



The Benefits of Aboriginal Language

Use and Revival in New South Wales

Literature Review



Jumbunna
Institute for Indigenous
Education and Research

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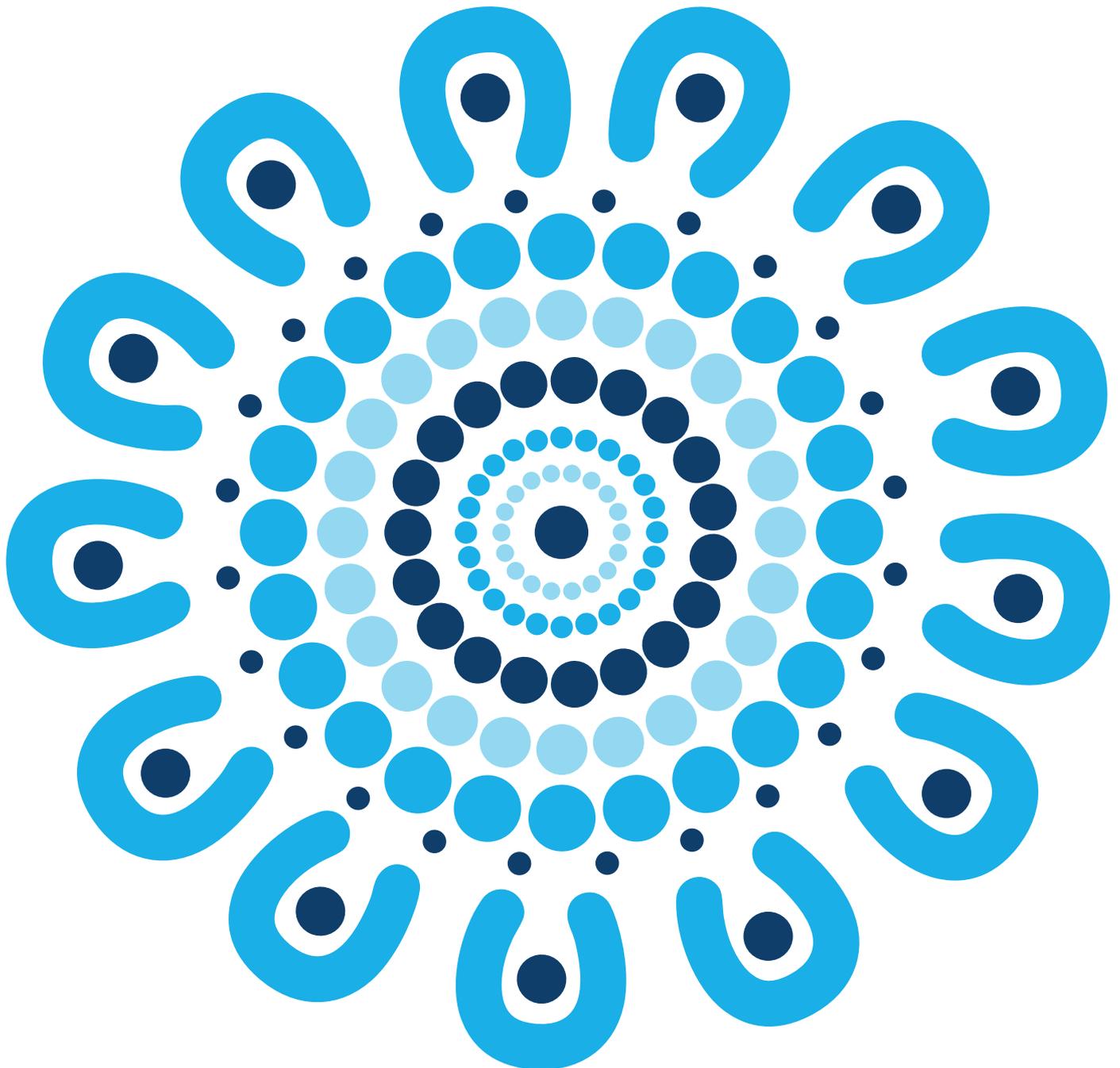
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Introduction

What are the benefits of Aboriginal language use and revival?

The New South Wales (NSW) Aboriginal Languages Trust (the Trust) is exploring this question in the context of the Trust's role in promoting Aboriginal languages and supporting Aboriginal language activities at local, regional and state levels in NSW.

Support and promotion of Aboriginal languages in NSW is vital as Aboriginal communities work on language reclamation, revitalisation and maintenance in the broader struggle to recover from the impacts of colonisation and thrive through the preservation of knowledges, identities and heritage. Despite the devastating impacts of past government policies that denied Aboriginal people the right to practice language and culture, and caused significant separation from language, Aboriginal people continue to connect with language for broader social, emotional and cultural wellbeing.

This is a literature review that draws on the literature broadly (including academic literature and other published sources) relating to the positive impacts of Aboriginal language use and revitalisation in NSW. A priority within the literature review has been to identify the literature that communicates Aboriginal Standpoints about Aboriginal languages.

The review has been conducted by the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research at the UTS in collaboration with the Faculty of Law.

