Fostering revitalisation through teaching and learning small languages in schools in New South Wales

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The NSW context

NSW total population
• 7 million

NSW Indigenous pop.
• 30% of the Indigenous population of Australia
• 150,000 or 2% of NSW
• 3-4% of school pop. NSW

How many?
• 120 dialects
• 35 languages
The NSW context

Languages

- All languages in need of reclamation
- Some community-held knowledge has survived and is highly valued.
- Need the support of historical sources and linguistic reconstruction

School programs

- Teachers are second language learners, with little/no passive knowledge
- Immersion, bilingual, language-medium programs not possible at this stage
- More than language awareness / heritage programs
The NSW context

Community aspirations

- Respect and recognition for their languages
- Increasing the learning and use of languages
- Language and culture are learned together

School programs

- Communicative language teaching
- 3 syllabus objectives

Diagram:
- Using Language
- Making Linguistic Connections
- Moving Between Cultures
NSW Aboriginal Languages K – 10 Syllabus

- Not language-specific
- Sequenced learning K – 10
- Implementation involves developing effective working relationships for local teams. People with skills and knowledge of:
  - local language and culture
  - teaching
  - linguistics

[Website link](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/#ablanguages)
Can a syllabus save NSW Aboriginal languages?

after Teresa McCarty in Hornberger (ed.) 2008: p161

No, but … observations in NSW.

The syllabus:

1. provides Aboriginal languages with status and a place in mainstream school curriculum
2. enables programs to draw on existing school infrastructure, resources and expertise
3. underpins development of language learning and teaching skills of adults in communities
The Ngiyambaa Story

• Positives
  – Links between languages & shared linguistic expertise
  – Links between schools
  – Shared responsibility for the program
  – More people knowing more

• Challenges
  – Teaching materials
  – Sustained adult learning
Contribution of the Syllabus

• Just one part of the emerging picture in NSW but has had broader impacts beyond school programs:
  – a mechanism for departments and agencies to work together to support communities’ aspirations for their languages
  – a focal point for increasing local community involvement and agency.
Mahalo

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