



BLACK INK PRESS

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In this paper I take for granted the contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture, the potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education and the educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities.

But the effectiveness of maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages is limited by the lack of written resources in the many languages that are used. This has a direct bearing on the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.

Black Ink Press is trying to do something about it.

Black Ink Press is a community-based Indigenous publishing company based in North Queensland, specialising in contemporary illustrated books for young readers. Black Ink Press has a strong commitment to publishing in Indigenous languages. Why?

As a speaker and writer of Wik Mungkan myself, learned while living at Aurukun with my family for 9 years, I initiated Black Ink Press (and continue as coordinator) largely because I long dreamed of more books in Indigenous languages, books with characters, images and language styles that young Indigenous readers can identify with and enjoy.

I began by writing and illustrating two books set in Aurukun which were published by a mainstream press. When my own books, Pigs and Honey and Going for Oysters were published I persuaded Omnibus Books to provide illustration blanks for translation into Wik Mungkan. One was printed by SIL and the other privately. This was after seeing the injustice of Indigenous language-learners being forced to see their own language in second-rate productions, wrinkly paste-overs and amateurish black-and-white booklets.

Learning requires motivation, and that means having something you want to read and that makes you feel good. Good about yourself and good about reading books. If Indigenous kids don't find themselves in books, if books have little or nothing to do with their life, if they are unlikely to find a hero to identify with, why would they want to read them?

Looking for the the everyday adventures of ordinary black kids, with black and brown and brindle characters who are both heroes and villains, you will search almost in vain. And if you are black and you live in the bush and you speak your own language or Aboriginal English, but every time you open a book it is about white kids living in the city using sophisticated English, where do you fit in?

I recognised a myriad potential stories and a wealth of Indigenous talent to create books, but realised that it is often constrained by lack of confidence and lack of knowledge of the publishing industry. So, driven by the need for reading materials amongst the Indigenous students at partner organisation Shalom Christian College, the school's umbrella organisation CCDEU (Congress Community Development and Education Unit Ltd) enabled me to establish a publishing arm, Black Ink Press, with a program to find and mentor Indigenous writers and illustrators.

Those students include young adults who are barely able to read at all. And many of the students speak English as a second (or third) language. The boarding college now counts among its students many youngsters from Galiwin'ku and a language program began around Yolngu-Matha. Black Ink Press is about to publish a bilingual book, Northern Territory Animals illustrated by a group of students in a project initiated by cultural studies teacher Pam Wallace and translated by Sandra Durrkay.

A Reference Group of Indigenous elders includes people who are committed to the publication of their own and other Indigenous languages. For example Warrgamay linguists Bridget Priman and Melinda Holden have been supporters from the start.

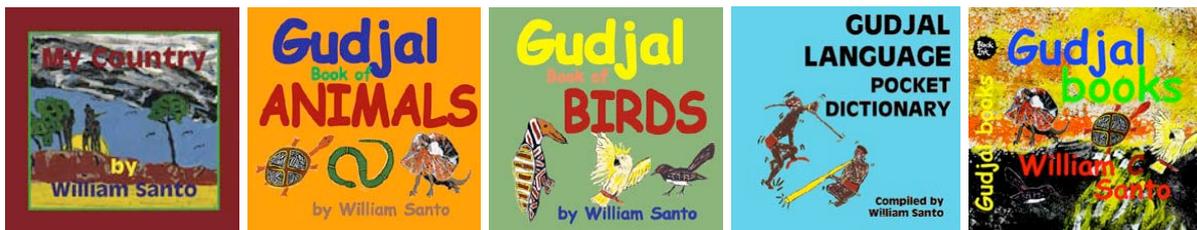
So far, Black Ink has published in Gudjal, Mamu, Mitakoodi, Gamilaraay, Wadja, Wik Mungkan, Wiradjuri, Kalaw Kawaw Ya, Torres Strait Creole and Nywaigi, we have a Kunjen book and a Djambarpuyingu book about to go to press, and we are developing projects in Warrgamay, Yidinj, Waluwara, and others. Admittedly some of these only have a few words "in language" but these do give readers a taste. Others are fully bi-lingual.

But these books don't appear by magic. This project of publishing in Indigenous language is very long-drawn-out and labour intensive and requires a lot of patience and imagination. The range of personnel needed to create even one small book include writer, illustrator, linguist, editor, technical informant, designer ...

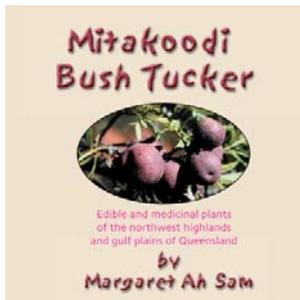
In order to illustrate the resources needed for these projects, I will list the bilingual books so far published by Black Ink Press and summarise the effort needed to make each a reality.

Many Indigenous people find their creative side works most effectively close to home and "on country". Black Ink Press goes out into communities to unearth the potential of Indigenous writers and illustrators through workshops. Funding is necessary to make this possible. Workshops and personal contact have helped to develop a wide network of interest, some of which comes to fruition many years later. For example I had a call from a Linguist in Mount Isa this year, enthusiastic about reviving a project I began about 8 years ago.

