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Submission No.74

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

19 August 2011

Dear Committee members

ARDS Inc. greatly appreciates the opportunity to submit to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities*.

ARDS is an NGO that has extensive historical and current experience working multilingually and cross-culturally in 'community capacity development' initiatives across the Northern Territory. Our submission was prepared on behalf of the ARDS Board.

The submission will be in two parts:

1. The Preamble:

We set our submission within the NT context, however our experiences and academic research will mirror the socio-political/educational contexts for many Indigenous minority contexts within Australia and around the world. ARDS understands that many groups will be covering related themes we raise in far greater depth. We will focus particularly on adult learning and community development per se; however key international research findings on children's learning and school education are equally relevant and applicable to adult education in regards to:

- a. multilingual learning and education
- b. intercultural learning and education
- c. broader educational themes in community development requiring 'life-long' learning.

d. multilingual and intercultural education being vitally important for all Australians in effectively working to *Bridge the Gap*.

2. ARDS Response to the Terms of Reference.

This section covers specific responses where applicable to the Terms of Reference based on the work and knowledge of ARDS.

In summary ARDS is firmly committed to the principles that:

- people's first languages and cultures are of primary importance in their daily lives in fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities to family, clan and their clan estates;
- people's first languages and cultures are of primary importance in engaging happily, healthily, productively, and respectfully in the wider-Australian community as intercultural learners/participants and life-long learners;
- people's first languages and cultures are of primary importance in learning in, through and about English as intercultural learners and participants in the wider world;
- Australia's first languages and cultures have a real academic place in all areas of education, early childhood through to tertiary education;
- Non-Indigenous Australians, as intercultural learners, should be respectful of and utilise people's first languages and cultures to work in successful partnership with the Indigenous Australians.

We wish the Committee well in its research and consultations. ARDS would be happy to provide further information if requested. We look forward to reading your findings and recommendations. We hope that your report leads to positive actions and further positive engagement with Indigenous Australians.

Yours sincerely

Maratja Dhamarandji
ARDS Chairman

Paul Bubb
ARDS Executive Officer

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Background

Aboriginal Resource & Development Services Inc. is a non-Government community development Aboriginal organisation affiliated with the Uniting Church. For over 25 years ARDS has been working with communities, homelands and other service providers across the Northern Territory to help empower local people to:

- build individual, family and community capacity in areas of western health, legal/governance and economic education;
- develop and deliver programs and resources in partnership with communities.

ARDS also operates the Yolŋu Radio (YR) service that broadcasts to Darwin and North-East Arnhem Land to meet the needs of the Yolŋu people. It aims to make accessible through Yolŋu languages and plain English a wide variety of programs covering:

- adult education and learning;
- government and non-government sector services information and discussions;
- news, current affairs and the arts.

This submission is presented on behalf of the Board of Directors - ARDS.

Preamble

The Committee will receive a number of submissions covering its Terms of Reference that will particularly focus on children's learning and school education. The ARDS submission will focus on Adult Education in *multilingual and intercultural learning contexts* in the Northern Territory. ABS data (2006) highlights the 'living' status of Aboriginal languages in the NT and recorded that only a quarter of 52 662 Indigenous NT residents reported that they used English exclusively. Our experiences may also be mirrored in other regions of Australia.

However while our submission will focus on adults and community development; extensive research findings in *multilingual and Intercultural* contexts highlights the **inter-generational** and **life-long learning**

relationship to between '*the heart*' (social) and '*the head*' (intellect) in Aboriginal peoples daily lives, well beyond formal schooling. In addition, the ARDS Board firmly believes that mainstream Australia also has much to learn from Aboriginal Australians that will benefit all Australians both intellectually and socially. This thinking has often been referred to as *Both Ways Learning or Two-Ways Learning*.

A key element of the 'Heart' for many Aboriginal Territorians is the focus on wanting to maintain their languages and cultures as living languages that are

1. both dynamic and relevant in today's Australia and
2. as important as English in a mutually respectful 'both-ways' relationship and exchange between Aboriginal & the mainstream societies.

They do not want the wider Australian society to see their languages/cultures as

1. 'historical artefacts' destined to all 'die out' and be confined to museums or
2. relegated to minor spots in schools as token cultural 'affirmation' lessons on 'Thursday afternoons' and/or confined to annual NAIDOC day events such as 'cooking bush foods, basket weaving and dancing'.

