

# Training Teachers for Indigenous Languages Education: What's Happening Overseas?

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## Abstract

As Indigenous languages revitalisation undergoes growth across Australia there is an increasing need for high quality and effective training to equip educators to teach their languages in a range of settings. While vocational and higher education institutions in various parts of the country are moving to respond to this demand, it is timely to consider how those in other post-colonial English-dominant societies are addressing the task. This paper presents some findings from a recent study tour of south-western Canada, the western United States and New Zealand examining teacher training and accreditation for indigenous languages education in those countries to consider if there are any lessons we can learn. It also examines some fluency development strategies from those regions and considers their potential for local application.

## Background

Since the implementation of the NSW Board of Studies' *Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus* (2003)<sup>1</sup> there has been steadily growing interest in the provision of training for Indigenous languages education as well as methods and fora that might foster the rapid development of fluency and speaker communities in the state's severely endangered languages. The Koori Centre at the University of Sydney has provided an early response by establishing the *Master of Indigenous Languages Education* in 2005<sup>2</sup>, while TAFE NSW recently implemented a *Certificate I in Aboriginal Languages* and is currently finalising *Certificates II and III* (Cheung, 2007). Graduate programs in language endangerment studies are available at Monash University<sup>3</sup> and vocational providers such as Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative in northern NSW offer Indigenous language study with some languages education content<sup>4</sup>. The nation's principal Indigenous tertiary institute at Batchelor has for many years provided both degrees in teaching and linguistics (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2007). However, there does not appear to be an initial teacher training degree with an Indigenous languages specialisation available anywhere in the country at this time<sup>5</sup>.

In the process of designing its courses the Koori Centre was faced with the difficult issue of catering to a broad range of languages in various states of health and revitalisation and, in many cases, with uncertain potential for recovery. Thus arbitrarily imposed and uniform standards for fluency in candidates and graduates were avoided in favour of a more flexible approach that allows for the development of languages and variable fluency standards over time (Koori Centre, 2005). While this has been perceived as the optimum solution for both provider and students it has been identified as problematic by the agency responsible for accrediting teacher education courses in the state. The NSW Institute of Teachers requires that to be recognised as an appropriate professional qualification such training should have parity with any other language offered, i.e. involving substantial post-secondary study and, hence, fluency. Given that this level of training is not yet available for any Indigenous language in the state an interim compromise was reached and:

The NSW Department of Education & Training acknowledges the availability of the Master of Indigenous Languages Education offered at the University of Sydney and accepts this program as providing appropriate training for qualified Aboriginal teachers seeking additional approval to teach an Aboriginal language. Aboriginal teachers completing the Master of Indigenous Languages Education up to the end of 2010 will be eligible for approval to teach Aboriginal languages. In 2009 the Department will reconsider the Master of Indigenous Languages Education and any other available Aboriginal languages programs in terms of the requirements for Aboriginal languages teachers after 2010. (Koori Centre, 2007: 2)

Although there is an expectation from all parties that baseline levels of community fluency should ultimately rise over time and fluency development for adults as

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_sc/pdf\\_doc/a\\_b\\_language\\_k10\\_syl.pdf](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/a_b_language_k10_syl.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Graduate certificate and diploma options were added in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Course Information: Studies in Language Endangerment <http://www.arts.monash.edu/linguistics/pglangen/course/index.php>

<sup>4</sup> Certificate II in Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Maintenance.

<sup>5</sup> An anticipated Australian Council for Educational Research report to DEST providing a comprehensive national overview of current Indigenous languages education activities was not available at the time of presentation or writing.

well as schoolchildren is seen as an urgent priority for the state, the accreditation of Indigenous language teacher fluency in NSW remains unresolved. Nor do there appear to be any interstate precedents available.

While other parts of Australia no doubt offer significant examples of Indigenous languages maintenance and revitalisation to follow in fostering fluency, current community interest here seems strongest in identifying overseas solutions coupled with a desire to find remedies that can be quickly appropriated to meet an increasingly urgent need. Thus there are ongoing calls for universities and, in some cases, schools to implement immersion programs, language learning institutes, language nests, Master-Apprentice programs and so-called accelerated language learning techniques modelled on perceived foreign success<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the draft resolutions of the Indigenous Languages Conference 2007 held in Adelaide explicitly called for the implementation of language nests<sup>7</sup>, echoing the recommendations of the *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report* (Department of Communications, Information Technology & the Arts, 2005) before it. The *Current Provision of Indigenous Language Programs in Schools* report under preparation for the Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST) (Australian Council for Educational Research, n.d.) is similarly charged with evaluating a Master-Apprentice program that was to have been trialed in NSW.

