



National Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Education Corporation

# Policy and Practice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Teaching in Australian Public Schools



**FINAL REPORT**

Prepared for the Australian Government Department of Education

October 2019



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation



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This Project has been auspiced by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. on behalf of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council (formerly Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies).

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We also acknowledge the Australian Department of Education for funding this project and providing an opportunity to present our recommendations for improving education through delivering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and culture programs in public schools.

## TERMINOLOGY

In this document the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'First Nations People' are used interchangeably. When the term 'Indigenous' is used it is referring to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia.

## ACRONYMS

AEW – Aboriginal Education Worker inclusive of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified roles in schools

AIATSIS – Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

IECB – Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies

IECM – Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting

KESO – Koorie Education Support Officer

NSW AECG – New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.

NATSIEC – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council

PD – Professional Development

VACL – Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages

VAEAI – Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like in other 'colonised' nations, over numerous generations Australian departments of education and public schools have largely ignored and devalued Australia's Indigenous languages and cultures. They have acted, and as Bamblett (2018) argues, continue to act, as *battering rams of assimilation*. The very first attempts by the British to engage Aboriginal communities in schooling began in 1814 within the Parramatta and Blacktown Native Institutions. The curriculum delivered in these schools focused on 'civilising' the students through instruction in 'reading, writing and religion', 'extending enlightenment ideals', 'training in manual labour for the boys and useful needlework for the girls' and 'inculcating European ideas of civilisation, commerce and Christianity'. The paternalistic teachings in these schools failed to connect with Aboriginal languages and concepts around Country, Kin, Spirituality, Lore and Community. It is therefore unsurprising that both schools consistently recorded low and fluctuating enrolments (Norman, 2015).

Prior to invasion it is estimated that there were more than 250 distinct Indigenous languages spoken across Australia. As a result of British invasion and the subsequent institution of British systems of education on Indigenous countries, less than 20 Indigenous languages remain strong (Hobson, 2014).

In the last few decades however, Indigenous language maintenance, revitalisation and reclamation programs are increasingly being established. In some places Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities are endorsing Australian public schools to deliver language programs with varying levels of support and success. The increased activity of Indigenous communities and schools in this area is encouraging but there are a range of political, institutional and contextual issues which clearly impede progress.

In regards to Indigenous language programs there is a history of no long term commitment to action at all levels within the education institution. Unless there is some overriding commitment to action Indigenous language teachers and Australian public schools will continue to struggle to effectively deliver Indigenous language programs.

Providing ongoing systemic support for the Indigenous communities that endorse schools to deliver language programs would help reconcile the 200 odd years of neglect and discrimination which Australian education institutions have shown towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' languages and cultures.

Providing ongoing systemic support for schools and their local Indigenous communities to sustainably deliver language and culture programs would help allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to form positive associations between their identity and their education, something which, by and large, Australian schools have failed to do.



## THE RESEARCH AIMS

The aims of this research project were to:

- *identify and document jurisdictional policy frameworks relevant to the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages*
- *review literature to identify and document contributors to success for Indigenous language teachers in Australian public schools, as well as common issues and barriers they face in the role*
- *conduct interviews and consultations with NATSIEC members and their nominated representatives to further identify and document prominent contributors to success for Indigenous language teachers, as well as the common issues and barriers they face in Australian public schools.*

## THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary questions this research project has sought to answer are:

- *what contributes to Indigenous language teachers achieving success in their role?*
- *what issues and barriers inhibit Indigenous language teachers achieving success in their role?*

## THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHER ROLE

Indigenous language teachers are employed in public schools in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. In Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory local languages are not taught within public schools. In these jurisdictions languages are in either a reclamation or revitalization phase where Aboriginal community members and organisations are leading the process and have not endorsed schools to establish and deliver programs.

The Indigenous language teacher role is highly complex due to:

- The need to develop and implement programs with respect to both Indigenous community and school protocols, pedagogical approaches and expectations
- Indigenous languages are traditionally oral languages and there are generally more than 40 language groups within jurisdictions, which means there is an associated shortage of literacy based teaching and learning resources
- In reclamation and revitalization contexts there is generally a need to undertake research and understand linguistics in order to develop language programs that progress into the secondary years of learning





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- Developing an effective Indigenous language program is expensive and resource intensive requiring collaborations that incorporate the knowledge of: language speakers and cultural knowledge holders; linguistics; school based teaching and learning methods; and, in revitalization and reclamation contexts building a program may require research skills
- The persistent push against the inclusion of Aboriginal languages and cultures within schools in favour of striving for assimilation based outcomes i.e. through literacy numeracy and attendance means Indigenous language programs are always at risk of being cut - Assimilationist ideologies amongst educational leaders and decision makers undoubtedly weigh heavy against Indigenous language teachers and the potential for successfully implementing Indigenous programs across the country.

## RELEVANT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Each of the policies and programs we reviewed were selected based on a desktop research and scan for relevance to and connections with Indigenous language teaching in public schools. In all jurisdictions there are policies and programs which refer directly to the importance of Indigenous languages and cultures in education. However there is significant diversity in each jurisdiction's policies and programs. Some jurisdictions have developed Indigenous language curriculum frameworks, guidelines and/or syllabi. Other jurisdictions, such as NSW's Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and the Victoria's Koori Languages in Schools Program, have developed specific programs with the purpose of supporting and increasing the establishment and implementation of language programs in public schools. Other jurisdictions have developed high level strategies that include accountability and measurement frameworks to support development and implementation of language programs.

Our interviews and review of the literature suggest that the following national and state supported policies and initiatives are supporting the establishment of Indigenous language programs; and/or appropriately recognizing the knowledge of Indigenous language teachers; and/or increasing the numbers of Indigenous language programs and students learning Indigenous languages in schools.

- The National Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages
- Indigenous Language and Culture Centres
- The Koorie Languages in Schools Program in Victoria
- The NSW Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests
- The Western Australian Department of Education Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training course
- Vocational Education and Training providers Cert I,II,III,IV courses in Aboriginal languages

These policies and initiatives are commendable and contributing to Indigenous language programs in public schools. However it should be acknowledged that no state or territory could be identified as



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having established policy or initiatives which comprehensively address the significant issues involved with establishing and sustainably implementing Indigenous language programs in public schools.

## THE LITERATURE AND THE INTERVIEWS

The literature we sourced and reviewed primarily focused on Indigenous language teachers and their work in schools from the 1990s – through to 2018. The main themes occurring within the literature we reviewed were also present in the messages participants provided during interviews. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council (NATSIEC) consultation and interview process was conducted during the months of May, June and July.

In regards to '*what contributes to Indigenous language teachers achieving success in their role?*', recurring stories throughout the literature and interviews illustrate that there is a need for:

**Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community control** - For school programs to be successful it is fundamental that the program is endorsed and its development supported by the local Aboriginal community. It is a widespread Indigenous community protocol that local language speakers/holders of cultural knowledge be employed by schools to teach the language and culture program.

**Resources/Funding** – the maintenance, reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures through school education programs requires significant human and financial resource to, for example: develop teaching and learning resources; teach and learn on Country; engage and employ local Aboriginal language speakers and cultural knowledge holders; conduct research to support language reclamation; engage linguists to support literacy teaching and learning and resource development.

**Indigenous Language and Culture Centres** – Language and culture centres are not spread widely across Australia and have limited capacity to work with all schools in their local areas. However when schools are able to work respectfully with Language and Culture Centres the quality of language programs can be bolstered significantly.

**Professional training and accreditation** – There is evidence that Indigenous language teachers who are fortunate enough to receive professional development and training opportunities are benefitting a great deal and using their training to support and mentor other Indigenous language teachers or potential future Indigenous language teachers.

Our research found the following training courses were recognized as contributing to success in Indigenous language teaching in public schools:

- Western Australia Department of Education Aboriginal languages teacher training course



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- University of Sydney Masters of Indigenous Languages Education
- Batchelor Institute/Charles Darwin University Diploma of Indigenous Language Work and Bachelor of Indigenous Languages and Linguistics
- NSW TAFE and Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative Certificates I, II and III in Aboriginal Languages
- Victorian School of Languages - Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language.

**Leadership support and instituting collaborative ‘two-way’ working relationships** – Leadership support, particularly from school principals was commonly cited as a ‘game changer’ as to whether or not a language program existed within a school or not. Many examples have been cited where a language program in a school has ceased to exist once a supportive principal left and an unsupportive principal took their place. Additionally the institution of collaborative ‘two-way respectful’ working relationships between school staff, Aboriginal language speakers and cultural knowledge holders and linguists is considered necessary for establishing, delivering and evaluating language programs.

**Policy Frameworks and programs** – numerous policy frameworks and programs are cited within the literature and were referenced in the interviews as opening ‘space’ and ‘opportunities’ for Indigenous language programs to be developed and implemented within schools. These include:

- Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Framework
- The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum
- NSW Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests
- NSW Education Standards Authority Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus
- The Koorie Language in Schools Program
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015
- Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - particularly article 14.

This research also revealed many of the prominent issues and barriers impeding Indigenous language programs in schools. In regards to ‘**what barriers and issues inhibit Indigenous language teachers achieving success in their role?**’ recurring experiences throughout the literature and interviews illustrate that the following issues have always been and continue to be prevalent:



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**Lack of relevant training and professional development programs** – 87% of interview participants indicated significant gaps in the availability of and/or support for professional development opportunities and qualification based training. Despite this need being cited in the literature for decades, across the country there are severely limited relevant training and development opportunities available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers and teachers. Aside from the Western Australian Department of Education’s Aboriginal languages teacher training, the 2012 *Our Land Our Languages* report on the inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities illustrated that there is

*no entry-level teacher qualification that has national recognition for appointment to a designated language teacher position in a school” (Parliament of Australia, 2011).*

The significant need for increasing relevant professional development and accredited training programs is magnified by:

- the complexity of the Indigenous language teacher role as outlined above
- the shortage of Indigenous language speakers and cultural knowledge holders who have teaching skills/experience;
- the relatively short period of time in which Indigenous language programs have been delivered in Australian public schools which means there are currently fewer opportunities for learning through peer networks and mentoring development; and
- the importance of reducing the ever present resistance against Indigenous language programs (outlined below) through developing and sustaining successful language programs in schools.

There is also a significant need for professional development to be available for non-Indigenous staff who will collaborate with Indigenous language teachers and communities to support program development and implementation

**Shortage of relevant expertise within schools and Indigenous communities** - Connected with the severe shortage of relevant professional training opportunities for current and potential Indigenous language teachers is a shortage of capacity, both within non-Indigenous school staff and Aboriginal communities. There are no Aboriginal languages which have a long history of formal school based teaching, therefore standard methods of teaching and teaching materials have not had the same time to develop as say for French language teaching. Furthermore as Henderson (1994) highlights

*“teachers, principals and administrators often don’t know much about the language or culture or don’t have much specialist experience in language teaching” and that speakers of an Aboriginal language “often don’t have very much experience in school teaching” (p7).*



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This shortage of expertise impacts further on the sustainability of language programs in schools because the programs are very often dependent on individual champions and Indigenous language programs don't receive the same systemic approval and support as other more established subject areas do. There are decades of examples indicating that many Indigenous language programs simply stop once the Indigenous language teacher leaves the school and/or a supportive principal moves on and is replaced by a principal who doesn't value Indigenous language programs. When this happens the continuity of children's learning is compromised and the hidden curriculum message that 'Indigenous language doesn't matter' is loud and clear.

**Resistance against implementing indigenous language programs in schools** - 65% of interview participants specifically indicated that school principals and senior educational officials can be unsupportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teaching and learning. 48% of participants indicated difficulties associated with the cultural bias towards Western educational standards within schools and the devaluing of Indigenous language and culture in schools. The relevant literature identifies a range of complex issues at work to resist the implementation of Indigenous language programs in schools. These include:

**The persistence of discriminatory assimilationist ideologies** - there appears to be an persistent push from school staff, parents and senior educational officials against the implementation of Indigenous language and culture programs. Often the undertones accompanying this resistance resonate with the discriminatory paternalistic and assimilationist ideologies which informed Australian policy prior to the 1970s. Generally the resistance against Indigenous language programs in schools is accompanied by the ill-conceived reasoning that English literacy, numeracy and attendance are of utmost importance and that by achieving in these areas Aboriginal communities will achieve improvements in other outcomes such as health and employment. However this reasoning fails to address the complexities of identity, language and power relationships in education. Efforts which ignore identity culture and language, such as those made through the Closing the Gap agenda to simply raise literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes have not resulted in much positive change.

Yalmay Yunupingu illustrates the destructive outcomes that result from the persistence of assimilationist educational ideologies.

