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**ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE REVIVAL:
THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF LANGUAGE PRACTICES**

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ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE REVIVAL

Aboriginal language revival is a recent phenomenon in Australia.¹ Prior to British colonisation, Australia had over 250 distinct languages that could be subdivided into 600-700 dialects; clearly, Australia was composed of “multicultural and multilingual societies.”² Today only 18 Indigenous languages are spoken by all generations of people within a given language group.³

In response to the urgent need to protect Indigenous languages, in August 2009 the Australian government launched a strategy titled *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach 2009 (Social Justice Report 2009)*. It highlighted the government’s plan to preserve and revitalise Indigenous languages through targeted actions. In 2015, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) released the Australian Curriculum *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages*, providing a tool for Australian schools to support Indigenous language education.⁴ Further to this, in 2016 the state of New South Wales (NSW) introduced Indigenous languages in the secondary school curriculum, with other states following. Australian universities are increasingly offering tertiary courses in Indigenous languages.

Subsequently, the *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* was passed in New South Wales, with a five-year plan to reawaken and nurture Aboriginal languages. The Act specifically acknowledges that Aboriginal languages are part of the cultural heritage of NSW while recognising the significance of reawakening and nurturing these languages in order to reconnect Aboriginal peoples to their culture and heritage. Importantly, the Act acknowledges that “Aboriginal people are the custodians of Aboriginal languages and have the right to control their revival and nurturing.”⁵ In 2023, NSW is the only state in Australia to have an Aboriginal Languages Act. The introduction of this Act is a reversal of assimilationist policies in Australia that prohibited the use of Aboriginal languages throughout the mid-twentieth century.

Meanwhile, Aboriginal Elders play a key role in reclaiming language and their voice in the policy arena by contributing to radical pedagogies and healing through language revival programs. To this end, Aboriginal scholars in Australia see their work as drawing on generations of Elders, particularly in the context of Grandmother's Laws, and their contribution to resistance, the challenging of stereotypes and a focus on survival as an outcome.⁶

As a result of these developments, competing tensions exist in Aboriginal language learning, with government policies on the one hand providing Western models for language learning within educational institutions while, on the other, Indigenous Community-led structures are informing vital ways of recentring language pathways.

This paper builds on and contributes to the ongoing work on Aboriginal languages in Australia by examining the intersectionality relevant to the revival of Aboriginal languages. The aim is to understand the ways in which different knowledges intersect and interact to shape experiences of oppression, resistance and privilege, in order to address and challenge systemic forms of inequality and discrimination. This study draws on a framework informed by the relationship between Aboriginal knowledges and pedagogies.⁷ This framework acts as a useful, yet destabilising element that brings into question how teachers teach and what systems of knowledge are applied. We also extend this framework to the concept of intersectionality, which is set in a history of challenges and resistance to ongoing systemic racism.⁸ The intersection in the context of Aboriginal language education is a space of friction where Aboriginal educators work to resist the ongoing effects and challenges of colonisation and to secure their human rights.

The study draws on interviews with Aboriginal educators in both an Australian educational institution and their local community context in order to examine the relationships between people and society in the process of language revival, as well as the challenges posed and solutions offered by the ways in which various forms of knowledge intersect. The education context is located in the state of NSW and focuses on specific Aboriginal languages from Countries located within this state.

KNOWLEDGE AND PEDAGOGY

Differential power relations between individuals and structural inequities intrude into the very heart of teaching and evaluation of Aboriginal language pedagogies and curricula. Michael Apple framed the problem of differential power in a series of questions that became the basis for an educational theory investigating the power and politics of difference in teaching and learning.⁹ Such a framework informs the moral and political dimensions of Aboriginal language education in Australia, which centre on questions including how knowledge is organised and transmitted, whose knowledge matters and whose interests are served by the production of such knowledge.¹⁰ In this context, therefore, differential power relations foreground how dominance and subordination are reproduced, critically examined and resisted in society through Aboriginal language transmission.

