

Aboriginal Languages

Newsletter



WORKING TOGETHER

An Aboriginal Languages Sharing Circle in Broken Hill, jointly organised by the Department and the Office of the Board of Studies, also brought together Ray Ingrey, Lesley Armstrong and Helen Pussell representing the Aboriginal Consultative Group (above) and Anthony Seiver from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs(left) as well as school and community members.

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Term 1, 2009



Aboriginal Languages newsletter

Dear colleagues,

Happy New Year and welcome back! The beginning of the year is often a time to make resolutions about the important issues in our lives. It is an opportunity to consider the big picture and decide where to make a real effort.

I have been working professionally with Aboriginal languages for 24 years now and have seen official policies and strategies come and go over the decades. It is always a delight when there seems to be widespread enthusiasm and support for Indigenous languages, and disappointing, even discouraging, when it seems to be less of a priority. Yet despite setbacks and difficulties over those years, almost everyone I have encountered working with and supporting Indigenous languages, has continued to work in the area and, gradually, substantial progress is made.

Sometimes there are great leaps forward: the launch of an Aboriginal Languages Policy in NSW in 2004 coincided with other initiatives including extensive support for the implementation of the Aboriginal languages syllabus, published the previous year. Now is a good time for consolidating that achievement, building up our resources and developing our skills. This year, a third intake of students has started studying for the Master in Indigenous Languages at Sydney University and a number of previous graduates of that course are working as languages teachers or in other roles that support language programs, directly or indirectly. At the Languages Unit, we are continuing to work on developing student resources for Stage 4 students which will be available later in the year. Around NSW teachers of Aboriginal languages, Elders and other community members, school teachers, state and regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) representatives and members and state and regional Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) staff continue to contribute significantly to language programs in numerous ways.

To keep up enthusiasm and energy year after year, it is important to establish and maintain a network of colleagues who share an interest in Aboriginal languages. Please take every opportunity to attend workshops, to talk to other interested people and to keep in regular touch with them. In the end, language is all about communication, about bringing people together. Literally it comes from the Latin meaning 'together with/union'. Our aim, in learning any language, is to be able to use that language communicate with others. As we develop the communicative skills and knowledge we need to support the revival of NSW languages, let's keep communicating with each other every way we can, sharing ideas, giving encouragement, asking for advice.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my colleague and friend Dr Jennifer Munro who has now returned to her home in Queensland after four years working at the Office of the Board of Studies. It was a pleasure working with her on many joint projects, particularly workshops and conferences that many of you would have attended. I will miss her, but I am glad to say she is still involved in supporting NSW languages as a lecturer in the current Master of Indigenous Languages course at Sydney University.

Warm regards to you all,

Mari

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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.

Sustainable and quality Aboriginal languages programs: Office of the board of Studies plans for 2009

Susan Poetsch

Welcome to the new school year and I hope you've all had a restful break. The Office of the Board of Studies looks forward to continuing to support Aboriginal languages programs this year. We are planning two major projects which focus on increasing the sustainability and strength of the programs.

At the end of last year, together with Tyson Yunkaporta (Aboriginal Education Consultant, NSW DET Western Region), we began to meet with schools and communities along the lower Darling River, including Dareton Public School, Coomealla High School, Menindee Central School, St Therese's Community School in Wilcannia, Wilcannia Central School and Willyama High School. At the meetings we talked about establishing a network to share resources and work together to develop programs. The network will also support the professional



Participants at the Broken Hill sharing workshop

development of Aboriginal community language teachers, write units of work, make classroom materials and audio-visual resources. In support of both community plans and school programs, TAFE (Broken Hill and Dareton campuses) are looking to establish the Certificate I in Aboriginal languages. This course will help to increase the number of people in each of the local communities who are learning their languages, and in the long term these people could become teachers for the school programs.

Also continuing from last year is the Quality Teaching (QT) Framework for Aboriginal languages project. In August 2008 we held a workshop in Dubbo in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education and Training (Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate and Curriculum K-12 Directorate) and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The workshop included sharing units of work and demonstration lessons by school-community teams from the western region – Brewarrina Central School, Wilcannia Central School, Parkes High School, Parkes Public School, Parkes East Public School, Dubbo College and Hillston Central School. Prof James Ladwig and Dr Wendy Amosa (from the University of Newcastle) provided feedback to the participants. Following this initial workshop, a number of the schools expressed interest in participating in the QT project as it extends into 2009. This project aims to specifically describe and adapt QT for Aboriginal languages programs. The project has two components – a professional development workshop and a QT resource which can be used more broadly by other Aboriginal languages teachers across NSW.

