intertwined. This is why, in the Aboriginal Languages syllabus and indeed all languages syllabuses, a substantial part is devoted to cultural content and outcomes. It was therefore very disturbing to hear that students were not learning why and how their language changed, so that, over the two hundred years since settlement, many languages have been severely damaged if not completely lost. At the time, I decided to find a way to gather stories about language loss from around the state and recently this has begun.

On the cover of this issue you can see two of the people, Murray Butcher and Aunty Edna Watson, who have already been filmed for the new web-based Stage 4 Aboriginal language resource that we are developing at the Languages Unit. This is a resource which has two main parts. One part will allow students to explore the sounds and structures of NSW languages using interactive technology. The other part contains a number of short filmed interviews with Aboriginal people from around the state speaking about their memories and stories about language. There will be listening guides for students and activities based on the interviews.

It has been wonderful meeting elders and language speakers around the state and listening to their stories. My last trip, to Wilcannia, almost did not happen because I was scheduled to fly to Broken Hill the day that the airport was closed by freak dust storms and 100km winds, but I was able to get there late at night and drive to Wilcannia the next morning. There, sitting on the bank of the Darling River, the Baaka, Murray Butcher told me about how his mother had been discouraged from speaking her language because of government policies at the time but he had been able to learn from his grandmother who sounds like a fiercely proud woman. Murray recounted that once, when his grandmother was challenged for speaking her language, she said that if Greeks and Italians could speak their languages on the streets then so could she, it was her country!

An issue that regularly comes up at workshops and in discussion with community language teachers is that of career pathways. If you are thinking of getting more involved in teaching language and want to gain some formal qualifications, or know someone else who does, now is the time to apply to the Koori Centre at Sydney University to do one of their Indigenous Language Education courses in 2009. Further information is available on the following pages.

Warm regards to you all,

Mari

To the best of my knowledge, the websites 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. Permission for all images and works included in this document has been given.



Rights, Reconciliation, Respect and Responsibility

Susan Poetsch

The 4Rs conference at the University of Technology Sydney, 30 September – 3 October, involved more than 100 speakers discussing opportunities for building a more inclusive and just society for Australia. The conference was attended by a diverse group of people – participants and presenters included scholars and activists, administrators and policy developers, artists and writers, community leaders and media practitioners, educators and students. The conference program was organised into four strands – Rights, Reconciliation, Respect and Responsibility.

One presentation at the conference – entitled *Promoting Reconciliation through the Teaching and Learning of Aboriginal Languages in schools in NSW* – was given jointly by: Susan Poetsch, speaking about the work of the Board of Studies in supporting communities and schools to establish Aboriginal languages programs; Geoff Anderson (Member of the Wiradjuri Elders Council) and Steve Maier (Teacher at Parkes High School), speaking about Wiradjuri language programs in schools in Parkes in Central Western NSW and Wendy Brown (Community Development Officer for the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council) and Gary Worthy (Teacher at Vincentia High School), speaking about Dhurga language programs in schools on the NSW South Coast.

Although our presentation was placed in the Reconciliation strand of the conference program, much of what we discussed was also consistent with the other three themes of the conference. Further, all four themes are highlighted in the Rationale section of the NSW *Aboriginal Languages K – 10 Syllabus* (2003). This is the section which outlines the intention of the syllabus and the meaning and purpose underpinning school programs.

Rights

As stated in the syllabus, *All people have a right to learn their own language, particularly in their own country ... In many cases the learning process will involve revitalising these languages. The capacity to learn and use these unique Australian languages can help all students develop a strong sense of identity and self-esteem.* (p 9)

In the 4Rs conference presentation, Wendy Brown spoke strongly from a community member's perspective. She discussed how learning language and culture has encouraged Aboriginal students to feel *deadly* not *shame*.

In preparing for the conference presentation, Geoff Anderson asked some students what they thought about the Wiradjuri program at their school. He described a moving moment in which a seven year old Wiradjuri girl replied, 'I learn my language and my culture then I teach my parents'. Geoff believes Aboriginal languages have healing powers for both children and adults. He said, 'The languages each belong in that country, in the hearts of the people that learn, speak and teach them; but most importantly in the schools and in the mouths of our future of this country.'

Gary Worthy described how, as a non-Aboriginal person, he felt that he needed to earn the right to be involved in the Dhurga program. He feels privileged to be involved in this work and is honoured to work with Aboriginal community members to revive their languages. He does not assume it is his right to do this. He feels the responsibility of supporting their rights to their languages.



Gary also talked about the background research done by school and community members to set up the school programs. This research was a collaborative effort and took a number of years. This time was a worthwhile investment for setting up strong and successful programs. However, in his talk Gary also remembered those community members who passed away before the school programs were established. He dedicated his talk to their memory, and reminded the audience that time is of the essence in projects such as these, supporting people's rights to their languages.

