

Our Powerful Original Australian Languages

Language Learning in Indigenous Communities

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Our Powerful Original Australian Languages

Australia has an original culture and part of that culture are the original Australian languages (OALs) like Yolŋu Matha, spoken by the Yolŋu people in north-east Arnhem Land. These languages speak of a powerful intellectual culture shaped and coloured by this land and the experiences of the people who cared for it. This Australian voice is being silenced by ignorance and neglect in a sea of abundance. These OALs are not just part of the Australian culture, but are also vital intellectual assets and vibrant, essential instruments of communication.

Note: When I use the term Aboriginal people in this submission I am referring to Aboriginal people who speak at least one of the original Australian languages and who may also speak English as a second, third or even fifth or sixth language. This includes many Aboriginal people who speak one of the Creole English languages. Creole English languages are very different from mainstream English and have the language structure of their OALs. These Creole English languages should also be included with the original Australian languages in many of the discussions in this submission.

For a lot of Aboriginal people who still speak and think in OALs, English is still a very foreign language, which means that a visit to or from government authorities, service providers, or a trip to the doctor or hospital is a frightening and confusing experience of powerlessness. For their children, schooling is traumatic, dumbfounding and demeaning; resulting in young people having no hope for themselves in a world they cannot understand. They are schooled by their experience for a life of drug abuse, alienation and criminalisation.

Even in important meetings with government or other statutory bodies, these first Australians are forced to receive information in English. This means they do not understand what is being said and due process cannot possibly occur, even though the English First Language (EFL) members of the meeting leave with the belief that the Aboriginal person/s had full comprehension of what was discussed and decided.

They are also locked out of the modern information era with very little access to everyday news and information in their own languages. Training and education services also do not use these languages, leaving the Aboriginal people to continually underachieve and eventually become despondent.

This whole process of not properly employing their own powerful languages, leaves them to fill hospitals, jails, rehabilitation centres and unemployment queues and remain living on the fringe of Australian society at a massive cost burden to themselves and the Australian community.

When it comes to issues of understanding the role and place of our OALs, most English First Language (EFL) Australians have little or any real understanding of the significance

and value of these languages. I believe this is due to the incorrect colonial stereotype of the original Australians and their culture as being 'primitive' and 'simple'. Many Australians see these 'simple' and 'primitive' languages as having no role to play in the education of Aboriginal people or in "Closing the Gap". This inaccurate belief affects many within the dominant culture from professors, politicians, political advisors and teachers through to normal Australians on the street. This false view has severe ramifications for Aboriginal citizens and for Australia leaving them locked out of the super information era that everyone else enjoys.

From my experience of almost 40 years, I have found that OALs like Yolŋu Matha (the languages of Yolŋu people) are very powerful teaching and thinking languages. The original Australian languages are also powerful tools that can be employed to teach English quickly and efficiently to Aboriginal people. This is especially true when it comes to the academic level of language or cognitive effective level English.

We need to give academic respect and value to the OALs. To do this they need to be studied and used in modern educational endeavours for the Aboriginal people that speak them. Other EFL Australians need to be encouraged and rewarded for learning one of these languages. Language Centres combined with Media Centres need to be funded as a front line service ahead of all other services to empower and equip Aboriginal people so they can take their future back into their own hands and have the 'gap' closed forever.

Before I answer some of the questions covered in the terms of reference for this review, I would like to talk about dendrite deafness and its ramifications for this discussion.

1. Dendrite Deafness

There is a lot said these days about auditory deafness and its effects on learning for Aboriginal children - and rightly so - but there is another far more significant form of deafness that has major impacts on learning outcomes for Aboriginal children and adults - and that is dendrite deafness.

Dendrites are the treelike extensions at the beginning of a neuron and brain cell, which help increase the surface area of the brain cell and are covered with synapses, the receiving ports. These tiny tree-like extensions receive information/electrical stimulation from other neurons through synapses on their surface and transmit electrical stimulation to the soma, the centre of the neuron.^{1,2}

Dendrites grow as new information is received by the brain creating a network of memory tracks within the brain that allows us to think. The growth of the dendrites' construction creates what we know as memory within the brain and also gives us our thinking ability. This includes information to recognise different experiences, sounds we hear and things we see and touch.

¹ <http://umaine.edu/publications/4356e/> 18/08/11

² http://psychology.about.com/od/biopsychology/ss/neuronanat_2.htm 18/08/11

When a person learns something new, they grow dendrites to create the neuron network to process, understand and remember that knowledge.³ This happens when we learn something totally new within our everyday experience, or as we learn a new word in the language that we can already speak; our brain will grow dendrites to encode the information. The more times we hear the same information, the stronger the dendrite growth, growing small memory tracks at first, to well reinforced memory tracks the more we hear the same information or word. Sometimes however, if the dendrite construction is not reinforced, there will only be a small amount of dendrite growth and the memory of that particular thing may be lost.

This is the same when we learn a new language. As we understand the new sounds, words and phrases and the meanings of these words and phrases we grow dendrites. We will also grow new dendrites to be able to speak the new words and enable us to spell these words if we are learning that information also. The brain also grows dendrites to connect words in a particular language to experiences of different things we see or to particular phrases and associated subjects. Our brain is growing dendrites for everything we learn.

2. Wired for Sound

For Aboriginal people who learn one of their OALs from birth they have all the dendrite growth necessary to hear and understand and speak their own languages. They are already wired for sound. The only difference between them and an English-speaking person is that they are wired for different sounds; the sounds of their particular OAL.

Yolŋu people in Arnhem Land have all the necessary wiring in their brain to understand the world around them to complex levels encompassing law, sociology, economics, biology, zoology, astronomy, philosophy, human dynamics, toxicology, history and technology. However, this information is stored in their brain through a different dendrite/neuron network system to that of an English speaking person.

Dendrite deafness occurs when a Yolŋu child or adult is forced to hear sounds that they haven't developed dendrite growth for. That is, they can hear the sounds properly, but what they do hear is not connected to any meaningful information within their dendrite/neural network. The impact that this has on Aboriginal people and their ability to meaningfully participate in and contribute to an English speaking society is underestimated.

From young Yolŋu teenagers struggling with petrol sniffing abuse or in criminal detention centres, to hundreds of Yolŋu adults of all ages experiencing communication isolation in one of Australia's medical, legal or training institutions or in the everyday work place, this dendrite deafness contributes to a high level of trauma for many Australian Aboriginal people.

³ <http://www.immrama.org/brainwave/brainwave5.html> 18/08/11

Dendrite deafness occurs while they are trying to understand important information, or even just general directions given to them in a language that is still very alien to them. Dendrite deafness is one of the most disempowering and traumatic experience that any human being could be forced to go through. It makes the victim feel that they are less human than everyone else around them speaking the 'strange' language. They start to self blame and question their own ability and humanness, not realising that the problem is that they are just not wired for the English language yet.