Dr R. Marika-Munungrirtj (deceased), a Rirratjingu clan elder, distinguished educator and academic highlighted the demand by Yolŋu and other Aboriginal educators and elders that the 'head and heart' of their cultures/languages be a serious part of education in her 1998 speech, *The Wentworth Lecture* when she passionately stated:

In conclusion I would like to ask this question. Is the government fair dinkum about bilingual education? We believe that our children have a right to know and understand their own cultural beliefs within the model bilingual program. ...The task ahead is to convince the Department of Education (*Northern Territory*) and the Commonwealth government that Yolŋu assessment and evaluation methods can and should be developed. These methods will have to involve our elders and our languages and our knowledge systems. ...The current system does not take into account our Yolŋu *garma* curriculum or Yolŋu 'both ways' pedagogy and curriculum. ...Our job as educators is to convince the people who control mainstream education that we wish to be included. Until this happens, reconciliation is an empty word and an intellectual *terra nullius*.

(AIATSIS Library, S06.1/AIAS/10 1999 no1, p. 9)

Later that same year she delivered the same challenge in her key note address to the annual conference of the *Australasian Curriculum, Assessment & Certification Australian Authorities*. While her speech challenged many non-Indigenous education bureaucrats in the audience, she received a standing ovation and best wishes from delegates and observers from PNG, NZ (Maori and Pākehā) and near South Pacific nations. (Personal observation – Paul Bubb, 1998.)

The inclusion and place of Indigenous cultures/languages goes beyond the confines of ‘*school education*’. “The Heart and the Head” of **Both Ways Learning** also literally covers ‘*life and death*’ situations in peoples’ everyday lives, where the deliberate exclusion, unintentional neglect or ignorance of peoples’ cultural/linguistic identities directly attributes to situations such as:

Our people are dying ... because they don't understand what doctors and nurses are saying to them. (Jakamarra, 2007 – In Talyor, A. (2010), p 242)

The relationship between Indigenous Australians’ aspirations for their cultures/languages and land and the outcomes for many *lives* has been well documented. The Commonwealth alone has historically commissioned many inquiries etc that directly reported on the status and relationship of Indigenous cultures/languages to many spheres of life and at times, death. Below is an abbreviated list of reports, findings and recommendations that will no doubt be raised and documented again in this current Inquiry:

- ***Indigenous Deaths in Custody 1989 – 1996***: A Report prepared by the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. - For the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. October 1996;
- ***Australia's Language. The Australian Language and Literacy Policy***. Companion Volume to the Policy Information Paper. (1991). Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service: Author;
- ***Language and Culture: A Matter of Survival. Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance***. Australian Parliament. House of Representatives.

Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1992). Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service;

- ***The Land Still Speaks: Review Of Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance And Development Needs And Activities.*** Commissioned Report no. 44 [an NBEET publication] Dr Graham McKay. February 1996;
- Davies, A., Groves, E., & Wilkes, M. (1997). **Review of literature on acquiring literacy in a second language.** In P. McKay, A. Davies, B. Devlin, J. Clayton, R. Oliver & S. Zammit (Eds.), *The Bilingual Interface Project Report* (pp. 16-73). Canberra: Aust. Govt Publishing Service;
- Purdie, N. Frigo, T. Noblett, G. Ozolins, C. Thieberge, N. Sharp, J. ***Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools - A Way Forward.*** Australian Council for Educational Research. .2008. (This project was funded by Australian Government Dept of Education, Science & Training through the Australian Government's School Languages Programme.)
- ***A Study Of Best Practice In The Teaching Of Indigenous Culture In Australian Schools.*** Final Project Report. Vision Network Pty Ltd. January 2008. Commissioned By Department Of Education, Employment & Work Relations.

The findings and recommendations made in the above research and reports also replicated in many international studies and reports. The positive and negative outcomes and pathways forward for Indigenous minorities and the nations directly relate to human rights agendas and affirming social and community development policies that incorporate not exclude Indigenous 'heads and hearts'.

For Australia, we are signatories to a number of UN treaties and have contributed UNESCO policies that highlight the relationships and interface between (1) Indigenous rights, (2) best practice for education and (3) community development for adults and children alike. However Australia is being criticised through the UN in a number of areas where we are not living up to our treaty obligations and at the same time ignore both rights and academic best practice relating to the role and place of Indigenous cultures/languages in education. (Refer to: ***Education In A Multilingual World. UNESCO Education Position Paper – 2003.***)

Countless academic studies, both overseas and in Australia highlight the intellectual and social advantages of multilingual and intercultural learning for all adults and children. A number of these

studies also highlight the continuing consequence of ignoring first languages and cultures of Indigenous minorities and migrant population. (Refer to: *Response to the Stage 2 Consultation Draft of the Indigenous Education Action Plan - (IEAP) 2010–2014*. 3 March 2010 Joint Submission from: The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA) and Australian Linguistic Society (ALS)).

