Submission for: **Language learning in Indigenous communities**

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[redacted]

1. What are the languages spoken in your community? Pitjantjatjara is the main language of community and other languages are also spoken by many community members as their connections are with other language groups. English is rarely used in the community and only to non Anangu people.

2. How well are they spoken by children, adults and elders? Pitjantjatjara is the main language used in daily interactions. Most do not speak Standard English nor even much more than single word English communication. School is the main place English is heard in the community. There are no signs in English, nor any great need to speak or read English except in interaction with a non Anangu. text based literacy is generally poor. English is a foreign language here. This community is remote and one where almost no one speaks even Aboriginal English as a first language and Pitjantjatjara is the local language in use. It is as if you have moved to another non English speaking country.

3. Describe your group and project: Pipalyatjara Anangu School caters for birth to tertiary education. We have a playgroup, preschool, primary school, secondary school and tertiary education for the Anangu Education workers through TAFE Certificate courses and Anangu Tertiary Education Program with Uni SA.

In Jan 2009 the school was an empty shell with only half the buildings powered and watered. There were very few resources and no furnishings in the buildings. It was a blank slate. It was a perfect time to make real changes to the culture of learning in the school and attendance at school.
We began a Literacy Intervention Program due to the high number of teenage zero readers and lack of progress in literacy generally. Attendance at school was very low. The school made a 5 year commitment to employ an extra teacher to allow for individual and small group time with all identified students. We reviewed our literacy policy and delivery and as part of that process identified the need to teach their first language. We addressed the need to have a broad based integrated literacy program that incorporates learning their own language alongside English. Also identified at the time was the need to have an AEW engaged in teaching in every classroom to support the teacher.
This holistic program takes teacher and AEW time and resources. This is a huge commitment for the literacy support teacher, the AEW support teacher and AEWs to make this possible. The school commitment over the five years will be close to $1m which will come from money that was saved over the years that no money was spent while waiting for a new school to be built. This is unsustainable into the future. Our funding for AEWs was cut this year from 110 hours to 40hours/week. We actually employ 7 AEWs working 30 hours /week plus the Anangu coordinator for 35hours. This is unsustainable in the long term. Our goal is to make a difference while we can and break the back of poor literacy. Ongoing funding would mean we could plan on into the future to ensure teaching Pitjantjatjara can continue and the intense literacy

support needed to counteract the slow start to children's learning due to lack of literacy and parenting skills in the community and the fact that these students are learning in a foreign language.

The delivery of Pitjantjatjara Language is by three key AEWs who are also supported by the particular class AEW. The Anangu Support Teacher is vital to the planning and delivery of the curriculum. Without this support teacher the program would not run. The best of our AEWs are not highly literate in any of their main languages. Aboriginal languages were not written languages and the grammar and function of their aboriginal language is not well understood even for their own language in its spoken form.
All our students are learning to read and write their own language. We have found that as students begin to make the connections in their own language their ability and interest in reading in English also grows. It is exciting to have some students now surpassing their AEWs in their ability to read and write in Pitjantjatjara. This clearly highlights the need to build the AEWs skills in their own language, requiring more time and money.

4. What activities do you do to record or encourage the use of languages, including local languages? The Pitjantjatjara language curriculum in based on that written by Sandra Ken and Katrina Tjitayi and other Anangu on the APY Lands. We looked at the methodology used to teach English literacy in the school and have applied it to teaching their first language. Added to this is the emphasis on cultural aspects where community involvement is vital. As with learning to read in English, fun and interest, large numbers of levelled readers is vital to their ability to progress. The use of story, songs, music and bush trips to embed the learning in their own context is a core aspect of the language program.

5. What help do you receive from the government or other organisations to carry out your activities? We have an agreement with COAG for 4 positions 20 hours/week for AEWs who come from CDEP program. This funding currently runs to Dec 2012 but is only for selected AEWs and does not cover their 30 hours per week.

We have 0.1 funding From First Language Maintenance funding which is 0.1 of the AEW support teachers cost.
We get AEW funding of 40 hours/week from DECS. The Anangu Coordinator is 35 hours/week. Leaving 5 hours to spread among 7 other positions!

6. Can you describe how your project's activities may have helped the whole community? The pride in having Pitjantjatjara language and culture explicitly taught and valued in the school is immense. It builds cross generational interaction as well as helping kids master reading and writing in their foreign language, English. While in community these students do not hear, read or need English outside school hours.