3. When the Wiring is Not There

Imagine finding yourself in a hospital in Indonesia or China where everything that is being said to you is in a language that is foreign and you cannot understand anything. You may even recognise a word or phrase here or there, but you really have no idea what is going on.

People who experience this will return to Australia as fast as they can and sometimes go on to suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. If you can get them to talk about the horror of the occasion you will find it full of grief and trauma, simply because they couldn't understand the language being spoken to them and about them at a critical time in their life.

When the above situation occurs it is because the dendrite wiring is just not there, and so people in such situations do not understand anything. In fact, they do not even hear the words or sounds clearly, but experience confusion, overload, tiredness and hopelessness - leading to panic and the desire to flee from the trauma.

Yolngu people have likened the experience of listening to English here in Australia as being like "Having a bomb thrown down in front of you - and I just want to run away". The same Chairperson went on to say, "It is the same for the whole committee. They come to the meetings and the first bit is okay and then comes the (English) bomb. They keep sitting there, but they don't understand anything. Then they start asking, 'When is the meeting going to finish?' and we've only just started."⁴ When trauma like this happens the people never really want to return to the same place again where it occurred even if it is an important meeting, school or training event intended to assist them.

The dendrite growth that occurs around times like these are very damaging as the memories of the traumatic events become hard wired into the mind. To make it worse, when communication stress and trauma occurs over and over again in a person's life it can have severe detrimental effect on a person's health. This is caused by high levels of cortisol being released into the body which can lead to various medical problems and brain cell death, reducing the connections between the cells, harming the vital brain circuits and often causing severe depression.⁵

⁴ Why Warriors Lie Down and Die. Trudgen 2000, P 84-86.

⁵ Too much cortisol causes abdominal obesity, high blood sugar (adrenal diabetes), muscle wasting, bone loss,

Sadly, this is the experience for most OAL Aboriginal speakers in Australia today when they come into contact with the dominant English speaking culture even though they are at home here in Australia.

To 'close the gap,' all forms of violence in Aboriginal communities must stop. I believe that the violence caused by failed communication is the forerunner of many other forms of violence being experienced on Aboriginal communities.

On the other hand, well constructed language lessons and information imparted to Aboriginal people in their own languages can grow the dendrites necessary for learning English and for receiving a whole range of information and knowledge in a constructive manner.

Dendrite deafness is real and is a key primary factor in the gap of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people. Dealing with dendrite deafness is an essential key to closing the gap forever. A true recognition of the OALs and the full employment of these languages in education and media communication is the only way this can happen.

immune shutdown, brain (hippocampus) atrophy, poor wound healing, thin wrinkled skin, fluid retention and hypertension. Excessive cortisol frequently causes increased fatigue/decreased energy, irritability, impaired memory, depressed mood, decreased libido, insomnia, anxiety, impaired concentration, crying, restlessness, social withdrawal and feelings of hopelessness. http://intelegen.com/nutrients/stress_cortisol.htm 18/08/11
<http://www.fi.edu/learn/brain/stress.html> 18/08/11

A. Benefits of Giving Recognition to Indigenous Languages

There are many benefits that would come from a genuine recognition of the OALs. It would mean a completely different picture from what we see today in many Aboriginal communities; we would see a real closing of the gap that exists between Aboriginal Australians and other Australians.

Currently millions of dollars are often wasted with visits to Aboriginal communities and families by government workers and service providers. Through these visits they try to communicate messages and information that are never fully or adequately understood by the Aboriginal people they are aimed at. The only real outcome of these meetings is frustration and disbelief on both sides of the communication barrier. Failed communication exercises like these leave a lot of EFL Australians with the assumption that Aboriginal people cannot understand anything, rather than realising that it is a language communication failure that is causing the problem.

Yolŋu and other Aboriginal people like them are some of the most information disadvantaged people in the world.

The true recognition and employment of their languages would turn a trip to the doctor or hospital from a frightening and confusing experience of powerlessness to a productive, empowering experience.

Their children's experience of schooling could be joyful and successful instead of the traumatic and demeaning experience of today, resulting in young people having no hope in a world they cannot understand.

Important legal meetings could become more productive where the people hear information in their own languages which have the capacity to communicate complicated legal issues and information more effectively and efficiently. People would feel as if they had been consulted respectfully and their issues had been understood and their agreement would be binding - because due process would have really occurred.⁶

We could see healthy thriving Aboriginal communities because the people would feel respected and included in what happens in the world around them rather than always feeling isolated and depressed from not knowing what is going on or why.

⁶ Many government organisations that have a statutory responsibility to represent and consult with Yolŋu people also have many of the same problems spoken of above when it comes to speaking to their clients. This leads to a high level of confrontation at many of the meetings organised by these bodies to consult with their Yolŋu clients. I have heard of one such organisation having problems at a meeting over the signing of travel allowance forms. Many of the Yolŋu people involved thought they were being asked to agree to the matter central to the consultation process by signing the documents. Of course people had not understood the issues and did not understand they were now being asked to sign travel allowance forms. Consequently, a physical fight occurred.

1. Fast Appropriation of Information

Giving a true recognition to the OALs could lead to fast appropriation of information by Yolŋu and other similar Aboriginal people groups.

During my time in Arnhem Land I have spent many thousands of hours in informal teaching sessions with Yolŋu adults on a range of different subjects. For the first seven years of that experience I used mainly English in those teaching experiences. It was only when I started to seriously learn the Yolŋu Matha language, and then used Yolŋu Matha in my teaching experiences, that Yolŋu people started to learn meaningfully in these sessions. That included teaching Yolŋu people about administration work, local government, legal and economic systems, and health issues.

When Yolŋu receive information in English, their rate of error is very high and they only receive a fraction of the information that is taught or told to them. This leads to them being continually confused and frustrated due to dendrite deafness as explained above. When this happens the EFL speakers are not always aware that poor communication is occurring and continue at their normal fast rate of English speaking.

For Yolŋu people this is like a recurring nightmare that personally attacks their intellectual integrity, sense of security and sense of capability. They panic and want to flee the trauma that the failed communication creates. People will group together with others who are having the same experience, play cards or do anything together in their language group to avoid this experience because of the failed social interaction with EFL speaking people.⁷ This feeling of panic, isolation, fear and despair also lead many Aboriginal people down the slippery path of alcohol and drug abuse and severe mental disorders.⁸

When they receive the same information in Yolŋu Matha their take-up of information is incredibly fast. In the last ten years while I was with Yolŋu Radio we produced over a thousand education programs covering health, legal, social, environmental and economical issues. See http://www.ards.com.au/hear_programs.htm

Through this exercise we saw that Yolŋu people can understand anything, as long it is delivered to them in Yolŋu Matha; for them to understand the same information in English would take them many decades for the same information to be appropriated.