The desire to produce works in language for school children began with the set of four Gudjal language word books by William Santo. ([Gudjal Language Dictionary](#), [Gudjal Book of Birds](#), [Gudjal Book of Animals](#), [My Country](#)). Santo's quest to reclaim his own language from around Charters Towers, Queensland, led to his creation of small picture word books containing his own lively paintings of animals, birds and the environment. But the pictures were first produced as posters (to teach children in the local schools) roughly painted and lettered, that needed to be photographed and Photo-shopped and designed into book form with pronunciation guide, map etc. The words for the "dictionary", which William had compiled after lengthy research, needed to be put into a database and re-ordered and spellings checked by a linguist.



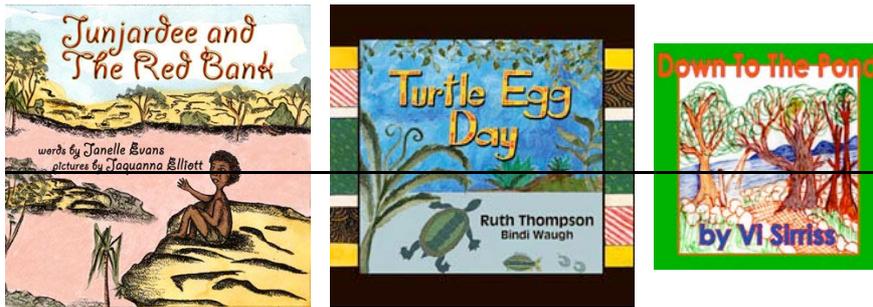
Following a language-recording skills workshop in Townsville at which William's daughter read his books, the books were included as "virtual books" on the State Library of Queensland's website. Read and listen to William Santos' Gudjal books at www.slq.qld.gov.au/find/virtualbooks/atsi/gudjal



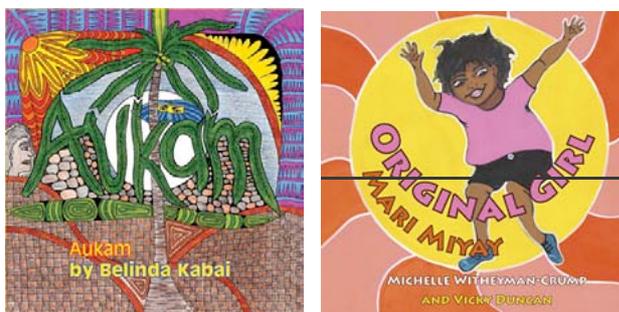
To develop [Mitakoodi Bush Tucker](#), linguist Cassy Nancarrow worked with the late Margaret Ah Sam in Mount Isa, using the many photos taken by Dale Rackham twenty-five years earlier, with the Mayi-Thakurti language work of Gavin Breen, and botanical lists of proper plant names, to create a beautiful and useful book. It took many months of patient work by her followed by a similar commitment in the Black Ink office to layout and design, not to mention sorting out cultural sensitivities and misunderstandings with the author so far away, and with the fear of affecting Native Title claims. Publication was finally assisted by a mining company, which also had to be negotiated.

The forthcoming Kunjen book is in the same spirit, [Uw Oygangand Oy Berr - Traditional Bush Medicine from the Kunjen of Kowanyama](#) by Alma Luke (Wason) with Myrtle Luke, with photographic images and layout and much more contributed by Bernadette Boscacci. This project has been ongoing over five years including travel between Townsville and Cape York and camping trips, and the contributions of linguists, land-management personnel and medical advisors. It is finally being

published with the assistance of Apunipima Cape York Health Council.

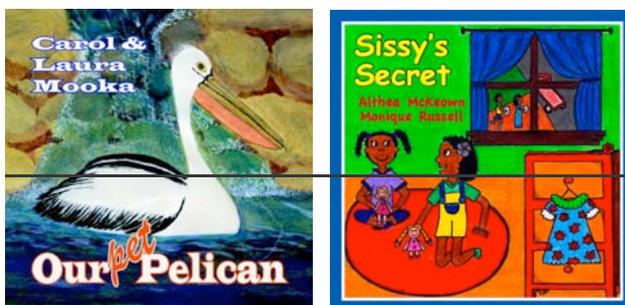


Junjardee and the Red Bank by Janelle Evans has a few words of Wadja from Woorabinda. Turtle Egg Day by the late Ruth Thompson has a few words of Mamu. Most recently, the book Down to the Pond by the late Vi Sirriss continues the tradition in Nywaigi. These were all provided by the authors.



Aukam arose from a single painting of a traditional Saibai Island story, made into a beautiful series of pictures by Belinda Kabai, written in Kalaw Kawaw Ya by the late Ezra Waigana and designed into a book at Black Ink. It only happened because Jenny Tyler was an art teacher with adults on Saibai Island and took the time to work in a detailed way with Belinda, helping her to interpret the advice given by Black Ink about turning a single image into a series of illustrations. Then meticulous work with PhotoShop and InDesign turned it into a book.