This range of issues suggested that it was timely to seek some insight from similar English speaking post-colonial contexts and establish what was really going on overseas in terms of training Indigenous languages teachers, including the accreditation of teacher fluency and preferred methods and events for fostering its development. On this basis the author undertook a study tour of British Columbia, Alberta, Montana, Utah, Arizona, California and New Zealand from July to September of 2007 visiting universities, government offices and community agencies directly engaged in the field to seek their advice and to alert them to current developments in Australia.

What follows is a highly condensed impression of the general situation in each country with reference to some specific initiatives and institutions based on discussions with individual practitioners. With a few exceptions, it does not seek to extensively detail the activities of particular offices, institutions, states or provinces, but gives a broad overview drawing attention to those

aspects believed to be of special interest and relevance to the domestic, principally NSW, context.

## Aotearoa / New Zealand

Although New Zealand is often thought of as Australia's closest cultural relative, in terms of indigenous language activity it is probably most different and, for other post-colonial indigenous minorities around the Pacific rim, can seem something of a language revitalisation utopia.

An ongoing treaty history that has specific application to a single indigenous language used by a numerically and proportionately large speaker population, combined with one level of relatively supportive government, has fostered an environment where good planning drives the restoration and development of *te reo Māori* (the Maori language) as one with strong contemporary relevance (Kalafatis, Fink-Jensen & Johnson, 2007). The 1987 Maori Language Act<sup>8</sup> together with government offices like the Maori Language Commission (MLC)<sup>9</sup> give status and provide a focus for development, while services such as Maori Television<sup>10</sup> evidence and foster strong community interest and support. It is not surprising then that New Zealand should have a highly structured and comprehensive national system of education and teacher training that makes it feasible to be educated in *te reo Māori* from preschool through to a teaching degree.

New Zealand is justifiably famous for its *te kohanga reo*<sup>11</sup> (language nests) that provide Maori-medium preschool and an incidental focus for parental fluency development. They are also reflective of the Maori imperative to restore *te reo* as the language of the home and child-rearing in particular. Public and tribal schools may offer bilingual or immersion programs, that reach their zenith in *kura kaupapa Māori* (Maori-medium schools) where students receive their education exclusively in the language<sup>12</sup>.

Such a strong national education landscape requires and sustains a well-developed and extensive teacher education system. Numerous universities and tribal colleges (*wānanga*) across the country offer a range of undergraduate degrees and graduate courses with either Maori immersion or bilingual specialist designations, that can reflect not only the intended classroom type in which graduates will practise, but also the delivery method for their course. Teaching degrees are generally only three years in duration and a Limited Authority to Teach exists for those who have not completed training but wish to work in restricted contexts, such as language classrooms. Many designated teacher-training programs

<sup>6</sup> The Koori Centre has already responded to these needs by implementing a unit of study in the Gamilaraay language in 2006 with another to follow in 2009, and joined with Murrumbidgee to inaugurate a NSW Indigenous languages summer school this year.

<sup>7</sup> Sharing Aboriginal Language: LINGAD2007 Recommendations.  
<http://sharingaboriginallanguage.pbwiki.com/LINGAD+2007+Recommendations>. Accessed September 10, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/act87/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.maoritelevision.com/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.kohanga.ac.nz/>

<sup>12</sup> The degree of classroom immersion needed to qualify for designation as an immersion program may also be as low as 12% (NZ Ministry of Education, 2006) and bilingual programs may actually teach only Maori language and culture in *te reo*.

are delivered by majority Maori staff and usually include some community (*marae*)-based instruction, with mixed mode delivery popular, particularly amongst the tribal providers.

Teacher fluency is accredited either through the substantial *te reo* component inherent in designated courses or by sitting the MLC's Teaching Sector Maori Language Proficiency Examination<sup>13</sup> that provides a specific and extensive assessment of fluency for teaching purposes. While training for an immersion designation requires strong *te reo* abilities, both non-speakers and non-Maori may train and teach in the language, and places are readily accessible in all programs under a national student loans scheme.