True recognition and employment of OALs would lead to fast appropriation of information by Aboriginal people and communities, empowering the people and getting real value for money from government expenditure.

⁷ The government can send hundreds or even thousands of highly qualified well resourced English-speaking trainers, teachers and resource people but they will all fail if the issues spoken of here are not taken into consideration.

⁸ I believe this is the main underlying reason for the high-level petrol sniffing, drug and alcohol abuse and mental disorder we see in Aboriginal communities.

2. Improve School Attendance Rates

The use of Indigenous languages in schooling would be a far better option of getting higher attendance and better educational outcomes instead of the neo-colonial methods that are now being deployed in the Northern Territory.

In the NT Yolŋu parents and communities begged the Government not to remove bilingual education. Sadly though, the education department has dismantled the years of hard work of Yolŋu teachers and parent groups who saw the power of their own language in the educational endeavours of their own children.

Yolŋu adults have had their children come home from attending school and speak of the panic they experience every day, how they remember nothing of what was talked about and how they feel like an inadequate Yolŋu person that can never understand the Balanda/English world.⁹ The result is poor attendance rates and low academic qualifications in Aboriginal schools due to the hopelessness that these children are experiencing.

Education is only possible when the students can understand the instructions that are given to them and can participate as equals in the learning process.

If we want Yolŋu children to attend school and achieve well academically, we need to create Yolŋu friendly learning environments. This can only occur when the OALs are fully used and the Yolŋu students can experience real semantic construction in their own thinking languages throughout the majority of their educational experience.

3. Real Educational Outcomes

The true recognition of Indigenous languages would result in real educational outcomes. It would allow powerful teaching languages to be employed within the contemporary education setting, rather than being pushed aside due to the misconception that to use OALs would be too difficult.

o Powerful Teaching Languages Going to Waste

A few years ago I was teaching at a seminar in Darwin and helping me was a Yolŋu medical interpreter. This interpreter had spent many hundreds of hours doing medical interpreting.

I asked the interpreter to write on the white board any English words that she could spell and use in context and yet gave the interpreter no real meaning.

At first the interpreter had trouble thinking of a word so I offered the English word 'contract'. I then wrote it up on the white board and I worked through a number of questions to discover what information she knew about the English word contract.

⁹ Balanda means European or dominant culture English speaking human/humans, person/people.

She could spell it, use it in context but it gave her no real mental picture or meaning. It is one of those English words that some Aboriginal people call 'hard' or 'secret' English words. In other words, if we were to look at the semantic envelope that came from the OAL listener's mind the only thing that would be in that envelope would be the picture of the spelling of the word.

For my colleague above, when she read or heard the word 'contract', the only information was the image of the word itself; there was no other information behind that image, only nothingness. And this is why many Aboriginal people have called the English intangible concept terms 'hard' or 'secret English' words.

I asked her if she thought there would be a word in Yolŋu Matha that was the same. She replied, "No, there is no word like this in Yolŋu Matha".

I then explained to her that I knew of a Yolŋu Matha word that was equivalent to the English word 'contract'. I gave her the equivalent word in Yolŋu Matha, 'djugu' and she picked up the meaning straight away with all of its significance and legal implications.¹⁰

In that moment I had become for her a dictionary where she could look up the English word and understand it quickly in her own language and semantic construction.

I had turned my back to the white board and was explaining to the seminar participants how comparatively easily and quickly it was for the Yolŋu people to learn the complex concept level English terms, but only when they are taught to them through the use of the people's own language. As I concluded this explanation, another EFL colleague of mine said, "We have another English word here that is a problem".

I turned and I was shocked at what my Yolŋu colleague had written on the white board. On it was an English word I would have never believed that a Yolŋu medical interpreter with her level of English proficiency would not understand.

*Note: to help the reader experience this feeling that the Yolŋu medical interpreter was experiencing I have just used ***** in the first part of this exercise instead of telling you what the English word was.*

I asked the interpreter where she heard the word that was now on the board. She said, "I hear the doctors talking about it all the time when they are standing next to the bed of Yolŋu patients and they are trying to work out what is wrong with them. They say, "It could be *****" or "maybe it is *****" but I do not know what this ***** is."

The word written on the board was the English word 'sorcery'. This one left me a little shocked. I would have assumed that most Yolŋu people who speak English well would have understood the English word sorcery.

Again I asked her if she thought there was a word like 'sorcery' in her language. Again she said she was very positive that there was not.

¹⁰ The word djugu has all the elements of the English word contract being an enforceable agreement entered into between two parties that have a job, specifications, payment consideration, and penalty.

Now of course there is a word/sound for sorcery in her language, and this time she got the shock when I asked my EFL colleague to write up the equivalent word in Yolŋu Matha.

When she saw the Yolŋu Matha word 'galka' she said in English, "Why would the doctors be talking about that for"?

To make it worse, this interpreter had just come back from an interpreting job at the Supreme Court. It was the first time she had been to the Supreme Court and she was completely overwhelmed about the court setup and was unclear on many of the English terms involved, including what 'Judge' and 'jury' meant.

- **The 'Knowing but not Knowing' Phenomenon**

Have you ever heard an English word but you were not sure what it meant? Sometimes when this happens we will look up the meaning in a dictionary or we might just keep listening to it being used in different situations and the context gives us an understanding of its meaning over time. But before you look up the word, you can probably remember the word, pronounce it well and use it in context, but you still do not know what it means. This is the 'knowing but not knowing' phenomenon.

'Knowing but not knowing' English words is comparatively rare for most EFL speakers when hearing or reading English because their 'dendrite wiring' and therefore their semantic construction is based on English. However, for Yolŋu and other OAL speaking people, whose 'dendrite wiring' and semantic construction is primarily around their first language, and there are no good language tools like dictionaries in their own language, this is an everyday occurrence. In fact, it is so common now for Yolŋu people that many times they do not even expect to really understand many of the intangible academic English terms - it has just become part of the English 'madness' they have learned to live with.

Some people might ask, "Why doesn't the Yolŋu Matha speaker look up an English dictionary?" At times, some do, but then they are faced with finding many other English words used in the explanation that they do not understand. Then if they go to find the meaning of one of the words in the explanation the confusion just goes on and on.

The following is the learning process where, for example, a Yolŋu student/person is being instructed/trained in English, or where a Yolŋu person is at a conference or meeting and they hear a new intangible concept or academic level of English word that they have no real understanding of.

When the Yolŋu student/person hears a new word or phrase at a meeting, or when their instructor teaches them a new subject that is strange to them, they will learn:

1. how to pronounce the word and learn the word itself so they can recognize it again if they hear it as they do not want to be shamed if the term is mentioned again or comes up in conversation and they do not know it.
2. how to spell the word. This will definitely happen if the teachers place great emphasis on getting the spelling correct. At this stage of the learning the

student is concentrating on not being embarrassed by spelling the word incorrectly.