In terms of adult education and its relationship to over all improvements in community development, substantial research demonstrate the way forward in education per se and community development is through multilingual/intercultural learning. The research clearly supports bilingual-bicultural/two-ways learning for meeting 'life-long' learning goals. The theory, researched practice and academic evaluations of quality bilingual-multicultural learning programs clearly demonstrates the interdependence between learning and developing as a successful child-adult bilingual/intercultural learners (Cummins, J. 2000, Grimes, C. 2009, Liddicoat, A. et al, 2003).

Many Aboriginal Territorians live bilingual/bicultural lives with varying degrees of engagement and 'success' with the mainstream. However, Yolŋu will not become mono-lingual/mono-cultural English speaking Australians either by design or force. That is why Aboriginal educators such as Markia strongly supported and utilised the theories and research on *dual language interdependence* of Canadian academic Jim Cummins. In fact Yolŋu educators at Yirrkala School adapted his 'dual iceberg model' to a localised 'dual reef' model to conceptualise his language/culture interdependence and common underlying proficiency theories. (See Attachment 1) As Yolŋu educators they understood that as Cummins (2000) stated:

Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible." If a child already understands the concepts of "justice" or "honesty" in her own language, all she has to do is acquire the label for these terms in English. She has a far more difficult task, however, if she has to acquire both the label and the concept in her second language.

However Jakamarra's anguish around the 'life and death' health outcomes for his countrymen's interface in Central Australia is all too common across a multiple of domains including, law, economics or education etc. However the underlying intercultural tensions go far beyond the simplistic 'mono-

cultural'/assimilationist solutions such as *'if only they spoke better English!'* and *"let's get the children learning English (exclusively) while they are young"*. These tensions are not confined to the Northern Territory or Australia. However international research clearly shows that if governments default to 'mono-lingual/mono-cultural' solutions by concentrating solely on learning the 'national' language, while deliberately ignoring the potential of people's first languages/cultures for intercultural learning, actually limits the overall cognitive and multilingual development of learners. (See **Collier and Thomas**, 2004).

This 'deficit' model of learning and defining success is unfortunately common in post-colonial Indigenous minority contexts, and the resulting poor outcomes is verified in academic research throughout the world. For example, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) highlighted the limitations of Canadian research into measuring learning and defining success for Canada's Aboriginal peoples in its report *Redefining How Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning, Report on Learning in Canada* (2007). It listed the following *"limitations of existing research and approaches to measuring Aboriginal Learning"* that are also applicable to the Australian context:

1. Most research on Aboriginal learning is directed at the learning deficits of Aboriginal people and overlooks positive learning outcomes.
2. Current research on Aboriginal learning often does not recognize or address the fact that economic, health and social challenges inhibit Aboriginal people's opportunities for lifelong learning far more than they inhibit non-Aboriginal Canadians.
3. Current approaches to measuring Aboriginal learning focus on high school and post-secondary education. They do not monitor progress across the full spectrum of lifelong learning, from infancy through the lifespan of a human being.
4. Approaches to measuring Aboriginal learning focus on years of schooling and performance on standardized assessments—the cognitive domain of learning. They do not reflect the purpose or nature of holistic learning—engaging the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional dimensions—for First Nations, Inuit and Métis.
5. Finally, most research and measurement approaches do not report on the experiential learning of Aboriginal people or on traditional educational activities that occur outside the classroom. (p. 29)

Later in their report the Canadian Council on Learning highlighted that

The CCL and its Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre are now working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning professionals, community practitioners, researchers and governments to define what is meant by learning success—and to identify the indicators

needed to capture a holistic view of lifelong learning that reflects Aboriginal needs and aspirations. (p. 30)

Like Canada, Australia needs solutions and ways forward that are inclusive of Indigenous Australians working partnership with other Australians. These partnerships should be within an Intercultural Learning framework. And like Canada, our Governments also need to be informed and willing partners. There are many Australians working to support *life-long learning* that include Aboriginal knowledges and languages as key elements in learning and community development to “*Close the Gap*” (aka - *Bridging the Gap*). However we need informed and appropriate Government policy and program initiatives. Otherwise the ‘gap’ will remain and possibly grow through the deliberate omission or neglect of (a) Aboriginal decision making, (b) Aboriginal knowledges and languages and (c) avoiding the need for intercultural learning for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

A clear example of avoiding or neglecting intercultural learning is the continuing ‘gap’ in Indigenous health in Australia. Governments and their agencies must be intercultural learners. Talyor, in her Central Australian based study *Intercultural Health Care Communication* study (2010) reported that Indigenous health statistics

... remains by any account, a national shame. Until the dominant cultural group can turn the critical lens on themselves, and their systems and structures, little if anything will change. (p. 260)

Her study then concluded that intercultural learning and communication was a primary key to making a real and significant difference.