The quality of language teaching in designated programs is widely regarded as amongst the best available nationally and academics bemoan the frequent siphoning of their most competent students from teaching to government and media. Outside teacher training courses, some universities, polytechnics and most wānanga (tribal colleges), offer adult Maori fluency development often with a strong emphasis on *marae*-based learning.

### United States

By contrast with New Zealand, the linguistic situation in America bears far more similarity to the diversity found in Australia, with widely variable speaker populations between languages that consequently exhibit great differences in vitality and levels of community activity (Campbell, 1997)<sup>14</sup>. This complexity is further compounded by the sheer number of largely unresponsive state jurisdictions and the complex web of surviving treaty rights and obligations that govern which people do, and do not, have access to resources and services.

Indigenous languages education generally occurs only in those states or parts of states that have substantial Native American populations with a strong speaker base. Where reservations survive, they are primarily under federal rather than state jurisdiction, and may exercise considerable local autonomy and be exempt from as well as denied state programs. Additionally, larger reserves may cross several states' borders. These circumstances make it difficult to characterise the national landscape of indigenous languages education that can be highly localised and, in many regions, simply does not occur. This is in no doubt also reflective of the prevailing American belief in so-called 'equality' and a consequent distaste for any perceived special treatment of minorities.

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<sup>13</sup>[http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/services\\_e/language\\_proficiency.shtml](http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/services_e/language_proficiency.shtml)

<sup>14</sup> An evident flaw of this field trip was the failure to visit Hawaii. However, by all accounts the island state is exceptional within the American context and has stronger relationships with and similarity to many New Zealand programs.

Both state and tribal schools may offer either native-medium or bilingual programs, although in only a few cases does it appear that relevant syllabi exist with such matters largely determined at the school level. Many local revitalisation programs also exist that generally appear to operate without teachers trained specifically for the task.

Teacher training is commonly provided under a two-tier system that may see candidates commence their studies at a college before transferring to complete at university, usually over a total four years. There are few designated Native American teacher training programs nationally and even less specifically for indigenous languages education. The majority of students simply complete a standard university teaching degree for which they may have been able to undertake some language and languages education training. Only a few major tribal institutions, such as Diné College on the Navajo nation, offer designated languages education programs (2006) in partnership with local universities.

The certification of indigenous fluency for teaching purposes, where required, is largely external to teacher training courses and is devolved to recognised tribal authorities<sup>15</sup>. Thus a teacher of a Native American language might either have undertaken a standard teaching degree and have their capacity to teach that language certified by virtue of their prior fluency, or undertake a degree that affords them some fluency development and seek subsequent recognition, or simply teach the language they speak without specific languages education training. Some states also allow for restricted teaching licences that permit those with less than full training to undertake limited responsibility for language classes.

Eligibility for programs that use Native-specific funds is generally limited to those who are enrolled members of particular nations, and criteria of 'blood quantum' are rigorously applied. Conversely most programs are open to all interested parties on a user pays basis and anyone can seek to learn or teach a Native language.

A few universities and some tribal colleges offer adult fluency development outside school programs. There is also a strong tradition of language institutes; events that occur regularly in different parts of the country and provide opportunities for language learning in addition to training in linguistics and teaching methods for revitalisation. Particularly notable in this context is the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival Master-Apprentice model that provides a last chance opportunity for intergenerational transmission of a dying language in the absence of linguistic support. An Accelerated Second Language Acquisition technique

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<sup>15</sup> There was some evidence of confidence issues in the certification process for languages where more than one agency was accredited.

currently enjoys some community popularity. These are discussed at greater length below.

## Canada

While Canada's indigenous linguistic situation is very similar to that of the United States, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale; the relatively supportive stance of both tiers of government creates a social and political environment much more like that of Australia. And, although surviving treaties still play a central role in determining resource access for specific peoples, there is a substantial base of provincial and federal support for all communities and languages that is evident in the prevailing partnership model (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages & Cultures, 2005).

Canada also exhibits multiple Aboriginal<sup>16</sup> languages with speaker populations numbering from single digits to the tens of thousands (Cook & Howe, 2004) and variable levels of community interest and activity. State and tribal schools may offer native-medium immersion or bilingual programs, although both are largely restricted to numerically strong languages and communities. Numerous local school and community-based revitalisation projects also exist.