*The decision to make English the only important language in our schools will only make the situation for our young people worse as they struggle to be proud Yolŋu in a world that is making them feel their culture is bad, unimportant and irrelevant in the contemporary world.*  
(Yunupingu, Y. in Simpson et al, 2009)

**Indigenous community concerns about schools delivering Language programs** – Some Indigenous communities are divided or not in favour of their local schools delivering language programs.



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Indigenous community concerns with schools delivering local language programs generally appear to relate to; a lack of trust that has resulted from the shameful history associated with the institution wide discrimination and racism that Australian schools have shown to Aboriginal communities in the past; concerns that Australian schools have been established to impart English language and Western cultural values and that therefore they are not equipped to effectively deliver Indigenous language programs; issues relating with schools struggling to effectively engage with community and support community control and leadership over language programs.

The overarching protocol is for schools to acknowledge and respect local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community leadership on whether or not a local language should be taught within the school.

***Insufficient funding and resources*** - 74% of interview participants indicated that limitations in regards to either human, teaching and learning, and/or funding resources create significant barriers to teaching and learning Indigenous languages in schools. References to inadequate funding and a lack of resources for Indigenous language programs were also throughout the literature we reviewed. While there is some evidence that funding for language revitalization projects has increased there appears to be little evidence showing equivalent substantial funding increases for school based Indigenous language programs. In terms of resources, the literature, as was noted earlier in this report, identifies that Australia's Indigenous languages have traditionally been oral languages and that there has only been a short history of teaching Indigenous languages in schools in Australia. This along with the significant number of Indigenous languages across Australia are factors which explain why there are limited local Indigenous language teaching and learning resources that have been developed.

As was noted above the need for teaching and learning resources and the collaborative development of programs - using the skills and expertise of language speakers, cultural knowledge holders, linguists and teachers - is expensive. Funding commitments that recognise this are paramount in order for Australian public schools to deliver effective Indigenous language programs that bring all the associated student participation, community engagement, well-being and reconciliation etc. outcomes.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

NATSIEC recommends that:

- 1. Governments in all jurisdictions resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to establish new Indigenous Language and Culture Centres within regions where there is an identified need.**
- 2. Australian governments significantly increase funding for Indigenous Language and Culture Centres, Indigenous Community Organisations and Vocational Education and Training Providers to support capacity to develop and deliver professional training in local Indigenous languages and pedagogy.**
- 3. Departments of Education, Education Ministers, Indigenous Language and Culture Centres and Universities in all jurisdictions work to support and establish further opportunities for qualification based training which leads to full teacher accreditation for Indigenous language teachers.**
- 4. In lieu of qualification based training opportunities outlined in recommendation three - Departments of Education in all jurisdictions work to develop alternative training and career progression pathways for Indigenous language teachers towards recognized teacher status such as has been achieved in the 'Limited Authority to Teach' Western Australian Department of Education Aboriginal Teacher Training example.**
- 5. The Australian Government Department of Education work with NATSIEC and Education Ministers in all jurisdictions to develop an ongoing database identifying language programs operating in each state and territory for the following purposes:**
  - a) to celebrate, support and promote the success of those schools/communities delivering language programs**
  - b) to provide a state/territory wide measurement/snapshot of Indigenous language programs in public schools**
  - c) to offer funding support for schools and Aboriginal communities implementing language programs to evaluate and improve their programs**
  - d) to monitor risk and support sustainability of programs when school leadership staff change or Indigenous language teachers leave their role with the school.**
- 6. Education Departments in all jurisdictions develop application processes and allocate specific ongoing funding for schools which have community endorsement to develop and deliver local Indigenous language programs.**



## 1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

### 1.1 NATSIEC

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council (NATSIEC – formerly Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies or IECBs) refers to the collective grouping of the six state and two territory members of NATSIEC. Across Australia, NATSIEC members include the peak community advocacy and advisory bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education within their jurisdictions, each being closely linked with local Aboriginal communities, particularly with community members working in and passionate about education. NATSIEC holds a specialist view in Indigenous education and training, having spent over 30 years representing grassroots views on what works and opportunities for improvement in the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around Australia. NATSIEC is also the most effective means through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be directly involved in the design, development and implementation of education policies and programs.

Since the IECBs (now NATSIEC) were defunded during the Tony Abbott government’s implementation of the much maligned Indigenous Advancement Strategy, an established independent national voice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has been non-existent.

A listing of current NATSIEC members is attached as Appendix 1

### 1.2 Background

This project emanated from the IECB’s advocacy for inclusion of a national independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based voice in educational decision making and policy development. During early 2016 the IECB Chairs met with the Federal Department of Education. As a result of this meeting, Michele Bruniges, Secretary Education, responded by organising and Chairing a formal biannual Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting (IECM) where federal education representatives could meet and discuss current educational matters with IECBs. During December 2018, Lyndal Groom, the Department of Education’s Branch Manager – Student Participation, discussed an opportunity for IECBs to lead a project documenting jurisdictional policy frameworks and strategies, as well as issues around the implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australian schools.

This report details *policy and practice* relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teaching and learning in Australian public schools. NATSIEC was also asked to complete a complimentary project around the Aboriginal Education Workforce. The report for that project is titled ‘*Policy and Practice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce in Australian Public Schools*’.





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## 1.3 Rationale

Prior to British invasion, over 250 different Indigenous languages were spoken in Australia (AIATSIS, 2019). Sadly, today, 250 years after invasion, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are considered at risk with many critically endangered (Marmion, Obata, & Troy, 2014).

Shortly after the British invaded and authorised the violent usurping of Aboriginal Countries, Australian education systems began to be established. Rather than acknowledging and valuing the existence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, languages, pedagogies and education systems, the Australian education system was established entirely through British cultural values and models of education.

Australian public schools became established on Aboriginal Countries during Australia's segregationist, paternalistic and assimilationist policy eras. During the past few hundred years they have been largely unwelcoming places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and have all but entirely neglected and devalued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures. Australian schools have often been described similarly to how Bamblett (2018) describes them, as *the battering rams of assimilation*.

It is concerning that in 2019, in terms of Indigenous education, senior educational decision makers continue to be primarily focussed upon deficits in Indigenous students' literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes. At the same time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to advocate the importance of an education which incorporates Indigenous languages and connects with and strengthens student's cultural identity. Indigenous community calls for a more culturally relevant education are supported in the writings of renowned educational theorist Jerome Bruner who once wrote

*A system of education must help those growing up in a culture find an identity within that culture. Without it, they stumble in their effort after meaning (Bruner, 1996: p42).*

However it appears that across Australia the vast majority of schools have been able to achieve little if anything in regards to connecting education with local Aboriginal culture. A recent large scale empirical research on Indigenous education which included more than 200 schools and 825 teachers across Australia found that out of a possible 1200 minutes of teaching time per week, Australian teachers were on average spending 5 minutes per week (or 0.4% of teaching time) teaching through or about Aboriginal education i.e. Indigenous cultures, languages, histories, literature, identities, perspectives etc. (Luke, Cazden, Coopes, Klenowski, Ladwig, Lester, MacDonald, Phillips, Shield, Spina, Theroux, Tones, Villegas, & Woods et al, 2013).

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australian public school education sends a strong message to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that their communities' languages and cultures are valued and respected. It also sends a strong message to all students and educators



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that we are all enriched by respecting, acknowledging and embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

This year, 2019, is the International year of Indigenous languages. The United Nations have called for governments to come together to promote and protect Indigenous languages and state that:

*“Languages play a crucial role in our daily lives. They are not only our first medium for communication, education and social integration, but are also at the heart of each person’s unique identity, cultural history and memory. The ongoing loss of indigenous languages is particularly devastating, as the complex knowledges and cultures they foster are increasingly being recognized as strategic resources for good governance, peacebuilding, reconciliation, and sustainable development. More importantly, such losses have huge negative impacts indigenous peoples’ most basic human rights”* (United Nations, 2019).

Currently across and within jurisdictions in Australia there is a wide range of variability in how Indigenous language teaching is supported and taught in public schools. There is also a range of complex issues associated with teaching Indigenous languages in schools, which continue to be problematic and largely unaddressed.

A documentation and assessment of current policy frameworks, strategies, conditions for success and issues and barriers associated with Indigenous language teaching and learning within each jurisdiction supports and furthers the Australian Government’s work towards *achieving better results for Indigenous Australians in three priority areas – getting children to school, adults into work, and building safe communities* (Australian Government, 2019).

## 1.4 Objectives

The objective of this project is to:

- Document current Department of Education policy frameworks concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teaching across jurisdictions
- Document and provide analysis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teacher (identified school based positions) roles and responsibilities and the issues, barriers and concerns associated with their work across jurisdictions within Australian public schools

## 1.5 Scope

The scope of this project is limited to what contributes to success and what impedes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teaching within Australian public schools across jurisdictions.

## 1.6 Governance

This project has been managed by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG) and governed by the eight state and territory Chairs of NATSIEC.



## 1.7 Methods

To achieve the objectives of the project within the brief project timeframe, NATSIEC agreed upon the following methods.

**Desktop research** - to identify, document and provide brief descriptions of each jurisdiction's current policies, initiatives and employment practices relating to Indigenous language teaching.

**Literature review** – to undertake a brief analysis of literature on Indigenous language teaching in Australian public schools to identify what contributes to success and what issues and barriers prevent success.

**Semi-structured interviews** – with NATSIEC Chairs and 2-3 NATSIEC nominated representatives within each jurisdiction.

*Note:* More information on methodology is provided at the introduction of each of the corresponding data sections.

## 1.8 Limitations

The potential of this project has been limited by a brief timeframe and limited funding. This project, along with the associated *Aboriginal Education Workers in Australian Public Schools* project, formally began on April 26 with both Final Reports to be completed prior to October 15. This timeframe and the funding attributed limited the possibility for comprehensive data collection and analysis of each State and Territory's policies and practices concerning Indigenous language teaching. The timeframe and limited funding meant that it was not possible to implement more appropriate methods such as face-to-face interviews, community workshops and yarning circles, and face to face consultations on the project and research findings.

## 2. IN POLICY – INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING

There are a wide range of policy frameworks and initiatives across jurisdictions that specifically refer to Indigenous language teaching in schools. This section provides a brief overview of some (not all) policies in each jurisdiction that directly refer to Indigenous language teaching and learning in public schools. With the knowledge that language and culture are inseparable concepts we have included policy frameworks and initiatives that refer to Indigenous culture in a manner which may promote opportunity for Indigenous language teaching to occur.



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## 2.1 National Policy Frameworks and Commitments

There are numerous overarching national policy frameworks and commitments which refer and/or relate to Indigenous language teaching. Some of the prominent and current policy frameworks and strategies which signal national commitments to Indigenous language teaching in schools include:

- *The National Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages*
- *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*
- *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*
- *The Indigenous Languages and Arts Program*
- *The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) collection*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the implementation of Indigenous language programs in schools, is tabled at Appendix 2

## 2.2 QLD Indigenous language policy and programs

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs in Queensland which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with Indigenous language program implementation in schools include:

- *The Department of Education - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement*
- *The Department of Education – 3 Way Strong language approach*
- *Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages Short Course Syllabus 2019*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages in Education Queensland Schools - A guide to implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Syllabuses*
- *The Indigenous Language Perspectives Team*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teaching, is tabled at Appendix 3.

## 2.3 NSW Indigenous language policy and programs

Some prominent NSW Department of Education and NSW AECG policies and programs which directly relate with Aboriginal language program implementation in schools include:

- *NSW Government – Opportunities Choice Healing Responsibility and Employment Strategy - Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests*
- *NSW Department of Education – Aboriginal Education Policy*
- *NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group – Healthy Culture Healthy Country Program*
- *NESA Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus*
- *The NSW Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*



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A brief description of each of the above, including the policy and program objectives/commitments relevant to Aboriginal language teaching is tabled at Appendix 4.

## 2.4 ACT Indigenous language policy and programs

The Australian Capital Territory is in a reclamation phase where the Ngunnawal language is currently being reclaimed by Ngunnawal community members. It has been mentioned that the community is currently working on language reclamation and are not yet ready for or may not wish for the language to be implemented in school programs. Currently some schools are teaching Wiradjuri language, which is a language group whose Country borders Ngunnawal. Whilst this is the current situation, the ACT Department of Education has policies and programs in place which may support the implementation of Ngunnawal language programs in the future. Some of these include:

- *ACT Department of Education: Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*
- *ACT Education Directorate: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to Aboriginal language teaching is tabled at Appendix 5.

## 2.5 VIC Indigenous language policy and programs

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in Victoria which directly relate with Indigenous language program implementation include:

- *Victorian Department of Education and Training - Marrung Aboriginal Education Action Plan 2016 -2026*
- *Koorie Languages in Schools Program*
- *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*
- *Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages*
- *Victorian School of Languages – Certificate III in Learning and Endangered Aboriginal Language*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to Koorie language teaching is tabled at Appendix 6.