Reconciliation

As stated in the syllabus, *Providing all students with access to learning about Aboriginal languages assists in the processes of reconciliation by increasing cross-cultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.* (p10)

All of the presenters highlighted the fact that all students learn together in the school language programs. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are involved in positive learning and sharing experiences.

Wendy Brown also spoke about the connection between learning Language and reconciling with Country. Through Language, learners are connecting with Aboriginal communities' knowledge of land, sea, flora, fauna, food, medicine, dance and other cultural practices.

Geoff Anderson and Steve Maier talked about significant ways in which the school program was impacting more broadly on the process of reconciliation in the town of Parkes. Community classes have begun. They are held one evening each week and everyone is welcome. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people learn Wiradjuri together. Some of the Aboriginal people in these classes are considering becoming teachers for the school programs.

Respect

By offering Aboriginal languages programs, school systems are respecting and valuing the knowledge and expertise of the local community. The programs provide community members with a significant role as active agents in the education of their children and non-Aboriginal students.

In the 4Rs conference presentation Geoff Anderson explained that through the Wiradjuri program students learn *yindyamarra*. They learn not only the meaning of the word but also how to put it into practice.

Through the experience of learning Wiradjuri, the Student Representative Council at Parkes East Public School wrote a letter to the local government council about erecting Welcome to Country signs. In the letter the students argued that it was important to respect Wiradjuri people as the traditional custodians of the country, and to raise the awareness of non-Aboriginal people. The Parkes Shire Council has taken the students' advice, and the signs are now in production. They will be 5 feet high, 2 feet wide and seen by an estimated 5000 cars per day on the Newell Highway.

Also on the subject of Respect, at the 4Rs conference Steve Maier talked about the importance of non-Indigenous people learning from Indigenous people. Through doing this we can learn from cultural practices and knowledge of country and the wisdom associated with being and living in this place.



Responsibility

As stated in the syllabus, Aboriginal people in NSW have a right to learn their own languages, and education systems have a vital role in facilitating this. ... Aboriginal languages are unique in that they are not spoken anywhere else in the world and consequently must be supported within Australia; if Aboriginal students are to have opportunities to revitalise and maintain the languages of their communities, they must be given the opportunity to learn their languages at school. (p 9)

In the 4Rs conference presentation, Wendy Brown pointed out that we all have a shared responsibility in knowledge building. Communities have a responsibility to ensure that the next generations are passionate about their language, culture and country. At the same time school systems must own the responsibility for providing students with these learning opportunities as part of the curriculum.

Indigenous Languages Education courses 2009

Applications are now open for the Koori Centre's innovative professional development courses in Indigenous Languages Education. These courses are designed for Indigenous educators who wish to develop their knowledge and skills as Indigenous languages teachers in any of the Australia's first languages.

The Graduate Certificate is a one-semester course and is open to applicants who have completed two years of teacher training or an equivalent course. Students undertake four units of study in the areas of linguistics and languages education. Candidates who complete the Graduate Certificate can also undertake two extra units of study in the second semester and qualify for the Graduate Diploma or, if they achieve an average grade of 70%, directly enter the Masters program with one semester's credit.

The Master of Indigenous Languages Education is a one-year degree and is open to applicants who have a recognised teaching qualification such as a four-year degree, or a Bachelor's degree and a Diploma of Education. Students complete eight units of study including linguistics and languages education, curriculum development, technology in languages education and a substantial classroom-based research project.

The NSW Department of Education and Training accepts the Master of Indigenous Languages Education as providing appropriate training for qualified Aboriginal teachers seeking approval to teach an Aboriginal language in NSW. Because so many languages are currently in a process of revitalisation there is no language proficiency requirement for entry to or award of the Masters.

These courses are open to Indigenous Australian candidates only and are delivered in block-mode. Students attend the University for three one week blocks each semester. The courses are offered at the lowest current rate under the HECS system with no requirement to pay 'up-front' fees. There is no cost to the student for travel, meal and accommodation to attend blocks—these are all covered by the University.

More detail and an application form can be obtained from the Koori Centre's website, at: <http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au/studying/postgrad.shtml> or by contacting Sherrie Connors on (02) 9351 7008, Freecall 1800 622 742, email.connors@usyd.edu.au



Dubbo workshop



In early August, the Regional Aboriginal Education Team, led by Allan Hall, hosted a workshop entitled *Effective teaching for Aboriginal Languages in NSW* at the Aboriginal Knowledge Centre in Dubbo. Co-organised by the Office of the Board of Studies, the workshop had a focus on Quality Teaching with presentations on the topic from University of Newcastle researchers as well as from Mari Rhydwen and Tyson Yunkaporta. Tyson's presentation focused on Aboriginal perspectives and illustrated ways in which good pedagogy is evident in Aboriginal imagery and concepts. He illustrated this with examples from Gamilaraay in which, as with many Aboriginal languages, the relationship between the concepts hearing, listening and thinking, is made explicit since they are all based on the word for ear.