If you are interested in these projects, don't hesitate to ring Susan Poetsch on 02 9367 8147 for more information.



New books on NSW languages launched

A handbook of Aboriginal languages of NSW and the ACT by Jim Wafer, Amanda Lissarrague and Jean Harkins and published by Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, was recently launched in Nambucca Heads.

New South Wales was the first part of Australia to be colonised and so the written records of the state's Indigenous languages go back more than 200 years. The body of linguistic information that has accumulated over that period is considerable, but it is also very uneven in its quality and coverage. The handbook distils this information in a way that makes it easily accessible to a broad audience.

The handbook combines the functions of both a guidebook and a dictionary. It runs to just over 830 pages and is divided into two parts: the first part is a survey of the Indigenous languages of NSW and the ACT (including Aboriginal English), giving information about dialects, locations, maps, and resources available for language revitalisation; the second part provides word-lists in practical spelling for 42 distinct language varieties. There is also useful information on sign languages and kinship classification, as well as an appendix on place names.

The handbook is a valuable reference and educational resource, useful to Aboriginal people who want to revitalise their languages and to those in the broader community who simply want to know more about the state's rich linguistic heritage. It will be particularly helpful in the planning and implementation of primary, secondary and tertiary educational programs dealing with Aboriginal languages and linguistics.



Author Jim Wafer at the launch of the handbook with co-authors Amanda Lissarrague and Jean Harkins on the right.



Also launched late in 2008, was the *Darkinyung grammar and dictionary: revitalising a language from historical sources*. According to Bronwyn Chambers, Chairperson, Darkinyung Language Group, 'This resource will be used as a tool to help us to teach our people, children and future generations the importance of language and that is the key to discover our culture, identity and heritage.'

Darkinyung is an Aboriginal language of New South Wales which is now again being taught and learned. Caroline Jones (Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong) has worked alongside the Darkinyung Language Group to develop a concise and authentic record of what is known of Darkinyung language today, based on research into historical sources mainly from the nineteenth century.

This first modern documentation of Darkinyung language includes an explanation of the speech sounds and a suggested writing system, how the grammar works, in accessible terms with examples, a database of source words, including R. H. Mathews' notebook material and several dictionary list formats suited for different learners' needs.



Members of the Darkinyung Language Group at the book launch





Aboriginal Language Resources

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In late 2006, *gleebooks* was attending the Aboriginal History Association conference at Bankstown. Chatting with Diat Callope and Esther Walsh from the Independent Education Union and Lisa Buxton from the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, about the difficulty teachers and schools had finding resources, we hatched the idea of putting together kits of material.

After months of hunting available resources, gathering donations from publishers and then Lisa, Diat and other Aboriginal education advisers accessing the materials, kits were launched at *gleebooks* in March 2008. Six kits, three covering primary and three covering secondary materials are now available for use by CEO and IEU officers, touring the state at in-service and courses with an Aboriginal focus. They will also be used to support the Indigenous teacher training components at Yalbalinga, the Indigenous Education Unit at ACU, Strathfield.

Originally a list of close to 300 titles was produced to travel with the kits, but we've moved to using a website so that new books can be added, and to develop more specialised resource lists for particular areas of interest. One of these key lists focuses on language materials.

We've listed all available language resources that are in print that we could find for NSW (except the Board of Studies materials which are available from the Board direct). When you click on a title, it usually takes you to the *gleebooks* website which is providing the e-comm facility for the website. In some cases, materials are produced by community-based organisations, and we link direct to them.

We currently list materials covering the NSW languages of Wiradjuri, Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay, Gundungurra, Dhanggati, Darkinyung, Gumbaynggirr, Awabakal, and general resources such as the recently released Handbook of Aboriginal Languages of NSW and ACT. We also list other materials including the picture dictionary range from the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD), but our main focus has been on NSW languages.

You can find the website by going to [gleebooks](http://gleebooks.com), and then following the link on the home page under Online Books > **Aboriginal Studies Resources** or by going direct to:

<http://sites.google.com/site/aboriginalstudiesresources/language-resource>

gleebooks can set up accounts for schools and organisations, so that orders can be invoiced when sent with an official order.

We'd love to hear about other resources that are available, so we can add them to the website, and would love to hear any suggestions or comments about improving the website!