## 2.6 TAS Indigenous language policy and programs

Tasmania is in a reclamation phase where local languages are currently being reclaimed and consideration is being given towards combining languages to form one language that covers Tasmania. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre has been leading work on language reclamation and are not yet ready or may not wish for the language to be implemented in school programs. Whilst this is the current situation the Tasmanian Department of Education does have policies and programs in place which might support the implementation of Palawa kani language programs in the future. Some of these include:



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- *Tasmania's Aboriginal Education Framework*
- *Tasmanian Government: Resetting the relationship with the Aboriginal community*
- *Aboriginal Sharers of Knowledge program*
- *Aboriginal Education Services – The Orb*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to Aboriginal language teaching is tabled at Appendix 7.

## **2.7 SA Indigenous language policy and programs**

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in South Australia which directly relate with Aboriginal language program implementation include:

- *The Aboriginal Education Strategy (2019 – 2029)*
- *Aboriginal Schools*
- *Aboriginal community voice*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to Aboriginal language teaching, is tabled at Appendix 8.

## **2.8 WA Indigenous language policy and programs**

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in Western Australia which directly relate with Aboriginal language program implementation include:

- *Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework*
- *Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to Aboriginal language teaching is tabled at Appendix 9.

## **2.9 NT Indigenous language policy and programs**

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in the Northern Territory which directly relate with Aboriginal language program implementation include:

- *Indigenous Education Strategy: 2015–2024*
- *Keeping Indigenous Languages and Cultures Strong – A Plan for Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages and Cultures in the Northern Territory*
- *The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to Aboriginal language teaching, is tabled at Appendix 10.



## 3. IN PRACTICE – INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This section sheds light on how Indigenous language teaching programs are implemented within Australian public schools. A brief literature review along with 23 open ended interviews were undertaken to inform this section.

### 3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides a short background on the teaching of Indigenous languages in Australian public schools along with an illustration of common themes within the literature around *'what contributes to success for'*, and *'what issues and barriers work against'* the teaching of Indigenous languages in Australian public schools. Analysis and discussion of the literature reviewed, along with the interview and policy data sourced through this project, is provided in the Discussion section 4.

The literature we reviewed was sourced through entering the following search terms through online university library databases: 'Aboriginal language education'; 'Aboriginal language teaching'; 'Torres Strait Islander language education'; 'Torres Strait Islander language teaching'; 'Indigenous language education'; 'Indigenous language teaching'. To source additional references NATSIEC Chairs and academics with relevant expertise provided the reviewer with suggestions of publications relevant to this research.

## INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Prior to British invasion more than 250 distinct languages consisting of some 600 plus dialects existed and flourished across the continent of Australia. During Australia's racist protectionist and assimilationist eras Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were subjected to living in government reserves where they were forced to speak English and forbidden to speak Indigenous languages (Tatz, 1999). Today, less than 250 years on, only 13 Indigenous languages are actively spoken and acquired by children as their first language (AIATSIS, 2019). All Indigenous Australian languages are currently viewed as at risk (Marmion, Obata & Troy, 2014).

Only recently have Australian public schools been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver Indigenous language programs. There is a wide range of local language contexts in which school programs are being delivered. These contexts have been broadly framed as:

- ***"First Language Maintenance"*** - A language is used daily by a sizeable speech community and so can be incorporated into children's schooling



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- **Second Language Learning** - A strong language is taught to a wide range of learners in the Languages area of learning — in much the same way as non-Indigenous languages are
- **Language Revival, and its sub-types:**

*Revitalisation* - A language still spoken by the older generation needs special support for it to be transmitted to the younger generations

*Renewal* - A language is no longer spoken 'right through' by anyone, but enough knowledge exists to form a language learning programme

*Reclamation* - There has been a complete break in the transmission of the spoken language, but there is sufficient evidence (e.g., historical records, related languages) for language reconstruction and learning

*Language Awareness* - The little bits that are known about a language can be incorporated into another area of learning (e.g., Society and Environment), but are not enough for sustained language learning" (SSABSA, 1996a).

To date the Northern Territory's Bilingual Program has been cited as the most consistent long lasting language program delivered through Australian public schools. It was delivered in around twenty-five Northern Territory schools from 1974 and continued relatively unabated until 1998 when the Country Liberal Party government in the Northern Territory made a decision to progressively withdraw the program in favour of further developing English as a Second Language programs. The Bilingual Program was formally ended in all schools by 2008 (Disbray, Raghunathan, & Baisden, 2018). However in some places, resistance to this unwanted government led change, meant that bi-lingual programs continued in certain schools for some time (ABC News, 2012).

Outside of the Northern Territory and some schools in the mid-West region of Western Australia there is little evidence to suggest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language programs have been instituted in a comprehensive manner or delivered over a long term period within Australian public schools (Purdie; Frigo; Ozolins; Noblett; Thieberger; & Sharp, 2008; Elefsiniotis, 2019)

There are some recent examples however, which indicate significant boosts in support for instituting Aboriginal language revival programs within public schools. Initiatives such as the *Koorie Languages in Schools* and the *Koorie Languages and Culture Program* have been successful in increasing programs within Victorian public schools. These programs were established as a result of collaborative partnership between the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL), the Victorian Department of Education and the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority. Recent Victorian Education "*Department figures show that a record 1867 state school students were enrolled in Aboriginal languages last year, up from just 23 students in 2011*" (VAEAI, 2015; The Age, 2019). In 2013, after the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW AECG) coordinated a series of Aboriginal Language Forums at locations across NSW the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests became a part of the NSW Government's Plan





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for Aboriginal Affairs, OCHRE (NSW AECG, 2016). By 2017 *three Aboriginal languages appeared in the top 15 languages studied in NSW government primary schools for the first time... with 3,236 students learning Wiradjuri, which is now taught more than Korean, Spanish, Indonesian and Hindi. There were also 1,294 students across the state learning Gumbaynggirr and 962 learning Bundjalung.* (SMH, 2018). There have also been a range of other recent policy and program developments across jurisdictions, which are outlined in section 2 of this report.

## **3.1.1 WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO SUCCESS FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING?**

There are some clear examples of successful Indigenous language program development and implementation in Australian public schools. Purdie et al, 2008 provide comprehensive case studies on six examples of such programs. The findings in the case studies Purdie et al documented are supported with similar findings of projects and research within the literature we reviewed. Below is a listing and brief description of commonly found themes within the literature we reviewed regarding *what contributes to success* for implementing Indigenous language programs in Australian public schools.

## **ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND CONTROL**

one of the most prevalent themes in the literature regarding the establishment of Indigenous language programs in schools is the importance of Aboriginal community control of the program (Williams, 2013; Hobson, Lowe, Poetsch & Walsh, 2010; Walsh, 2005; Smith, Giacom & McLean, 2018; Purdie et al, 2008). The literature specifically highlights the importance of schools consulting with local Aboriginal Elders and community to get consensus on important fundamentals for program development such as: *why should the school deliver a language program; what do they want to achieve with the language program; which language should be taught; who can teach; what can and will be taught* etc. (Williams, 2013; Purdie et al, 2008; VAEAI, 2015; Amery & Gale, 2008).

## **RESOURCES AND FUNDING**

The literature clearly indicates that for Indigenous language maintenance, revitalization and reclamation programs to be successful in Australian schools appropriate resource and funding considerations are required. It is widely acknowledged that establishing local Indigenous language programs can be more resource intensive than establishing other language programs due to several reasons. For example, the languages are traditionally oral rather than written languages. Therefore there is a massive shortage of written teaching and learning resources such as books, dictionaries, programs etc. available for schools to use.

Additionally the literature over the past three decades highlights the need for programs to be developed and implemented in a 'two-way' collaborative approach where the skills of Indigenous



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language speakers and cultural knowledge holders, teachers/school program writers, linguists and in some cases researchers are utilized (Purdie et al, 2008; Henderson, 1994).

In terms of the massive amount of work that needs to be done, the literature identifies schools, state and territory education departments and governments as institutions which are grossly underfunding Indigenous language programs for schools (Henderson, 1994 p243; Mahboob, Jacobsen, Kemble & Xu, 2017).

## **INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE CENTRES**

Indigenous Language and Culture Centres are identified as invaluable resources that, in many cases, support public schools in establishing and teaching Indigenous language programs. Schools have achieved success with language program development and implementation through developing partnerships with community controlled Aboriginal language centres. The Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative is one among several Indigenous Language Centres identified in the literature as fundamental to the development of local Indigenous language programs for schools. In addition to providing language teachers and tutors, language centres support teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in schools through a wide range of ways including:

- Developing and delivering accredited language training for local community to increase numbers of language speakers and language teachers
- Developing and sharing local language teaching and learning resources
- Supporting the development and implementation of language programs (Purdie et al, 2008).

**PROFESSIONAL TRAINING** – Some universities, departments of education and TAFE institutions are delivering professional accredited training in Indigenous languages which support language teachers' professional development and confidence in delivering programs within schools. Some of these professional training providers, as mentioned in the literature, are outlined below.

1. **Western Australia Department of Education** offers a course titled Aboriginal languages teacher training. The Department states that *In order to meet the continued demand for Aboriginal languages teachers, the Department provides a training course for Aboriginal staff of the Department who are speakers of an Aboriginal language... This is an in-school traineeship and the course incorporates language revival/maintenance strategies, language teaching methodology and current resources for the teaching of Aboriginal languages* (Western Australian Department of Education, 2016).

2. **University of Sydney** offers a Masters of Indigenous Languages Education. The University states that the course is *developed specifically for Indigenous Australian participants...designed to improve your knowledge of Indigenous Australian languages and enhance your employability in the field. The program delivers a broad knowledge of the linguistic features of Indigenous Australian languages as*



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*well as covering theories of language acquisition and learning. It integrates and applies the areas of linguistics, language education theory and practice to Indigenous Australian languages. (University of Sydney, 2019)*

**3. The Batchelor Institute** offers a *Diploma of Indigenous Language Work, an Associate Degree of Indigenous Languages and Linguistics and a Bachelor of Indigenous Languages and Linguistic under the Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University partnership.* (Batchelor Institute, 2019)

**4. TAFE Institutions** in NSW (and possibly some other jurisdictions) offer Certificates I, II and III in Aboriginal Languages. TAFE NSW Courses are focused on 'language revitalization and maintenance for current and future generations' and include: Cert I in Fundamental Aboriginal Languages for Personal Use; Cert II in Basic Aboriginal Languages for Social Use; Cert III in Aboriginal Languages for Community Use (NSW TAFE, 2019).

**5. Victorian School of Languages** implements a Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language which is a Department of Education and Training funded pilot course delivered in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI). VAEAI has highlighted that the *Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language is for Aboriginal participants only, targeting their own heritage language. The course gives learners the tools and linguistic skills to study their own heritage language through an exploration of published and unpublished materials related to their heritage language, and own-community engagement...Certificate IV in Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language is currently in development* (VAEAI, 2019).

Training opportunities such as these are vital for increasing employment opportunities for Aboriginal language educators and increasing potential for the development of successful Indigenous language programs for public schools. However the literature also points out that there are relatively few accredited training courses in Aboriginal languages (Hobson, 2014; Parliament of Australia, 2011).

In addition to the importance of professional training for Aboriginal communities to maintain, revitalize and reclaim languages within schools, there is equally a need for non-Aboriginal staff to undertake training to develop their capacity as well (Henderson, 1994).

Williams (2014, p3) illustrates that this is required to ensure non-Aboriginal staff don't undermine the integrity of Aboriginal teaching and learning programs within public schools.

*"staff involved in developing and delivering local NSW Aboriginal language/culture programs should familiarize themselves with foundational Aboriginal knowledge frameworks, contemporary Aboriginal cultural contexts and the fundamentals of Aboriginal cultural health and well-being...without sufficient understanding of these key facets...staff may easily*



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*misinterpret cultural dynamics of Aboriginal being, and in doing so significantly compromise the integrity of language and culture programming.”*

## **LEADERSHIP SUPPORT**

Leadership and support from school principals is highlighted as a key element for success throughout the literature on Indigenous language programs in schools. Some of the supporting practices of principals within the literature include:

- allocating time and funding for the development of local language and culture teaching and learning resources
- allocating time and funding for community control including consultation, endorsement and engagement with the language program
- supporting the use of culturally appropriate Indigenous teaching methods such as teaching and learning of language on Country
- providing a dedicated facility/room for local Indigenous language/culture classes and resource development workshops etc.
- supporting the need for collaborative working partnerships between school staff and Aboriginal language teachers and cultural knowledge holders, and, if required linguists and researchers (Henderson, 1994; Purdie et al, 2008 p153; Amery & Gale, 2008; NSW AECG , 2016; VAEAI, 2018).