3. the syntax, where the word fits in a sentence and whether it has any suffixes or prefixes with it.
4. the context of the word, whether it is medical, legal etc, what subjects it fits. They will even learn the whole sentences around the word.
5. Finally, the student should learn the semantics or meaning of the word. Unfortunately in most cases this is where the learning ends. There is not a lot of concentration on this because it is assumed by the EFL instructor/people involved that if the student can repeat, spell and use the word in the correct context then they will also know what an EFL person or student will know and so the meaning would be clear to them.

However, for many OAL speakers this is not the case. In fact the student can learn all the above information and pass examinations with this information. For example, a student can learn that bacteria, viruses and poor diet will make you sick, and if asked this question in an exam will repeat back what they have memorized. But if asked for a specific meaning of 'bacteria' or 'virus' they might not have any relevant information to give.

Or, like the current discussion of recognizing the first Australians in the "preamble of the Commonwealth constitution", some of the people might even learn these three words and can even repeat them in context. They might even know that it is important and that it has something to do with Australian law but the words and their real meaning will probably remain a mystery. Even for many Aboriginal interpreters asked to explain what this all means to their people the words might also be a complete mystery and when they come to interpreting or translating these English word they will just repeat the English word because these English words have no semantic meaning for them, so they cannot explain it in their own language.

Sadly, when government has positive discussions like the preamble discussion, many Aboriginal OAL speaking people will not even participate in the debate, because it is all just too hard, while others might have unreal expectations believing that all their traditional law will be recognised because they have not fully understood the English words and their full ramifications.

There is clearly a massive educational and training problem here; a problem that many people in Australia do not even know is there, because they are English only speakers and have little or no experience of this phenomenon. But for the OAL speaker attending school, training or try to access information from English sources, it is just all so much gobbledygook that nothing real comes from it.

With a true recognition of OALs, these powerful teaching languages can be put to work to get some real traction with real educational outcomes for whole communities of people.

4. Empowered Communities

A real recognition and employment of Indigenous languages would also lead to happier, more empowered and participating Aboriginal communities.

All cultural groups of people like to feel they are appreciated and understood - and they also like to feel they can understand. In fact, Aboriginal people are desperate for knowledge and real information from the English-speaking Western world.

In the last few months, I was involved in a patient survey in the local hospital. Over 60% of those Yolju patients had little or no understanding of their disease or sickness and/or had little idea why they were being operated on. All these patients had come to the hospital after receiving instructions and information from a registered nurse, doctor or an Aboriginal health worker - yet the information they had about their conditions and the treatment they were to receive was scant at best. This left many of them sitting in hospital in a bewildered and frightened state.

The situation was turned around by a short conversation in the patients' language and English, between the patient, the accompanying doctor and myself. This short conversation changed the patient's demeanour from being scared and uncertain of being in an alien, strange medical world where they were suspicious and angry at the things that medical staff were doing to them, to joy, relief and thankfulness toward the same medical staff that were helping them.

What brought about this change? Being able to hear information about the nature of their disease and sickness and the medical intervention planned for them in a language they could understand; in OAL Languages that are very capable of explaining all a biomedical processes and disease information very quickly and effectively.

Some people will ask why some of these patients were confused when they were sent by an Aboriginal Health Worker from their own home community to hospital for treatment. Why did they still have so little information about their disease or sickness or the operation they were about to undergo. I would suggest, from past experience, that the Aboriginal health worker in their home community was probably also having some of the same difficulties accessing English information from the registered nurse or doctor in that particular community.¹¹

5. Information is Power

It has been said that information and knowledge is power, but the power can only come if the information you are receiving or the knowledge someone is trying to give you is in a language you can understand. If it is not, then you experience powerlessness. What is power to one is powerlessness to another.

¹¹ The Yolju patient in this particular situation when she had received information she was entitled to about her impending surgery opted not to have the operation and flew home to her community to talk things over with the Aboriginal health worker and her family.

Isn't it strange that an attempt to give power, by speaking to a person in English, can create powerlessness? This powerlessness experienced over and over again in a person's life will translate into absolute hopelessness for whole communities of people. This is the gift that is naively given and is reflected in every Government report that looks at Aboriginal disadvantage. Yet language and its ability to empower is hardly ever spoken of and misses out on the public purse spending that is being wasted on so many other unproductive and even damaging programs.

At present there are so many changes being forced upon Aboriginal communities and the people cannot keep up. Many of these are changes in legislation, meaning that Aboriginal people can end up with prison sentences if these laws are not understood and complied with. Yet all this information is delivered in English and OAL speakers know almost nothing of it; it is as though they live on another planet. People are bewildered and living in fear and many parents do not know what their rights are any more when it comes to disciplining their children. This leaves the children to run wild. Parents are saying they do not know what is right or wrong anymore and are confused. We have jails in Australia with first Australians in them who are not even sure why they are there.

This situation leaves many Aboriginal communities in a powerless despondent state. A true recognition and employment of the OALs would make a real difference in empowering these communities, and in so doing Australia would see a 'closing of the gap' for its indigenous people in years rather than decades.

B. How Indigenous Languages can be used in Education to Improve Competency in English.

Indigenous languages have a very powerful role to play in the education of Aboriginal people, especially when it comes to learning English and academic or cognitive level English language. Unfortunately, many of the attempts to teach English to Aboriginal people at the moment are based on flawed educational methodologies. Many methodologies now in use to teach English to Aboriginal people deny the role and use of the students' language in the education process. This method of teaching English to Aboriginal students is at odds with almost every other language learning program in the world.

When we look around us we can see that there are many programs and resources for learning new languages that are foreign to us. If you pick up one of these resources, the instructional language on that resource that contextualises and guides you through the language lesson, will be in the language of the intended student. For example, I just picked up a resource package of two CDs and a book for 'Learning Japanese' and the instructional language on the CDs and in the book are in my first language English. This is the normal, good sense, methodology of teaching a foreign language to students. If the instructional language in this 'Learn Japanese' resource was Japanese, it would take me only a short amount of time to become frustrated and disinterested in using this learning resource, so I would not be able to learn Japanese from it. With the instructional language in English, I can understand what we are going to be doing in the language lesson for the day and what I am going to be expected to learn.¹²

All over the world language learning programs have instructions in the students' first language so they can learn effectively and efficiently without them tiring too quickly or just dropping out from overload.

This is how it should be for Aboriginal people who speak one of their OALs and who speak English as a second, fifth or sixth language. The same could be said for Northern Territory Aboriginal schools where, rather than the method chosen to force children to hear English for the first (and most receptive) four hours a day, there should be separate constructed English lessons with the instruction in Yolŋu Matha. The rest their class lesson should then be delivered in Yolŋu Matha right up to high school.

I. Learning English Faster- Using Language and Radio

Between 2002 and 2010 the writer of this submission was a principal mover in building a radio station in north-east Arnhem Land for the Yolŋu people; called Yolŋu Radio. This radio station's primary purpose was to deliver community education programs in Yolŋu Matha.

