An Australian trial of the Master-Apprentice method

John Hobson & Brad Laurie
Koori Centre,
University of Sydney
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- **Context**
  - South-eastern Australia (NSW)
  - No first language speakers?
  - No naturally transmitted languages
  - Limited language use in communities
  - Few formal language centres/authorities
  - Rapidly developing school-based programs
    - K-10 Aboriginal Languages Syllabus (2003/5)
    - Both stimulating & diverting community activity
  - Growing community-based initiatives
  - Post-secondary course development
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- **Interest**
  - Imperative to catch up with overseas trends
  - Calls for MA incorporation in school programs
    - “That a pilot national program of Master Apprentice relationships (along the lines of those promoted by Leanne Hinton, 1994) be funded and implemented where appropriate.”
    - “An evaluation of the wider application to the Australian context of an immersion style training programme, based on aspects of the ‘Masters-Apprentice’ [sic] model used in the US and Canada as being trialed by NSW Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre.”
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- Current Applications?
  - Adult-to-adult transmission
  - One-to-one transmission
  - Immersion-based cultural activities
  - Immersion lessons
  - One-to-one immersion by external linguist
  - Elder speaker/classroom teacher teams
  - No ALRRC trial to date

Takahashi (2007)
- An earnest attempt, but...
  - Language centre staff contracted as subjects
  - No prior training, but elicitation experience
  - Live implementation
  - Linguist-scripted sessions with elicitation goals
  - Linguist recorded all sessions
  - Cross-cultural & remote area fieldwork issues
  - Some progress observed over 10? hours
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- Current Trial
  - Wahlubal Bundjalung
  - Northern Rivers NSW, SE Queensland
  - Some school programs in other dialects
  - Dialect issues
  - Internecine disputes
  - Limited documentation
  - No agreed orthography
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- **Participants**
  - ‘Poppy’ Harry Walker, Jabulam elder
  - Brad Laurie, MILE student & languages teacher
  - John Hobson, linguist & MILE coordinator
  - Many Rivers Aboriginal Language Centre
  - Foundation for Endangered Languages

- **Partnerships**
  - Master-apprentice
  - Teacher-student
  - University-school-community-language centre
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• Aims
  ◦ Local demonstration of Master-Apprentice
  ◦ Evidence adult intergenerational transmission
  ◦ Foster acquisition for prospective teacher
  ◦ Stimulate increased use of spoken Wahlubal
  ◦ Foster awareness of Wahlubal & the need & potential for its revitalisation
  ◦ Facilitate increased documentation of Wahlubal
  ◦ Inform policy development
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- Logistics
  - Master and apprentice 70km apart
  - Apprentice & school 80km apart (different direction)
  - Teacher & student 700km apart
  - Limited capacity to contact master from outside
  - Master’s poor health
  - Apprentice’s full time employment
  - FEL grant permits 36 hours payment to master
  - No paid release for apprentice
    - Weekends or leave
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**Variations**

- **Time**
  - 36 vs. 300 hours

- **Training - Apprentice**
  - Languages teacher (Spanish & Japanese)
  - Graduate student in Indigenous languages education
  - Capacity to evaluate applicability of Hinton (2002)

- **Training - Master**
  - Identified by linguists as a natural immersion teacher
  - Supplied with copy of Hinton (2002)
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- **Progress**
  - Commenced November 08
  - Visits
    - 2 successful, 3 failed, 2 cancelled
  - 3 hours of recording

- **Acquisition**
  - Baseline test, zero proficiency (ASLPR)
  - Minimal gain to date
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- Observations
  - No reason to question the method, but...
    - It’s not as simple as it seems
    - Logistics are the key
    - Are we missing something (interpersonal, financial, family)?
  - Indications of loss through lack of use
  - Importance and influence of location
  - Cross-cultural communication issues
  - Cultural transmission is integral
  - Generating local community interest & ‘participation’
  - When it works it’s effective and fun
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- The Future
  - Time is fast running out
  - Any documentation strategies should be pursued
  - MA is worth pursuing to both preserve high individual proficiency and document
  - Funding for MA likely to be problematic
    - limited Australian philanthropy/ alternative sources
  - Classroom-based instruction probably remains the most cost-effective option for developing a larger but less proficient speaker population