1.1 Note on language

The authors note the use of various terminology referring to Aboriginal people, including use of 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal', and 'First Nations', as well as referencing specific Aboriginal language groups or nations where known. We acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal communities, cultures, languages and experiences of Aboriginal people in NSW, including Stolen Generations Survivors.

The authors acknowledge that some of the terminology utilised in the literature may not align with local community ways of knowing. Our intention is to present the literature without imposing additional (or endorsing specific) categorisations and frameworks onto NSW Aboriginal language contexts.

There is interchangeable terminology used throughout the literature review regarding language revitalisation, including language 'renewal', 'reclamation' and 'revival' (e.g. DITRDC 2020), or 'systematic separation of people from their languages' (e.g. Sivak et al. 2019) and 'repossession of language' (e.g. Williams 2011b). All of these terms have been engaged with by the variety of literature reviewed. We acknowledge the specific contexts and depth of understanding related to each of the terms used.



Special Care Notice

This document may contain references to Aboriginal peoples who are deceased.

They can also relate to experiences and reflections on language, colonial violence, trauma and other related themes that can be distressing and can cause sadness and anger.

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2. Executive Summary

“This is not my knowledge that I pass on but the knowledge of my old people. I have always felt privileged and honoured that, for one reason or another, these Elders have shared their knowledge with me and pushed me to share it with others.”

“Language is its own medicine, it was language that got me back on track within my life. It was the old people that guided me through that process.”

Diane Riley-McNaboe and Rhonda Ashby, respectively, quoted in Knowles, 2019.

Nationally, important conversations are taking place on the importance of Aboriginal voice and representation in decision-making, largely framed through the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty and self-determination. Many of these conversations reflect intergenerational issues of importance to Aboriginal people and include: Country, family, culture and health and wellbeing. The importance of connecting to culture and connecting with language are key areas of focus for Aboriginal people.

A core driver of this engagement has been the desire of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain or reconnect with their languages, including connecting holistically to culture. However, despite the growth in language projects, there has been limited research undertaken on the wellbeing impacts of this work for Aboriginal people, or indeed the broader Australian community.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have diverse needs in terms of their engagement with language reclamation. In New South Wales (NSW), where the impact of British invasion was most severely felt, language use was, and continues to be, interrupted by colonisation. In recognition of the value and importance of NSW languages, and in the context of this historical background, the NSW Parliament committed to supporting language use and renewal in NSW by enacting the *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* (NSW). In the Act’s Second Reading Speech in Parliament, then NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell MLC, acknowledged past governments’ attempts to “eliminate” Aboriginal languages (Mitchell, 2017).

The *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* (NSW) provides a focus for coordinating a sustained effort to support Aboriginal languages in NSW, where the legislation is enacted in recognition that:

- (a) The languages of the first peoples of the land comprising New South Wales are an integral part of the world’s oldest living culture and connect Aboriginal people to each other and to their land;
- (b) As a result of past Government decisions Aboriginal languages were almost lost, but they were spoken in secret and passed on through Aboriginal families and communities;
- (c) Aboriginal people will be reconnected with their culture and heritage by the reawakening, growing and nurturing of Aboriginal languages;
- (d) Aboriginal languages are part of the cultural heritage of New South Wales;
- (e) It is acknowledged that Aboriginal people are the custodians of Aboriginal languages and have the right to control their growth and nurturing.



The work of the Trust is significant in supporting language use and revival in an NSW context. This literature review provides an overview of the benefits of Aboriginal language use in NSW, both to Aboriginal people and the broader Australian community. We also provide insights into the gaps in current research and documented knowledge. Lastly, the report concludes with a summary of recommendations for future research priorities.

3. Background, Methodology and Scope

3.1 Background

The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research responded to a request for quote for undertaking a literature review on the benefits of Aboriginal language use and revival in NSW. The literature review would inform future discussions of the Trust and identify gaps in the research as well as areas for future development.

3.2 Methodology

The review took a broad scope in engaging with the topic including accessing academic literature, government reports, online sources (including websites and published videos), and other grey literature (including unpublished sources). In addition to providing key resources for review, the Trust provided clear criteria to assist with the review process indicating criteria for prioritising literature that:

- relates to Aboriginal peoples in NSW;
- prioritises Aboriginal viewpoints about their languages;
- has been developed by, or in partnership with, Aboriginal peoples or Aboriginal-led organisations; and
- has been authored or published within the last ten years.

Our team is Indigenous-led and includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. As an inter-disciplinary team, we approached the literature iteratively, with some of the team focussing on reviewing academic literature and both national and NSW reports, and others focussing on surfacing literature from grassroots and community-based projects. We then grouped the literature thematically under the four key research questions outlined below. At the outset, it was clear that there was a significant gap in academic and report literature within the scope of our review. Recognising these gaps and understanding the importance of us prioritising Aboriginal viewpoints on NSW languages, we extended our review of sources to widen and reveal deeper insights on the topic.

