Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Education**

Kimberley Education Region

Box 2142 Broome WA 6725

Submission

To the Parliament of Australia,
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.
Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities.

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Prepared by Lola Jones
Aboriginal Languages Curriculum Officer

From the Kimberley Education Regional Office, WA Department of Education

Authorised by Gary Sampson on behalf of the Regional Executive Director, Greg Robson.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

BACKGROUND
ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
There has been a continuous and increasing presence of Aboriginal languages being taught in WA public schools since 1992. Aboriginal languages have been part of the list of priority languages as part of the *WA Department of Education and Training LOTE (Languages Other Than English) Strategy.* Aboriginal Languages are embedded as part of the Languages Learning Area.

The key goal for Aboriginal languages in WA Department of Education is to:

- increase the levels of student achievement and participation rates in Aboriginal Languages Education:
- maintain a critical pool of highly skilled Aboriginal language teachers providing quality sustainable language programs in Department of Education schools.

The teaching of Aboriginal languages is a cooperative effort between the school and the Aboriginal community. The language (or languages) taught in the school and the language speakers are negotiated with the local Aboriginal community. A steady number of Aboriginal staff and some community members, who are also language speakers, are undertaking the Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training course provided by the department. These people graduate as qualified Aboriginal languages teachers with the skills to teach their language in a school environment.

In 2011 there are twenty Aboriginal languages being taught in fifty Western Australian public schools in remote, urban, rural and metropolitan areas to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Fifty five Aboriginal Languages teachers and eight elders are teaching language to 7,246 students in Years K-12.

Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities
Terms of Reference

The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

Over the last sixteen years the WA experience has shown repeatedly that giving attention and recognition to Aboriginal languages by teaching them in school has 5 major benefits:

1. **Language revival and maintenance**
   - Language becomes a focal point of discussion in the community and on the 'agenda' rather than being an invisible asset.
   - Language is revived and maintained as the language is taught and used in a range of situations. The preparation of resources means language is discussed and researched, recorded, learnt, practised and used regularly by a range of people.
   - Language resources are developed by language teachers and community to meet the needs of teaching in a school setting.
   - Language teaching is directed by languages teachers and community.

2. **Engaging students and community**
   - Elders and community members are involved in identifying the language and appropriate people to teach the language. They continue to be involved as teachers, support people, mentors and guest speakers as programs grow and develop.
   - Aboriginal students have the opportunity to learn/maintain their language and culture at school. Non-Aboriginal students have the opportunity to learn about the language, land and culture of the local people.
   - In WA public schools Aboriginal Languages can be taught from K-12.
   - The Year 11 & 12 Curriculum Council Aboriginal Languages Course of Study provides an opportunity for students use their Aboriginal language knowledge and skills. Scores from this unit go towards their final WA Certificate Education – for tertiary entry.

3. **Career opportunities**
   - Aboriginal staff and community members have the opportunity to become languages teachers. This provides stable, regular employment.
   - Aboriginal languages teachers network regularly to develop language specific resources, share best practice and keep up to date with current developments.
   - Some languages teachers go onto further study and full teaching qualifications.

4. **Skills for learning**
   - Aboriginal languages teachers learn to use a range of technology to prepare language specific teaching resources. A range of digital, print and multi-media resources as well as learning on country are used in teaching language.
   - Students are exposed to and use technology in learning language.
   - Literacy skills in the target language are transferred to English language learning.
   - Learning and discussing the grammar of the target language develops students' meta-language skills (the language to talk about language). Comparing language and English helps develop students understanding of English grammar.

5. **Advancing reconciliation**
   - Teaching language in school positively locates Aboriginal knowledge in mainstream curriculum and increases the understanding of Aboriginal people and cultures by students, staff and the wider community.
   - Aboriginal languages teachers and community members involved in the programs provide strong role models to students and staff and other community members.
   - Non-Aboriginal students and staff develop respectful relationships with Aboriginal languages teachers and community members involved in teaching language.

The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

The current Aboriginal languages program in WA public schools enhances the identity, self esteem and engagement of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal Languages teachers employ their knowledge and experience and links to country and family to successfully teach their language in the school. This results in both students and community members having a meaningful connection to the school. The program also positively locates Aboriginal knowledge in mainstream curriculum and increases the understanding of Aboriginal people and culture by non-Aboriginal teachers and students. Aboriginal languages teachers and community members involved in the programs provide strong role models to students and staff and other community members.

