

Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities

Action items

Point 1: The needs of first language speakers of Indigenous languages (L1 speakers) differ from those of English-speaking Indigenous people seeking to restore ancestral languages (L2 speakers).

Point 2: First language speakers' needs

2.1: There is considerable pressure on L1 speakers to switch to using English as the main language of communication.

2.2: Once a language ceases to be spoken by children, it is very hard to restore it as a living means of thinking and communication in a community.

2.3: However, there are few first language speakers of Indigenous languages compared with English-speaking Indigenous people. They live in remote areas and have little access to government funding, grants and services for maintaining Indigenous languages.

2.4: Therefore if Australian society values existing Australian Indigenous languages, there needs to be consideration of the needs of L1 speakers in:

2.4.1: interpreting in courts, hospitals, government agencies and business transactions with large companies,

2.4.2: consideration of the needs of L1 speakers in early childhood education: balancing learning standard English in pre-school, along with maintenance and revival of Indigenous languages through pre-schools and language nests,

2.4.3: recognition that using children's first language as the medium of instruction in the classroom mother-tongue medium instruction (multilingual or bilingual education) is best practice

2.4.4: development of language enrichment curricula for high schools,

2.4.5: recruitment, support, training and professional development of L1 speakers of Indigenous languages as language teachers.

2.4.6: recognition that needs are not only in homelands and outstations, but that much work must be done in cities and "growth centres" to support language maintenance, and counteract the likely detrimental effect on language use and language maintenance of policy that pressures people from outstations and homeland centres to move to the growth centres.

Point 3: Needs of English-speaking Indigenous people seeking to restore ancestral languages (L2 speakers).

3.1 Making Indigenous languages attractive to young people

3.2 Support for communities to go through informal and formal training to attain goals of Indigenous language restoration

3.3 Recruitment, support, training and professional development for Indigenous people to learn their languages and to become skilled language teachers and language revivers.

3.4 Development of maintenance and revival of Indigenous languages through pre-schools and language nests,

3.5 Development of language revival curricula for high schools.

Point 4: Recognition of Language rights For Points 2 and 3 to be sustainable, it is essential that the wider community recognise Indigenous languages as the first languages of Australia, and that in many communities maintenance and restoration of language is essential for reconnection to culture and identity, and for community well-being. This needs to be enshrined through recognition of Indigenous language rights.