

## **APPENDIX B**

***KIMBERLEY LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTRE***

***SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS FOR THE INQUIRY ON LANGUAGE  
LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES***

***AUGUST 2011***



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### To Whom It May Concern

Please find attached a document which the Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC) is submitting to the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority's *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* consultation process.

The KLRC is a Regional Aboriginal Language Centre. Over its 25 years of operations it has supported or delivered Aboriginal language programs and language teacher professional development in a large number of Kimberley schools. In recent years it has turned its focus to increasing opportunities for Aboriginal groups to engage in teaching and learning opportunities 'on country'.

The KLRC appreciates the statements made in Paragraphs 11 and 14 which acknowledge the rights of Aboriginal children to learn their first languages. The notion referred to in Paragraph 14 that a diversity of language programs may be required to deliver effective language learning forms the basis of the attached which suggests the concurrent development of an Aboriginal teaching and learning curriculum (for the Kimberley) which the organisation has titled the *Teaching On Country Early Years and Integrated Curriculum*. This proposal asks for a closer collaboration between the education system and the Kimberley Aboriginal languages groups in accounting for, and documenting, Aboriginal ways of passing on language and knowledge.

In Paragraph 48 of the draft document the dichotomy of orality versus literacy which emerges when Aboriginal languages are integrated into the western education model is acknowledged as an ongoing challenge for the teaching of predominantly oral languages. The Board of Directors of the KLRC concurs that the development of literacy skills in Aboriginal languages is a significant outcome of Aboriginal language programs within the Western education system. They believe this will create opportunities in the future for the linguistic and anthropological materials created over the decades to be understood and accessed by future generations. They also acknowledge increased engagement with English literacy as an additional benefit which may result from the development of literacy in Aboriginal languages (Paragraph 44).

Nevertheless, the importance of the Aboriginal oral heritage tradition could perhaps be more strongly affirmed in Paragraph 19 where the significance of the ecology of Aboriginal and Torres Strait languages is referred to. Some of the paragraphs which refer to the development of literacy could also recurrently emphasise the predominantly oral use of the languages as a means of transmission of knowledge in many regions of the country. The 'documenting' of this knowledge in written form will not increase knowledge and language skills in the younger generations to the extent that continued oral transmission will.

As acknowledged within the document, literacy has had a profound effect on the way Aboriginal languages are perceived and used by Aboriginal people in the public domain. It is of concern to the KLRC Directors that those Kimberley languages which urgently need support to increase community level reclamation or revival may be disadvantaged by an over-emphasis on resourcing literacy outcomes. This will prevent certain languages from being resourced to develop strong oral learning methodologies in the early years. It is imperative that Naturalistic Language Acquisition is strengthened or maintained concurrently with the resourcing of language programs in the school. These do not have to be mutually exclusive, and potential methods of addressing this issue for Kimberley languages are referred to in the attached proposal. We hope that the issue of home/community language continuation having different aims to school language program can be highlighted within the National Language Curriculum document also.

The KLRC hopes that the development of a National Languages Curriculum will inspire creativity in the search for ways to integrate Aboriginal and Western knowledge within the school system. We hope the attached submission provides some background on the needs of Kimberley Aboriginal language groups. We would be very pleased to discuss this further. As the regional representative body for languages, the Kimberley Language Resource Centre is an appropriate organisation to be further consulted regarding Kimberley Languages during the development of the national curriculum.

If you wish to contact the organisation, please address your correspondence c/o Siobhan Casson at the contact details above.

**KLRC Board of Directors**

**April 6<sup>th</sup> 2011**



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### ***TEACHING ON COUNTRY***

**A PROPOSAL FOR THE NEED TO DEVELOP AN EARLY  
YEARS and INTEGRATED CURRICULUM IN THE  
KIMBERLEYS**

**SUBMITTED TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM,  
ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING AUTHORITY IN  
RESPONSE TO THE *DRAFT SHAPE OF THE AUSTRALIAN  
CURRICULUM: LANGUAGES CONSULTATION***

**APRIL 2011**

## INTRODUCTION

The Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC) is the umbrella organisation for Kimberley Aboriginal language groups who have the same stated goal:

**Kimberley Aboriginal children need to strengthen knowledge of who they are through their own heritage languages, cultural knowledge and family values.**

### What is happening now?

- Children are failing at school in the Western education outcomes of literacy and job readiness
- Children are also missing their own oral tradition heritage teaching and learning – often leaving them without a comfortable place in either world
- The Western education system does not, and cannot, deliver culturally appropriate education that builds identity through Aboriginal languages, knowledge and values within the existing curriculum framework, and within four walls.