Building the skills of the AEWs in their own language and having community members support in cultural learning involves community in their children's education. This involvement is so vital to improve learning outcomes. This is an area of concern that we are now turning our attention toward.

7. How are your languages, including your local languages taught in school?

Pitjantjatjara is taught as a subject and is also used to support understanding in all curriculum areas.

- daily for 20 minutes to pre-school students
- 2 X45 minutes a week, as a first language literacy program, for all other children, in the 4 multi level classes that cover Reception to Year 11

Explicit language teaching is modelled on the integrated Accelerated Literacy model of delivery used for English literacy. It is also supported by Anangu Domain and Land Management which incorporates other cultural aspects. Pitjantjatjara is also used by AEWs to explain teaching and learning in all curriculum areas.

8. What difference has the teaching of local languages made to children's attendance and achievement at school?

Attendance at the school is now 90-100% (most of the time) *when students are in the community*. Events occurring in community do have some effect on this but generally if a student is in community they will be in school. Yes we do have some exceptions but this is the general situation now. Our attendance figures do not reflect this accurately as children are still regularly taken from community during school terms and most often do not attend another school. We are trying to collect data so that we can accurately track the different attendance situations. We really want to know what the attendance rate is for a child in community, for a child attending any school anywhere and when a child in not attending school anywhere. Families are extremely transient although now an adult will more often than not let us know when they are taking students out of community.

Students are often taken out of community for a range of reasons including medical appointments. It takes a minimum of a week for a round trip to the hospital in Alice Springs for a half hour appointment. Our local clinic does their best to ensure minimum turn around for both AEWs and students but it is often the timing of the specialist appointment that dictates the person being out of town. Footy in WA is still carnival style that can take 3-4 days to complete. Family obligations, funerals, meetings of various kinds and unrest contribute to families moving in and out of community. A child very sensibly gets in a car with family moving out of town. They know that family may not return for some weeks or months.

We now have no teenage zero readers (of our regular students) and all children above reception are reading and moving forward in their literacy. We are now turning our attention to what we can do to increase the speed of reading mastery.

As children succeed in learning they enjoy school more which means they come more often, succeed more and the cycle continues. We know that even with our special literacy Program (of which teaching Pitjantjatjara is a part) students need to be attending above 75% to make progress.

9. What interpreting and translating services are available in your local languages? How useful and effective are they? One AEW has completed her Diploma of Interpreting through TAFE and is sometimes taken from school to interpret. More often one member of community is used for community meetings. Governing Council is run in both languages with interpreting going both ways. AEWs support with family meetings. This is not always satisfactory as few have the language to accurately express the ideas in both languages.

10. What are the main difficulties facing your project? Lack of money to employ the staff and provide resources we know we need to allow these students to succeed in the schooling being delivered in a foreign language. Our commitment to employing extra teachers and extra AEWs will come to an end as we use up the capital only built up due to the time it took to build the new school.

We need to be able to train the AEWs in their own language as well as in English. Currently all training is at the expense of time in classroom. We pay AEWs for all training and are expected to also pay their cultural, sick and family leave. Every Anangu uses every bit of leave every year. Increasing their skills, understanding and ability to contribute to the learning environment is a huge part of the success of the teaching and learning in the school. Still none are able to plan, teach and deliver without huge support from teachers. Skills of AEWs need to be upgraded**.** This means an ongoing commitment to a literacy support teacher, an Anangu support teacher and enough AEWs that while some are training others are in the classroom working with teachers and students.
We also need to be able to produce more good quality commercially printed books in Pitjantjatjara for children to read. At the moment there are some available but the bulk of books we use are hand made. The difference in quality does not give equal value to Pitjantjatjara and English. When children are learning to read they need to have a large number of books available to them which are continually changed. We do not have access to a Pitjantjatjara library or source of graded books.

11. What are you aiming to achieve in the future? Our goal is to have AEWs more capable and confident in taking a leading role in the programming and delivery of Pitjantjatjara language and culture to ensure all students become literate in their own first language.
We have recognised the need for a dedicated space for language teaching and aim to set up the current adult education room as a place dedicated for teaching and learning about Pitjantjatjara language and culture.
We need to expand the range of good quality resources and would like to develop more digital resources, in both English and Pitjantjatjara, for use in community homes. This would be one way of getting text in use in the community which would in turn promote learning for the students. Engaging family in their students schooling is a big area for us to work on. Engaging community in the teaching of their own language and culture is one way to do this.

The biggest issues in achieving this are time and energy, personnel and resources. It would be helpful to have the fact that these children are learning in a foreign language recognised.

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