

# TEACHING LOCAL NSW ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

## A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

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**New South Wales  
Aboriginal Education  
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## ACRONYMS

ALCN	Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest/s
NSW	New South Wales
NSW AECG Inc.	New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated
NSW DEC	New South Wales Department of Education and Communities
OCHRE	Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment

## OVERVIEW

'Teaching Local NSW Aboriginal Languages and Cultures: A Guide for Schools' is a NSW AECG Inc. advisory booklet for all NSW Department of Education and Communities [NSW DEC] staff involved in developing and delivering local Aboriginal language/culture programmes within NSW public schools.

### What is in this guide?

**Aboriginal Languages and Cultures** provides an essential snapshot of the foundational knowledge frameworks and contemporary cultural contexts that underpin Aboriginal NSW.

**Cultural Programming** suggests programme options, a curriculum structure and teaching approaches relevant to the development and delivery of local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programmes within NSW public schools.

**Effective Partnering** provides culturally apposite advice on how to establish and maintain productive working partnerships with local NSW Aboriginal communities.

### Why should local NSW Aboriginal languages/cultures be taught in NSW public schools?

At present, the NSW State Government plan for Aboriginal Affairs, OCHRE [Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment], defines the State's current direction for the recovery, development and maintenance of local Aboriginal languages and cultures within NSW. The State Government recognises the right of the Aboriginal peoples of NSW to lead fulfilling cultural lives and accepts that there is a direct correlation between Aboriginal cultural health and wellbeing and degrees of Aboriginal disadvantage. OCHRE mandates a course of action for redressing Aboriginal disadvantage that includes the teaching of local Aboriginal languages and cultures within NSW public schools and NSW Aboriginal communities. Enveloped within OCHRE is the NSW DEC Connected Communities Strategy which similarly mandates the teaching of local NSW Aboriginal languages and cultures within selected NSW public schools.

**OCHRE** identifies key social, cultural and economic directions for Aboriginal NSW.  
<http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government-aboriginal-affairs-strategy/>

**Connected Communities Strategy** positions selected NSW public schools as community hubs with a strong emphasis on maintaining strong working school-Aboriginal community partnerships.  
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/connected-communities/>

NSW DEC staff involved in developing and delivering local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programmes should familiarise themselves with foundational Aboriginal knowledge frameworks, contemporary Aboriginal cultural contexts and the fundamentals of Aboriginal cultural health and wellbeing in order to better understand Aboriginal NSW. Without sufficient knowledge and understanding of these key facets of Aboriginal NSW, NSW DEC staff may easily misinterpret the cultural dynamics of Aboriginal being, and in so doing significantly compromise the integrity of language and culture programming.

### Foundational Knowledge Frameworks

Prior to 1788 proprietorship of NSW was held by a diverse mosaic of Aboriginal cultural nations. Each Aboriginal cultural nation had its own corpus of knowledge that projected a particular set of spirit relationships, a particular routine of cultural and social praxis and a localised language. Whilst these cultural nations were identifiably distinct from one another, they were also organically similar because they held in common knowledge frameworks which were essentially enveloped within the same ontological, epistemological and axiological understandings and meanings.

The understandings and meanings that underpinned each distinct Aboriginal corpus of knowledge were definably spiritual in orientation; that is they rested on a complex metaphysical theory that engendered spirit persona to life and land forms. These spirit persona were intellectually established as orienting agents in human existence. Human existence was thus embedded within a complex spiritual web that defined a specific way of life that in NSW embodied spiritual reciprocity *'with'* salt-water and fresh-water bionetworks.

The spiritualised systems of knowledge that the Aboriginal cultural nations of NSW were founded upon encompassed three discrete forms of knowing: *i. whole of community knowing, ii. female knowing, and iii. male knowing.* Whole of community knowing was gender neutral, whereas female knowing and male knowing were gender specific. All forms of knowing were governed by spiritual delimiters that restricted right of access to

specific tracts of knowledge, not only because of gender but also on the basis of pre-determined spiritual custodianships.

All knowledge, whether it was whole of community, female or male knowledge, was packaged, stored and transmitted within the mediums of story, song, music, dance and art. These mediums, which were communicated in ceremonial and non-ceremonial forums, utilised both verbal and non-verbal vernaculars. Aboriginal verbal vernaculars, however, were particularly intricate, containing within them meticulous naming systems that succinctly captured in word the many nuances of seasons, life-cycles and change.