### What we know?

- When children have a strong sense of identity they are best able to integrate other ways of knowing.
- Western educational methods can be integrated in successful ways with Aboriginal education content
- The basis of any success will be a curriculum that is culturally responsive and relevant.
- The acquisition of a second language and literacy (in this case English) *can* be successful when built on the first language(s) of children.

### How can change occur?

The Kimberley Language Resource Centre believes there is an urgent need to develop a curriculum framework that captures the Aboriginal teaching and learning process from early childhood up.

- ✓ The curriculum framework developed would be for the Kimberley Region
- ✓ Individual language groups would be supported to provide appropriate content

We believe that this approach could have been successfully integrated with the WA Curriculum Framework. However, until the National Languages Curriculum is developed it is unclear where this approach will fit in a national framework.

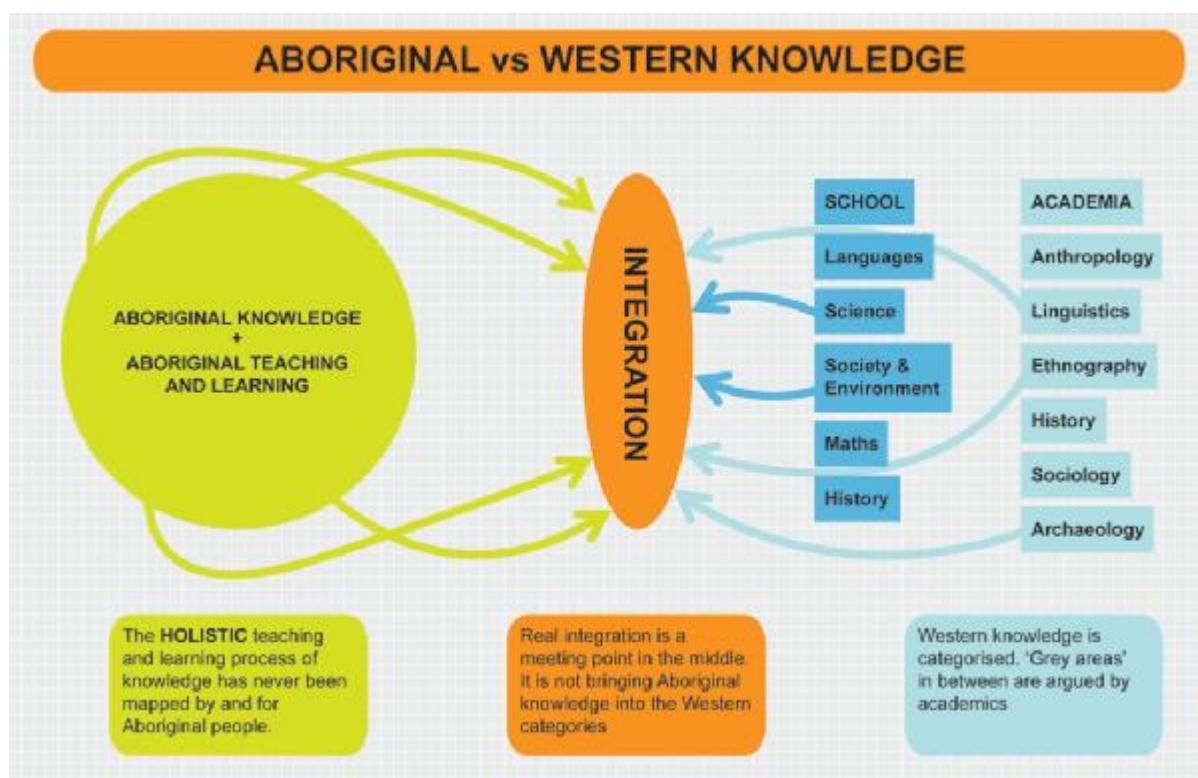
### What needs to be done differently?

For Kimberley Aboriginal people, the most suitable teachers of Aboriginal knowledge and values are the older generations. The most appropriate place to start developing teaching content for delivery through a curriculum is on country. The most appropriate teaching method for early years content is oral.

*Taking the language out of its natural context makes the 'curriculum' non-existent. You've taken the life out of it. (Tom Porter, Mohawk in Linn Peter & Yamamoto, 2004, cover page.)*

Western schooling needs to build on Aboriginal teaching and learning content while introducing children to the wider community and the world through the Western teaching and learning content. The cycle of 'fitting in' Aboriginal knowledge to the Western knowledge system needs to be broken.