## **OVERARCHING POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

Policy frameworks were commonly cited within the literature we reviewed as supporting the establishment and implementation of Indigenous language programs in schools. Some of the current policy frameworks cited included:

- the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Framework
- The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum
- NSW Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests
- NSW Education Standards Authority Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus
- The Koorie Language in Schools Program
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015
- Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - particularly article 14



## **TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH CULTURE**

There are numerous statements within the literature we reviewed which highlighted that language is inseparable from culture and the importance for Australian school programs to recognize this. Indigenous pedagogies such as teaching on and through Country are viewed as necessary to ensure Indigenous concepts are learnt in a meaningful and contextually relevant way. (Purdie et al, 2008 p165; Henderson, 1994; Williams, 2014).

## **WORKING COLLABORATIONS**

Respectful ‘two-way’ working collaborations between, for example, Aboriginal language teachers, community and cultural knowledge holders, linguists and school teachers and designers (for teaching and learning resource developments) is cited as necessary for the development and implementation of effective Indigenous language programs (Henderson, 1994; Purdie et al, 2008; Amery & Gale, 2008). The case studies of Purdie et al (2008, p162, 165) state that

*the teamwork relationship, between Balanda and Yolngu remains critical at all levels... Shepardson College is highly aware that the success of its programme depend on the effectiveness of the working relationship that is evident between teachers and teacher assistants.*

The importance of working collaborations being ‘respectful’ and ‘two-way’ is recognized in Henderson (1994, p7) as vitally important for developing a language program with shared and understood goals.

*goals are often not clear and are not always understood in the same way by all the people involved. This is not surprising when the speakers of the language often don't have very much experience in school teaching and teachers, principals and administrators often don't know much about the language or the culture or don't have much specialist experience in language teaching.*

Purdie et al's (2008, p162) *Figure 7.2 Teamwork in Bilingual Schools* (see below) based on the case study of the successful Yolngu language program at Shepardson College illustrates some of the fundamentals upon which ‘two-way’ partnerships can be formed between school teachers and Indigenous language speakers/cultural knowledge holders.

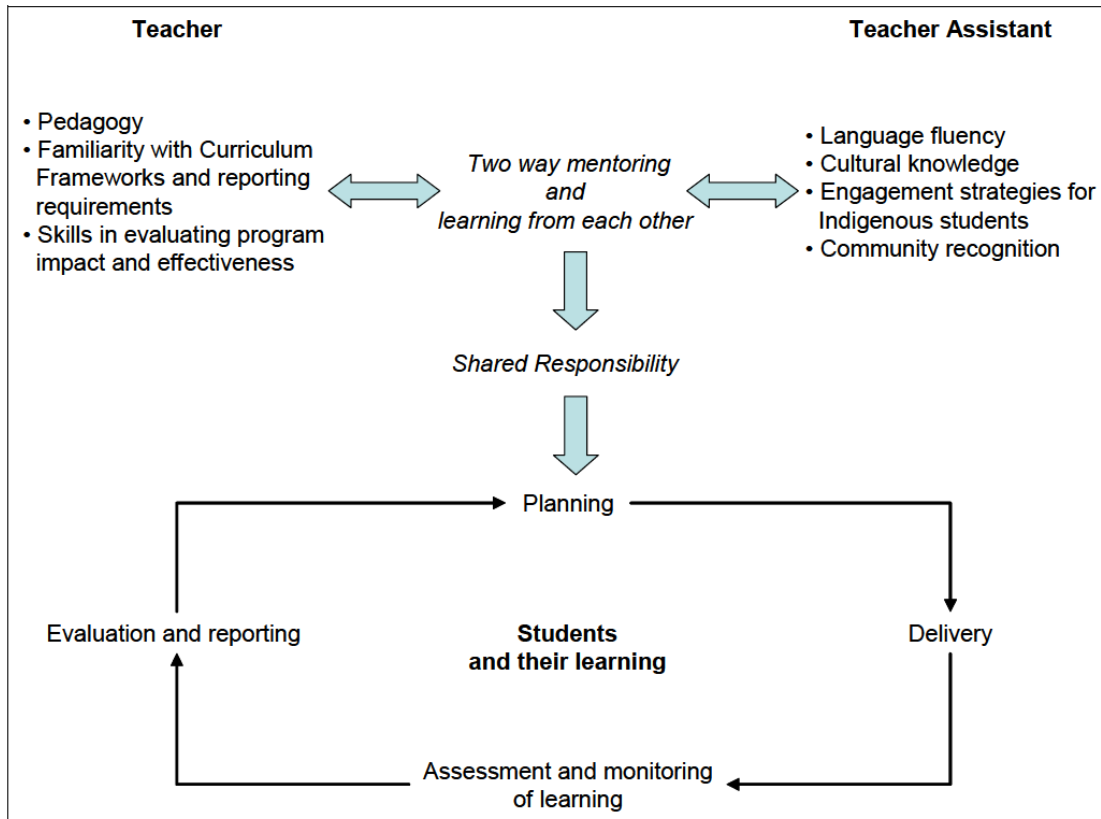


Figure 7.2 from Purdie et al (2008)

### 3.1.2 WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AND BARRIERS IMPEDING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING?

The literature sourced for this review presented very clear messages around prevalent barriers and issues that impede establishing and implementing effective Indigenous language programs in Australian public schools. These themes have been gleaned from a relatively brief review of the literature and therefore should not be considered as a comprehensive representation of the issues and barriers associated with implementing Indigenous language programs in public schools.

#### **LACK OF RELEVANT TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Across the country there are severely limited training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers to obtain training and qualifications that will provide them with



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professional development and appropriate recognition for their role in public schools. Purdie et al's (2008, p119) comprehensive review of *Indigenous Languages Programs in Australian Schools* found

*a paucity in professional learning opportunities for Indigenous languages teachers – opportunities to develop both their language and pedagogical skills.*

This is despite the need for training being constantly cited as crucial in relevant literature for several decades (Henderson, 1994 p241; Hobson, 2014).

Furthermore, in regards to qualification based training it appears that across the country 'Indigenous language teachers' have little or no option to be formally recognized as a 'teacher' within public schools. Aside from the Western Australian Department of Education's Aboriginal languages teacher training, the 2012 *Our Land Our Languages* report on the inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities tabled by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs illustrated that there is

*no entry-level teacher qualification that has national recognition for appointment to a designated language teacher position in a school" (Parliament of Australia, 2011).*

## **SHORTAGE OF EXPERTISE WITHIN SCHOOLS AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

The literature on Indigenous language teaching in schools commonly refers to limitations in human capacity to effectively deliver Indigenous language programs. Henderson (1994, p6) illustrates this by stating that there are no Aboriginal languages which have had a history of formal school based teaching, therefore standard methods of teaching and teaching materials have not had the same time to develop as say for French language teaching. Henderson further highlights that

*teachers, principals and administrators often don't know much about the language or culture or don't have much specialist experience in language teaching" and that speakers of an Aboriginal language "often don't have very much experience in school teaching" (p7).*

In terms of school staff Williams also points out there is often a lack of expertise in working with and understanding Aboriginal cultures and states that this needs to be addressed prior to establishing Aboriginal programs to ensure programs aren't undermined (Williams, 2013).

The complexities around lack of expertise in both school staff and local Aboriginal community are further pointed out by Amery and Gale (2008) who highlight examples of language programs being developed and implemented entirely from an English standpoint and/or with very little knowledge of the language and/or language teaching skills.



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Purdie et al's (2008, p153) comprehensive review illustrates the serious risk to sustainability that the shortages of expertise poses to Indigenous language programs in schools across all jurisdictions in Australia. They stated that it was frequently noted in all States and Territories

*that the success of the program is so often dependent on the hard work of one person or a small group of dedicated people on the ground.*

## **RESISTANCE AGAINST IMPLEMENTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS**

The relevant literature identifies a range of complex issues referring to a resistance against the implementation of Indigenous language programs in schools. These include:

**The persistence of discriminatory assimilationist ideologies** - within Australian schools and communities there appears to be an ongoing powerful push against the implementation of Indigenous language and culture programs. Purdie et al's case study of a successful school Indigenous language program (2008, p145) noted that

*While the Indigenous language program in the school is undoubtedly well organized and well taught, it nevertheless struggles for legitimacy with some parents and staff questioning the need for the program to be offered.*

Often the undertones accompanying this resistance resonate with the discriminatory paternalistic and assimilationist ideologies which informed Australian policy prior to the 1970s. During the drafting of this report community discussion in the letters section of the Sydney Morning Herald (14/06/2019) included several comments illustrating a scathing disregard for the value of Indigenous languages.

*Your correspondent opines that the teaching of Indigenous dialects 'might be at least useful for living in contemporary Australia'. Perhaps, but it's difficult to see how learning such language might halt the apparent decline of standards in English, our mother tongue, among the young in this country. Greg Partington, Quakers Hill.*

And late in 2018, Tony Abbott after being appointed by the Morrison Government as special envoy for Indigenous affairs also showed resistance to giving value and importance to Indigenous language programs in remote schools.

*It all starts with learning to how to read, to write, to count and to think in the national language (Sky News, 2018).*





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Generally, as was the case for those in power who removed the bi-lingual program in the Northern Territory, the resistance against Indigenous language programs in schools is accompanied by the misconceived reasoning that English literacy, numeracy and attendance are of utmost importance and that by achieving in these areas Aboriginal communities will achieve improvements in other outcomes such as health and employment (Simpson, Caffery & McConvell, 2009). However Kostogriz (2011) argues that this reasoning fails to address the complexities of identity, language and power relationships in education. Kostogriz (2011, p25) further argues that

*efforts to ameliorate the performance of Aboriginal students by attempts to raise their literacy levels have not improved matters much because they did not address a set of larger social, cultural and linguistic issues.*

Yalmay Yunupingu's concern resonates with Kostogriz's contention that a focus on English literacy without recognizing the importance of Indigenous language will not be effective and likely very counterproductive.

*The decision to make English the only important language in our schools will only make the situation for our young people worse as they struggle to be proud Yolŋu in a world that is making them feel their culture is bad, unimportant and irrelevant in the contemporary world.*  
(Yunupingu, Y. in Simpson et al, 2009)

**Community concerns about schools delivering Language programs** – The literature also indicated that some communities are divided or not in favour of their local schools delivering language programs. Walsh, (2005, p5) identified that in 1991 the Gumbaynggirr community clearly pointed out that schools need not be the primary place where language is taught.

*we have learnt that schools are only good as back-ups; they are not the first place where culture is taught* (From McKay, 1996 in Walsh, 2005)

Walsh (2005 p5) further explains reasons behind Aboriginal community resistance to language programs in schools in quoting the following from Johnson

*...the school is usually a major non-Aboriginal organization in a community [referring especially to northern Australia] and its way of working are alien to Aboriginal society. It is probably the major instrument of assimilation at work and as such acts as an agent of the outside government and society....the fate of language is very closely bound up with that of local control and understanding of educational goals, and language maintenance must include this as one of its basic aims.*



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Williams (2011, p96) also points out community resistance to supporting schools implement language programs by saying

*many of us say that State mainstream education should not envelop our languages and cultures; that our cultural education is solely our business. The tenor of this opposition can be found in the words of Pearson, who Purdie et al. quoted as saying categorically that:*

*'Schools are not the places for cultural and linguistic transmission, and we must stop looking to schools to save our languages. This is because the primary purpose of schools is for our children to obtain a mainstream, Western education, including full fluency in English.'*

## **INSUFFICIENT FUNDING AND RESOURCES**

References to inadequate funding and a lack of resources for language programs were throughout the literature we reviewed (Henderson, 1994; Mahboob et al, 2017; Smith et al, 2018; NSW AECG 2016; Parliament of Australia, 2011; Marmion et al, 2014). While there is some evidence that funding for language revitalization projects has increased, there appears to be little evidence showing equivalent substantial funding increases for school based language programs (Amery &Gale, 2008).

The National Indigenous Languages Survey report, published in 2014, found that

*only one state government, New South Wales, has dedicated ongoing statewide funding to traditional languages (Marmion et al, 2014).*

In their submission to the Australian Parliament's inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Communities recognised several issues relevant to insufficient funding:

*There is no acknowledgment of prior learning for the significant cultural knowledge that these language speakers bring into the classroom. The lack of an adequate wage for community language teachers is compounded by insecurity of employment, with a lack of permanency in language teaching positions. Standard employment conditions such as sick leave entitlements and professional training are not accessible for community language teachers (Parliament of Australia, 2011).*

There are many other mentions across the literature which indicate insufficient funding is being attributed to language maintenance, revitalisation and reclamation in all jurisdictions. Many have referenced the links between language programs and improvements to positive identity formation and wellbeing outcomes in stressing the urgent need for governments to increase funding support.