¹² 15 Minute Japanese. Eyewitness Travel, Dorling Kindersley Limited 2006

Today there are over 20 transmission sites across Arnhem Land and one in Darwin. One of the hopes and desires of the Yolŋu Elders of Arnhem Land was that this radio service would run “learning English” programs.

If I ask Yolŋu youth and adults what they want to hear and learn from Yolŋu Radio, one of the things high on their list of requests, which includes information about alcohol and drugs, health, economics, law and current news is that they want to learn English. Despite continually talking to the Government about this proposal, nothing has come of it.

There may be a number of reasons for this, but I think there is a lot of confusion in the NT bureaucracy about projects that empower Aboriginal people like Yolŋu Radio. On one hand they make comments like, Aboriginal people won’t listen to radio, so how are they going to learn anything from radio. This comment is essentially completely untrue as radio is the most accessed media, particularly, in remote indigenous communities. Then other servants of the people get very concerned when Yolŋu people raise issues about the intervention and bilingual education when they visit Yolŋu communities. It then seems that Yolŋu Radio is teaching Yolŋu people too much.

It is clear that if empowerment programs based on the use of Indigenous Australian languages for Aboriginal people are to be put into place, clear directives will need to come from Government otherwise it probably will never occur on the scale that will have a significant impact.

Just as Fijians in Fiji learnt English on Fiji radio, Yolŋu people in Arnhem Land and in Darwin could learn a high-level English competency from a “Learn English” radio program on Yolŋu Radio. This form of learning allows the whole cultural group to learn together. They also increase the learning experience between themselves as they practice new words and phrases learnt together on Yolŋu Radio. For these programs to work however, the instructional language must be Yolŋu Matha (or OAL of the community).

Yolŋu Radio and Yolŋu Matha could also be teamed together to teach high-level academic English correctly so that medical, legal, economic and technical English-language could be taught to the whole community of Yolŋu people.

If radio was also used to deliver current and contemporary news,¹³ using both Yolŋu Matha and English people would receive up-to-date information and English learning at the same time; closing the gap more quickly.

It has also been a practice on Yolŋu Radio to develop and deliver other educational programmes around vital health issues, legal matters, environmental subjects like global warming and economic issues. These programs are produced in a combination of Yolŋu Matha and English so that the Yolŋu listener can hear what the doctor, lawyer or other

¹³ At the moment OAL speaking people in Australia receive almost no news and current affairs through some form of media service in their own language. Yet there is much discussion in how we need to close the gap. The biggest gap that exists is the gap in information; this gap creates all the other gaps as it would in any community if the same lack of information existed.

professional has to say in English and they also hear and understand it in their own language.

This creates programs that not only deliver the particular information but also deliver English learning. For example, if a Yolŋu person hears a doctor explaining a particular disease condition, they are learning about the disease and also the English terminology that the doctor is using to explain the disease, including other medical terms. This is a well constructed scaffolding methodology of education. In other words the Yolŋu person is listening to a subject they are interested in, in their own language and learning some of the English terms and phrases used to explain that particular subject at the same time.

II. New Word Meaning Discovered

In recording the programs for Yolŋu radio, bilingual teams of two or three people are used. At times there is an EFL speaking person who also speaks Yolŋu Matha as a second language. They will team up with a Yolŋu person who speaks Yolŋu Matha as their first language and who also speaks English as a second language. This person is usually a Yolŋu interpreter. Sometimes this bilingual team is joined by a special interest EFL speaking person like a doctor or lawyer.

In this program development methodology, a question is asked in English or in Yolŋu Matha and then translated into the other language. That is, the question or statement is made in English and is then translated into Yolŋu Matha by the Yolŋu person. If a statement or question is asked in Yolŋu Matha, it is then translated into English by the EFL person. There is a two-way translation of all things that are said during the production of the program. This allows for the correct pronunciation and full meaning-based translation of both English and Yolŋu Matha languages.

At times the Yolŋu interpreter will not understand what the EFL professional is even talking about. The interpreter cannot pick up the context of what was being spoken of in English, so the recording process will stop and a discussion in Yolŋu Matha occurs so the Yolŋu interpreter can come up to speed very quickly with the English discussion.

Many times during this process the Yolŋu interpreter involved in the production will ask for the meaning of a particular English word, phrase or concept to be explained. Again the recording process is stopped and we work through the meaning of the English word, phrase or concept that the Yolŋu interpreter is having problems with.

Then the 'new' meaning of the word, phrase or concept is used in the program giving the whole Yolŋu listening audience a chance to pick up the new understanding of the English word or phrase.

Sometimes we would record a separate program just to explain the English concept word or phrase by itself. Only a lack of funding has put a stop to this important English learning resource development.

III. E-Learning School: a Yolŋu Friendly Learning Environment

The idea to develop an e-learning school started at least eight years ago when adult Yolŋu people started to ring me and say that they needed a school to teach them how to read and write English and understand maths. I made the suggestion to many of these adults that they should go to the local school and ask to be taught English or maths. All of them said, "We need education for ourselves and our children like Yolŋu Radio where we can learn things without feeling ashamed." They need a Yolŋu friendly learning environment.

Many older Yolŋu people also spoke to me. These were people who could read and write English and were now in their 60's and 70's. They said, "We learnt to read and write English but our grandchildren cannot and we want them to learn how to read English".

When I asked these older Yolŋu adults what method of education was used to teach them many of them told me the same story? They said that the EFL teacher who taught them to read and write English could speak Yolŋu Matha and so schooling was easy for them.

She would use a picture or drawing up on the board. The teacher would then ask them what they call this particular thing in Yolŋu Matha. The Yolŋu Matha word/phrases would be written up on the board and underneath that phrase the English word/phrase would be written. Then they would discuss the meaning of the word/picture in Yolŋu Matha. After that both the Yolŋu Matha word and the English word would be broken into its syllabic phonics. It was a Yolŋu friendly learning environment.

Subsequently, we started with the idea of developing an e-Learning school with a Yolŋu friendly learning environment in mind. The e-Learning trial modules that we have developed are based on the use of Yolŋu Matha first with the same English word beside them.

This is another example of how OAL can be used to teach English in a highly active and efficient way once the material is developed it has a long life span and same material can be accessed by thousands of people at will. As this resource is online individuals can work whenever they have a chance, at their own pace and according to their level of prior English language knowledge.

See <http://www.whywarriors.com.au/elearn/literacy/>

When you visit the site, open up one of the modules and put your cursor over the top of the words. If you have the sound enabled on your computer you will hear the sounds of the words and the syllables in both Yolŋu Matha and English.