### Contemporary Cultural Contexts

Contemporary Aboriginal nationhood in NSW is as spiritual and culturally diverse as it was foundationally. It remains spiritual, despite the destructive impact of colonisation and protectionism, because the Aboriginal peoples of NSW have been able to safeguard, and carry into the present, a deep-seated state of consciousness that steadfastly bonds contemporary cultural being to foundational cultural being. Without doubt a great deal of foundational knowledge has diminished, but its essential spirit logic has not.

Similarly, contemporary Aboriginal nationhood in NSW remains culturally diverse because of the survival of Aboriginal cultural identifiers, which continue to be expressed on the basis of *i. fresh-water, salt-water being; ii. ancestry, i.e. Ngarigo, Wangkumara, Muruwari, Biripi and*

Ngiyampaa (there are some 100 plus ancestral cultural nationhood's in NSW) and regional affiliations, i.e. Koori, Goori and Murri. The external borders of Country may be less well known now, but fundamental relationship with Country remains strong.

Interestingly, in reference to Aboriginal nationhood in NSW it is possible to argue that at an individual level inherited cultural nationhood may be more dynamic now than it was foundationally. This is because of the emergence of multi-affiliate cultural identities. Foundationally, inter-cultural relationships were strictly governed. As the rule of this governance collapsed Aboriginal peoples in NSW were thrust into new places and new bonds. The net result, overtime, is that contemporary Aboriginal identity in NSW is now oftentimes premised on a far wider number of cultural lineages.

There can be little doubt that assertion of Aboriginal identity in NSW continues on the basis of inherited cultural lineages. These cultural lineages name identity, but identity as an apparatus of social and cultural meaning is expressed more deeply through the use of mother tongue and the practice of ways of mother culture. Contemporary Aboriginal identity in NSW is thus inescapably reliant on foundational knowledge. There is a tangible correlation between the degree to which foundational knowledge is present and the fabric of Aboriginal cultural identity.

In NSW the continuance of spirit logic and ancestral connection personifies contemporary Aboriginal identity, but it is an affected identity because of diminished foundational knowledge. The contemporary status of mother tongue and mother culture for each Aboriginal community, and indeed each Aboriginal citizen, has a determining influence on the cognitive character of cultural identity. Across NSW the status of language and culture knowledge, and as such foundational union, is associable with three levels of circumstance:

**Awareness**, which denotes a circumstance in which there are no existing speakers of mother tongue or knowledge holders of mother culture. Use of mother tongue and practice of mother culture has ceased. Mother tongue and mother culture are only recoverable through research.

**Reclamation**, which denotes a circumstance in which there are very few speakers of mother tongue or knowledge holders of mother culture. Use of mother tongue and practice of mother culture is highly limited. Mother tongue and mother culture are diminished to the point where research is still the primary means of recovery.

**Revitalisation**, which denotes a circumstance in which there are speakers of mother tongue and knowledge holders of mother culture. Use of mother tongue and practise of mother culture occurs, but is incomplete in terms of full speech fluency and full cultural practice as a way of life. Mother tongue and mother culture can be recovered through the input of knowledge holders and supplementary research.

## Cultural Health and Wellbeing

For contemporary Aboriginal cultural identity in NSW to healthily thrive it must be re-embedded as closely as possible within foundational knowledge systems. This is a matter of psycho-social and psycho-cultural health and wellbeing for each Aboriginal citizen and community within NSW. It must be acknowledged that across Australia, including NSW, the life circumstance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians has been drastically marred by a xenophobic past, which led to decades of social, economic and cultural privation.

To reverse this circumstance within NSW contemporary Aboriginal identity must be expanded beyond the knowing of ancestral cultural lineages and the sensing of spirit logic. It must extend into knowing and maintaining foundational mother tongue and ways of Country. There are without doubt instances of this already, but it is not systemic. The recovery and resurgence of mother tongue and mother culture is an imperative for achieving healthy cultural being which achieves healthy citizenship. This is what begets healthy futures.

## CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

To successfully *develop* a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme the *format*, *timeframe* and *content* of the programme will have to be determined.

To successfully *deliver* a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme the programme's *mode of delivery*, *teaching methods* and *assessment methods* will have to be determined.

