

Senate Inquiry Into Language Learning In Indigenous Communities.

18/08/2011

In support of the revitalization of Aboriginal languages.

As a TAFE teacher I have been teaching Aboriginal languages to two separate groups of students since late 2009.

The students have been enthusiastic in their desire to learn their respective languages and for them it has been an empowering experience, both culturally and educationally.

The Wanarruwa language classes were conducted at Singleton, on campus, and the Gathang classes for the Warrimay people were off campus, but on country at Williamtown.

An older student at Singleton, who was also enrolled in literacy classes with the Community College situated within the TAFE Campus, had decided to translate the Tiddalik story. This she successfully achieved. The process to carry out this project necessitated her intensely perusing, 'A Salvage Grammar and Wordlist of the Language from the Hunter River and Lake Macquarie'. This activity impacted profoundly and positively on her ability to read English and I feel this supports an assumption or expectation that the learning of an Aboriginal language can raise, through various factors, not the least an elevated sense of identity and self esteem, a student's ability to progress toward 'closing the gap' educationally. The Wannaruwa class attained Certificate 1 level.

The Warrimay group had more time in class and attained Certificate 2 level. They were easily forming sentences of their own choosing and readily and freely communicating with each other, in the Gathang language. I have no doubt that having access to language is empowering for the students both culturally and socially within the broader community.

The confidence that gaining language has given these students is remarkable. Many of the Warrimay and some of the Wanarruwa students have taken what they have learned in the classroom into their homes and communities and are actively practicing what they had learned.

This year I have been working in concert with the Murrumbidgee Language Centre and together we are delivering a language learning method that is having instant and lasting results, necessary, since the opportunity to deliver such events as these classes is infrequent due to lack of directed funding. My students are all adult and one can only imagine the positive flow on effects for students who have access to their Aboriginal languages within their early school experience and surely a reduction in racism when their language is recognised as a subject within the school curriculum.

Thanking you for your indulgence

I remain

Yours sincerely

Marianne McKinnon-Kidd

B.A.V.A. (U of N) 1992, TAA04 (TAFE) 2007, MPhil. I.S. (Mq U) 2008, M.I.L.E. (U Syd) 2009