Aboriginal languages month at Sydney University

January is starting to shape up as the Indigenous languages month at the University of Sydney's Koori Centre. This year both Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative's Summer School for Gamilaraay, Gumbaynggirr and Wiradjuri Languages, and the first block of the Koori Centre's graduate courses in Indigenous Languages Education, were held for the third time running.

Nine students commenced the graduate courses in Indigenous Languages Education this year arriving at the University from across NSW and as far away as Shark Bay, WA and Aurukun, QLD. Although the seven day block was tough going, especially in Sydney's heatwave conditions, all the students worked really well and had a great time developing new understandings about Indigenous languages and teaching.

Like most people, the students found learning to look at language in the way that linguists do quite challenging, but by the end of the week they were using many new terms and concepts with familiarity. The skills and experience of their teachers, Jen Munro, Albert Burgman and John Hobson who have all worked in Indigenous languages for many years, helped them no end. As is normally the case this year's class also includes students with a mix of language knowledge, teaching experience and goals. However, all of them share a strong ambition to actively participate in revitalising their languages.

The Master of Indigenous Languages (MILE) at the Koori Centre is the only recognised professional development program in the field for graduate teachers being offered anywhere in Australia. Any Indigenous person with a standard school teaching qualification is eligible to enter the MILE course. Those with at least two years towards a teaching degree can start in the Graduate Certificate and bridge up to the Master's along the way. You don't need to speak an Indigenous language to commence the course but can undertake learning one as part of your degree. At least one MILE student attended both the summer school and the MILE block this year. Talk about keen!

If you or someone you know might be interested in these courses in 2010, now is the time to find out more and get in touch with the Koori Centre. Ring Sherrie Connors on (02) 9351 7008, or toll free 1800 622 742 for more information and an application form, or look up the web at :

<http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au/studying/postgrad.shtml>

John Hobson, Koori Centre.

Response to the Ngaawa - Garay Girramubang Ngiyambalgarra Summer School, held from Monday 12th through to Friday 16th of January, was overwhelming. Students were very hungry to learn their language. Gumbaynggirr had 24 students, Gamilaraay had five students and Wiradjuri had four. Students are asking for a Winter School now. On our sharing night all language groups did a performance for each other. Hearing people speak their language out loud for the first time is very emotional, tears just start to flow, for the teachers as well. We feel we are achieving a strong connection with the other language groups to keep our people strong.

Pauline Hooler, Muurrbay.



Keeping in touch: Aboriginal languages email list

The Aboriginal languages newsletter is sent out to you every term but often there is information about upcoming events that you should know about straight away. If you are a member of a school Aboriginal languages team and would like to be on the Aboriginal languages email list so that you can be contacted with information more regularly, all you need to do is to send an email to the Aboriginal languages consultant mari.rhydwen@det.nsw.edu.au and your name will be added to the list. Please don't forget to include your name, and the name of the school you are working with, in your email.



Upcoming workshops and conferences

Regional languages workshops

Teachers of Aboriginal languages are welcome to attend any of the regular workshops offered for languages teachers. Over the coming year a number of two-day workshops for languages teachers will be offered at regional centres across NSW. The first one will be held in the Northern Sydney Region in March followed later in the month by one in the Illawarra and South Coast region. In May there will be workshops on the North Coast and South Western Sydney regions followed by others elsewhere during the year.

The workshops cover such topics as working with Gifted and Talented students (GAT) in languages, programming for languages, assessment and reporting in Languages Years K-10 and language learning through games.

To find out more about these, please go to the Curriculum Support website and follow the links on the Languages homepage to the Curriculum K-12 Directorate's Professional Learning courses 2009. <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/prolearn09/index.htm>

If you are currently a community member teaching an Aboriginal language in a DET school, you may be eligible for some funding to cover the cost of attending one of these courses. For more information please contact Mari Rhydwen by email mari.rhydwen@det.nsw.edu.au or by phone on (02) 9886 7659.



Teaching methodology for Aboriginal languages

In the second half of 2009, we will again offer the two-day workshop *Teaching methodology for Aboriginal languages*. This is recommended professional development for anyone who is part of a school Aboriginal languages team, including members of the school executive, teaching staff, community-based language teachers and Aboriginal Education Officers. If you have not already attended one of these courses and would like to, please contact Mari Rhydwen (see above). This will help us to plan where and when to offer the workshops.