### Format Options

There are three options to consider when deciding upon the format of a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme for a NSW public school:

#### **Option 1 – Cultural Studies**

*A cultural studies programme embeds language and culture instruction within one holistic educational experience.*

#### **Option 2 – Language Studies**

*A language studies programme focuses solely on language instruction. Instruction in culture is incidental within the programme.*

#### **Option 3 – Culture Studies**

*A culture studies programme focuses solely on culture instruction. Instruction in language is incidental within the programme.*

There are qualities to consider with each of these formats:

**A cultural studies programme** is well suited to full speech/full culture contexts and revitalisation contexts where language and culture knowledge is relatively comprehensive. A cultural studies programme cements culture at its core. Language is taught as an inseparable aspect of culture.

**A language studies programme** is purposed towards promoting dialogue at a developed conversational level and competency in written expression. As such, a language studies programme is more compatible with full or near full speech fluency contexts.

**A culture studies programme** is well suited to contexts where culture knowledge significantly outweighs language knowledge. Culture knowledge may well be incomplete, especially in reclamation and awareness contexts, but sufficient enough to develop a generalised learning programme.

To decide which option is best the following questions should be considered:

*How much language knowledge is present?*

*How much culture knowledge is present?*

*Is there more culture knowledge than language knowledge?*

*Is there enough language knowledge to separate language from culture within education programming?*

*Is it more culturally apposite to reinforce language learning through culture learning?*

*Is there enough culture knowledge to create an education programme?*

There is a fundamental interconnection between what can be realistically achieved and the depth and breadth of a supporting corpus of cultural knowledge. When there is equal depth and breadth in both language and culture knowledge a cultural studies programme is a best choice, though theoretically it would be possible to incept separate language studies and culture studies programmes simultaneously or rotationally. When there is far more culture knowledge than language knowledge a culture programme is a best choice.

If an effort is made to create a specialised language studies programme in preference to a broader functioning cultural studies programme, without the requisite language knowledge, it is inevitable that the programme will transition into a culture studies programme. For a language studies programme to be successfully developed and delivered in a way that is sustainable as a singular entity the following must be present:

- *a large enough lexicon to enable exponential growth of a learners vocabulary over an extended period of time,*
- *enough vocabulary to enable learners to form whole sentences that include culturally germane operative speech conjunctions,*



- sufficient depth of sentence formation so that learners can produce enough dialogue to be able to engage in interactive conversation,
- a sufficiently diverse range of linguistic conventions so that a grammar of speech can be established and taught, and
- a sufficiently diverse range of linguistic conventions so that a grammar of written language can be established and taught.

## Timeframes

Once the format of a programme has been settled the timeframe of a programme can be determined. The best way to do this is to consider how a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme will roll out within a NSW public school. NSW DEC staff involved in developing and delivering local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programmes will need to think about the following questions:

*What amount of time will be available for the programme?*

*Will the programme be conducted on a daily, weekly or fortnightly basis?*

*Will the programme run for 1 hour, several hours, ½ a day or for a whole day?*

*Will the programme operate across a single term, a semester, a year, or for multiple years within a learning stage or over a number of learning stages?*

*Will the programme run as a distinct local cultural initiative or will it be subsumed under the auspice of an existing syllabus?*

By addressing these questions NSW DEC staff will be able to clarify whether or not they are aiming to transform a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme into a subject that will fit within a schools pre-existing curriculum, or aiming to create a unique cultural product to specifically facilitate the cultural health and wellbeing of First Nations students.

## Curriculum Content

When the format and size of a programme has been agreed a programme's content can be developed. NSW DEC staff involved in developing a discrete curriculum for a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture

programme will become actively involved in:

- negotiating with local Aboriginal parents/carers, families and communities to select language/culture knowledge for inclusion within the curriculum (see pages 11-12),
- working with Aboriginal parents/carers, families and communities to ensure that all language/culture knowledge included within the curriculum is properly endorsed as accurate and reflective of Aboriginal forms of knowing (see pages 11-12), and
- structuring the curriculum so that it logically presents language/culture knowledge in a way that exponentially builds learning experience

An effective approach for structuring a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture curriculum is to scaffold it so that it encompasses a set of cultural syllabuses that umbrella cultural learning modules. The following illustrates this:

*The curriculum is structured as an educational reflection of a local Aboriginal corpus of cultural knowledge. The curriculum should carry the name of the relevant Aboriginal cultural nation, i.e.*

### **Living Dhungutti Way**

*The curriculum is organised into a series of cultural syllabuses. These syllabuses represent cultural places of knowing, i.e.*

### **Thinking Country Reading Country**

*These places of knowing are then further organised into cultural lesson modules, i.e.*

### **Spirit origins of Country Kinship origins of Country Ecology of Country Fauna of Country**

The number of cultural syllabuses that a local curriculum can entail will depend entirely upon the size of the local corpus of cultural knowledge that will support it.