Within the context of Aboriginal language revival, conflict has arisen between Aboriginal Nations. This is due to the ongoing effects of colonisation and structural inequities over what is regarded by some as privileging the teaching and learning of one language and cultural group over others. These tensions are identified by the *Social Justice Report 2009* as the result of colonisation and

decades of Australian government policies and practices banning and discouraging Indigenous people from speaking their languages during the assimilation years commencing in the early 1900s. This report has shown that current Indigenous language policy in Australia is inconsistent and in some cases contradictory. On the one hand, the Commonwealth has a national approach that values Indigenous languages and supports their preservation. On the other hand, some state and territory governments have policies that limit Aboriginal language teaching in the interests of promoting English-language literacy.

At the same time, research on the revitalisation of Aboriginal languages suggests that a lack of coordination in resource sharing and teacher training are the biggest challenges to be faced in Aboriginal language teaching and learning in Australia.¹¹ This lack of coordination is complicated by the fact that there is a diversity in language visibility and approaches, with a wide range of views on education held by the Aboriginal community. Koch's study of Aboriginal languages reveals that "the lack of qualified teachers of the language in the communities is an inhibiting factor."¹² This teacher shortage is complicated by the fact that many languages have been depleted by the loss of significant amounts of linguistic and cultural knowledge and may not be used on a daily basis.

Further challenges include resistance by some Aboriginal communities towards non-Indigenous people "learning languages or even having access to them."¹³ Despite these challenges, bodies such as First Languages Australia are playing a role in developing a national framework to provide the guidance and support required by "local communities and schools for the development of local Aboriginal language or Torres Strait Islander language curriculums."¹⁴ In the area of curriculum development, fundamental questions arise regarding the relationships between different Aboriginal Community groups and their languages competing against each other. Another dimension of this inquiry – beyond curriculum or content knowledge – is the connection between the pedagogy of language learning and the colonial history and politics of Aboriginal languages.

Pedagogy is best understood as a complex encounter between knowledge and the learner.¹⁵ Pedagogy as a concept draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced, transmitted and reproduced. In the context of Aboriginal language teaching and learning, concepts of teaching as knowledge delivery and learning as knowledge transmission – where knowledge is at times limited – involves complex, indeterminate and unpredictable pedagogies. The contexts, relationships, subjectivities and texts of an Aboriginal language, language learner and teacher are intertwined, connected and unfolding. This reality calls for a holistic approach to understanding pedagogy.

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT AND COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

According to the *Report on Professional Learning to Support the Teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages*, produced by First Languages Australia for the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the demand for formal language training "continues to grow" for people who are keen to teach Indigenous languages in schools.¹⁶ Similarly, Mary-Anne Gale's study on the South Australian educational context suggests that there is a strong "demand from schools wishing to introduce Aboriginal language programs ... with many schools actively seeking teachers of Aboriginal Languages."¹⁷

To qualify as a teacher of an Aboriginal language, a person needs to complete a course delivered by a registered training organisation. The report by First Languages Australia points out that in Australia, while each state and territory has clear pathways to becoming a classroom teacher, “virtually no state and territory has a clear pathway for those who wish to become an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teacher.”¹⁸ The various states and territories across Australia have diverse approaches to Aboriginal language teacher training pathways. In some states and territories, Aboriginal languages educators are often employed as teaching assistants or Aboriginal education workers, administrative or support staff, or as contractors.¹⁹ In NSW, the state in which this study is situated, Aboriginal languages teachers in specific areas can be employed through an initiative known as the Language Nest program.

NSW ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE NESTS

The Language Nest program first originated in New Zealand in the 1980s, as a part of the Māori language revival program. It has been successful in New Zealand and in Hawaii. In Australia, support for a similar initiative has come from various sectors. For instance, the NSW government’s community-focused 2013 OCHRE Plan for Aboriginal Affairs has supported five language and culture Nests. Furthermore, the NSW state government, through the NSW *Aboriginal Languages Act*, has prioritised the revitalisation of critically endangered Aboriginal languages by supporting the implementation of the Language Nest initiative.²⁰ In addition to this, the NSW Aboriginal Education and Consultative Group (NSWAECG)²¹ and the NSW Department of Education (NSW DoE)²² have partnered to provide support for Language Nests.