Original Girl is a fictional story about cultural identity, based on a real little girl, written in English by her mother and translated into Gamilaraay by her father, linguist and educator Des Crump, assisted by linguist John Giacon. It is also a SLQ virtual book. Illustrations were done by a NSW Gamilaraay person known to Black Ink Press, although they were all unknown to each other.

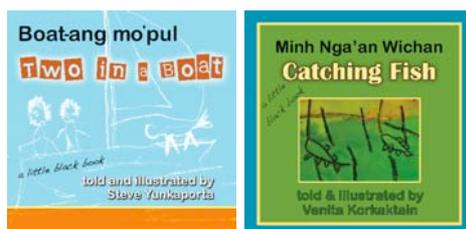


Our Pet Pelican by Carol Mooka and Sissy's Secret Althea McKeown are both examples of stories told with the narrative in plain English and the dialogue in Torres Straits Creole. This is an improvement on a tradition observed amongst Torres Strait

families, of parents orally translating books as they are reading to their children. Each of these books needed beautiful illustrations by culturally appropriate artists, and to be edited to create a consistent style in which the Creole was confined to dialogue in order to avoid being confusing to young readers.

Jane Karyuka and local linguists have made Aurukun Shire Council's Koolkan Childcare Centre into a Wik Mungkan language nest. However this is not a simple project, as despite the Wik Mungkan language being universally spoken by locals (generally not by white staff) few people are actually able to read their own language. Quite a few small books were created in the school and by SIL in the late 1970s. To support their use in the community today, funds were obtained for Black Ink Press to re-publish a number of them. This project means that there are books for children to read in their language which is still very much a part of their lives.

Meanwhile unfortunately the bilingual education program has been abandoned. However there is little hope of it's being reinstated unless and until an adequate body of reading and teaching materials is developed. This is very possible because of the wealth of materials created by SIL and School personnel in the past (all needs revamping) and the wealth of local stories. But each book requires weeks or months of work to achieve a result worthy of the young learners.



The cute Little Black Books series by young people includes two bilingual Wik Mungkan books, Two in a Boat (Boat-ang mo'pul) and Catching Fish (Minh Nga'an Wichan). These resulted from hands-on workshops by for Black Ink Press personnel in the Wik and Kugu Art Centre, the Wik Mungkan version made possible by my own facility in the language and that of Bernadette Boscacci. There are additional difficulties of financing travel, finding accommodation and organising a welcoming and workable host organisation in the community.

There are many hours of old tapes of people telling stories and recounting history in language and history, all of which would be very valuable reading materials (in good quality language) but the task of transcription, editing, illustrating designing and printing is a costly one which requires a strong commitment from government.



More recently Victorian artist Gloria Whalan, who is trying to learn Wiradjuri in

her later years, has incorporated example Wiradjuri words into her “Grandma’s Farm” books, Mermando the Spider, Guulaangga the Green Tree Frog and Girrawaa the Goanna. The keenness of Indigenous people of all ages across the country to revive or retain their languages in a written form must be capitalised on for the sake of the next generation and for the sake of strengthening Australia’s amazing cultural identity as a multi-lingual nation. This is something of which all children should be made aware and proud.

Another venture begun but aborted due to lack of funding was an excellent, vibrant interactive CD Rom using beautiful 2D animations of the work of a local Indigenous artist, with words and coding to make it an effective language learning tool as well as a cultural awareness tool. This was based on a word list of Warrgamay language (animals, plants and relationship terms to start with) but our dream was to develop this as an instrument that could be adapted to any language, including English.

Meanwhile as a project for 2011 Black Ink Press has begun to develop a whole set of “virtual” and “talking” books with the authors and other native speakers reading the books. These will be targeted at classrooms where they can be read on computers. This makes the meaningful reading of bilingual books a real possibility. But it involves finding a reader of the language, and recording them then editing the sound, and incorporating the sound files into each book. Then the books need to be packaged and marketed, not forgetting contracts and royalties and sometimes community permission being organised.

Ideally to make these truly engaging and effective as learning tools, these books should have their illustrations animated, a very costly project.

To achieve all this, Black Ink Press continues to be a part of CCDEU’s set of not-for-profit operations in Townsville, and over ten years has published 67 books, almost all by Indigenous authors and illustrators. We are determined to keep language books as a vital part of our list. We seek government funding to enable us to provide the support services necessary to publish these well, and of course the language books tend to have quite small markets which means they cannot be sustainable in publishing terms.

But we are coming under increasing pressure from the economic rationalists to make this a self-sustaining business.

If the government is serious about encouraging Indigenous languages to be a real part of Australia’s life, there is a need for real financial resources to be put into ventures like ours. We certainly now have the infrastructure, experience, commitment and community and cultural contacts that mean we will make good use of these resources. And our products will entertain and educate all Australians.

Jeanie Adams,

August 2011