When we trialled this module we got very favourable results and learnt some pitfalls that will be developed out of the next level if we can get financial support for its development. Please see the video of what Yolŋu parents think at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAKMuHZiP38>

It is hoped to develop a whole school for Yolŋu people online including; how to read and write Yolŋu Matha and English, maths, science and world history using Yolŋu Matha as the instruction language. The school could develop right through to university level. The lack of resources is the only thing stopping the development of this Yolŋu friendly school.

The recognition and employment of the OALs will improve competency in English all-round, but especially for the cognitive effective English.

- **Yolngu Matha is like Latin is to its Latin roots**

Yolŋu Matha is a very powerful teaching language, over English, for Yolŋu people as we have pointed out above. It is also very effective in teaching Yolŋu Matha speaking people the cognitive effective or the academic level English. The reason for this is that the Yolŋu Matha concept language, the cognitive effective language, is much closer to its concept roots than English is. It is like Latin is to its Latin Roots.

That is, if you look for the root word¹⁴ of many English concept terms, you have to go back through many linguistic generations before you find the root word in French, Greek or Latin. At times there can be three, four or five linguistic generations before we get to a clear 'word picture' that gives you a fuller richer meaning of the concept term.

In Yolŋu Matha however, concepts terms have their clear 'word picture' root in the top generation of Yolŋu Matha words or are only one generation removed. This makes it very quick to understand and retain complex information being held in the full meaning of the Yolŋu Matha concept.

Many people learning English as a second language or even EFL speakers sometimes struggle with the top level meaning of the English concepts because the term or words being used are many linguistic generations away from its root meaning. This is not the case in Yolŋu Matha - as you learn the concept term you also have its full meaning right there in the same linguistic generation, or very close.

This also makes it very easy for Yolŋu people to learn academic level English if they can move from the full semantic construction richness of their Yolŋu Matha concept straight to the English concept term. To do this they implant the English word into the rich semantic construction of the concept that already exists in Yolŋu Matha; a semantic construction that is much richer than English at this higher linguistic level. They do not have to go back through the English linguistic generations but can just work straight from their own linguistic root to the concept word in English.

Using the OALs is by far the quickest and most efficient way of teaching English to the First Australian OAL speaking people without destroying them or their future.

¹⁴ When I am talking about the root word here I am talking about the root word that will give us a clear picture of the original concept. For example if we look at the English word 'charge' it has many meanings. But what is the original word picture or concept that the word 'charge' comes from. We find when we look it up that its root word is "Middle English chargen < Anglo-French, Old French charg (i) er < Late Latin carricāre to load a wagon, equivalent to carr (u) wagon <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/charge>

C. Current Maintenance and Revitalisation Programs for Indigenous Languages

The current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages do not go far enough. Many countries like Australia wait until there are only a few speakers of a given language or for them to die out completely and then spend millions of dollars on revitalisation programs. This has already happened and is now necessary in Australia with many of the southern Indigenous languages.

Sadly, unless real action is taken soon it will be the same story for the other remaining OALs. The remaining OALs, like Yolŋu Matha, need to be employed as every day useful tools or they will suffer the same fate. Any funds then spent to revive them will only be fractionally as effective as these language can never return to the powerful languages they are once lost. Money now spent to maintain these languages will allow them to be effective education and communication tools for the people that still speak them.

Aboriginal people like Yolŋu people, need a whole range of self learning language tool developed so they can get real efficiency out of their languages. By 'self learning tool', I mean good two-way English to Yolŋu Matha dictionaries. These dictionaries should cover high frequency and everyday use words, as well as, subject areas like economics, law, health and technical languages. They also include learning English programs with instructions in Yolŋu Matha. These resources could be developed at well resourced Language Centres.

Of course, we still need expenditure on some of the endangered Indigenous languages as we are losing languages as we speak.

It is important to understand that there is another powerful teaching language that is also being lost, and that is the Indigenous academic languages, within each of the OALs. These languages are sometimes called "ceremonial languages" by many linguists, which means they are underappreciated and misunderstood. This comes from the belief that OALs do not have an economic/commercial, legal, biological, zoological, philosophic, astrological and other dimension to them. So unfortunately, in many cases, even where dictionaries exist, it is only the basic instructional language that has been studied and recorded.

(i) Indigenous Academic Languages

In 1994 I was sitting with two Yolŋu Elders. They were teaching me new words from their language. They were teaching me the meaning of one important word. To do that they would have to give me two or three other new words that I didn't understand that were necessary to understand the meaning of the first word they are trying to teach me. This is

So as we go back through the linguistic generations we come to – "to load a wagon". In other words, there are many linguistic generations back to the original word picture that gives a defined understanding of the word charge.

a fairly normal exercise when working with uncharted languages. For me as the student it was extremely frustrating.

During this process one of the men said to me in English, "Wamut, this is our gurranjay matha". To which I said in their language, "What is gurranjay matha"? My two Yolŋu colleagues went on to explain that gurranjay matha is their language like the big English language in an English dictionary. It is their academic language.

That morning I had discovered the name for a whole category of cognitive effective language, or academic language, within Yolŋu Matha. From that time on I have concentrated on trying to learn as much of this academic Yolŋu Matha as I possibly could. My main reason for doing this is so that I can use this gurranjay matha in my education endeavours with Yolŋu people.

We have found that there is not a subject that cannot be explained effectively and efficiently in Yolŋu Matha. There are many concepts and terms in Yolŋu Matha that do not exist in English. Of course there are also a large number of concepts and terms in English that do not exist in Yolŋu Matha. However when there is no Yolŋu Matha terms the English term can be broken down and expressed much quicker in a Yolŋu Matha /English dialogue then it can be explained to a Yolŋu person in only English.

The academic level of Yolŋu Matha has no problems coping with the medical terms and concepts, legal language even to a constitutional level, or any form of economic or commerce discussion. In fact there are some economic and legal concepts I have learnt in Yolŋu Matha where I cannot find an equivalent in English.

There needs to be real investment made in the maintenance and revitalisation of these OALs and especially the academic languages within each of these languages as we are losing powerful thinking concepts as every old person dies in Arnhem Land.

D. Healing Benefits of Language and Identity

1. It's All a Matter of a Fair Go

The healing benefits of recognizing and employing the OALs is much more than just culture, it's a matter of being okay with who you are, who your mother and father are, who your grandmother or grandfather are, who your people are and your whole identity. It is a matter of affirming for Yolngu people to know the world around them in the same way their people have known this country for thousands of years. It is a matter of not needing to think in a language that is foreign and alienating you from your heritage and in fact from everything that makes you Australian. It's a matter of a fair go.

Having lived for many years in an Aboriginal community that speak their own languages and visited many other Aboriginal communities who have now lost their languages, I know that the differences in these communities are worlds apart.

The communities who still speak their own languages have a sense of pride and engagement that is not evident on communities that now speak Creole English languages or Aboriginal English as their first language.