Ideally, a discrete local NSW Aboriginal language/culture curriculum should facilitate knowing of:

#### **THE SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS OF COUNTRY**

- At an awareness level -  
*Basic familiarity with spiritual connection.*
- At a reclamation level -

*Sound knowing of spiritual connection, spirit beings of Country, philosophies and wisdoms of Country.*

- ➔ At a revitalisation level - *Comprehensive knowing of spirit beings, spirit practice, spiritual kinship structures, foundational law/lore, cultural philosophies, wisdoms, values and ethics to enable spiritual thinking.*

#### **ENVIRONMENT OF COUNTRY**

- ➔ At an awareness level - *Basic cultural knowing of general environment.*
- ➔ At a reclamation level - *Sound cultural knowing of flora, fauna and ecology.*
- ➔ At a revitalisation level - *Comprehensive cultural knowing of flora, fauna, ecology, geology, geography, climate and astronomy to enable cultural 'reading' of Country.*

#### **WAYS OF LIVING COUNTRY**

- ➔ At an awareness level - *Basic knowledge/practice of cultural arts, crafts.*
- ➔ At a reclamation level - *Sound knowledge/practice of cultural arts, crafts and resource making.*
- ➔ At a revitalisation level - *Comprehensive knowledge/practice of cultural arts, crafts, music, song, dance, resource/tool manufacture and use; comprehensive knowledge of foundational medicines/ways of healing, food and nutrition, cookery; and cultural maintenance of Country.*

The above points reflect advice provided in Williams, ST 2013, *Implementation Plan: Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests [ALCN] in NSW*, Document No.2, NSW AECG Inc., Stanmore, NSW.

### **Mode of Delivery**

Having a curriculum in place is one thing, but delivering it is altogether another. In terms of Indigenous education, **immersion** has come to be valued as a best-practice mode for cultural education delivery, both internationally and nationally. The purpose behind immersion is to centre the cultural learner within the domain of mother culture, using mother tongue as the primary language of instruction. Classically, immersion is considered impracticable where full or near full speech fluency is unattainable.

In NSW, in circumstances where local Aboriginal corpuses of knowledge are reasonably wide ranging in terms of culture knowledge immersion *can* still be considered best practice. Immersion doesn't necessarily have to rely solely upon full fluency in mother tongue, so long as there is enough culture knowledge to create and sustain a genuine Aboriginal cultural environment where cultural learners can be immersed within mother culture.

In order to determine whether or not immersion is a workable mode of delivery for a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme each school will have to establish whether or not the following conditions can be met:

**Space** - *a dedicated learning site is necessary so that the learning domain functions as a cultural domain*

**Knowledge** - *if there is no depth to what is being taught learning cannot become culturally transformative*

**Consistency** - *if learning is sporadic cultural thinking will not develop*

**Longevity** - *it takes time to transform cultural learning into cultural maintenance*

The following questions will be of assistance when deciding upon a mode of programme delivery:

*Will the programme be aimed at enabling Aboriginal student uptake of mother tongue and practice of mother culture?*

*Will the programme be aimed at telling Aboriginal students about mother tongue and mother culture?*

The difference between these two core aims is significant. If Aboriginal students are being encouraged to acquire and actively apply mother tongue and mother culture immersion is best practice. If it is only possible to encourage Aboriginal students to passively learn mother tongue and mother culture because of a lack of space, knowledge and/or time a traditional classroom based mode of delivery will work, but it is more likely to facilitate detached knowing as opposed to experiential knowing.

## Teaching Methods

Even if immersion is not possible DEC staff involved in developing and delivering local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programmes should consider utilising key global Indigenous teaching methods. These methods include:

**Learning on Country**, which is valued by Indigenous peoples as a teaching method because Indigenous knowledge systems are synonymous with Country. Country is the most appropriate place to encourage learners to gain spiritual synergy with spirit ancestors. Traditional classrooms tend to represent artificial learning environments that detach learners from the spirit essence of Country.

**Circle learning**, which enables educators to democratically position themselves as fellow students of mother tongue and mother culture. In traditional classrooms educators are typically positioned at the front, away from learners. Whilst this position asserts the authority of an educator, it forces an imbalance that works against Indigenous ways of sharing and discussing knowing.

**Learning through story, music, song, dance, art and craft**, which sustains the way foundational knowledge is packaged and transmitted. Indigenous peoples utilise these mediums in order to facilitate experiential learning as uptake of cultural practice.