The workshop was also designed as an opportunity for school teams to share their knowledge. Before coming, participants were asked to provide notes on their school programs and, on the first morning, each school team spoke about their program and plans for the future.

Tyson Yunkaporta speaking about Aboriginal perspectives

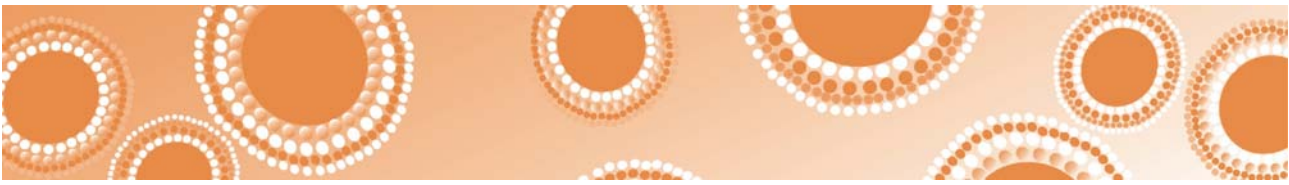
Geoff Anderson and Ron Wardrop, who are involved in a number of schools in Parkes, spoke about how language classes are helping community relations. At Parkes East Public School Ron runs a special Year 6 'Men's business' class which is a powerful way to engage boys, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

In the afternoon, school teams were each asked to provide demonstration lessons. On the second day, James Ladwig and Wendy Amosa provided feedback to the participants on the elements of Quality Teaching they had incorporated into their lessons.

They referred to the SIPA research project (Ladwig, Gore, Griffiths and Amosa 2004 - 2007) in which they have identified that Cultural Knowledge is the least observed element of Quality Teaching in both classroom and assessment practice. The "And What of Cultural Knowledge" project is taking a closer look at this trend by examining relationships between school demographics and the use of Cultural Knowledge, and the nature of Cultural Knowledge that is evident in classroom and assessment practice.



Geoff Anderson and Ron Wardrop teaching Wiradjuri



Dr Wendy Amosa giving a presentation

Language classes have not been the subject of their investigations and yet Aboriginal Language classes, indeed any language classes, provide a perfect opportunity for including that quality teaching element. Indeed, Cultural Knowledge is impossible to avoid in the languages class since language is itself the most potent forms of cultural knowledge. Of course, the syllabus also ensures that students learn to use language in a context that also explicitly teaches cultural knowledge through the Moving Between Cultures outcomes.

Growing demand for Indigenous languages in WA

More teachers have been trained to meet the growing demand for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in Government schools across Western Australia. Education Minister Liz Constable today announced that another eight educators had successfully graduated from a two-year Aboriginal languages teacher training course. Dr Constable said more Government school students were learning Aboriginal languages than ever before.

‘In 1995, we only had eight schools across the State where Aboriginal languages were offered as a study option - that number has now grown to 75,’ she said. ‘The teacher training course is a vital component in preserving these traditional languages and boosting students’ cultural pride. It is also creating more employment opportunities for indigenous Australians in education.’ During their training, all graduates spend at least one hour each week teaching a language class. They also undertake four weeks of theoretical training in resource development, planning, teaching and assessment.

One of today’s new graduates, Nadine Dymock from West Busselton Primary School, teaches the Noongar language and also Wardandi, the traditional language of the Indigenous people of Busselton. ‘It is important to preserve Aboriginal languages, because we are in danger of losing them and they are a vital part of our heritage and culture,’ Nadine said.

‘Students who learn these languages benefit from a better understanding of Aboriginal people in their area and a greater knowledge of their own culture. The course has widened my own language and teaching skills and I am really looking forward to continuing to teach the Noongar language.’

Since the training program began in 1998, 99 Aboriginal people have graduated.



Book launch

A book on Aboriginal weather cycles by Frances Bodkin, and beautifully illustrated by Lorraine Robertson, was launched recently at Campbelltown TAFE. Frances teaches Dharawal at several schools in South Western Sydney.

The books are \$34.95 each, with postage and packaging \$10.00 for up to 20 books in the metropolitan region. Copies can be ordered from Frances Bodkin, LPO Box 341 Macarthur Square, NSW 2560.



Frances Bodkin listens to an introduction by Gavin Andrews at the launch of her book



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