Communication in health care is a key requirement for safe and effective practice. Communication that involves culturally and linguistically diverse participants is defined specifically as intercultural communication. Research globally has identified that intercultural communication is an aspect of health service delivery with the potential to impact either positively or negatively upon clients and their care (McGrath, 2006; Neulip, 2006; Skutnab-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995). In an increasingly multicultural and potentially racist world, intercultural communication skills are gaining in importance. Literature reviewed has highlighted

the need for health professionals and health services to be appropriately prepared for intercultural communications in order to provide technical, ethical, legal, economical, effective and culturally safe care (Buttow, 2010; Lowell, 2001).

English is the language privileged within Australian health care systems. This is hardly surprising given that is the country's official language. However, in Australia, there is the dilemma of the original inhabitants rarely being able to obtain health care using their first language. As long as Indigenous Australians are viewed through a colonial lens with an unshakeable belief in non-Indigenous superiority, the capacity for effective communication remains limited. Any relationship with Indigenous Language speakers that continues to colonise by existing without effective communication, jeopardises the health, well-being and cultural safety, not only for clients, but also for those providing care.

In health care settings in Central Australia, non-Indigenous (western) models of health dominate, and English is an unchallenged and privileged tool of access to care. Yet Indigenous language speakers are the majority users of these same health care services in Central Australia. Slowly, almost grudgingly, health professionals have had to examine the ways in which services are delivered to Indigenous clients. While it would be nice to think this examination has arisen from a regard for lessons learnt from the past and a genuine desire to halt the painful impact of colonising practices, it seems more pragmatic factors are at play. 260 This pragmatism however, does not negate the individual good will and 'good intentions' of many non-Indigenous health professionals who genuinely want to improve their capacity to provide culturally safe care. However, ineffective health care communications are costly, personally, financially, and to the community at large. (p. 259-260)

Taylor's study (2010) and findings are also reflected in the health education work at ARDS in partnership with Yolŋu communities in NE Arnhem Land, part of which was acknowledged by the awarding of the NT Administrators' Primary Healthcare Award- 2010. In their recently published article ***Health Literacy and Australian Indigenous Peoples: An Analysis of the Role of Language and Worldview.*** (2010), Vass, Mitchell, and Dhurrkay noted that:

The burden of disease experienced by Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory (NT) is more than three times that of their non-Indigenous national counterparts. The litany of statistics will be familiar to those working in the field. The prevalence of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, renal disease, cardiovascular disease and chronic obstructive airway disease is substantial. Mental health conditions and infectious diseases such as scabies, skin infections and rheumatic fever also contribute significantly to disease burden.

Improving Indigenous health has become the focus of a public 'Close the Gap' campaign, as well as a stated priority of both State and Federal Governments. A broad range of strategies and policies has been developed to enhance public health and health promotion measures. Various studies in the literature have concluded that low health literacy negatively affects health outcomes and patient safety. In recognition of its potential role in achieving the desired outcomes, health literacy is beginning to be integrated into policy. (p. 33)

They went on to also support Taylor's Central Australian study (2010) recommendations relating to *Communication in health care* and the direct correlation to **health professionals and health services to be appropriately prepared for intercultural communications** when they also concluded that

In-depth dialogue in Yolŋu Matha (language) allows for access to the existing Yolŋu knowledge base and worldview. From there, Yolŋu Matha equivalents can be found for new English health and biomedical terms. The alternative is to continue to use English terms, no matter how seemingly simple, that people do not fully understand. Furthermore, this process allows Yolŋu to own new knowledge in a way not possible when it remains situated within the Western health and English domains. New understandings from the non-Indigenous health sphere can be situated within Yolŋu culture and meaningfully integrated. Health empowerment through these processes also creates opportunities for Yolŋu understandings of health to inform and contribute to Western understandings.

While words and worldview concepts vary between Indigenous nations, the principles of working in-depth in language and through the Indigenous worldview are likely to have relevance to any Indigenous groups who do not speak English as a first language and do not have a biomedical or Western worldview.