**Learning within gender**, which is fundamental to protecting the sanctity of female knowing and male knowing. Indigenous peoples resolutely require this in order to eliminate any possibility of protected knowledge being imparted in a manner not consistent with Indigenous knowledge frameworks, and to avoid negative spiritual consequence.

## Assessment Methods

DEC staff involved in developing and delivering local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programmes should also

be open to utilising assessment methods that are compatible with foundational Indigenous knowledge frameworks. These methods include:

**Interpreting Country**, where an individual learner expresses their knowledge of Country or story's Country on Country by walking Country with their teacher/s, who assess the depth and cultural accuracy of what they hear.

**Talking Country**, where a group of learners dialogue or conjointly story Country in the presence of their teacher/s, who assess the depth and cultural accuracy of conversation as well as the cultural behaviour and contributions of individual learners.

**Imaging Country**, where individual learners express Country through art or craft, then story the knowledge contained within their works to their teacher/s, who assess the depth and cultural accuracy of their knowledge and expression.

**Performing Country**, where individual learners or groups of learners express or story Country through dance, music or song in the presence of their teacher/s, who assess the depth and cultural accuracy of their knowledge and expression.

**Within Gender**, where interpreting, talking, imaging or performing Country is assessed in the presence of gender appropriate teacher/s.

Whenever possible storying mother culture by interpreting, talking, imaging or performing Country should include as much use of mother tongue as possible. Language specific programmes would need to encompass a set of assessment standards that measure a learner's ability to verbalise their knowing using mother tongue.

No matter how knowledgeable individual NSW DEC staff are, or how well developed a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme is on paper, it is unlikely to be successful or longstanding without sustained proactive Aboriginal input. In order to gain this input effective Aboriginal/school partnerships need to be established and maintained. These partnerships are more likely to flourish when Aboriginal cultural issues are better understood, when cultural standards are instigated and adhered to and when cultural forms of communication are valued.

### Aboriginal Cultural Issues

To successfully implement and sustain a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme within a NSW public school there must be in place a strong working partnership between a school and its local Aboriginal community. Partnerships between schools and Aboriginal communities, however, are often difficult to maintain if school staff are not aware of the following issues, which not only exist within many NSW Aboriginal communities, but also cause deep tensions within these communities:

#### **Culture** – opposing interpretations of:

- the exact geographic boundaries of Country,
- the content of knowledge stories of Country,
- the identification of spirit ancestors of Country,
- the identification and gender specificity of spirit sites of Country
- foundational law/lore of Country
- cultural imaging of Country
- Kinship structures of Country

#### **Language** – opposing interpretations of:

- cultural origin of words
- meaning of words
- pronunciation of words
- spelling of words
- gender specificity of words
- construction and phraseology of sentences
- linguistic precincts

The extent and severity of any of these cultural issues varies from community to community. Some NSW Aboriginal communities do not particularly experience great difficulty with these issues, whilst others are greatly troubled by them. Given this, it is crucial that NSW DEC staff involved in developing and delivering local NSW Aboriginal language/culture

programmes find out what is going on within their local Aboriginal communities in order to avoid unwittingly:

- consulting with persons who are not widely recognised within a local Aboriginal community as legitimate cultural knowledge holders
- engaging persons to teach language/culture who are not widely respected within a local community as legitimate cultural instructors
- including cultural knowledge content within a language/culture curriculum that is not widely considered accurate by a local Aboriginal community
- revealing restricted cultural content against the spiritual foundations that regulate dissemination of cultural knowledge
- revealing gender specific culture content, including cultural items, to the wrong gender
- encouraging inappropriate contact with, and use of, cultural items that are gender restricted

Mistakes of this kind not only fuel Aboriginal community cultural tensions they also distance Aboriginal trust. To circumvent becoming embroiled in local cultural issues NSW DEC staff wishing to implement a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programme within a NSW public school should begin by taking the time to meet the parents/carers of Aboriginal students on an individual basis. Doing so will increase understanding of what each Aboriginal parent/carer wants and expects in terms of the provision of language/culture education.

It will be important to establish whether or not each Aboriginal parent/carer wants their children to participate in language/culture education, and if so, what culture or cultures are relevant to the children concerned. It will also be important to establish what each Aboriginal parent/carer feels in terms of the accuracy of

language/culture knowledge, and who they individually respect as legitimate cultural knowledge holders and instructors of language/culture knowledge.