*A long term effect of colonisation is that it steadily erodes the structures and practices of a healthy culture that allows community members to value their own and others' experiences as key events in an unfolding individual and collective life. Without those structures and practices, the content of knowledge, whether it originates from one's own or another's culture, has little resonance (Ball & Pence, 2006, p.40).*



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## ABOUT THE KIMBERLEY LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTRE

### MISSION STATEMENT

*To advocate for Kimberley languages on all levels*

*To promote recognition that diversity in languages is central to Kimberley culture, land and identity and that Aboriginal languages have value in today's world.*

*To work in partnership with the diverse Kimberley language communities*

*To ensure Kimberley languages are passed on to children.*

The KLRC is the only organisation in Australia focussing solely on Kimberley Aboriginal languages. The Kimberley was, and still is, the one of the most linguistically diverse areas in Australia with at least 42<sup>1</sup> language groups plus additional dialects identified. The KLRC Directors advocate for the 30 or so languages still spoken.

It was established in 1984 by Aboriginal people concerned about the effects of colonisation and the continuing impact of Western society on their spoken languages and cultural knowledge. It is governed by a Board of 12 Directors accountable to a membership from across the region. The office is based in Halls Creek in the East Kimberley.

The KLRC provides a forum for developing language policy to strategically revive and maintain (in other words, *continue*) the Kimberley Aboriginal languages. The organisation responds directly to community requests for assistance with language continuation. It also provides services to the non-Aboriginal government and private sector. For more information please see [www.klrc.org.au](http://www.klrc.org.au)

The KLRC's objectives fall under 5 AIMS

- ✓ Encourage the oral transmission of Languages and Knowledge
- ✓ Advocate for Kimberley Aboriginal Languages
- ✓ Build capacity in Kimberley Aboriginal people to own and manage Language and Knowledge continuation
- ✓ Engage in partnerships, develop networks and fundraise
- ✓ Strengthen the effective operations and governance of the KLRC

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<sup>1</sup> Jabirrjabirr, Nimanburru, Ngumbarl, Jugun, Yawuru, Warrwa, Worrorra, Umiida, Unggarrangu, Andajin, Worla, Wunambal, Gaambera, Kwini, Mangala, Yulparija, Wangkajunga, Juwaliny, Malignin, Doolboong, Winjarumi, Jawijibaya, Ngarnawu, Guwij, Wila Wila, Miwa, Yijji, Bardi, Jawi, Nyulnyul, Nyikina, Kija, Miriwoong, Gajirrawoong, Ngarinyin, Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Karajarri, Walmarjarri, Ngardi, Jaru, Kukatja



## THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND A KIMBERLEY TEACHING ON COUNTRY EARLY YEARS AND INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

Australian Aboriginal culture is the oldest continuous indigenous oral culture in the world. This special identity shared by Kimberley Aboriginal people is in danger of being lost because Aboriginal people are not being supported to pass this knowledge on in parallel with the teaching and learning provided through the Western system of schooling.

Aboriginal people across the Kimberley have a deep concern about the loss of their languages and cultures. This concern has been captured in surveys and reports conducted through the on-the-ground operations of the KLRC. The steps the organisation is taking to find solutions to these concerns are captured in the KLRC's Strategic Plan <http://www.klrc.org.au/images/stories/pdf/Strat-plan-for-website.pdf>

Aboriginal people can see a connection between a lost identity and the disadvantage they are experiencing in their living conditions, health, education and employment.

*This means that the Aboriginal structures for leadership are not there. The gardiya influence is so strong it's almost like a distraction. And our authority is slowly lost. You wouldn't let an athlete compete in the Olympics if they were not groomed, day to day. It's about exercising through knowing your language, cultural knowledge and using it in leadership roles. You can't just cast it aside for a time and then try to pick it up again (personal communication, Olive Knight, Walmajarri Elder, Wangkatjungka Community as quoted in the KLRC's submission to FaHCSIA's National Indigenous Representative Body consultations 2008)*

There is an urgent need to review the education of children in the region, and to account for the fact that the majority of children schooling in the Kimberley are Aboriginal. In many remote locations they form 100% of the school population.

### TAKING A LONG TERM APPROACH

Until 2004 the KLRC operated mainly by sourcing funds for discrete projects on individual languages. These projects were, due to the funding model, relatively short-term and finite. However this model of operation, while resulting in successful one-off activities and the production of language resources, did not initiate sustainable strategies for the revival and maintenance of Kimberley Aboriginal languages (see KLRC 2010a, 2010b).