We would recommend that further research be undertaken into models exploring health education that use the language and worldview of Australian Indigenous people in order to advance health literacy and therefore health outcomes. (p. 37)

Clearly *Working in the Gap* requires a commitment to effective intellectual and practical partnerships in research and application of knowledge/findings that are based on multilingual/intercultural learning. Indigenous languages and English and the cultures they transit are mutually dynamic and active in the Northern Territory. They should be seen as inclusive rather than exclusive to each other in the future across the NT. It is a matter for both *The Heart* and *The Head*.

The role and place of Australian Indigenous knowledges and languages should be a part of learning and academic discourse in our schools and universities for all Australians, and not be confined only to anthropological and linguistics departments.

Perhaps this is why, like Dr Marika, Professor Martin Nakata, another Indigenous academic highlighted in his 2004 *The Wentworth Lecture – Indigenous Australian Studies and Higher Education* that

What is needed is a reconsideration of a different conceptualisation of the cross-cultural space, not as a clash of opposites and differences but as a layered and very complex entanglement of concepts, theories and sets of meanings of a knowledge system.

If this were to be our starting point then the deeply cross-cultural encounters between different knowledge intersections that emerge every day in communities, in health, in education, in governance and so on, could be approached, not ambivalently as heralding further cultural loss, but more robustly as the source of new sets of negotiated meanings that may or may not look distinctly Indigenous but which connect with older traditions in ways which do not disrupt and alienate people from those traditions but continues them by enriching practices in ways to produce much better outcomes.

In formal education contexts, then, the consideration of Indigenous knowledge, standpoints or perspectives, at whatever level we want to consider them, should be primarily about bringing them into conversation with knowledge in the traditional disciplines in order to negotiate a new set of meanings and reinterpretation of meanings. (p. 14)

In the NT and across other areas of Australia Indigenous languages and cultures are lived daily while people have at best 'confused' and at worst fatal interfaces with most wider world domains of economics, health, education, law and politics. Australia is a signatory of UN conventions on the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly Articles 13 & 14 as documented in the U N Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and these conventions do not create 'separatism' but should ensure 'inclusion' and intercultural learning and exchange across all spheres of Australian life.

As Graham concluded in her paper *The Right to Education and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples -2010*

On the larger question of national unity, Jose R. Martinez Cobo , author of the UN study on discrimination against indigenous populations, perhaps stated it best when he explained that "national unity does not necessarily imply cultural uniformity and the disappearance of different cultures, which can in fact enrich this unity by giving it many different shades and facets and strengthened and deepened contributions since each individual and each group would participate on the basis of his or its own identity and cultural patterns. It is therefore desirable, and even necessary, to respect and strengthen . . . indigenous culture[s] simultaneously with the efforts to provide a better knowledge of the dominant culture." (p. 72)

However in 2009, in specific reference to Australia's compliance to Article 13 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Tom Calma, Social Justice Commissioner for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice reported on *The perilous state of Indigenous languages in Australia*. (Chapter 3). He recommended that the Australian Government commit to the following:

1. Immediately fund a national working group with the task of establishing a national Indigenous languages body as per the commitment of *Indigenous Languages - A National Approach*.
2. Commit to the development of a national Indigenous languages body with functions and responsibilities similar to those of the Māori Language Commission.
3. Utilise the expertise of the national body to assess the required resources for critically endangered languages and commit these resources immediately.
4. Agree to resource an ongoing plan of action for the preservation and promotion of Indigenous languages as recommended by the national Indigenous languages body.

5. Become a signatory to the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003).
6. Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), develop agreements with all governments to ensure consistency and compliance with Australia's *Indigenous Languages - A National Approach*.
7. Commence a process to recognise Indigenous languages in the preamble of Australia's Constitution with a view to recognising Indigenous languages in the body of the Constitution in future.

Australia does not have a consistent approach to its first nations' peoples or their languages and cultures. In addition, Intercultural learning is not or should not be a 'one-way' street for only Indigenous Australians. As Trudgen (2000) concluded in his book:

Yolŋu must be empowered before they can take control of their own destiny. This will only happen if the dominant culture sees things in a totally new way. While some dominant culture people will have joined Yolŋu in their struggle, others do not want to see change. All Australians citizens, governments, professional and most importantly policymakers, must accept responsibility that comes from being part of the dominant culture. It is time to actively create 'Yolŋu friendly' environments so the Yolŋu of Arnhem Land are empowered. (p 251)

All Australians working to 'Bridge the Gap' should be mutually obliged to be intercultural learners and navigators. Indigenous languages and knowledges are active and vibrant and

... we wish to be included.

Until this happens, reconciliation is an empty word and an intellectual terra nullius. (Marika-Munungirtj, R. 1998. P. 9)

The ARDS Response the Terms of Reference.