As well as consulting directly with Aboriginal parents/carers on an individual basis NSW DEC staff can seek to develop productive relationships with local Aboriginal representative bodies. The NSW AECG Inc., which auspices a number of local AECG's, has been formally recognised by the NSW DEC as the peak community advisory body on matters to do with Aboriginal education, so contact with relevant local AECG's is advisable.

The OCHRE plan will also precipitate the establishment of Aboriginal language and culture nests [ALCN] within a number of NSW Aboriginal communities/regions. Over time these ALCN will become specialist organisations purposed towards the recovery, development and dissemination of local/regional Aboriginal language and culture knowledge. ALCN will become key community partners, alongside Aboriginal parents/carers, for NSW public schools.

### Cultural Guidelines

One of the most productive ways of avoiding cultural complications with the development and delivery of local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programmes is to instigate within each NSW public school at set of cultural guidelines that will benchmark local standards for educational practice. The following guidelines should be adhered as standard practice:

**Guideline 1** – All persons engaged to teach a local NSW Aboriginal language/culture will be approved by relevant local Aboriginal parents/carers and communities before teaching commences.

*A valid teacher of Aboriginal language/culture is characteristically a local Aboriginal community person who is widely known and respected within a local Aboriginal community as a significant cultural knowledge holder and skilled speaker of mother tongue, and/or skilled practitioner of mother culture.*

*A non-Aboriginal teacher may also be accepted as an instructor in a local Aboriginal language/culture, provided that they have been widely accepted within*

*a local Aboriginal community as sufficiently knowledgeable about local language/culture.*

**Guideline 2** – All language/culture knowledge to be taught will be approved by relevant local Aboriginal parents/carers and communities before teaching commences.

*A local Aboriginal language can be thought of as valid when it encompasses words, meanings, syntax and phonics that are recognised within a local Aboriginal community as belonging to local Country.*

*Local Aboriginal culture knowledge can be thought of as valid when it encompasses spiritual understandings, knowledge stories, cultural practices, philosophies and values that are recognised within a local Aboriginal community as belonging to local Country.*

**Guideline 3** – All language/culture knowledge to be taught will be vetted to ensure that Aboriginal cultural knowledge conventions are not breached.

*All forms of Aboriginal knowledge are embedded within spiritually founded conventions that govern public disclosure and dissemination of language and culture knowledge, especially cultural knowledge known to be gender specific.*

### Cultural Communication

Partnerships between Aboriginal communities and NSW public schools will be adversely effected if **Aboriginal English** is not valued within school environments. All NSW Aboriginal communities speak Aboriginal English to reinforce and assert cultural identity. It is important that NSW DEC staff involved in developing and delivering local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programmes understand the cultural nuances of Aboriginal English. Common features of Aboriginal English include:

- *The use of words that carry specific cultural meanings, for instance 'deadly', which can mean terrific, great, wonderful. Words such as 'deadly' hold different meanings in English and can often be misconstrued.*
- *Words of mother tongue, for instance 'gammin', which means fake or pretend. There are many such words in Aboriginal English, and these words can vary from community to community.*
- *The use of sentence tags, for instance 'aay' as in "that's a deadly bike, aay". These tags tend to be thought of as 'bad' English'.*
- *The use of terms such as 'sister', 'sis', 'brother', 'brus', when addressing each other. The terms*

'aunt' and 'unk' are often used when addressing older persons.

- Differences in use of individual sounds, for instance 'h' is often added to words as in 'h'egg', 'h'animal', 'h'omelette'. Some sounds are used interchangeably i.e. d and t, b and p.
- The use of periods of silence between being spoken to or being asked a question and response. The gaps in the flow of conversation are often misread by non-Aboriginal people as

indicating a lack of knowledge, or a reluctance to respond, or even ignorance. They are actually speech gaps founded on giving each other time and space within a conversation.

- Extensive use of humour. Humour is often added to conversations in a way that non-Aboriginal people find inappropriate.

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*“Aboriginal people have a fundamental right to revitalise and maintain traditional languages as an integral part of their culture and identity”*

*“The teaching of Aboriginal languages and culture can help increase school participation and retention, better engage parents and families and improve community relationships between generations”*

*“Teaching languages and culture in schools can also contribute to improved interactions between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students, reducing racism and promoting reconciliation”*

OCHRE: NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs: Education, Employment and Accountability, 2013, NSW Government, page 18.  
<[http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/AA\\_OCHRE\\_](http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/AA_OCHRE_)





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