The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education

Teaching Aboriginal languages in early childhood reinforces and provides positive affirmation for Aboriginal learners that their language and culture is valued. Early literacy skills can be developed in the target language and English. Students learn that language can be written down, that we read left to right, they learn about words and pictures. You only learn to read once. It is easier to learn to read in your first language because the language that is in your head matches what is on the page. Students can then transfer their literacy skills to English. Students believe in themselves as learners.

The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages

Teaching languages in schools is only a very small part of language revitalization and maintenance. In some communities teaching language in school has lead to community language revival in other communities it has provided a maintenance strategy. In all cases it has been the commitment and effort of individuals, a family group or very small groups of people who have led the revival and maintenance at the school level.

The number of students learning and Aboriginal languages in public schools has been steadily increasing over the last 16 years. The key to long term, sustainable languages teaching in WA public schools has been the ongoing training and support provided for Aboriginal Languages Teachers.

Two Aboriginal Languages Curriculum Officers/Coordinators provide training and in-school support to languages teachers and schools teaching an Aboriginal Language.

In order to meet the continued demand for Aboriginal languages teachers, the Department of Education provides a training course for Aboriginal staff who speak 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.

Course Objectives

At the completion of the training, languages teachers will have developed a high degree of skills and expertise in language teaching to enable them to:

1 Plan a language program for teaching across years K-10;
2 Have the skills to make oral, visual and written resources in their own language using a range of technology; and
3 Teach language across year levels using age appropriate listening, speaking, viewing, reading and writing strategies and tasks.

Course information and requirements

The course is coordinated and presented by Aboriginal Languages Curriculum Officers.

- Applicants need to be teaching at least one language class every week for the duration of the training as this is a practical course and trainees are assessed on their skills in planning and teaching and their language proficiency and use.
- This is a three year course - two years in-school traineeship, which includes attending four block releases and a third probationary teaching year.
- Four block releases of five days, Block releases are intensive live-in/residential training, two being held in-term and two in the school holidays. Trainees must attend all block releases as each block builds on the skills acquired in the previous block.
- After block releases trainees return to schools to teach in language class/es, applying skills and using materials developed at block release. This practical application forms the basis of assignment requirements.
- Assignments must be completed during the term and submitted at the beginning of the next block release.

Quality Assurance

Course presenters conduct regular in-school monitoring and assessment of trainees planning and teaching development using the ALTT rubric.

- Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training Rubric is used as:
    - The basis for self reflection and monitoring progress
    - Part of progressive appraisals by Aboriginal Languages Curriculum Officer
    - Part of appraisal process by line manager/class teacher in the second year of training
- In-class observation and appraisal of trainee's progress occurs at 2-3 times in the first year of training and 2-4 times in the second year of training and during probationary year: planning and teaching progress is monitored, team teaching as required, linguistic support for language development and extension. Oral and written feedback is given to trainee and line manager.
- Appraisal meetings. During block release three and four trainees also meet with course presenters to discuss their progress, strengths, and weaknesses and focus areas. Assignment feedback, Rubric and Appraisal notes are used during this meeting.

Registering as an Aboriginal Languages Teacher

At the end of the two year traineeship

- Trainees will qualify as a Languages Teacher if they have reached the required level (competent) in the areas of:
    - Planning,
    - Resource development,
    - Language proficiency and
    - Teaching (includes classroom management)
- If trainees have not reached the required level of competency at the end of three years they can negotiate additional time to continue developing their skills.
- At the end of the year, following graduation, qualified language teachers need to register with WA College of Teaching (WACOT) and then may be appointed as a language teacher at a school. Language teachers are registered with WACOT as Limited Authority to Teach Teachers (LAT) – registered to only teach language, not all subject areas.
- Newly qualified/graduate language teachers have a teachers ID and will be paid under the Teachers' Award on Level 1 Step 6.
- Graduate language teachers work as a Probationary Teacher for one year. Support visits and progressive appraisals from an Aboriginal Languages Curriculum Officer continue during this final year.

Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities

Terms of Reference

The Committee will inquire into and report on Indigenous languages in Australia, with a particular focus on:

- The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages
- 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
- Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language
- The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities
- Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services
- The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages, and
- The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.