The accreditation of Aboriginal teacher fluency is devolved to autonomous community language agencies under arrangements with teachers' institutes and may be evidenced through challenge or coursework. Access to funds and initiatives provided through Native bands is restricted to enrolled members, but access to language and teacher education programs are notionally accessible to all on a user pays basis.

As in the United States there is a tradition of indigenous language revitalisation institutes, usually with a strong emphasis on fluency development. Universities and tribal colleges also offer community-based or on-campus classes in many regions.

Teacher education normally involves a five-year degree, optionally based on initial college studies. Restricted licences for teaching languages and other specific fields are available requiring a lower level of training. There are a few providers of Aboriginal-specific programs and a limited number of designated indigenous languages education programs with immersion or bilingual specialisation, mostly through partnerships between universities and tribal colleges. Most indigenous teachers would undertake a standard teaching degree that might, in a few cases, allow for some optional language content.

### A Laddered Approach

However, there is a particular Canadian response to the need for fluent indigenous languages educators that

should be of great interest to us. This 'laddered' approach provides a series of articulated qualifications through which students can progress with a range of exit points directly relevant to the language revitalisation process. Perhaps the most coherent example is to be found at the University of Victoria and is based in strong partnerships between university, government and communities<sup>17</sup>.

Here students may undertake initial fluency studies in specific languages offered through institutes or tribal college courses recognised by the university, or seek certification based on their current fluency in a language. The assessment of fluency is made solely by the relevant First Nations Language Authority accredited by the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT) and results in the award of a First Nations Language Certificate (FNLC). Thus already strong speakers can gain immediate certification while those still developing their fluency are supported through a structured acquisition process that results in a state-recognised qualification.

With the FNLC, candidates are eligible to enter the Certificate in Aboriginal Languages Revitalisation (CALR) program. This is offered by Continuing Education in collaboration with the Linguistics department and provides further training in revitalisation studies including introductory linguistics and language teaching methods. Graduates of the CALR are equipped with sufficient skills in addition to their fluency to allow them to work in language centres or support languages education programs.

CALR graduates may also choose to undertake further studies in linguistics, advanced vernacular fluency and languages pedagogy and qualify for the BCCT Developmental Standard Term Certificate (DSTC). The DSTC equates with a university diploma and allows graduates to teach their language in local primary schools. However, it only has a 'standard term' of four years and holders must either be making progress towards a degree at the end of the term, or lose certification and retrain. Ideally all who attain the DSTC will undertake two years of further mainstream teacher training or linguistics and graduate with a Bachelor of Education or Arts (Franki Craig and Associates, 2006).

The University of Victoria is also currently seeking to establish a graduate teacher education qualification based in part on the Koori Centre's Master of Indigenous Language Education. It is understood that this will be the first such program offered in Canada.

### Delivery & Development

In addition to the provision of teacher training for indigenous languages education, the following delivery modes and fluency development strategies currently

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<sup>16</sup> As in Australia, "Aboriginal" is used in Canada as collective name for the country's indigenous population.

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<sup>17</sup> University of Victoria: Aboriginal Teacher Education - Aboriginal Education.  
<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/aboriginalated/ate.php>

attracting interest in Australia were investigated.

### Immersion

In all of the countries visited there was a strong and consistent emphasis given to immersion as the most desirable and effective method for indigenous languages education, if not the ideal method for all indigenous education. However, it was also apparent that there are wide differences of opinion as to what actually constitutes immersion, above and beyond any particular theorist's definitions.

In the context of Indigenous Australian languages revitalisation, immersion is often used to describe those second language classes or lessons that seek to emulate authentic settings in the target language, and restrict instruction and all interaction to it. Thus teacher and students hunting or making a meal in the target language would generally be recognised as an immersion lesson that might constitute part of a broader collection of languages education classroom strategies.

By contrast, in the *kura kaupapa Māori* of New Zealand and some major tribal institutions in North America, immersion describes second or even first language education where the target language is used for most, if not all, content and instruction. In both the New Zealand and Navajo cases, this is substantially supported by vernacular syllabus documents and teaching materials for most curriculum areas<sup>18</sup>, as well as fluent bilingual teachers. In effect this appears to be simply indigenous-medium schooling.