The latter groups have clearly been dumbed down through the neo-colonial methodologies and strategies of the dominant Australian culture, leaving them deskilled and with little sense of mastery over any area of their lives, lost as a people group with little or no future. These communities have lost any form of self-sufficiency and intellectual capability even down to everyday skills like parenting. They have been convinced by the dominant culture that everything about them, their culture and way of life is primitive and should be jettisoned. Many of them now feel that there is nothing useful in their 'way of life' to help convey them forward productively in a modern world.

Recognition of Indigenous OALs and their employment in contemporary education can lead to healing in many areas of community life, connecting the past to the future. It would give Indigenous Australians a solid cultural platform to stand on and to move forward from, rather than losing firm cultural footing and sinking in the quicksand of misunderstanding.

2. Closing the Generation Gap and Saving Lives

One of the areas where the use of the Indigenous OALs and the academic languages within these languages can make a major difference is, to close the generation gaps that now exist within Aboriginal communities.

Many Aboriginal communities suffer from a massive generation gap between the oldest people in the community and the younger people, due to the colonial process, disruptive engagement methodologies and policies that are common practices at the colonial interface. This leads to major social disorder, including petrol sniffing alcohol and other drug abuse and high levels of suicide among young people as they find themselves lost within their own community.

Many of these young people see no future in growing up and ending up like their old people. They now view their old people as primitive people in a lost world. These Youth have taken on the distorted, destructive image that the dominant English speaking culture has placed on them. Sadly they then start to act out the image they now have of themselves.

However, when the gurranjay matha (academic language) of Yolŋu Matha was used in radio programmes we discovered some unusual results. Many of the old people said to us, "Thanks for using the gurranjay matha in the radio programmes when you are talking to the doctor or the lawyer". When I asked them, "Why? What difference did it make?" the people responded, "The young people are now respecting us more". "How come?" I would ask "The young people cannot understand the English language of the doctor or gurranjay matha academic Yolŋu Matha that you are using to explain what the doctor says. So young people are now turning to us as their teachers again!"

One elder rang me and said the same thing, and also went on to say she is now organising a weekly gathering of young women who are having problems with controlling their weight. They are now working through the issues of proper diet and exercise.

I asked the elder what material she was using to talk through the issues. She responded by saying we are talking through the issues of obesity, diabetes and heart disease and their relationship to food and diet from the material in the programmes that you have produced on Yolŋu Radio.

The counselling session organised by this community elder, all in Yolŋu Matha, is not funded by Government money but is a result of the empowerment of the Elders and adults within the Yolŋu community through programs accessed from Yolŋu radio because it was in their own language. The use of language tied together with good media outlets can lead to information being appropriated very quickly within a community and building healthy, strong, stable social structures within communities.

3. Every Adult Yolŋu Person Becomes a Teacher of Traditional and Contemporary Knowledge

The appropriate recognition and employment of the OALs creates the opportunity of turning every adult Aboriginal person, in some of the most remote communities of Australia, into teachers of both traditional and contemporary knowledge. Returning respect, pride and the desire for academic achievement to the main place in their daily lives.

Adult Aboriginal people have taught their own people and children for centuries. They have very good traditional education skills for teaching children and adults - skills they lose as they come into contact with dominant Australian culture. This is because the dominant culture does not recognise these skills or create programs that empower these traditional teachers.

These adults have educational systems and institutions that cover a vast array of information and knowledge within their traditional systems. However, they desperately need access to information from the Western English-speaking world. Aboriginal people have found that their whole world has changed. The information needed to deal with that change must come from the English-speaking world.

As discussed earlier, all these people could learn English through a structured English learning program. However, this will take time and will be more difficult for the older people in that community to learn English than for the younger people. This is why it is necessary to deliver information and knowledge about the English speaking world; its disease, foods, economic legal systems and new legislation and many other issues in the people's own language so there can be a fast take-up of that information by the whole language community in a much more constructive way.

Many dominant culture people believe Aboriginal people and communities need to be changed through the younger people. This is neo-colonialism in its most ugly and destructive form usually classed as paternalism.

Policies that stem from this thinking - and there are many at the moment - leave communities broken and destroyed. The concentration on elitist education, leadership training and the colleges that take the young people away from their communities and elders have never worked in the past and will never work in the future, no matter how many billions dollars are spent on them. Many of the young people end up lost and dismayed filling the courts and the jails across the land.

Healthy communities need empowered and informed adults. It is the adults that are the makers and shakers and reformers of any community. Without empowered adults, the children and youth have no one to look up to and no hope for the future; and for a fraction of the cost, of the above mentioned programs, whole communities can be empowered by using the OALs.

I have had many Yolŋu adults say to me that even just walking into a store is a very confusing thing; not knowing what is good food to buy with the money they have. Products like fizzy drinks are seen as healthy and there are many other confusing issues just around the issues of Western foods; all new to Yolŋu people. Yolŋu and other Aboriginal adults are dealing with a time warp of new information.

The only way to deliver this new information quickly and efficiently is through the use of the OALs teamed together with appropriately resourced language centres and good media services. Media services can then deliver this information to adult Aboriginal people in the communities creating an information revolution just like what is available to other language groups across the world.

This way we can turn every adult Aboriginal person into a teacher of traditional and contemporary information. Teaching their own children is something Aboriginal people have been doing for thousands of years.

E. Inadequate Interpreting Service

The present Aboriginal interpreter service is far from adequate. This is no fault of any Aboriginal interpreter however its success could clearly be improved by utilising the OALs appropriately.

At present in the Yolŋu Matha languages, only a small handful of Yolŋu interpreters can successfully and accurately perform medical and legal interpreting. Our most qualified Yolŋu interpreters still struggle in these areas, so their mistake level can be quite high. This is putting unreasonable and unsustainable pressure on the interpreters involved. We are losing our best Yolŋu interpreters faster than they are being trained from stress-related diseases and illnesses.

There are many things wrong with the service and the following discussion will work through some of the issues that I have encountered, having spent many thousands of hours working with Yolŋu interpreters around a whole range of issues.

First let me give some background history.

- **History of Language Research**

Many people wonder why Aboriginal people like Yolŋu seem to find it so hard to understand, speak and learn the English language.

If we look at the years of research that have been applied to chartering the English language to other European languages it has been at least two thousand years; in fact English has grown out of a number of European languages.

If we were to compare English with Asian languages like Japanese and Chinese we would discover that Jesuit priests started learning both these languages over 400 years ago. So there is at least a 400 years association between English and Chinese/Japanese.

If we compare English with many of the Pacific Island languages like Fijian and Tongan we see that many of these languages have had a linguistic association with English for around 180 years. Not a long time but enough to develop a number of self learning language tools and resources; these includes good two-way dictionaries and for Fijian people an English learning program on Fiji Radio.

Therefore Fijian and Tongan people can come to Australia and operate comparatively well in English because of this linguistic advantage; the main benefits being the length of history between Fijian/Tongan and English. This has allowed the Fijian and Tongan community a corporate knowledge history around the use of English and has also allowed the development of good two way dictionaries, giving individuals the opportunity to advance their personal English skills.