Language Nests are programs for intergenerational language teaching and learning. Aboriginal Language Custodians, who are mainly Elders and language teachers from local Aboriginal communities, are critical for supporting the teaching and learning in these Nests. This program provides NSW public school children with exposure to language learning and acquiring fluency in their local Aboriginal language. NSW Language Nests are bound by public school districts and are found in the following NSW regional Aboriginal language areas: Bundjalung, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuawaalayaay, Gumbaynggirr, Wiradjuri and Paakantji/ Baakantji.

Through this program, educators can provide language classes at various schools under the supervision of a classroom teacher.²³ In terms of the NSW Education Curriculum requirements, Aboriginal languages are taught from the first year of compulsory schooling until the year before the final two years of secondary education (kindergarten until Year 10 or K-10). Furthermore, Aboriginal language study is not a mandatory subject. In 2024/2025, however, the NSW Secondary School Curriculum is planning to introduce Aboriginal languages as part of the Higher School Certificate (HSC – the highest educational qualification in NSW schools Years 11-12) component.²⁴ In terms of which Aboriginal languages are assessed, priority is given to the language of Country where the school is located.²⁵ The NSW syllabus website makes a point of stating that the “successful delivery of the Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus” is “dependent on expertise and guidance from local Aboriginal knowledge holders and keepers, custodians and stakeholders to support classroom teachers,”²⁶ thus highlighting the role of local Aboriginal communities in the success and sustainability of Aboriginal language education.

Despite this, the challenge of identifying pathways for Aboriginal language teachers is an ongoing process, with calls for various initiatives to take place. Some of these initiatives target the need for vocational-level or tertiary education degrees to train Aboriginal educators in the area of language learning.²⁷ In the meantime, with the growing interest in language education, “a number of community language programs are developing non-accredited community language learning activities to help support educator language learning.”²⁸

COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES USING GRANDMOTHER’S LAW

Community-led initiatives draw on traditional structures centred on the role that Aboriginal Elders play in the transmission of Aboriginal languages, particularly Grandmother’s Law. Grandmother’s Law is one half of Aboriginal Law and stems from the Land. The Law was laid down by the Creator Spirits when the Land, its Nation and Language and the people belonging to it were created. According to this Law men and women hold equal positions, with reciprocal rights and responsibilities for maintaining societal harmony and balance in their own Nations. As Elder Betty Pierce, cited by Irene Watson, states: “We’ve got what we used to call Grandmother’s Law, or Grandmother’s Ways, Grannie’s Ways ... and the Grannies have got to stand up and the men have to remember that the Grannies, the women’s stories are stronger than the men.”²⁹ Aboriginal Law is also termed Business, Men’s Business and Women’s Business, and is managed jointly and separately by both men and women. Grandmother’s Law holds the responsibility and obligation for sharing and passing down intergenerational stories, ceremonies, languages and cultural practices to future generations. Throughout this process, Aboriginal language is in itself a community, which connects kinship, Country, Land, Law and family all together to the self. This conception of self in Aboriginal culture is composed within a collectivist perspective that views the self as holistic and inseparable from, and deeply rooted within, Land, family, languages and community.

Throughout life, girls learn from women Elders, including Kinship mothers and Grandmothers. From the age of seven, boys progress their culture and language-learning journey through their male Elders, Kinship father and grandfather. These interdependent roles are designated as “Women’s Business”³⁰ and “Men’s Business.”³¹ “Grandfathers look outwardly, protecting home community, Land and camp.”³² Grandmothers look inwardly, teaching and nurturing younger generations to have respect and responsibility for caring for Country to benefit both Land and people and to maintain continuing cultural connections with family, Language and Land.³³

Languages used in ceremonies through songs and dance are embedded in the spiritual and cosmological connections referred to as Dreaming, and form the basis of Men and Women’s Business.³⁴ Aboriginal languages are living and deeply connected to Country, carrying encoded knowledge which guides both men and women through Country and are embodied through their gendered social roles and responsibilities to care for Country (Land, Sea and Sky). Women and men sing the histories of place, dance, practice art, tell stories and collect bush tucker (Native foods) on-Country, connecting both language and culture. They speak to their Totems and Ancestral beings in their sacred landscapes and seascapes. Language in these places carries cultural and spiritual restrictions based on age, Clan, Kinship and gender. For example, there are some Aboriginal languages that are gendered, and are only spoken by women and not men, and vice versa, and inform the inside and outside perspectives on Aboriginal languages associated with spirituality and sacredness. As Jane Jacob has identified, there are gender-based rules governing the knowledge of Traditional Custodians:

To pass on such information would be a breach of [Aboriginal] [L]aws relating to women discussing '[M]en's [B]usiness.' Further, the very fact that some women are custodians of such knowledge reflects on the male member of the group who, in passing this information on, is also seen as not having complied with gender-based rules of secrecy, despite there being evidence to suggest that over time gender-specific song-cycles can become open.³⁵

Dispossession from the Land, massacres, murders, prohibitions against language use and the forceful removal of generations of Aboriginal children, among a range of colonising practices and despite concerted resistance, have today undermined the fulfilment of language-related roles and responsibilities for many Aboriginal women, too often and for too long. Consequently, the present-day teaching of Aboriginal languages in educational contexts draws on the complex intersectionality of government legislation governing teaching training and Aboriginal Law, which understands language learning and nurturing in ways connected intimately to a community, the Land and the knowledge of Elders and Traditional Custodians.

RESEARCH SET-UP

In order to examine Aboriginal women's engagement with resistance to oppressive colonial Aboriginal language-teaching practices and policies, interviews were conducted with six Bundjalung, Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri NSW Language Nest educators in Sydney in November 2022. The six participants are women aged between 55 and 68, each with approximately a decade's experience of teaching languages in community in public schools at primary and secondary levels.

Out of the six women, three have family members from the Stolen Generations, whereby either one or both of their parents were forcibly removed from their families and communities by the Australian government. These members of Stolen Generations were forced to live with foster families and institutions with white carers in the context of Australia's assimilationist policies from the 1930s to the 1970s. Because they were only able to return to their Country in adulthood, there is a break in continuity and fluency in their Ancestral tongue. Given the small sample size, to ensure the anonymity of the participants, they have all been de-identified.

Within the context of the broader study, the main purpose of this paper is to recognise the role of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal language revival in the communities. These women navigate Aboriginal and non-Indigenous knowledge systems in their teaching, often motivated by a sense of language activism embedded within complex power relations. The participants' responses stem from their direct experiences and perceptions as women from the Bundjalung, Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri NSW Languages Nest, helping to shed light on and document the positive impacts of language reclamation activities in educational contexts, as well as to inform future policies relating to Aboriginal languages in NSW schools and community spaces. The themes that emerge from the findings centre on notions of belonging and knowledge, the role of Community Elders and language protocols.

BELONGING AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

In the mid-twentieth century, ongoing government assimilation policies prevented the use of Aboriginal languages in schools favouring the use of the English language. Consequently, for some families there has been an intergenerational break in the learning of their Aboriginal languages. For teachers from specific Aboriginal language groups who invest their time in the teaching of Aboriginal languages, this disruption to their linguistic heritage is not uncommon and is a feature of their background as language educators. One of the participants in the interviews reveals this aspect:

I learnt no Aboriginal language or culture as a child – it wasn't taught in schools in the 90s, it wasn't spoken in my family because my father was a member of the Stolen Generations. [Jane]

Another participant expressed a similar viewpoint:

I never had spoken my language because my dad was a Stolen Generation. I didn't start speaking our language until I studied and graduated in Gamilaraay Language. Similarly, with those kids in my language school, [they] need to be taught our language and these students will be our future language teachers, but they're not regarded as role models by their schools. [Bernie]

One salient aspect of this language context is the lived experience of this disruption and its impact on some language teachers, shaping the way they understand the relationship between their language and its continuity and the importance of reviving and nurturing language for future language educators. This way of understanding Aboriginal language education is situated within a context of disconnection, manifesting in resistance and the hope of reclaiming the thread of language continuity through the Language Nest program in the school system.