1. *The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages.*

- a) Dignity to the speakers: Aboriginal Resource and Development Service Incorporated (ARDS) is a community development organisation working with the Yolŋu people of North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. These Yolŋu people have their own distinct culture, which means that they view the world systematically, but in a different way from mainstream Australia. Language is inextricably entwined with this systematic world view. When their languages are not acknowledged, or valued, there is, by implication, a lack of respect for the languages and the worldviews they encode, and the speakers of those languages are by implication not respected.
- b) Cognitive and conceptual development: ARDS educators have found that the traditional indigenous languages have every facility for concept development that other languages have, e.g. English. We have also found that it is common for dominant Australia to assume that this is not so. This both demeans the speakers of indigenous languages, and creates an implicit assumption that indigenous people cannot grasp the complexities of mainstream systems such as health, law or economics. ARDS has found that this is not so. Indeed, when people are educated through their own language, they come to a clear understanding of these systems. Further, they are then more easily able to learn the Standard Australian English (SAE) around the concepts they have gained.
- c) Effective communication: Because the Yolŋu languages are the dominant languages of the communities and homelands in North East Arnhem Land, the speakers are not hearing other languages, including English, as an everyday event. They shop in their language, bank in their language, speak with their families and neighbours in their language etc. In fact, English is only used when there is a need to interact with someone who doesn't know a Yolŋu language. Consequently, English is more akin to a foreign language than a second language in the communities. Into this situation come important messages from various government departments, some with no removal of jargon, or little acknowledgement that the speakers have limited English. Or, on the other hand, messages are written that are

slogan like, not educating people as needed. To communicate effectively, educators need to bring their subject to the people in their language, be it by interpretation, or more effectively, through learning the language themselves.

- d) Conveying knowledge not in the dominant Australian culture: There is a vast amount of knowledge and wisdom about our land and life on it that mainstream Australia could be learning, and which is bound up in our indigenous languages. There is much to learn from these insights which, in many parts is dying out as the languages are dying. This is Australian knowledge and should be playing a significant part in our identity.

2. The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture.

- a) The bridging of knowledge gaps in all systems of dominant society: Perhaps the major “gap” amongst indigenous people is a knowledge gap based around the major systems of mainstream Australia – health, law, economics etc. Each of these holds many mysteries for indigenous people. Once a people group know and understand how the systems work, they will be able to use them effectively and independently. It is obvious that language is the major issue in their lack of understanding and in the educating of Indigenous people around these topics. Most adults do not know English well enough to come to an understanding of these systems. It is a fundamental truth of education that one must go from the known to the unknown. Therefore it is imperative that the educator/teacher MUST investigate what the learner/student already knows and their worldview. This is best done through the language the learners’ speak.

John Cawte an Australian psychiatrist who was one of the pioneers of transcultural psychiatry states in the forward to his book “Healers of Arnhem Land” (1996) that “sound medicine is not enough. If suffering individuals are to be reached, the doctor should try to grasp the patient’s language, religion and basic beliefs. Unless the cultural gulf is narrowed in this way, there will be limited compliance with care.”

With a lack of English, using the language is the only effective way to educate. With the concepts developed in language, the English language around the concepts is then easier to grasp also.

3. *The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education.*

- a) Since ARDS is a community development organisation working through the adult members of society, we will leave this discussion to those whose expertise is in this field.

4. *Measures to improve education outcomes in those indigenous communities where English is a second language.*

- a) Again, with effective education of adults, we must teach new concepts in their known languages. Education requires cognitive thinking, so if the level of English of the learner is not sufficient, then our teaching is deficient if we are doing it in English only.
- b) Because of the “language barrier”, a lot of teaching to indigenous adults is not appropriate to adult thinking. Childish language and concepts are used to teach adults, which demean the learners, and does not create an atmosphere of learning for them.
- c) ARDS has developed a methodology, based on the work of Paolo Friere, which has proved successful over the years in the area of adult education. It includes the following processes:
- Dialogue format
 - Researching and identifying the knowledge gaps
 - Researching and identifying appropriate generative language and cultural terms in the language of the learner.
 - Researching and identifying the ‘mystifying’ issues.
 - Develop the ‘storyline’ starting from the known (which has been researched) and moving to the unknown – that which we want them to know.

5. *The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages.*

- a) From the government perspective, in both adult and child education indigenous languages are presently being by-passed, not maintained as avenues of effective learning. This sets up a mind-set in the minds of both indigenous and non-indigenous that the indigenous languages are somewhat “deficient” as modes of education. Once a “hierarchy” of languages is established, and English is the language of knowledge and power, there is a

decline in the maintenance of the indigenous languages. With this decline, there comes a deficiency in cognitive language in general and education becomes far more difficult. Losing the cognitive language in first language makes it more difficult to acquire in second language.