It is clear to the organisation that a sustainable and long-term approach is needed in order to ensure the survival of Kimberley languages and the knowledge contained within them. The work which would be carried out during the development of the proposed curriculum is intended to capture a framework for the language and knowledge Aboriginal people want to be passed on in a way that would create clear pathways into western education curriculum documents.



## Diversity in the Kimberley

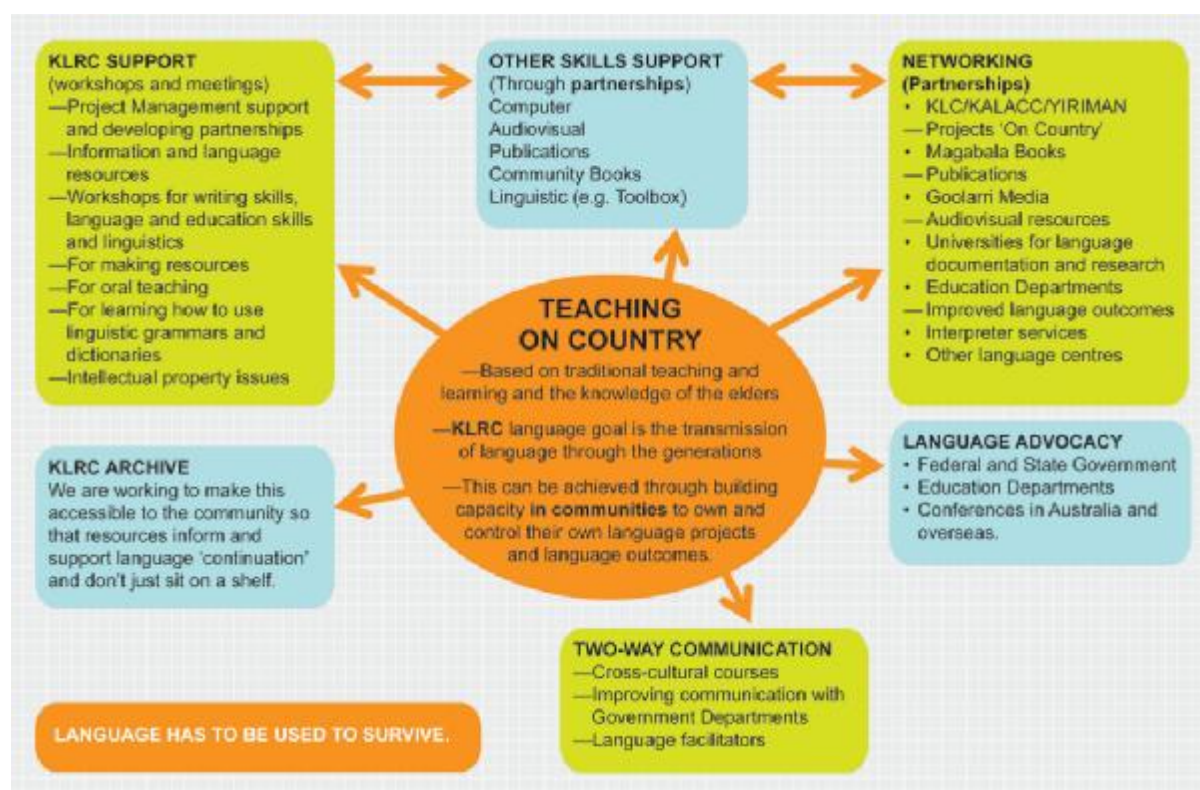
Some language groups in town communities or towns do not have easy access to the classroom environment of 'country'. Here the language groups want 'community learning programs' to encourage the speaking of languages and the passing on of knowledge in the town/community environment. This is also relevant to remote communities when access to country is not possible. The KLRC has contacts with groups that have already started this process and which could be considered as potential case studies (see page 9).

## Holistic methodologies

There are different strands of the *Teaching On Country Early Learning and Integrated Curriculum* which need to be brought together into a framework:

1. Bush teaching
2. Community teaching
3. Strengthening the connection between older and younger generations
4. Working on ways to integrate with the Western curriculum

Through the process of supporting this work, the KLRC would encourage communities to strengthen their skills in two-way education, culturally appropriate childcare, project management, governance and the related area of NRM or 'caring for country'. This approach underpins the KLRC's philosophy that language is the foundation for all aspects of Aboriginal society. Its continuation cannot be guaranteed unless it is supported holistically.