But, not all immersion is 100% in the target language. In Canada, a highly regarded immersion class for adults was observed where the teacher lectured on traditional foods and hunting in an Aboriginal language with simultaneous English translation, but did not require or invite student interaction. The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2006: 3) distinguishes four levels of immersion program down to a minimum of 12%<sup>19</sup> while simultaneously asserting that between 12% and 80% *te reo* instruction constitutes a bilingual program, rather than immersion (Murray, 2005: 3). Practitioners in all three countries also routinely distinguish bilingual education from immersion where the former is commonly associated with learning vernacular fluency and culture as a subject within a predominantly English curriculum. Others would probably consider immersion to be simply one strategy for bilingual education.

On this basis the bilingual schools of Australia's Northern Territory (NT) would readily approximate to some of the immersion programs of other nations, while the kind of languages education envisaged by the NSW syllabus would potentially qualify as bilingual programs

<sup>18</sup> In the New Zealand case this has involved a great deal of language engineering and the production of *te reo* dictionaries of mathematics and science, each with thousands of entries.

<sup>19</sup> Also questioning the effectiveness of immersion below 50%.

elsewhere<sup>20</sup>. Of course the kind of immersion offered in the NT assumes a substantial first language speaker population sufficient to provide fluent classroom teachers and translate content that would not currently be feasible for our south-eastern states.

### Language Nests

The value of language nests as a highly specific immersion strategy in languages revitalisation is well attested (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2006). The Maori model has been successfully exported to Hawai'i and is being implemented in other American and Canadian communities where strong indigenous languages are in decline. However, there are some significant issues relating to the strategy that are currently being recognised.

Research is indicating that children's participation in language nests without subsequent progress to school-based immersion is actually likely to be counterproductive in terms of both their vernacular and English language development (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2006: 4) and is, at best, unlikely to result in significant retention<sup>21</sup>. Similarly many practitioners claim that without *te reo* being spoken predominantly at home the gains of immersion schooling are quickly undone. Thus such strategies to reverse language loss require substantial supporting mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness, including sufficient places in school-based immersion programs for children to continue their acquisition without disruption, and adult fluency development to ensure the language continues to be spoken to the children out of school.

Additionally, while a secondary aim of the *kohanga reo* experiment in New Zealand was to create an environment where elders could also transmit fluency to parents who attended with their children, the declining participation of ageing speakers and the increasing desire for second incomes in Maori households has meant that many *kohanga* are now perceived simply as Maori-medium childcare. While not devaluing the strategy, it is nonetheless pertinent to note that it is normalising and evolving to a form that no longer fulfils all its original aims.

### Master-Apprentice

The Master-Apprentice model is a response developed and managed by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival<sup>22</sup> to situations of imminent language death and is explicated at length by Hinton (2002). At its core is the concept of pairing an

<sup>20</sup> In the Indigenous Australian context, bilingual education is also normally used to describe those second language English programs that share instruction with local languages, and is usually perceived by government as intended to enhance English fluency but often seen by communities as a means of preserving vernacular fluency.

<sup>21</sup> The same problem has been identified for those leaving school-based immersion programs after only a few years.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.aicls.org/>

older speaker with a younger learner in a contracted relationship over several months where both are paid for their time. This arrangement essentially substitutes for one between an informant and linguist where the latter is not available, and is intended to ensure intergenerational transmission before the 'last' speaker of a language is lost. The model is most actively applied in California where it originated and a strong tradition of philanthropy underwrites the substantial costs involved. There is also some spread to other states and across the border into Canada.

In discussions with Hinton it was apparent that while the model has much to recommend it in the field and uses sound language-learning techniques that can potentially be employed in any languages education classroom, it is not intended to replace programmed teaching where such is possible. Similarly the availability of a linguist to work on the language and produce learners' materials would normally obviate the need to implement the model. However, where no other resources are available it is clearly an excellent technique to avoid a language passing from living speech.

### **Accelerated Second Language Acquisition**

The use of Accelerated Second Language Acquisition (ASLA) in indigenous languages revitalisation is promoted by its author and principal practitioner, Stephen Neyooxet Greymorning, an Arapaho man and speaker at the University of Montana. It has been used by him extensively in immersion programs for Arapaho and is being adopted by several community language projects in the United States and Canada. Although it is obviously held in high regard by some, there is a clear disjuncture between ASLA and some university programs.