If we look at Yolŋu Matha and its relationship to English, we discover that the linguistic association between Yolŋu Matha and English is only about 60 years. Yolŋu and other OALs speakers and thinkers do not have these same well developed self learning language tools, adequate dictionaries or even corporate knowledge around the English language.

(i) Interpreter Services Run from Language Centres

Interpreter services that are just booking agents are not appropriate for many of the indigenous languages as so much development work still needs to be done. Yolŋu interpreters could also be involved in this work if interpreter services were run from language centres.

Yolŋu interpreters need to be able to sit down with EFL workers who can also speak Yolŋu Matha and discuss any linguistic difficulties they are having with English words or phrases.

Operating interpreter services from language centres will give Yolŋu interpreters real colleague support, a chance to upgrade skills and also be involved in the chartering of their own languages. This would also give interpreters a better income stream.

(ii) Team Interpreting

Due to the amount of work that still needs to be done between Yolŋu Matha and English languages I believe a team interpreting approach should be used.

Until Yolŋu Matha has been fully charted with all the academic and cognitive effective language documented and good linguistic tools developed, Yolŋu Matha and other Australian Indigenous languages should be treated in a special class. The Australian Indigenous languages should not be compared with other ethnic languages due to the disparity in the level of charting and understanding between ethnic languages and English and the Indigenous languages and English (explained above).

The people needed to do team interpreting would be Yolŋu Matha first language speakers who also speaks English as a second language teamed together with an EFL person who also speaks Yolŋu Matha as a second language.

This would allow the team who is interpreting to work together and also record any new terms or phrases they come across in a central data base giving others in the team access to what they have learnt. This work would also fuel the development of good dictionaries so the whole Yolŋu population, including the interpreters and translators, would have the necessary tools to quickly understand difficult English words and phrases. I believe team interpreting needs to be the model used in many interpreting situations for indigenous languages at the moment.

(iii) New Interpreter Categories

Many Yolŋu interpreters have talked about the need for a new category of naming for Aboriginal interpreters. At the moment almost any Yolŋu person can get a job as an Aboriginal interpreter as long as they speak some English. Yolŋu people are being employed in very complicated interpreter settings with almost no training whatsoever. Experienced Yolŋu interpreters are very worried about the situation, as the mistake level of these untrained interpreters is extremely high.

The present system also brings into disrepute the whole of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. If untrained Yolŋu people are clearly seen as inadequate interpreters, it brings the whole service into question, on both sides of the language cultural divide. Many Yolŋu clients will also not trust their own Yolŋu interpreters due to the level of mistakes that occur.

To solve this issue I believe there should be a mentoring system in place, with a new category of Language Assistant for those people who are employed with very little training. These Language Assistants should then be teamed together with the more experienced Yolŋu interpreter so real on the job training can occur.

(iv) Using Technology and Internet

I have talked about combining Language Centres together with a good Media Service to develop a whole range of self-learning tools for interpreters, Yolŋu adults and other Yolŋu professionals who want access to high levels of English learning through their own language. They could also produce modern language learning materials for English first language speaking people.

The Language Centres would be a place for excellence in language charting, documenting and for the development of language tools. The media services may include radio, internet and print media services. These services need resourcing as the present level of support is almost nil.

Some Examples:

- **Dictionary Development and Internet**

At present there are no complete two way dictionaries of OALs in Australia. There are some partly completed tangible dictionaries, as in picture dictionaries and the like. For Yolŋu Matha there is significant better dictionary availability yet are still seriously lacking in the academic language areas. There are whole groups of these concepts that have not been recorded into a dictionary resource; these areas include medical, economic, commercial and legal/political terms.

Of the Yolŋu Matha dictionaries, the best are Yolŋu Matha to English dictionaries, not English to Yolŋu Matha. One of these is the Gupapuyngu Dictionary by Beulah Lowe from the 1950, 60 and 70's.

It is available online at <http://www.ards.com.au/Gupapuyngu/lexicon/main.htm>

This was originally a Yolŋu Matha to English dictionary. On the internet it has been set up to work both ways. Due to lack of resources the English to Yolŋu Matha does not work very well, however, it is a good example of how media can be used to give a wide range of people access to language resources when they are developed.

Some other uncompleted dictionaries that show us what is possible if some real funding was available include:

Interactive Yolŋu Matha Anatomy Dictionary:

<http://www.ards.com.au/healthdictionary/lexicon/main.htm>

Legal English to Yolŋu Matha Dictionary:

http://www.ards.com.au/Downloads/Legal_YM_Dictionary.pdf

- **The Best Kept Secret in Australia - Yolŋu Radio**

Yolŋu Radio is an OAL Radio service for the Yolŋu people of north-east Arnhem Land. It has 20 small FM transmission sites in Arnhem Land and an AM transmitter in Darwin, can also be received Australia wide via a free-to-air signal on the Aurora satellite platform and on the World Wide Web at; <http://www.ards.com.au/> (make sure you also download the audio recorder available)

Yolŋu Radio creates a classroom for over 8,000 Yolŋu people and now also has a national and worldwide audience but is struggling to survive financially. (See page 16 above)

To hear over 1,000 individual programs go to on line storage of education programs at;

http://www.ards.com.au/hear_programs.htm

- **e-Learning School**

(See page 19 above for full explanation)

To experience what is possible in the teaching of Yolŋu to learn to read and write their own language while learning English, see <http://www.whywarriors.com.au/elearn/literacy/>

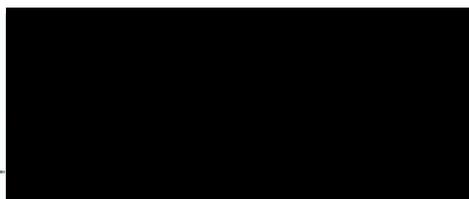
If you visit the site, open up one of the modules and put your cursor over the top of the words. If you have the sound enabled on your computer, you will hear the sounds of the words and the syllables in both Yolŋu Matha and English.

F. Conclusion. An Intervention in Communication

Aboriginal people need to regain control over their lives and build health, happy and vibrant communities to 'Close the Gap' forever. To do this, like all Australian citizens, they need access to good modern information and knowledge. Information and knowledge can only flow effectively and efficiently to them through their own languages. They needed an intervention in communication and their OALs are key to this intervention.

These Original Australian Languages are also academic assets that hold the very essence of what it is to be Australian. It is hoped they will be recognised for their full potential and employment to really make a difference.

The writer of this submission commends the Government for conducting this review and hopes that real policy changes will come out of it to give the First Australians a chance of an equal opportunity in this lucky country.



Richard Trudgen August 2011

Acronyms used in this Document

OALs - original Australian languages

OAL - original Australian language

EFL - English first language