6. *The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous Languages Policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.*

The current policy lacks both cohesiveness and consistency in terms of policy guidelines and implementation that are nationally applicable and reportable. (It is even rather ironic that the departmental link currently does not currently work

(www.arts.gov.au/indigenous/languages_policy)).

For example, under the section *Indigenous languages and literacy and numeracy* the following *Actions* are stated however they lack national application and also highlight funding to schooling areas that are clearly not dedicated to Indigenous Languages and Cultures, e.g. *to expand intensive literacy and numeracy* attainment.

- The Government is committed to languages education and recognises the important role that Indigenous language learning plays in some schools, particularly bilingual schools.
 - *Clearly this Commonwealth pronouncement has no application in the Northern Territory with the NT Government closing formal Bilingual programs, including the NTG not meeting agreements to maintain the program under negotiated agreements with Indigenous School Councils via negotiated Remote Learning Partnership Agreements. (See Wali Wunungmurra, The Disappointing Level of Support for Contemporary Yolngu Education. Keynote Speech, Garma Festival 2011).*
- The learning of English is also a fundamental skill that all Australians, including Indigenous Australians, must have in order to maximise their learning opportunities and life chances.
 - *This is an agreed outcome for all Australians, however it is placed within a policy on Indigenous languages yet makes no reference to quality bilingual learning that supports first languages maintenance and uses first languages for intercultural learning and the learning of and through English across all levels of schooling and education.*

- All Australian governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) processes have committed to halving the gap in the reading, writing and numeracy achievements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students within a decade.
 - *See comment above. Supporting quality bilingual schooling will support this Action. (See **Gaps In Australia's Indigenous Language Policy: Dismantling Bilingual Education In The Northern Territory**. Jane Simpson, Jo Caffery, and Patrick McConvell. AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper No.24. 2009.)*
- The Government is providing \$56.4 million over four years to provide extra assistance to schools to enable them *to expand intensive literacy and numeracy approaches* that have been successful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide professional development support to assist teachers to prepare Individual Learning Plans for Indigenous students.
 - *This Action bears no direct relation to promoting, developing and supporting Indigenous Languages and Culture (ILC) programs in schools/education. In fact we believe that the consistent referencing of English literacy and numeracy attainment in schools in a National Indigenous Languages Policy only further highlights that it is highly likely that in essence the Government internally believes that supporting both ILC programs and English literacy and numeracy initiatives are at best problematical rather than actually complementary and in fact 'best practice'. In short, why announce funding in this document the spending of \$56.4 million over four years which has nothing to do with ILC programs whatsoever?*

Finally, overall ARDS supports the 2009 analysis of the Social Justice Commissioner for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice via his report: '*The perilous state of Indigenous languages in Australia*' (Chapter 3). He made the following observations and recommendations. ARDS would support his deliberations as summarised below.

Until August 2009, Australia did not have a stand-alone Indigenous languages policy at the national level. Some earlier policies made reference to Indigenous languages in broader Australian language and literacy policies.

In August 2009, the Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs announced the first national policy exclusively focussed on Indigenous languages:

Indigenous Languages - A National Approach 2009, The stated aims of the policy are to 'improve coordination between those who are already working to support Indigenous languages including government, cultural institutions, Indigenous languages organisations, and education and research bodies. Activity is to be focussed in five areas:

- 1. Bringing national attention to Indigenous languages;*
- 2. Encouraging the use of critically endangered languages to maintain and extend their everyday use as much as possible;*
- 3. Making sure that in areas where Indigenous languages are being spoken fully and passed on, government recognises these languages when it interacts with Indigenous communities;*
- 4. Helping restore the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages to the extent that the current language environment allows; and*
- 5. Supporting the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools.*

*The centrepiece of Indigenous language **funding** in Australia is the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records (MILR) program administered through the Department of Environment Heritage and the Arts. The MILR program funds a range of organisations to develop language databases, resources and programs through a grants application process. This program has been in operation for a number of years and is now the sole source of funding for the Commonwealth's new National Approach. No new money has been added to the MILR to meet the new obligations of the National Approach. The allocation of \$9.3 million to MILR for 2009-10 was committed **prior** to the National Approach. This means that the Commonwealth has been unable to be responsive to situations that are new obligations. For example, the recent abolition of bilingual education funding by the Northern Territory Government now requires the attention of the Commonwealth Government if it is to implement the fifth element of its National Approach which is: "supporting the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools?"*

Unless there is new money and mechanisms to regulate state and territory Indigenous languages policy, it is unlikely that the National Approach will change the status quo and

reverse the language decline. The National Approach has so far been impotent in directing the states and territories to comply with its objectives. For example, the National Approach has not changed the education policy of the Northern Territory which aims to dismantle Indigenous bilingual education.