Greymorning is strongly disinclined to publish any guide to or explanations of ASLA and professes significant concern that it could be appropriated, modified and misused by authorities. He views it as a technique that is best suited to indigenous practitioners and intends to teach it only to them. On that basis he is also rather disinclined to discuss the details of ASLA with outsiders.

Notwithstanding these circumstances it is clear that the method is oral in its nature, and strongly within the immersion realm. It is also highly structured requiring staged introduction of controlled vocabulary in clearly designed steps. Reference is also made to 'natural' learning principles based on children's first language acquisition that includes learning ungrammatical structures as intermediate steps in the process.

While some academics equate ASLA with the Berlitz method and other early oral approaches there is an evident disinclination to endorse it until some methodology and reproducible results are published, which Greymorning clearly does not intend to do, beyond showing videos of his children's apparent

proWess. Nevertheless some universities in North America and, recently, Australia clearly regard Greymorning as an inspirational teacher who is able to motivate other indigenous educators to move beyond literacy-based and grammar translation methods, and his services as a consultant and lecturer are certainly not without demand.

### **Language Institutes**

Across North America there is a strong tradition of indigenous language institutes; summer schools and similar events at which participants can develop their vernacular fluency and literacy, or study linguistics, languages teaching methods, and resource production techniques. Based on a model developed from the initial American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI)<sup>23</sup> held in 1978 similar events have been established throughout the United States and Canada with local, regional or national foci. Some, especially in Canada, appear to emphasise language learning, while others are more oriented to linguistics or languages education.

Although usually a collaborative production between universities and community interests, and with a strong early emphasis of locating events in communities, the institutes have increasingly become university or tribal college-based events. In large part this seems to have grown out of the logistic difficulties of gathering large numbers of staff and students at rural locations, and the difficulty some community members face trying to undertake intensive study within their home environment.

The institutes have also mostly evolved into offering courses within vocational or higher education frameworks; enrolling students and giving credit through hosting institutions' administrative systems. Beyond charging considerable fees the institutes are also substantially reliant on philanthropy, voluntary teaching and institutional goodwill, making for a somewhat tenuous existence. Most also only exist as events, without staff or dedicated offices, AILDI being the notable exception with both space and personnel provided by the University of Arizona administration in recent years.

Given the family and employment needs of community members and their frequent distance from college and university campuses, the institutes provide an effective way for indigenous people to access education for languages revitalisation and do so in a way that can lead to recognised qualifications. Thus most institutes offer units of study that are accredited within their degrees or diplomas and can provide students with a professional pathway into the field as well their own personal development.

### **Discussion**

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~aildi/>

While all of the information presented above should be of some interest to those engaged in Indigenous Australian languages education there are hopefully several ideas that could also prove quite useful, as well as those that should be recognised as only appropriate to highly specific contexts. On that basis it is pertinent to give some interpretation in terms of the Australian situation and what is likely to be relevant and practicable here.

The application of a Master-Apprentice model, while suitable to saving some languages in immediate crisis, is clearly not the best option for broad-based languages education. Thus, in contexts like NSW with its unique generic Aboriginal languages syllabus, actively developing teaching programs in schools and TAFE, and linguists engaged in documenting most still-spoken languages, it would simply not be appropriate. But, for other states and territories, particularly more remote communities without access to such resources, there could be some potential for productive implementation.

However, rather than diverting precious funds to copy the Californian structure and establish an auspicing body to seek benefactors and administer funds and contracts, it might initially be prudent to simply identify a prospective master and apprentice pair and seek specific funding and support for them. This could be through DCITA's Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program<sup>24</sup>, the AIATSIS Research Grants Program<sup>25</sup> or, if an appropriate case could be found, NSW DAA's Aboriginal Community Languages Assistance Program<sup>26</sup>. The partnership of university linguists or their research students could also be profitably utilised for this. Such a pilot study could relatively easily and quickly offer proof of concept in the Australian setting and, if successful, provide a local model to follow. Of course, if such prospective pairs could not be identified it would be a clear indication of relevance.