In terms of resources the literature, as was noted earlier in this report, identifies that Australia’s Indigenous languages have traditionally been oral languages and that there has only been a short history of teaching Indigenous languages in schools in Australia (Henderson, 1994). The literature also notes the significant number of languages across Australia as a factor which naturally impedes widespread sharing of resources that have been developed (Parliament of Australia, 2011; Marmion et al, 2014).

### 3.2 NATSIEC CONSULTATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

The NATSIEC consultation and interview process was conducted during the months of May, June and July. Phone and face to face interviews were undertaken with all of the six state and two territory NATSIEC representatives. Each NATSIEC member was also asked to nominate additional representatives for interview. As identified in the limitations section, the short project timeframe limited potential for a more comprehensive consultation and interview process. The table below provides a breakdown of interviews conducted in each state/territory.

STATE/TERRITORY	Interviewees contributing to this report	Total
NSW	NATSIEC Chair, four Aboriginal language tutors, one Aboriginal language and culture nest project officer	6
ACT	NATSIEC Chair, one Indigenous Language Teacher, one AEW	3
VIC	NATSIEC Chair, four Koori language teachers, one senior project officer - Koori languages and curriculum	6
TAS	NATSIEC Chair	1
SA	NATSIEC Chair, one Indigenous Language teacher	2
WA	NATSIEC Chair	1
NT	NATSIEC Chair, one AEW, one former school principal	3
QLD	NATSIEC Chair	1
<b>All States and Territories</b>		<b>23</b>

*Note: All NATSIEC Chairs have worked towards promoting Indigenous language teaching in public schools within their jurisdictions over a long period of time.*

Interviews included a set of broad open ended questions based on the project objectives. The interview questions are attached as Appendix 11. The 23 interviewee responses were transcribed and returned to interviewees for accuracy checking. The interview data was then coded into themes, documented and resent to interview participants for comment and input.



NATSIEC reiterates that, with adequate funding and additional time, methods such as: face to face consultations; workshops; yarning circles; etc. would have been possible. We acknowledge this limitation in regards to the following findings.

The findings below document the consistent messages sourced through the interviews. Analysis and discussion of the interview data, along with the other data sourced through this project, is provided in the Discussion section 4.

Interviews were conducted with NATSIEC members and their nominated representatives from each state and territory. Therefore the findings around success, and barriers and issues reflect contextual and institutional differences across the states and territories.

## **THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

Aside from THE contributors to success and barriers and issues involved with Indigenous language teaching and learning, participants shared strong insights into the vital importance of Indigenous language teaching and learning in Australia. These included:

*"I just think it's really important for Aboriginal kids so they can be themselves and make that connection...they can then reconnect. A lot of them still have that shame. I feel a lot of the non-Indigenous kids they just love it too, and then when our kids see them loving it, it makes them drop some of that shame."*

*"Something you can't put a figure on is when you see the kids downtown, they come up and talk to you in language. Their parent comes and asks 'are you teaching language?' And they're happy with what we are doing, it's a proud feeling."*

*"They stopped bilingual teaching in remote communities. In these places language and culture is identity and if you can't learn your language first you can't take your place in the universe."*

*"It's an important point to make that some things in the Aboriginal dictionary aren't in the English dictionary...Aboriginal cultural concepts that don't translate into English. This means that if you stop teaching languages you risk losing this part of culture and identity."*

*"I feel it's important to me because we need to revive that language just to instill the culture back into the young kids and give them a sense of pride about who they are."*



## 3.2.1 WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO SUCCESS FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING?

Several common themes arose in the interviews around what contributes to success for Indigenous language teaching and learning. The most prevalent themes are listed below.

### LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

78% of participants specifically indicated that leadership and support from local Aboriginal communities and Elders and school staff was vital in implementing a successful Indigenous language program. Some of the comments regarding the importance of leadership and support included:

#### COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

*"The Elders I was working with, this made me feel good. The encouragement they gave made me feel good."*

*"I think when it's taught with the support from the local Koorie community and with support within school structures, governance and leadership then this contributes to success. When that support is not there it can be counterproductive where a Koorie language teacher gets burnt out, not listened to and has to walk out on a program."*

*"We spoke to local Elders and got their permission and support to start the program."*

*"We are lucky the NSW AECG came along. They took over us tutors' employment. We went from struggle street and now we get support. And we get to see each other now, we're like family not a workforce now... We was making resources in our own time and not getting paid. A lot of the work was being done at home, making the resources and now we've come to the NSW AECG who have given us stability to continue doing what we love to do and making a living out of it."*

#### SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

*"Principals can provide the space like specific language classrooms as well as the resources such as materials and also resources such as community people - both bringing community into school and also being flexible to support the need to be*



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*taking kids out on Country because language is much more than just language, it's about connecting to Country, it's all about the mob, it's about culture."*

*"My Principal allowed me to go out and meet with other community members to talk about what they've been doing in their schools and gives me opportunities to go to (professional) training – to talk with Elders and (Aboriginal) organisations about the program. My Principal also gives me time release to do this engagement – she is very supportive of language and culture."*

*"Unless there is leadership support to explore and develop best practice programs, then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language programs generally don't go anywhere."*

*"I am getting tremendous support which started with the school's leadership team including the Principal and the Deputy Principal. Support for language teaching in this school goes up all the way to the Director General, she has come to watch our Connecting to Country classes."*

*"Koorie teachers often talk about how supportive a principal is – for example if a school is supportive they might dedicate a specific language classroom – in a school that is not supportive you'll have language teachers lugging around their resources traipsing from classroom to classroom."*

School Principals were identified as important for supporting teaching and learning on Country.

*"I've taught on Country with kids – there is a big difference when kids are on Country. They're asking 'what's this? What's that?' They're in context and at the same time you're also able to be giving culture, explaining middens for example, and give a history lesson too about what was happening on this Country and when. You can give all this information – it makes it interactive and makes the kids want to learn more because its more interactive – they're seeing and feeling and they can get a sense of connecting to Country."*

School Principals were also mentioned in terms of supporting professional development opportunities for language teachers.

*"A principal allows a language teacher to do Professional Development (PD) work and work with (Aboriginal) organisations to build resources and network etc. If they're*



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*not supported by their principal or the principal views it as a 'lesser' sort of program, then the program lags and flounders – if principal is behind it, it is much more successful.”*

*“Where training and career development is provided staff will actively get involved in the teaching and learning and programming and use their language and culture knowledge in a productive way in the school.”*

*“Reflecting on PD opportunities for those teachers – where Principals support teachers to get ongoing PD, this could be going to local community language workshops or attending national Pullima conference – giving the support for this is very important for success.”*

## SCHOOL STAFF SUPPORT

*“When I went back to my home town and worked in the school, I had the KESO (Koorie Education Support Officer) working there who I knew and when I went to another school I had the same, there was a KESO working there too so I felt comfortable. But when you're on your own in schools, as a Koorie you feel isolated...There is a need to ensure that somewhere in schools KESOs are on site on a regular basis so Koorie language educators have a connection – if Koorie language educators have a good support network around them they will continue – if not they're more likely to leave, especially the younger Koorie's starting out. Those who are strong with identity and connected in community they can do it hands down.”*

*“The school's teachers have Koorie word walls in their classroom, displaying local language, the whole staff are helping with reinforcing the language in their classrooms...If I need resources I can reach out to my KESO and he'll bring the resources and he'll come into the cultural lesson.”*

*“I was given time to present on the language teaching during staff meetings and share the language, outcomes and opportunities...the whole school came on board with the language teaching and learning, for example when other teachers started to learn parts of the language and take it back into their subject areas, their teaching and learning.”*

*“There has to be encouragement and support in a lot of ways: schools and school staff need to work to support language teachers in meeting the requirements of the*



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*workplace given their family situations and responsibilities; schools need to recognise the demands of family and ceremony – the thing about ceremony is it is the equivalent of access to a university. Just to be able to go and hear and participate is part of your progression as a person in that community, it is also important for kids to be there.”*

## **COMMUNITY PROTOCOLS AND OVERARCHING POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

74% of participants indicated that community protocols and/or overarching policy frameworks supported their successful initiation and implementation of language programs. Some of the comments referring to this theme included:

*“You have to follow protocols – non Indigenous people that are the teachers have to have a Koorie person doing the language with them – this is protocol and also respect. Non-Indigenous teachers need to show respect – for example to always ask Koorie language teachers what is appropriate, what protocols they should follow etc. If any non-Indigenous person is going to be teaching language they need approvals first. Schools as a whole also have to take responsibility to follow Koorie language and culture protocols.”*

*“During the 90’s there was a national initiative called ‘statements and profiles’ which supported the development of a Pitjantjatjara curriculum framework. I was able to access this and it was very helpful.”*

*“The Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages is one of just 16 curriculum documents prepared for languages under the Australian Curriculum. This is great profiling at the national level for these languages and will help stimulate the provision of appropriate professional development.”*

*“This is a process that is undergoing the appropriate protocols...as has happened across Australia, Ngunnawal people were taken off Country... So what I’m aware of is that once the level of language is built amongst the Ngunnawal community then Ngunnawal people will be given opportunities to come into schools and begin teaching Ngunnawal language. A lot of teachers want to teach it and the Department wants it done, but it is now needed that community put in place the correct protocols so that this can be done properly.”*





## 3.2.2 WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AND BARRIERS IMPEDING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING?

The interviews sourced a raft of commonly cited issues and barriers that Indigenous language teachers face in their role in schools. The most prevalent themes are listed below.

### UNSUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

65% of participants specifically indicated that Principals, Education Department Secretaries and Education Ministers can be unsupportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teaching and learning. Comments regarding this theme included:

*“Leadership is a significant barrier and it is important to state this is not simply about school leadership either, it goes all the way up the institution to Deputy Secretaries – Secretaries and the Minister. Everyone across the board needs to be familiar, on the same page and understand what we are dealing with and what is needed. Those sitting at the highest levels in the State’s education department right down to a school principal and leadership staff because for example, if a Principal is devaluing and blocking the development and implementation of Indigenous language programs in their school, those who are senior to that principal need to step in and enforce change. We need all levels to be supporting us as the issues in implementation are system wide and leaders need to stand there and say ‘this is going to happen’.”*

*“I felt good teaching Pitjantjatjara language in the school but it was hard work because I was asked to do the teaching during NIT Non Instructional Time which meant the students were often not mentally prepared and ready for learning and didn’t see the course as something the school valued.”*

*“If they had a proper setup for example an actual language class in the school that would have been good. But I was given a corner in the library or had to share half a classroom while another teacher was teaching.”*

*“There is a lot of ignorance and lack of recognition which then links to language teachers being underpaid, under celebrated for what they are actually doing...There’s a lack of assistance in building up the skill base so that people can be recognised professionally for what they are doing.”*

*“You can have a supportive principal who helps and respects and values but then you can have another principal comes along and then the program just drops.”*



## **INADEQUATE RESOURCING – HUMAN, FUNDING AND TEACHING AND LEARNING**

74% of participants indicated that limitations in regards to either human, teaching and learning, and/or funding resources created significant barriers to teaching and learning Indigenous languages in schools. Some of the comments participants made in regards to this included:

*“There’s not enough work going into growing our own local Aboriginal teachers in communities.”*

*“This is hard because of the lack of (teaching and learning) resources – with other subjects you can go online and everything’s there for you... and funding, it’s important to pay someone to come in and share their knowledge, it’s about valuing the cultural knowledge.”*

*“The amount of human and material resources attributed to Aboriginal language teaching is also a barrier. There’s not enough teachers who can teach and not enough funding put out to make it a valuable career...not many language teachers are actually qualified teachers themselves and there is no structure in place like there is for Aboriginal Education Workers such as the Award that was brought in...one language teacher would have easily been at level 5 AEW who, until she finished, was only being paid at the equivalent of a minimum wage for an AEW.”*

*“Schools don’t get enough money. Even though schools have curriculum to do it Government doesn’t give enough money to get Indigenous people in to go and teach this so the schools just don’t do it. This is a shame because with our kids and our mob all we want is for our language and culture to be passed down and schools are crying out for this too.”*

*“There’s a lack of resources and funding made available to develop and deliver language programs.”*

*“One of biggest barriers is resources, local language resources.”*



## **CULTURAL BIAS TOWARD WESTERN EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS AND THE DEVALUING OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

48% of participants indicated difficulties associated with the cultural bias towards Western educational standards within schools and the devaluing of Indigenous language and culture in schools. Some of the comments relating to this included:

*“You’re teaching in the classroom so you had to follow the school protocols but when you’re teaching culture you want to be out on Country and you want community to come in and be involved because you’re teaching culture as well and that makes it hard.”*

*“I enjoyed doing it but like with a lot of Aboriginal language teachers we didn’t have professional training, like we didn’t go to university so it was a bit overwhelming teaching it at school, I felt not sort of good enough you know. The expectations. The system expects you’re proficient at it and coming from a university point of view. Those expectations are based on the standards set in the education system and those expectations then come from the other staff in the school.”*