The divide between Commonwealth, state and territory policy is a large obstacle in the implementation of coherent direction in areas such as education. Cooperative federalism is a worthy aspiration, though it is rarely a straightforward process and it is often reliant on Commonwealth funding incentives and COAG agreements.

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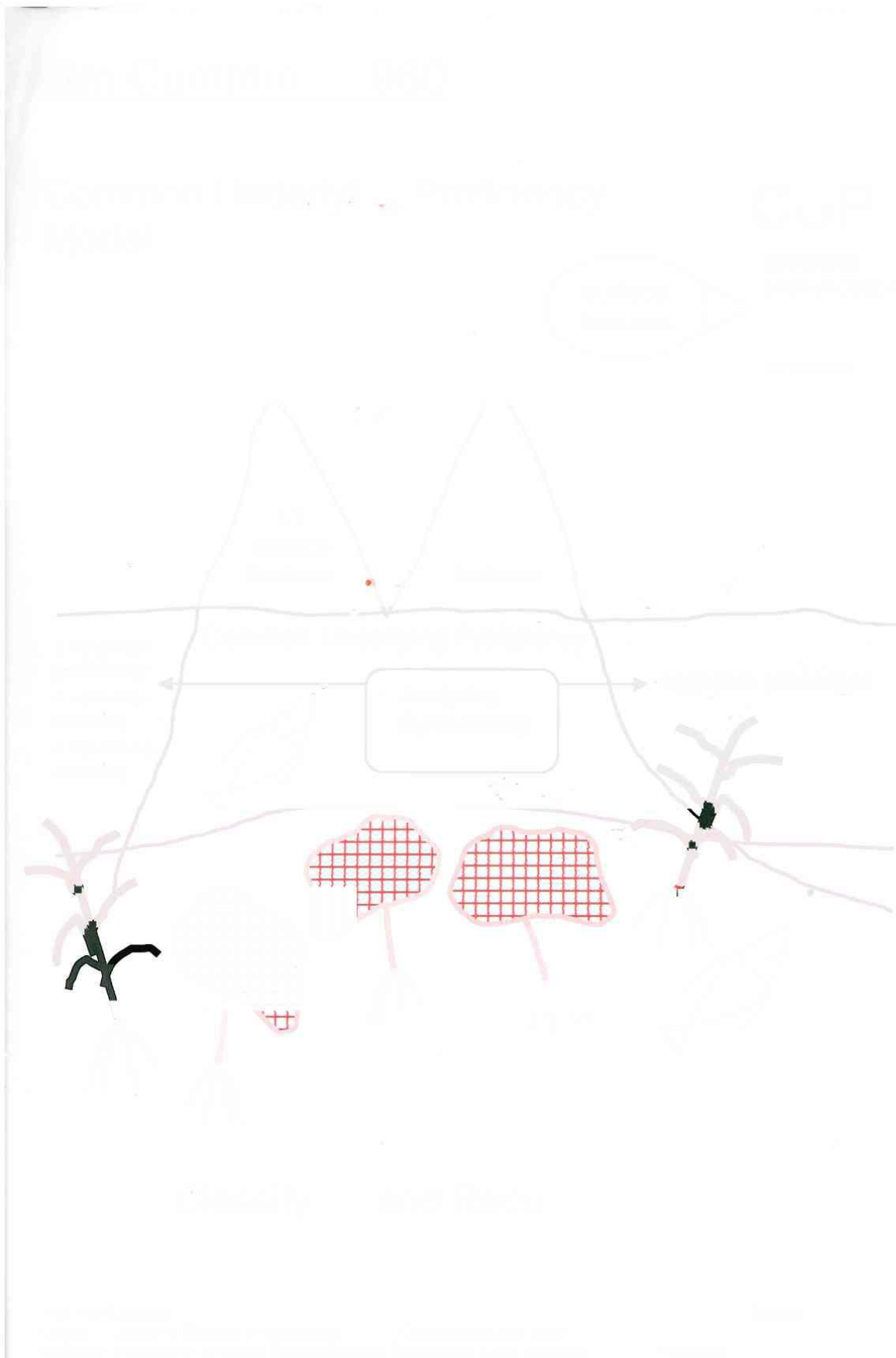
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