In the context of language revival, for many of the participants in this study language is defined by the shared connection to community and their cultural identity. One of the participants, Bernie, stated:

With Aboriginal people – our language informs our identity, and culture. I think for me and for most Aboriginal people, we grew up with community being the most important thing in our lives. It's not one person, it's not you who's the person, it's your whole community. [Bernie]

For this language educator the notion of pride is also associated with the way language learning strengthens students' sense of belonging to the community. She refers to the high motivation of students during their language learning journey:

Gamilaraay language, it's mine, it belongs to the Community and that's our community's language. And I love the language and the students love learning about their Aboriginal language and culture – when I get to school on a Monday morning and the kids are like oh, we got you today. That is what makes me feel good, that is what makes me take more time, when the kids are keen to have language lessons. [Bernie]

At the same time, as a result of colonial disruption to many of the Aboriginal languages spoken in NSW, the authority of some of the participants as holders of language knowledge is often questioned. For instance, Jill, another Gamilaraay language teacher, states that people always question her Aboriginal accent. Yet, when she started teaching language, she challenged stereotypical assumptions:

Sometimes my little accent comes through every now and then, and it annoys me when people say, "That's Aboriginal English." I say, "No, it's not that, it's my accent that's coming through." Now I confidently stand up, and I say to people, "I have an Aboriginal Ancestral mother tongue, my Aboriginal language that I should have been talking other than English and sometimes that comes through." [Jill]

Aboriginal people have an accent. It annoys me when they say, "Aboriginal language," or "You talk mission," and I'm like, "There's no such thing as talking mission." It's just our accent that's coming through. Ancestral tongue. Yeah, when I can't spell something it's because I've only got 13 letters in my language, not 26. I was teaching a bit of Gamilaraay when I was at home, but that's about it. [Jill]

Despite these challenges to her knowledge, Jill has been able to build confidence within her student groups:

When I taught out there, with the class that I had, I built a phrase that they could say, and it was, like, a normal phrase so that they'd just get used to speaking their own language and after a while they could speak it fluently, they didn't even have to read it up on the board, which was good. It was just, "Hello, my name is ***, and I come from Gamilaraay Country," and this is a place where two rivers meet, it wasn't anything fancy. It was where the Barwon and the Namoi meet. [Jill]

While Jill was able to overcome some of the stereotypical assumptions made about her language-teaching capabilities, other teachers have been faced with racist attitudes towards Aboriginal language learning. Bernie argues that not every teacher and student share the same attitude towards Aboriginal language learning. With past government assimilationist policies preventing Aboriginal people from speaking their languages, the systematic separation of people from their languages as a form of linguicide (language killing) persists in the current education system. One participant relates:

My position in the school is the language and culture teacher. [I] love teaching, love my language and culture and [am] very proud, but it would be better to incorporate language into your school if everybody was on board. Currently not everybody is on board with the language and culture program. Unless we get the teachers on board and [get] all of them to respect our language and our culture, then we're not going anywhere, we're still going to go around in circles. [Bernie]

She adds that the Aboriginal language context is fragile due to the ongoing effects of past racist colonial policies which undermined Aboriginal languages:

Very fractured, our community relating to our Gamilaraay language, and I can't even get all our teachers on board to say "Yamma" [hello] to the kids. Some non-Indigenous parents don't want their kids learning First Nations Language at all. No, it's just a tick box. Language is a part of our identity. [Bernie]

For educators teaching Aboriginal languages, finding support from teachers in their school can sometimes involve challenging implicit racism that undermines the value of Aboriginal languages.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ELDERS

While the introduction of Language Nests and Aboriginal languages in the NSW school curriculum involves following NSW education-approved guidelines, Elders and Language Custodians also guide the learning of language and culture in schools and communities, giving local custodians cultural authority to teach younger generations. A Wiradjuri community language learner and a teacher, Lisa reflected on her personal language journey and the vital role of Elders:

Uncle Ray passed you these stories and you are custodian of these stories, and you can go and teach so many people. And while he was teaching us Wiradjuri for over six months, his wife came in, who's now deceased, and we heard his stories and her stories, and as Elders. I just feel so spiritually strong that I got to hear that, because I was not only learning the language, to pass on to Wiradjuri students in the school, I was learning the culture of those stories, and that's the magic, isn't it? [Lisa]

For language educators, Elders share and pass on intergenerational knowledge and skills through their stories, language and culture to the future generations. Elders hold the responsibility for ensuring that their words are still listened to, that the younger generations are supported to know their language and to understand Country. Elders also provide individual mentoring opportunities for young people. Another Gamilaraay Language teacher, Julie, stated:

But one of our boys had an Aboriginal mentor who was an Elder, and Brodie used to go and sit with him for hours. And they'd talk in our language. And he taught him all the food, the medicines, he'd take us out to see Aboriginal sites, etcetera. I know that Brodie has benefited from that, he's much stronger because of the cultural representation in his life than it was for the elder boy. And he wishes he had done the same. [Julie]

Some participants strongly emphasise that Aboriginal languages need to be taught by Traditional Custodians. According to Lisa, this aspect is more important than holding a teaching degree. For Lisa, Kooris (a term referring to some Aboriginal groups in NSW) should be the ones teaching language:

If they want us to teach about Aboriginal languages, get a person, a Traditional Custodian, who usually comes from that local language area, to teach that element. I think that's something we can keep to ourselves, as Koori people, to be able to teach our way, and there's nothing more authentic than a Koori person teaching it. Because we use our ways of knowing, feeling, doing and being, and that's important and we connect it back to Country. It doesn't matter what it is, you can always connect it to Country, to people, or to place. It's highly localised, it's like a specialist local knowledge. I think even our Mob, when we've got them in the school, they may not have the teaching degree, but they're still teaching that knowledge – the Aboriginal language that they have is vital. [Lisa]

While the *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* and the Department of Education 2024 strategy on teaching and learning Aboriginal languages acknowledge the role that Aboriginal community and Elders play in reviving Aboriginal languages, the Elders also understand their responsibility and are honoured and respected in their community. They embrace their role as knowledge keepers who connect their community to the past while forging a path for future generations. In addition, Elders as language custodians play an important role in cultural and linguistic continuity, as Bernie explains:

When I say that to the kids learning language at the school from K-10, [it] is very important to me because a lot of us work to revive language. We only heard words that our brothers and sisters said and talked about. Well, I only heard words then and I didn't know what they meant until I did the teacher training with our Elders. There was four or five Uncles, Elders, fellows who used to teach the language with us when the community first started teaching. Now, there's only one man who knows language in the Elders group and that's my uncle, who is sick at the moment. So now we don't have any fluid language speakers. [Bernie]

Bernie's concern for her language program reveals the fragile nature of the Aboriginal language landscape:

Our language program has been on and off, and there hasn't been any consistency since. I started teaching language and got offered the language teaching position. We've got an actual Elders group, but these Elders have only been there for a decade, so that's when I first started the training to learn language, when language first started coming into the schools. We used to go to a meeting at the Community centre every Friday and the female Elder would come in and take some ladies on Country. We have set up the Community Language Centre without these old fellows and teach Language, and at this stage there is no one here teaching language to the language teachers. [Bernie]

This last comment brings to the forefront the challenges faced by language educators when Elders are not available, due to Sorry Business (deaths, problems and illness), to support their language mentoring and to nurture their own learning pathways in their communities.

LANGUAGE PROTOCOLS

Language Nests are informed by teaching the true history and knowledge of the local area. This is not a 'one size fits all' approach to language teaching and learning, but is rather adapted to the context and the history of the local area. Consequently, the interview findings suggest that language teachers require protocols when using Aboriginal language in schools in order to address who teaches Aboriginal languages and how an Aboriginal language program is delivered. This is particularly relevant to how Aboriginal language protocols are understood by communities. For instance, Lisa points out that language and people are connected to Country and therefore community consultation is vital. Consequently, the findings suggest that Elders are crucial to supporting the teachers with language learning and culture. Lisa states:

The voices, opinions and the words around the room ... in Aboriginal language, it means nothing if the culture itself, the people and the feelings aren't there. Because people are the language and people are the Country, so community consultation is a massive role and incredibly important. It is quite difficult to engage quite a few community members, for whatever reason. They're off working ... [Lisa]

For Language Nest Elders and community educators of Aboriginal languages, this means that they are not only educating students within schools, but also other staff members. Often this aspect of language education is not visible in the school language curriculum. It represents a significant aspect of the language teacher's work in curating understandings around protocols for learning with Country and the ongoing relationships with Traditional Custodians of Language and Country. Bundjalung Elder, Maree, explains:

We've had two whole school staff development days so far. ... We had a language one as well. ... We're not just teaching the kids. We're teaching the staff. We're taking them on that journey too. I use that word a lot, but it's true, the journey, it's a Song Line. And for all of us to work together, kids and all, everyone needs to know about it. So, he [the principal] will come and consult with us if there's anything even relating to culture, he'll come and talk with us, whether it's individually or as a group. So, he knows the protocols, which is important, as every principal does, needs to. And he didn't know at the start and now he does and he's a different person, and I've got respect for him now. [Maree]

These protocols with non-Indigenous teachers are nuanced. Maree explains:

The true histories need to be taught [as] a compulsory subject in schools, [with] a flexible curriculum where the things that are learnt are local. There's Language Nests that are happening and we've ran our own language nest here, because it's Bandjalang Clan of the Bundjalung Country. There's Githabul, Minjangbal and Yugambah dialects, so that's all – there's cross over? So, some of our words are very similar and some of our words are different, like bunge for echidna, and we say jena jena. For instance, a non-Indigenous teacher came with animal names for Githabul dialect the other day. I said to her, "That's not my language." She went on the internet to look up the word for echidna, assuming that we all have the same language – no way. But she's only been at the school for a couple of weeks and still learning. I said to her, "Let me change these and I'll put Bandjalang on there, but thank you for coming down and not going ahead with teaching incorrect Bandjalang Language in class." [Maree]

Maree's example unpacks the complexity of whose language can be taught, how it is taught and by whom, and why it matters. Accessing information off the internet and third parties creates tensions with the language keepers (Elders), teachers and learners. Sharing knowledge around language requires additional and deeper thinking around how Intellectual Property and protocols work in Aboriginal communities. These protocols also apply to Aboriginal teachers and language learners who are not Traditional Custodians of the local language. Bernie explains how these interactions are fraught with tension:

We've got Aboriginal teachers at the primary school from other Countries too. We don't work together and we're not all on the same page – we're going in different directions, which is sad. This Aboriginal teacher, instead of coming to me first, she photocopied a book that had some language words on it and then she's got language incorporated into her programs. She didn't ask me for permission to use the words first or even how it is used in a sentence – we have always asked for permission from the Elders. [Bernie]

Meanwhile, some of the participant responses reveal that not all language teachers understand the Aboriginal language policy and rely on non-Indigenous teachers, often teaching languages other than English, to explain the policy to the Aboriginal Language teachers. In such a context, one participant, Maree, explains:

A lot of policy stuff that I didn't know – but the people I work with sat me down and went through everything with me and explained. I had to do it and I did the job fine. Oh well, I know what I think and do, but yeah, but we don't get the opportunity to. [Maree]

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Aboriginal languages are central to Aboriginal culture and identity. The loss of language is a source of grief for many. The number of Traditional Custodians who are fluent language speakers and who are available to pass their language skills on to future generations is diminishing due to Sorry Business of Elders, who have undertaken this important work in the past. Local Elders who contribute to teaching language in schools are knowledge keepers. Sound policies and relevant cultural protocols are essential in order to safeguard community interests and to protect the Intellectual Property Rights of Elders and the Indigenous knowledges of Aboriginal communities. This is significant both for current practice and to safeguard the interests of future generations. The narratives of the participants in this study reveal that policies are also needed to ensure that schools create culturally safe environments and develop programs which are relevant to Aboriginal communities, as well as culturally appropriate to the local context.

Examining Aboriginal language revival through the intersectionality of knowledge and resistance pedagogies is a starting point in the larger task of bringing to the surface the tensions and opportunities that exist in the space of Indigenous language education in the NSW school system. The narratives of the women given a voice in this paper identify the layers of protocols, policies, attitudes and beliefs that they navigate in order to secure a place in the education system to revive Aboriginal languages. Although this study of the revival of Indigenous languages highlights the challenges relating to the availability of local Elders, it also highlights current knowledge gaps in language pedagogy. The interview responses in this paper are timely and suggest that the pedagogy of language revival needs to include a political pathway with respect to the knowledge formation of both the teachers' professional development and the curriculum. As a result, the language program should be clear in acknowledging the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems and between power differentials in the process of language revival. Likewise, the pedagogy of language revival should also include an understanding of the symbolic power of language as an inherent part of the diversity in the nation, while still recognising Indigenous people as representing the first culture of the land.

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