*“The major barrier is that this sort of work is not easy for the majority mainstream. And when it’s not easy and familiar then it won’t get done properly at all...unless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed and resourced properly to do this work and make this work easier for the mainstream culture to understand, value and engage with, then nothing will happen.”*

*“What we come up against is a lot of people, many of whom are supportive, many of whom are not so supportive and then many who are actively opposing what we are trying to do... there’s a Western ideology and focus that is ever present and overwhelming within schools that counteracts against the delivery of for example a stand-alone Aboriginal cultural curriculum.”*

*“One of the things about the use and teaching of local language – there needs to be an understanding that oracy is the way people hand on their knowledge. Writing is a whitefella idea. Even if whitefellas value the local language they often want it written down, whereas the first step is oracy which is the fundamental foundation of any literacy.”*



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*“We still have barriers within the school where teachers don’t sit in and share what we teach our kids either... so having the teachers disconnected, kids can see the teachers are disconnected and doing their own thing...”*

## **LACK OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND QUALIFICATION BASED TRAINING**

87% of participants indicated significant gaps in the availability of and/or support for professional development opportunities and qualification based training. This was primarily in regards to opportunities for Indigenous language teachers, but also in terms of the need for increased training and development for non-Indigenous staff to develop their understanding. Some of the comments regarding this issue included:

*“If you’re not professionally trained for teaching this can be a barrier for teaching in schools. If you can’t go to university (and do a teaching degree) there needs to be something offered to help you develop your teaching skills, so you can deliver your language program effectively. Not just a rushed course, it needs to be ongoing.”*

*“The other thing is with Language Teachers... they cannot really further develop their careers because there is no affordability to leave their communities for PD in urban centres in Darwin because they are too important in the school and teachers don’t let them go because they can’t afford to have them out of school...”*

*“There’s a need for cultural awareness, you need to engage the other school staff so they can reinforce our language in their classrooms as well. They’re supposed to but whether they do or not is another thing, so cultural awareness and understanding Aboriginal perspectives and cultural perspectives helps with this.”*

*“One current problem is that there is not enough attention given to the linguistics knowledge that is needed to support, teach and use the local language. There is a common assumption that if you can speak an Aboriginal language you can teach it in schools. We speak English, but there is not the assumption that we can therefore teach English... There is a shortage in terms of available tertiary and VET courses that appropriately provide linguistics education for community/language teachers.”*

*“There’s not enough work going into growing our own local Aboriginal teachers in communities.”*

*“When Gough and Kim Beasley Senior introduced Bilingual Education in the 70s staffing (for bilingual schools) included a Senior Linguist, a Senior Anthropologist and*



*other Senior staff. Changes to ideas about language etc. saw the removal of these positions as well as diminished ideas about its importance. Linguistics also has dropped in the importance given to it in Teacher Ed. New recruits like me (30 plus of us) in '74 were able avoid Cyclone Tracy because we were in Sydney doing a linguistics course run by Summer Institute of Linguistics. This was not optional really if you wanted to work in a Bilingual Program. We have a lot to make up for in lost ground."*

## 4. DISCUSSION - What do the findings of this research tell us?

This research informs us that there is much good work being achieved between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and schools to implement language programs in Australian public schools. The findings also tell us that there is much more that can and should be done to collaboratively maintain and establish new language programs in schools where communities are happy for their languages to be taught. The main findings from this project are bolded and discussed below.

### **The teaching and learning of Indigenous languages is supporting wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

There is insurmountable qualitative evidence that the learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools is contributing to well-being outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities (Marmion et al, 2014; Purdie et al, 2008, NSW AECG, 2016). In regards to well-being outcomes, the findings within the literature we reviewed were mirrored in our interview responses. Part of the first interview question we asked participants was ***Tell us about your role and how you felt working within the school you were in?*** Interviewees overwhelmingly stated the importance of the maintenance, revitalization and reclamation of Indigenous languages through school programs with comments such as:

*"Helps healing and helps me"* (Interview participant – July, 2019)

*"I just think it's really important for Aboriginal kids so they can be themselves and make that connection...they can then reconnect. A lot of them still have that shame. I feel a lot of the non-Indigenous kids they just love it too, and then when our kids see them loving it, it makes them drop some of that shame."*  
(Interview participant, June, 2019)

*"Language is who we are, it's a part of our culture and a part of identity..."*  
(Interview participant, July 2019)



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The responses from participants clearly indicate that, through their employment in schools, Indigenous language teachers appear to be intrinsically motivated and gain a sense of well-being through their role. And the language programs they are delivering are seen to be increasing Indigenous student participation and engagement in education. Furthermore, in schools where Aboriginal communities have approved the teaching of local language/culture for all students there are clear messages that indicate reconciliation outcomes. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in these schools are said to be gaining positive associations with Aboriginal language, culture and community. In Australia, these outcomes are much needed for nation building and reducing the deficit stereotypes that continue to be promulgated through, for example Indigenous student education outcomes in Closing the Gap discourses.

## **National and jurisdictional initiatives are supporting progress in establishing and maintaining Indigenous language programs**

This research illustrates that there are some clear examples where Australian governments and departments of education have backed the establishment of policy frameworks, statewide programs and other initiatives which have supported and progressed the implementation of Indigenous language programs in public schools. Some examples which stood out in the literature and our interviews include:

- *Support for Indigenous community controlled language and culture centres*
- *The NSW Department of Education – NSW AECG led Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests*
- *The Western Australian Department of Education’s Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training Program*
- *The VAEAI – Victorian Department of Education - Koorie Languages in Schools Program*
- *The University of Sydney’s MILE Program*
- *The National Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Curriculum*
- *The Northern Territory Bilingual Program (1974-2008)*
- *AIATSIS collections*
- *NSW Aboriginal Languages Syllabus*
- *Northern Territory Language Curriculum*



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Initiatives such as the NSW Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and the Victorian Koorie Languages in Schools program appear to be increasing employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers in schools. While we have not been able to obtain exact data, there is clear evidence that each of these programs has significantly increased the numbers of students learning an Indigenous language in each state over the past 5-7 years (SMH, 2018; The Age, 2019).

Additionally the Western Australian Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training Program and the University of Sydney's Masters of Indigenous Languages Program appear to have supported building employment recognition and opportunities for Indigenous language speakers.

The Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous communities specifically highlighted the Western Australian Department of Education's Aboriginal languages teacher training appears as a standout initiative.

*The Committee commends the Western Australian government for the development of the limited authority to teach qualification being offered to Indigenous language teachers. This qualification allows Indigenous language teachers a qualification to be able to teach in a school classroom without the requirement of having a full teaching degree. The Committee believes this is a sound initiative and would like to see it developed in other jurisdictions.*

*The Western Australian initiative has several benefits. The limited authority to teach would not replace the need for more fully qualified Indigenous teachers, but the flexibility of the qualification would enable the schools to harness language expertise of local communities and provide employment opportunities for those committed to their local community and not seeking a national qualification. (Parliament of Australia, 2011).*

While all the initiatives outlined above are commendable, there is wide ranging critique that successful programs and initiatives are either: few and far between; difficult to access; underfunded and understaffed; or in the case of the NT's Bilingual program, ended without any supporting evidence (Disbray, 2018; Henderson, 1994; Hobson, 2014).

In regards to qualification based training it appears that across the country for 'Indigenous language teachers' there is

*no entry-level teacher qualification that has national recognition for appointment to a designated language teacher position in a school (Parliament of Australia, 2011).*



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There remains a very dire need for initiatives such as those outlined above to be strengthened, shared, re-established and supported across all jurisdictions.

## **There appears to be a severe shortage of training opportunities**

The urgent need for increased professional development and training opportunities for existing and potential Indigenous language teachers is clear throughout the relevant literature and within the responses of interview participants. The importance of training was clearly stressed during interviews.

*“Where training and career development is provided staff will actively get involved in the teaching and learning and programming and use their language and culture knowledge in a productive way in the school”* (interview participant, August 2019).

*“Where Principals support teachers to get ongoing PD, this could be going to local community language workshops or attending the national Pullima conference, giving the support for this is very important for success.”* (interview participant, July 2019).

As Indigenous language teaching in schools is a relatively new career opportunity, it appears professional qualification based training and development are worthwhile for those who get the opportunity to attend.

*The MILE course gave me the opportunity to understand linguistic terminology and the confidence to work with specialists in the field of linguistics. It gave me the knowledge, self-confidence and the understanding about how languages work, particularly my own language.* (Michael Jarrett in Hobson, Oakley, Jarrett, Jackson, & Wilcock 2018, p113).

Across the country there appears to be limited training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers to obtain professional development and qualifications that will provide appropriate recognition and professional skills for their role in public schools. Despite decades old calls for action to develop and offer more training opportunities (Henderson, 1994), the literature continues to highlight

*a paucity in professional learning opportunities for Indigenous languages teachers – opportunities to develop both their language and pedagogical skills* (Purdie et al, 2008, p119).





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As outlined earlier in this discussion section, across the country Indigenous language teachers have little or no option to be formally recognized as a 'teacher' within public schools. Hobson points out the university sector's reluctance to deliver in this area, stating that

*Despite an evident and growing need no university has thus far taken significant steps towards implementing an initial teacher training degree for Indigenous Australians, seeking to revive their languages through schools or other formal educational settings. There have been instead a series of unconnected stopgap measures to provide much needed training in the vocational sector and education departments or as postgraduate professional development. While each of these serves a very useful purpose and is to be commended for its positive contribution there remains an apparent reluctance on the part of universities to respond to this significant national training need'. (Hobson, 2014 p193)*

Hobson's article further indicates universities avoid developing Indigenous language teacher programs for a range of reasons including concerns that running a course would not present the university with viable 'economic opportunities'.

Encouragingly Purdie et al, (2008) tells us that with support, there is capacity to improve the current dearth of training opportunity

*there is a small but highly knowledgeable and extremely passionate group of people who have the level of skill and experience to provide others with the ability and knowledge required to teach Australian Indigenous Languages. It is fundamental that these people are supported with the necessary structures to provide quality professional learning opportunities for speakers of Indigenous languages. This is vital in developing Indigenous languages as a component of school curricula, and for students if they are to experience quality Indigenous languages programs in schools. (p120)*

## **Respectful 'two way' collaborations are essential for establishing an Indigenous language program in schools**

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders and school leadership staff who choose to deliver language programs within local schools there is a clear need for a commitment to collaborative 'two way' working relationships. The literature and interviews indicate that a range of skills and expertise are required to deliver an effective Indigenous language program in public schools. These include the skills of Indigenous language speakers and cultural knowledge holders; school teachers/education program writers; and in some cases the skills of linguists and researchers. For



success, ideally everyone contributing to the program development implementation and evaluation will have the ability to understand and respect the different skills and knowledge that individuals can bring for a school based Indigenous language program. Additionally the literature and interviews indicate there needs to be a sustained commitment to evaluating and growing the program at the guidance of local Aboriginal community (Henderson, 1994; Purdie et al, 2008).

Education departments appear to be struggling to find ways to formally recognize the skills that Aboriginal language speakers and cultural knowledge holders bring to the classroom. Low salaries, lack of pay scales, lack of recognition of prior learning, provision of appropriate status to receive sick leave etc. are all things that have been identified as issues Indigenous language teachers face. (Parliament of Australia, 2011). To support increased establishment of effective language programs each jurisdiction's education department should be seeking ways to adequately recognize and value the skills and knowledge Indigenous language teachers and cultural knowledge holders.

## **The persistence of discriminatory assimilationist ideologies**

The literature and interviews revealed that within Australian schools and communities there continues to be a persistent resistance to teaching through Indigenous languages and cultures in favour of the more discriminatory assimilationist approach imposed in Australia throughout much of the 1900s. The persistent push against the inclusion of Aboriginal languages and cultures within schools undoubtedly weighs heavy against Indigenous language teachers and the potential for successfully implementing Indigenous programs across the country. The persistent push against Indigenous education initiatives in favour of striving for assimilation through literacy numeracy and attendance means Indigenous language programs are always at risk of being cut.

The growth and sustainability of Indigenous language programs in Australian public schools appears constantly at risk because they are subject to:

a) whether or not successive school principals see value in Indigenous language programs

*“You can have a supportive principal who helps and respects and values but then you can have another principal come along and then the program just drops”*  
(interview participant, June 2019).

b) whether or not successive state/territory government leaders support the implementation of Indigenous language programs. For example, the decision to remove the NT Bilingual program has been roundly criticized in the literature (Disbray et al, 2018) and in our interviews for lacking any relevant evidence and for not having the backing of communities.