While generating some international excitement at the community level, Accelerated Second Language Acquisition clearly remains an unproven technique, at least in standard academic terms. It is probably worthwhile then to wait until some methodology or results are published before investing precious time or funds in experimenting with it locally. There have been many predecessors that have promised to revolutionise languages education and each has usually brought something new to the field. However, it is highly unlikely that this or any other single method is the magic bullet that some are hoping for.

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<sup>24</sup>[http://www.arts.gov.au/arts\\_culture/funding\\_programs\\_and\\_support/Maintenance\\_of\\_Indigenous\\_Languages\\_and\\_Records](http://www.arts.gov.au/arts_culture/funding_programs_and_support/Maintenance_of_Indigenous_Languages_and_Records)

<sup>25</sup>[http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research\\_program/grants](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research_program/grants)

<sup>26</sup><http://www.alrc.nsw.gov.au/pages.asp?page=&pubid=95&isid=94&artid=204&pgid=186>

In all locations visited, the great majority of practitioners were at pains to explain that there is no single or quick answer to learning languages, no matter how appealing such an idea might be. The common approach was to equip languages educators with as broad a range of methods and techniques as possible from which they could make choices appropriate to different needs and contexts. In this, communicative and immersion methods were consistently rated most highly as both require students to speak the language in meaningful contexts; exactly what language is mostly used for. Thus the best remedy for local needs might simply be to provide greater access to specific training in these and other oral methods.

The application of immersion in the Australian context evidently requires some clarification as to what exactly is proposed. If it is only to incorporate immersion-style lessons in Indigenous languages education, then this is happening now in some school and adult programs and could be more widely promulgated without great difficulty. However, if what is being sought is closer to the recommended 50% minimum class time spent in the target language found in overseas programs, there are substantial practical limitations to consider.

At this time there are very few languages that could sustain such a program. It would probably require an active fluent speaker population that numbered in the hundreds, and was at least sufficient to produce several native speaker teachers who could provide vernacular classroom instruction and teach standard curriculum content in the language. In practice only some of the stronger bilingual programs of northern Australia would approach this standard, and many would be quick to point to their present difficulty in finding vocabulary to deal with marked non-Indigenous topics.

Notwithstanding these issues it would certainly be of benefit to maximise the level of immersion-style activity available in Indigenous Australian revitalisation classrooms, whether this was by developing specific lessons or fostering such experiences as language learning retreats where English use is actively discouraged. As the community base of fluency rises, so will the potential to move in the direction of true immersion. However, to seek to implement it for most languages now seems only to be an invitation to failure and a consequent disincentive to continue.

Similarly, the provision of language nests in Australia would currently only be possible for the strongest languages<sup>27</sup>. This should be quite apparent if one recognises the need for several adults who could spend entire days speaking spontaneously to groups of children without using any English, and on a full-time basis. It could not currently apply in even the strongest

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<sup>27</sup> It would be of great value for there to be some research into the current provision of pre-schools in remote Australian communities to assess whether or not *de facto* language nests already exist.

languages of south-eastern Australia. Of course, incorporating Indigenous language activities in relevant preschools and making them immersion-style where possible would be an excellent strategy for any revitalising language. But, it would be quite inappropriate to describe it as equivalent with the true nature of *te kohanga reo*.

The advice now coming from New Zealand that sustainable fluency requires vernacular speaking homes and immersion primary schools should also be heeded. This suggests that any proposal to establish language nests in Australia would do well to consider integrating mechanisms at the planning stage to ensure the necessary environment for the maintenance and preservation of children's language learning, including parental fluency development and the timely availability of immersion schooling.

Of course the suggestion that some of these strategies might be unnecessary distractions and should be avoided will be disappointing advice for some. However, this is not the first time such observations have been made, and Amery (2000: 208) noted that Master-Apprentice, language nest and immersion strategies were all inappropriate for Kaurua revitalisation without higher community fluency levels. Besides, there are some foreign innovations with greater potential benefit that are strongly recommended for adoption.

The development of Indigenous language revitalisation institutes would seem to be an idea of significant merit for Australia at this point in time. Current activities such as the Australian Linguistics Institute<sup>28</sup> and Muurrbay's Ngaawa-Garay Summer School<sup>29</sup> could readily be used as vehicles to provide defined offerings that were directly relevant to Indigenous fluency and literacy development, linguistics, and languages education. Wherever possible these could be delivered under TAFE or university frameworks and allow for accreditation and articulation into recognised qualifications.