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## **A METHODOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING THE TEACHING ON COUNTRY EARLY YEARS AND INTEGRATED CURRICULUM**

The KLRC believes that to successfully develop a curriculum that can be used on a regional level a three year staged plan is required.

- Engage people in the process of developing a curriculum and document ideas and processes of learning for the curriculum framework (Year 1)
- Support Aboriginal Teaching On Country to enable case study groups to document content (early childhood up) for a culturally appropriate curriculum (Year 2)
- Map the progress of this work and develop a curriculum document (Years 1, 2 and 3)

The groundwork of consultation has been done - it is the development stage which needs to be undertaken. Most importantly a collaborative relationship with the Kimberley education systems must be established so that the curriculum is not developed in isolation from the mainstream society's educational processes.

The KLRC would support the staged development of an oral curriculum using 3 methods:

- a. Initiating a survey using Community Linguists in communities
- b. Supporting the implementation of three case studies
- c. Collating research

### **a. Community surveys**

In the past, language surveying has been designed by non-Aboriginal researchers with the main aim of quantifying the number of fluent speakers (ATSIC, 1996, McConvell & Thieberger, 2001, AIATSIS, 2005). There have been limitations in the methodology which can lead to incomplete data, even if Aboriginal people are used to collect it. For example, younger people, who can understand language but do not speak it as their daily language, do not believe this is significant in terms of language revival, and will always defer to the older speakers as the only ones who 'know' language. The Australian Bureau of Statistics census statistics are also limited, as many people do not identify an Aboriginal first or second language voluntarily or are not sure what to call their language if it is not represented in the list of choices. A more accurate way of surveying language use and language status would be to use Aboriginal Community Linguists who have an understanding of the status of their languages, know the people and are able to effectively interpret and communicate the idea behind the survey and the answers they receive.

Furthermore, in order to support curriculum development, survey questions need to be broadened out to account for an Aboriginal perspective on languages and the perceived relationship to education, employment and training in English. The questions need to account for concerns that the potential revival of Aboriginal languages as first languages would affect the future of Kimberley children in mainstream Australian society. Strong evidential data underpinning the curriculum development will ensure the expectations of Kimberley Aboriginal people are incorporated into the framework for integrating language continuation needs into Western educational needs.

Approaching language surveying in this way will result in strong qualitative data as well as better quantitative data on the use and influence of Aboriginal languages at the community level. The KLRC is best placed to research and design a data collection tool because it has access to previous research and to the community voice. DIA has funded the organisation to survey the four Kimberley COAG sites of Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Beagle Bay and One Arm Point. The results of this research may attract funding to broaden the survey out into the rest of the region.

Accurate data would serve several purposes

- identify language speakers of all generations and fluencies
- identify language attitudes
- identify different generational aspirations for languages
- identify community attitude on early years learning and integrated curricula

#### **b. Case Studies**

Several communities are willing to participate as case studies to help the KLRC map out Aboriginal early years teaching and learning, and to explore areas where this can be integrated into the Western schooling system.

#### **c. Research**

A review of national and international research on indigenous teaching and learning is required to investigate thoroughly the argument that increased engagement with the education system and increased access to the English language will be an outcome. The organisation has existing staff who are able to manage this research, but partnerships with universities and other institutions are actively being sought.

### **CASE STUDIES**

The KLRC has been working and liaising with Community Linguists and elders in communities across the region for the last 5 years. Through this contact it has become clear that there are shared goals in each group for early years learning, but that the different locations and statuses of each language requires different approaches. The KLRC believes that by selecting three or four case studies from these groups, important quantitative and qualitative data can be collected which will inform the development of an oral curriculum framework. It will also allow a monitoring of progress and the identification of positive outcomes for both school and community.

## CONCLUSION

The Kimberley Language Resource Centre believes that by working in this way from the ground up the organisation will not only help communities to strengthen the passing on of heritage knowledge and language between young and old, but they will create a strong foundation for engagement with the Western education system.

Aboriginal groups want to be supported to pass on their own knowledge *in their own way* – not as one-off projects, but as a way of life. They want to teach their younger generations about country, language, culture, family, health and identity. All these areas link to the *disadvantage* that Aboriginal people are experiencing in daily life. A well designed and implemented *Teaching On Country Early Years and Integrated Curriculum* document will turn this existing knowledge to an *advantage*, and a huge step will have been taken towards ‘closing the gap’.

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