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*“they stopped bilingual teaching which effected a lot of remote communities – in these places language and culture is identity and if you can’t learn your language first you can’t take your place in the universe...people in remote NT live and breathe language and culture. A lot of Aboriginal language teachers learnt growing up in bilingual schools and were in uproar about the removal of bilingual programs in schools” (Interview participant, July, 2019).*

c) whether or not relevant training opportunities exist and are accessible and whether or not support and succession planning is in place to sustain local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community capacity to lead, support and maintain language programs.

While Australian government and education department initiatives and policy supports and illustrates commitment towards Indigenous language teaching in Australian schools, there appears to be many who don’t value and/or actively oppose Indigenous language and culture. As Pensalfini puts it:

*There is disagreement within the education community as to the value of language maintenance. The value each school/district places on it is as much a product of individuals in the system as of government policy or community desire (Pensalfini in Walsh, 2005 p10).*

Individuals in powerful roles in schools and departments of education can act contrary to and make a mockery of Aboriginal community efforts along with governmental commitments, policy and funding towards the inclusion of Aboriginal languages and cultures in public schools. While Australian Governments appear to support Indigenous languages it would be naïve to think that there aren’t many within high levels of government who share the ideology that the ‘be all and end all’ for Indigenous communities is improvements in English literacy, numeracy and school attendance outcomes. Only long term systemic and institutionalized programs and reforms can change this sad reality.

In response to the persistent culturally unilateral focus on literacy numeracy and attendance outcomes one interview participant highlighted the need for schools to be accountable and measured on their performance in regards to supporting the development of Aboriginal language educators.

*“We’ve got to see more action on the ground and one of the ways is to generate our own data outside of NAPLAN for example. It would be positive to measure numbers of schools who have supported local Aboriginal teachers to receive advanced diploma in education etc..” (Interview participant, August 2019)*

National measurements continue to provide us with data on school performances in literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes for Indigenous students. While there appears to be comparatively minimal concerted jurisdictional and national efforts going into supporting, evaluating



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and measuring the performance of schools to work collaboratively with their local Aboriginal communities to develop and implement language and culture programs.

## **There is a need for increased capacity and resources**

Aboriginal languages are traditionally oral languages and have not been allowed to be taught in schools for very long in Australia. There is no one Aboriginal language which covers significantly large parts of most jurisdictions. Given this situation several participants specifically mentioned they were developing their own teaching and learning resources as they taught

*“All the teaching and learning resources you basically made yourself” (Interview participant, July 2019)*

Another issue impacting implementation of Indigenous language programs is that across Australia many Indigenous language teachers are working hard to improve their knowledge of the language at the same time as teaching it to children in schools.

*“You’re trying to teach the kids and also revive your language at the same time.” (Interview participant, June 2019)*

Additional resource intensive tasks that Indigenous language teachers and schools may need to do in order to establish and implement a successful Indigenous language program include:

- consulting with community on program development, protocols, implementation and progression
- sourcing funding to support regular on Country teaching and learning activities
- sourcing funding to pay Elders and cultural knowledge holders to support the program
- employing linguists and allocating staff to collaboratively share expertise around school teaching and program development.

Indigenous Language programs cost a lot (Walsh, 2005) and not all schools lie in regions that are fortunate to have a language and culture centre. Even when schools are located nearby Indigenous language and culture centres, not all Indigenous language and culture centres are equipped with the human and financial resources to support numerous schools to establish and deliver language programs.

Recently

*“the Government committed a further \$10 million over four years from 2016-17 to protect, preserve and celebrate Indigenous languages. As part of this, the*



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*Government is undertaking extensive consultations with Indigenous stakeholders on how to best deliver digital solutions and partnerships for ongoing capture and teaching of language, and developing career pathways for Indigenous language workers and linguists." (Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).*

The outcomes of this government funded project will support some schools and Indigenous language teachers to establish language programs. But for sustainable and increased implementation of language programs there is a need for ongoing funding streams that can be allocated to schools which have existing language programs and to schools that have the capacity and endorsement of their local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community to establish a local Indigenous language program.

The findings within the literature review and interviews indicates that by and large education Ministers, Departments of Education and schools must do much more to honour the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to receive an education which reflects their languages and cultures.



## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

NATSIEC recommends that:

- 1. Governments in all jurisdictions resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to establish new Indigenous Language and Culture Centres within regions where there is an identified need.**
- 2. Australian governments significantly increase funding for Indigenous Language and Culture Centres, Indigenous Community Organisations and Vocational Education and Training Providers to support capacity to develop and deliver professional training in local Indigenous languages and pedagogy.**
- 3. Departments of Education, Education Ministers, Indigenous Language and Culture Centres and Universities in all jurisdictions work to support and establish further opportunities for qualification based training which leads to full teacher accreditation for Indigenous language teachers.**
- 4. In lieu of qualification based training opportunities outlined in recommendation three - Departments of Education in all jurisdictions work to develop alternative training and career progression pathways for Indigenous language teachers towards recognized teacher status such as has been achieved in the 'Limited Authority to Teach' Western Australian Department of Education Aboriginal Teacher Training example.**
- 5. The Australian Government Department of Education work with NATSIEC and Education Ministers in all jurisdictions to develop an ongoing database identifying language programs operating in each state and territory for the following purposes:**
  - a) to celebrate, support and promote the success of those schools/communities delivering language programs**
  - b) to provide a state/territory wide measurement/snapshot of Indigenous language programs in public schools**
  - c) to offer funding support for schools and Aboriginal communities implementing language programs to evaluate and improve their programs**
  - d) to monitor risk and support sustainability of programs when school leadership staff change or Indigenous language teachers leave their role with the school.**
- 6. Education Departments in all jurisdictions develop application processes and allocate specific ongoing funding for schools which have community endorsement to develop and deliver local Indigenous language programs.**



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## 7. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

#### NATSIEC CHAIRS

State/Territory	Chair
New South Wales	Cindy Berwick
Victoria	Geraldine Atkinson
Australian Capital Territory	Carly Freeman
Tasmania	Clair Andersen
South Australia	Peter Buckskin
Western Australia	Isabelle Adams
Northern Territory	Mark Motlop
Queensland	Leon Epong

*Note: Chairs are current as at time of publication of report*



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation

## APPENDIX 2

### National Policy Frameworks

National policy frameworks and commitments which refer and/or relate to Indigenous language teaching in public schools include:

**National Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages** – *“The Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages is the first national curriculum document - Foundation to Year 10 - to provide a way forward for all schools in Australia to support the teaching and learning of the languages indigenous to this country”*. More information on the Framework can be found at: <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/>

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (2015)** – The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* (the Strategy) documents an agreed commitment of education ministers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The opening page of the Strategy states:

*Governments across Australia affirm the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain languages and cultures and acknowledge their deep cultural associations with the land and water*

The Strategy includes a set of principles, priorities and actions that inform jurisdictional approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Education ministers agreed to the principles outlined in the strategy, one of which states:

*Cultural recognition: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s histories, values, languages and cultures are acknowledged and respected.*

The Strategy outlines five national collaboration priorities, including the statement that by the end of 2017:

*The Education Council will request that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group facilitates - sharing of approaches to developing and implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous languages curricula, consistent with ACARA’s framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.*

The Strategy can be found at - <https://www.education.gov.au/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-strategy>

### United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - Article 14



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The Australian Government announced its support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2009.

Article 14 of this Declaration states:

- 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.*
- 2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.*
- 3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.*

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can be found at:

[https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf)

## **The Indigenous Languages and Arts Program**

The Australian Government's Department for Communications and the Arts has established the Indigenous Languages and Arts program. This program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to revive and maintain languages, and to develop and present art. More information on the program can be found at: <https://www.arts.gov.au/funding-and-support/indigenous-languages-and-arts-program>

## **The AIATSIS Collection**

The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies care for a growing collection of over 1 million items including language, sound, photos, video and books, all dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. More information on the collection can be found at: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collection>

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **QLD Policy and Programs**

Queensland Department of Education policy and programs which directly refer to the language teaching and learning in schools include:

#### **The Department of Education - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement**



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The Queensland Department of Education has developed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement which *provides the basis to assist Queensland educators and school communities to support the languages and cultures of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school context. This statement builds on Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools, a key initiative within the department, and supports the Closing the Gap education strategy.*

The Queensland Department of Education's Languages Statement can be found at:

<http://indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/schools-educators/atsi-languages-statement.pdf>

## **The Department of Education – 3 Way Strong language approach**

The Queensland DoE has developed a three way strong language approach which focusses on the concepts of **Recognise; Engage; Support**.

**Recognise** and value the language varieties which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are using for their 'everyday' talk.

**Engage** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in learning and achieving in schools by teaching Standard Australian English (SAE) explicitly, actively and meaningfully.

**Support** children's access to their heritage by maintaining, learning or researching their traditional languages and cultures.

To achieve the 3 way strong language approach the department has stated it will:

- provide leadership, information and approaches to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools
- strengthen our relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders
- support schools working with local communities to implement ACARA's P-10 Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages and/or Queensland's Short Course senior syllabus for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (2019). (*ACARA - Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority*)
- increase the skills of our workforce to value and recognise students' home languages
- deliver high quality explicit teaching and learning that builds Standard Australian English (SAE)

More information on this approach can be found at:

<http://indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/schools-educators/atsi-languages-statement.pdf>



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## Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages Short Course Syllabus 2019

The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages Short Course Syllabus 2019. More information on this can be found at:

<https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior/senior-subjects/languages/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-languages>

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages in Education Queensland Schools - A guide to implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Syllabuses

The Queensland Government has developed a guide for implementing Indigenous language syllabi which *aims to support principals to engage effectively with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities in order to implement the QSA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages syllabuses. It provides strategies to assist with the process about developing and running a language program in Education Queensland schools.*

The guide can be found at:

[https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p\\_10/snr\\_atsi\\_languages\\_11\\_implement.pdf](https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p_10/snr_atsi_languages_11_implement.pdf)

### The Indigenous Language Perspectives Team

The Indigenous Language Perspectives (ILP) team supports the teaching and learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Queensland state schools. More information on the ILP can be found at: <http://indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/school/language-perspectives/Pages/default.aspx>

## APPENDIX 4

### NSW Policy and Programs

New South Wales Department of Education policy and programs which directly refer to the language teaching and learning in schools include:

#### **NSW GOVERNMENT - OPPORTUNITIES CHOICE HEALING RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY – Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests**

The Opportunities, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment (OCHRE) Strategy commits the NSW Government to supporting Aboriginal communities by building strong working partnerships that have at their heart respect for local Aboriginal culture, leadership and decision making. OCHRE aims to support strong Aboriginal communities in which Aboriginal people actively influence and fully participate in social, economic and cultural life.

The Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests project within OCHRE specifically focusses on the *teaching more Aboriginal languages and culture to build people's pride and identity.*



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The Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests initiative is jointly lead by the NSW Department of Education and the NSW AECG. More information on the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests can be found at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/language-culture-and-communities/ALCN-2018-Guidelines.pdf> and <https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/languages/>

## **The NSW ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES ACT 2017**

The NSW Aboriginal Language Act became law on 24 October 2017 and is the first legislation in Australia to acknowledge the significance of First Languages. The Aboriginal Languages Act 2017 seeks to promote, reawaken, nurture and grow Aboriginal languages across NSW. Aboriginal languages strengthen connections with culture and identity and improves the wellbeing of First Peoples.

The NSW Aboriginal Languages Act 2017 can be found at:

<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/acts/2017-51.pdf>

## **NSW ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY**

The NSW Aboriginal Education policy was first established in 1982. The commitments within the policy stated include the implementation of *Aboriginal languages programs*.

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/aboriginal-education-and-training-policy>

## **NESA Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus**

*The aim of the Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus is to enable students to develop communication skills, to focus on languages as systems and to understand the relationship between language, culture, community and land, in a range of language revitalisation contexts.*

More information on the Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus can be found at:

<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/languages/aboriginal-languages-k-10-syllabus>

## **NSW ABORIGINAL EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE GROUP HEALTHY CULTURE HEALTHY COUNTRY PROGRAM**

The Healthy Culture Healthy Country programme advances the importance of maintaining local Aboriginal languages and cultures through education. Our programme emphasises the synthesis between the health of culture, the health of Country, and the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians. More information on the Healthy Culture Healthy Country programme can be found at:

<https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/policies-and-programs/healthy-culture-healthy-country-2/>



## APPENDIX 5

### ACT Policy and Programs

ACT Department of Education policy and programs which might support local language teaching and learning in schools include:

#### CULTURAL INTEGRITY IN ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The ACT Department of Education has developed a Cultural Integrity policy intent which calls for all ACT schools to:

*“demonstrate both respect and high regard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, knowledge system languages; welcome and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and local community members; meet the learning needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students... Cultural integrity represents a break from the negative discourse that has dominated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for many years... ACT school leaders will be change agents building a culture of high achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and ensuring improved cultural integrity is a priority...*

*Schools will be provided with a rich set of supporting resources, framed around a self-assessment continuum. Resources will feature examples of local and international leading practice... Resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be allocated to schools in two ways: an annual payment to all schools to build their Cultural Integrity, and an enrolments-driven allocation”*

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/support-for-our-students/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education>

#### The Cultural Integrity Continuum:

The Cultural Integrity self-assessment continuum *has drawn on the latest evidence and research which says that to build their Cultural Integrity schools should focus on four dimensions:*

- *Engagement with families and community*
- *Teaching with Cultural Integrity*
- *Leadership, celebration and environment; and*
- *High expectations and successful transitions*





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<https://www.education.act.gov.au/support-for-our-students/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education>

## **ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STAFF NETWORK**

The ACT Education Directorate supports an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network* (Staff Network). Membership is open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees including IEOs.