Approval of such courses under the provisions of DEST's uniquely Australian away-from-base allowance<sup>30</sup> (block release) would afford the auspicing institution/s access to student travel and accommodation funds, and allow the deferral of fees through the student loans system or restrict them to TAFE levels. Of course the ideal would be for one or more educational institutions in partnership with community language organisations and government to establish recurrent annual events that fulfilled these functions on an ongoing basis.

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<sup>28</sup> A professional development event regularly convened by a collection of peak linguistics bodies in Australia that offers courses and often includes an Indigenous Australian program.

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.muurrbay.org.au/ngaawa\\_garay.html](http://www.muurrbay.org.au/ngaawa_garay.html)

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous\\_education/publications\\_resources/abstudy/allowances\\_and\\_benefits/away\\_from\\_base\\_assistance.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/publications_resources/abstudy/allowances_and_benefits/away_from_base_assistance.htm)

Such an environment could also support the development of a series of articulated post-secondary qualifications in a range of areas relevant to languages revitalisation, modelled on the Canadian laddered approach and existing local precedents<sup>31</sup>. Thus TAFE certificates in Indigenous language learning could be married with training for education workers, language workers and teachers offered by VET and higher education providers. This would allow candidates to progress on a number of overlapping pathways towards staged qualifications in relevant fields.

A generic model that allowed for any Indigenous Australian language to be studied would probably be the preferred option, as the speaker population levels that support language-specific designated degrees overseas could not readily be met here. Maximising institutional portability and emphasising away-from-base delivery would also facilitate the broadest possible student access nationally and possibly allow different institutions to contribute in their sphere of expertise. Whether or not sufficient goodwill exists to realise such potential remains to be seen. But, some visionary institutions might otherwise be prepared to implement their own schemes.

There also evidently needs to be some action to respond to the concept of fluency in the Indigenous Australian revitalisation context that both gives recognition for achievement and provides incentive for development, especially for languages educators. It is quite pointless to set an arbitrary or universal standard, especially if that is based on notions of parity with dominant languages, and then wait for endangered languages to catch up. It may never happen. Given that in all jurisdictions visited the certification of fluency was devolved to indigenous authorities without apparent disaster, perhaps some consideration needs to be given to taking a similarly brave step here.

Despite the likely bureaucratic attraction of emulating a quasi-governmental body like the Maori Language Commission to administer a standardised national test, the linguistic diversity of Australia would probably be better served by following the American or Canadian example. However, the American *ad hoc* approach of recognising whatever authority exists is unlikely to appeal in the Australian context. The system administered by BCCT in Canada whereby language authorities must be recognised and apply for accreditation reliant on the support of a language-specific peak tribal body seems far more likely to succeed.

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<sup>31</sup> The Koori Centre and Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney, for example, currently offer an articulated diploma & bachelor program that qualifies Aboriginal Education Assistants in the first instance, and secondary teachers of Aboriginal studies and history in the latter.



Of course, this would be a developmental process and require the establishment or formalisation of organisations in many cases. That, in itself, could be an excellent incentive for capacity building in the language groups concerned and provide a community stimulus for continuing languages revitalisation. It might also be prudent if such fluency certification were provided under a limited term, similar to the British Columbian DSTC, at least until a designated standard could reasonably be set.

### Some Final Words of Wisdom

In most locations visited overseas there was significant interest in the current status of Indigenous Australian languages revitalisation and a great generosity of spirit in sharing information and advice. Above and beyond responses to questions on particular topics there were a number of explicit messages identified by elders and languages education practitioners that they were keen to see carried back to their colleagues in Australia. Some of them are reflective of comments made above. All these words of wisdom are listed below for consideration:

- Languages revitalisation *is* community development.
- Indigenous people need to drive the revitalisation process.
- Schools and governments cannot revitalise your language for you.
- Without good planning you will waste a lot of time and money.
- Work with the people who want to work with you; don't be distracted by those who won't.
- Speak your language at home.
- Speak as little English as possible.
- There is no one way, or quick answer.

Perhaps we would do well to listen and learn from the experience of those who have followed a similar path before us.

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