*Since 2016, the Staff Network has met quarterly with the Senior Executive Team to progress issues raised through members, including culturally responsive recruitment practices, career development and leadership. The meetings provide opportunities for the Senior Executive Team to update the Staff Network on key initiatives and seek feedback on Directorate activities.*

*In 2017, the Staff Network Executive worked extensively with the Senior Executive Team in relation to Cultural Integrity, unconscious bias and cultural change processes relating to a diverse workforce within the Directorate. This resulted in the development of an extensive Cultural Integrity learning journey for all corporate executives and ACT public school principals.*

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/?a=1291070>

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **VIC Policy and Programs**

Victorian Department of Education policy and programs which directly refer to the language teaching and learning in schools include:

**Victorian Department of Education and Training: Marrung Aboriginal Education Action Plan 2016 - 2026** - Marrung commits the Victorian Department to taking action towards achieving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Marrung was developed in partnership with the Koorie community, including the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), the Department of Education and Training's (DET) principal partner in Koorie education.

The Plan includes a commitment to

*support sectors to enhance learners' understanding of Koorie culture and history by: increasing the number of Koorie language programs in Victorian kindergartens and schools, by supporting community efforts at language learning through working with VAEAI and the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, and providing assistance to support Koorie community members to undertake relevant language and teacher training courses.*



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DET, in partnership with VAEAI, the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) has established the Aboriginal Languages Steering Committee to progress relevant actions under Marrung, specifically Action 2c:

*“Increasing the number of Koorie language programs in Victorian kindergartens and schools, by supporting community efforts at language learning through working with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and providing assistance to support Koorie community members to undertake relevant language and teacher training courses.”*

More information on Marrung can be found here: <http://www.vaeai.org.au/documents/>

## **Koorie Languages in Schools Program**

In Victoria, there are currently over 1,000 students learning a Victorian Aboriginal Language in a formal school-based languages program. This is unprecedented in Victoria and a direct result of the Koorie Languages in Schools Programs, supported by a collaborative partnership involving VAEAI, the Victorian Aboriginal Languages Corporation (VACL), the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) and the Department of Education and Training (DET).

What makes these school based language programs successful and unique, is the effective collaboration between the partners involved and the protocols in place to support them. As a result, all formal Victorian Koorie Language and culture programs in government schools must and do have school council support along with Traditional Owner and Koorie Community support through their Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) before commencing.

The Koorie Languages in Schools Program commenced in 2012 with 3 schools.

- In 2018, there were reportedly 1,867 students learning an Aboriginal language in Victorian schools.
- In 2019, 11 schools across the state are delivering a Victorian Koorie Language Program.
- 7 Victorian Languages and 1 Northern Territory Language (*Murinpatha*) are taught through the Koorie Languages in Schools Program.

## **Victorian School of Languages - Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language**

The Cert III in Learning and Endangered Aboriginal Language is a DET-funded pilot course, delivered by the Victorian School of Languages (VSL) in partnership with VACL and VAEAI.

- Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language is for Aboriginal participants only, targeting their own heritage language.
- The course gives learners the tools and linguistic skills to study their own heritage language through an exploration of published and unpublished materials related to their heritage language, and own- community engagement.



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- The 12-month pilot-course commenced in October 2018, with a class of 19 students from around the state.
- Certificate IV in Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language is currently in development.
- VAEAI is collecting the names of interested community members for future runs of the Cert III course.

## **Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages**

*The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages was established in 1994 to address the issues of language loss and is the state body responsible for coordinating Community Language Programs throughout Victoria. These programs are run in local communities that report regularly back to VACL. The Corporation is focused on retrieving, recording and researching Aboriginal languages and providing a central resource on Victorian Aboriginal Languages with programs and educational tools to teach the Indigenous and wider community about language.*

More information on VACL can be found at: <https://www.vaclang.org.au/>

## **Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023**

Goal 19 of the Framework illustrates Government commitment to ensure - *Aboriginal culture and language are supported and celebrated* and includes the following objectives and measures

### ***Objective 19.1 Support the preservation, promotion and practice of culture and languages***

***Measure 19.1.1 Participation in community events which celebrate Aboriginal culture***

***Measure 19.1.2 Investment in Aboriginal language and culture revitalisation programs***

The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework can be found at:

<https://w.www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/policy/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework-2018-2023.html>

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **TAS Policy and Programs**

Tasmanian Department of Education policy and programs which might support local language teaching and learning in schools include:

#### **Tasmania's Aboriginal Education Framework**



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Tasmania's Aboriginal Education Framework supports Tasmania's Closing the Gap Strategy. This Strategy takes into account Tasmania's unique socio-cultural context and responds to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy.

The Framework aims to ensure that - Aboriginal students are engaged in learning programs and supported by staff, families and the valued and respected input of the Community.

- Aboriginal children and young people are enrolled, engaged, attending and progressing at rates equivalent to those of other students.
- Ongoing support for educators to enable the provision of culturally responsive pedagogy.
- To provide dynamic learning environments that are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal students.

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/>

## **Aboriginal Education Services – The Orb**

*The Orb is a collection of online multimedia resources designed to assist the teaching of Tasmanian Aboriginal histories and cultures.*

*It is highly visual and is suited to a range of learning styles. It embraces a number of Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing, including learning through narrative, connection to Country and cultural practice.*

*A selection of teaching materials including; learning tasks, inquiry-based investigations and illustrations of practice have been included to extend teacher and learner understanding of the concepts introduced within The Orb. These materials use Australian Curriculum achievement standards, content descriptors, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities to support the planning, teaching and assessment of integrated units of work. It can be used across all learning areas and year groups. It is a publically accessible website.*

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/>

Visit The Orb at [www.theorb.tas.gov.au](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au)

## **Tasmanian Government: Resetting the relationship with the Aboriginal community**

The Tasmanian Government has made a formal commitment to reset the relationship with Tasmanian Aboriginal communities. Key Priority 2 of the commitment calls for a - *Focus on Tasmanian Aboriginal history and culture in the delivery of the Australian curriculum*. The Department of Education is leading the development of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Histories and Cultures Framework.



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[http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/390103/Reset\\_update\\_OAA\\_2018.pdf](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/390103/Reset_update_OAA_2018.pdf)

## **Aboriginal Sharers of Knowledge (ASK) program**

The Aboriginal Sharers of Knowledge (ASK) Program provides Tasmanian Government schools with opportunities to involve Aboriginal Cultural Educators to work alongside teachers to deliver learning programs that draw on the rich knowledge and experiences of the Aboriginal community. ASK Aboriginal Cultural Educators work with teachers in class and off-campus settings to assist in providing culturally responsive programs and curriculum.

<https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/ASK%20Program%20-%202019%20Guidelines.pdf>

## **APPENDIX 8**

### **SA Policy and Programs**

The South Australian Department of Education policy and programs which directly refer to the language teaching and learning in schools include:

### **The Aboriginal Education Strategy (2019 – 2029)**

The Aboriginal Education Strategy was released in December 2018 with the aim to increase outcomes for Aboriginal students by developing successful foundations in the early years, supporting excellence at school and pathways to success.

The approach for developing the Aboriginal Education Strategy “took into account Aboriginal nation building, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the principles of self-determination. Language is a key focus area within the Strategy and the importance of Aboriginal language is documented throughout the Aboriginal Education Strategy, including Principal 3 which refers to the importance of

**Culture and identity** – We will acknowledge, value and respect Aboriginal knowledge, wisdom and expertise, including our existing Aboriginal staff and students and we will adopt local approaches to teaching Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages.

The *Achieving our Goals* section states: *We will: create opportunities for communities to engage in the teaching and delivery of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and languages within education settings*



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A key focus area for reform within the Strategy includes:

## *Languages*

*Strengthen and reinvigorate the learning of Aboriginal languages in children's centres, preschools and schools, including language revival and maintaining strong active languages. Recognise the linguistic rights of Aboriginal children and students, building on home languages through family and community engagement. Move toward a bilingual education model that ensures proficiency for Anangu children in Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara and Standard Australian English as an additional language.*

The South Australian Department of Education Aboriginal Education Strategy can be found at:

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/dept-ed-aboriginal-education-strategy-2019-2029.pdf>

## **Aboriginal Schools**

*Special learning programs are provided for students attending Aboriginal schools in outback South Australia, regional centres and metropolitan Adelaide.*

*Teaching programs take account of culture, social experience and learning experience. Aboriginal languages are spoken at most Aboriginal schools. For more information see:*

<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/education-and-learning/aboriginal-education/aboriginal-schools>

## **Aboriginal community voice**

The SA Department of Education Website states that “*when you work on a governing council for a school or preschool (site) that has a lot of Aboriginal students you must make sure that the views and needs of Aboriginal families and students are thought about.*”

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites-and-facilities/governing-councils/working-others/aboriginal-community-voice>

## **APPENDIX 9**

### **WA Policies and Programs**

The Western Australian Department of Education policy and programs which have references to language teaching and learning in schools include:



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation

## Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework

The [Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework](#)<sup>7</sup> is identified as a priority in the Department's Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2016-2019 and Focus 2019.

The framework is aligned with the [Australian Professional Standard for Principals](#)<sup>8</sup> and [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#)<sup>9</sup>.

The Framework calls for *School leaders support staff to build individual capability for developing their knowledge of local Aboriginal histories, peoples, cultures and languages and for Teachers incorporate Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages into learning activities.*

<http://det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/navigation/aboriginal-education/>

## Aboriginal languages teacher training

The Western Australia Department of Education offers a course titled Aboriginal languages teacher training. The Department states that *In order to meet the continued demand for Aboriginal languages teachers, the Department provides a training course for Aboriginal staff of the Department who are speakers of an Aboriginal language... This is an in-school traineeship and the course incorporates language revival/maintenance strategies, language teaching methodology and current resources for the teaching of Aboriginal languages.*

More information on the Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training can be found at:

<http://det.wa.edu.au/curriculum-support/detcms/school-support-programs/curriculum-support/news-items/expressions-of-interest-for-2017-aboriginal-languages-teacher-training.en>

## APPENDIX 10

### NT Policy and Programs

The Northern Territory Department of Education policy and programs which directly refer to the language teaching and learning in schools include:

#### **Keeping Indigenous Languages and Cultures Strong – A Plan for Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages and Cultures in the Northern Territory**

This Plan provides a long term vision and goal for building the capacity of Indigenous leaders, sector and school leaders and classroom educators to implement teaching and learning programs in Indigenous Languages and Cultures. More information on the Plan can be found at:



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation

<https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/indigenous-education-strategy/indigenous-education-strategy-issue-15/keeping-indigenous-languages-and-cultures-strong>

## The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum

The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum was developed by a reference group led by Indigenous educators from across the Northern Territory.

At the heart of the curriculum is cultural knowledge, organised across three strands: Country/Land, People and Kinship, and Natural Environment. Students in Northern Territory schools come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and to cater for this diversity the NT ILC Curriculum provides four broad learner pathways:

1. First language pathway
2. Language Revitalisation, Revival and Renewal Pathway
3. Second Language Learner Pathway
4. Language and Cultural Awareness Pathway

The choice of pathway is based on the community language profile and the knowledge situation of the languages. Schools negotiate the choice of the focus language and the best language learning pathway with the school community. More information can be found at:

<https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/indigenous-languages-and-cultures>

## APPENDIX 11

### Interview Questions

#### Language Teaching and Learning

1. Have you taught an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language in public schools?

**If yes** – Tell us about your role and how you felt working within the school you were in?

What contributed to you feeling successful and/or happy in your role?

Were there any barriers to achieving what you wanted to achieve in the role?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the role?





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Is there anyone else you would like to suggest would be happy to be interviewed for this part of the project?

**If no** - can you tell us about what you are aware of in regards to how Aboriginal people feel when working as language teachers within schools?

Are you aware of what contributes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teachers/tutors in schools feeling successful and/or happy in their role?

What barriers are you aware of that inhibit language teachers/tutors achieving what they want to achieve in schools?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the role?

Is there anyone else you would like to suggest would be happy to be interviewed for this part of the project?