Within the literature review, we have reviewed **112 sources**, searching across academic databases, publicly accessible websites, and media sources. Key search terms included: Aboriginal Language Benefits, Aboriginal Languages Impacts, Aboriginal Language Reclamation/Revival/Revitalisation/Use, NSW Aboriginal Health and Language, NSW Aboriginal Song Revitalisation, NSW Aboriginal Language Teaching, NSW Aboriginal Languages and Poetry, Racism and NSW Aboriginal Languages.

3.2.1 Understanding The Benefits Of Languages From An Aboriginal Standpoint

“There may well be bucket loads of literature on us and about us, but only a scant proportion of it can be attributed to our own Indigenous authorship”
(Williams, 2011b p.19).

“Indigenous standpoint notes up front that we, as individuals, are shaped by our cultures, cultural values, and experiences within society’s institutions [...]. In this way, Indigenous standpoint theory plays an important role in challenging the assumptions around neutrality that are actually a way of reinforcing power structures of colonisation and patriarchy”
(Behrendt, 2019 p.76).

Understanding the benefits of language from Aboriginal viewpoints and standpoints assists in avoiding any tendency to neglect existing Indigenous strengths as revealed in the literature. Properly regarding Indigenous expertise and experiences and viewing Indigenous collectives as self-determining and self-governing with decision-making potential applicable to their affairs and the resources within their jurisdiction is an important ethical principal. We aimed to ensure the analysis of the reviewed literature would be properly informed by Aboriginal standpoints and accord with appropriate epistemological and ontological points of view.

Vivian et al. (2016 pp.53-54) provide an overview of the decolonising research paradigm and define core principles arising from the Aboriginal standpoint and Indigenous methodologies literature including: research must “Support Indigenous community self-determination; Promote an Indigenous version of social justice; Respect Indigenous peoples agency and humanity; Respect Indigenous knowledge in theorising and in research design; Support Indigenous communities in reclaiming knowledge, language and culture; recognise the greater potential for learning; Reject the minimal ‘protect-the-institution’ model of research and seek to transform research institutions”. These principles forefront Indigenous standpoints and yield critical insights into governmental and Indigenous interrelationships, policy, strategy and programs. We also drew on the principles of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008; Archibald, Lee-Morgan, De Santolo and Smith, 2019) to ground the voices of Aboriginal people and their views on wellbeing benefits and language use.

3.2.1.1 Aboriginal Self-Determination

We engaged with the literature on language reclamation and maintenance through a strengths-based approach (consistent with, e.g., the Mayi Kuwayu Study; the NSW OCHRE Plan; Angelo et al., 2019 p.12) and in line with mandates for Aboriginal self-determination (UNDRIP 2007; NHMRC 2018; AIATSIS 2020; Janke 2021; Aboriginal Affairs NSW and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2014 p.20). This approach is consistent with the NSW Aboriginal Affairs’ research agenda, which acknowledges the “Existing strengths, assets and knowledge systems of Aboriginal communities and the diversity of cultures, languages, community structures, resources and experiences are given prominence” (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017 p.12). From the perspective of many Aboriginal people, truth-telling about language ‘loss’ (or violent dispossession) and effortful language renewal in line with Aboriginal self-determination are vital in achieving justice. Moreover, there is evidence that law and policy that addresses Aboriginal disadvantage with a view to increasing self-determination is most effective (Malezer, 2013; see also AHRC, 2008: Recommendation 5; Behrendt, 2019 p.184).

3.2.1.2 Decolonising Research Approaches

Understanding the context of language separation as being a part of colonisation, we also approached the literature with a decolonial lens. In a forthcoming manuscript, *Ethics in Linguistic Research and Working with Indigenous Communities: Redefining Collaborative Linguistic Research: Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Perspectives* (Woods, manuscript forthcoming p.24), Lesley Woods asserts that in the context of language maintenance and revitalisation work, “The impacts of colonisation are in no way a thing of the past and self-determination and reclaiming sovereignty for Indigenous people is a high priority”. Woods (manuscript forthcoming p.16) also argues that Indigenous communities “are beginning to question if documentation alone will save their languages. They are increasingly choosing to take control of their languages programs in an effort to reverse the rapid decline in the number of people speaking the languages and to regain and maintain control of their language and cultural knowledge”. Uncle Ray Kelly, a Dhungutti man, reminds us of the importance of engaging in decolonial and critical approaches when engaging with the literature:

“We will never have fluency in our community languages whilst we continue to mouth the colonisers’ narrative of division and loss. You have knowledge, and I have knowledge, sharing together surely, we are destined to have even greater knowledge.

A miirra sometimes has been described as a pool of water, from the surface we may all see certain things, if we all have our mi open under the gurru our potential for seeing more will be significantly increased”. (Kelly, 2020).

In addition, the recently published Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) *Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research* (the AIATSIS Code; AIATSIS, 2020) discusses the history of exploitation that Indigenous people have faced in relation to colonisation, and how research played an integral role in this. A decolonial approach foregrounds the recovery of Aboriginal voices. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012 p.40) asserts that the exercise is not only a part of recovering stories but is “inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations”. As Behrendt and colleagues have further argued, “access and control over identity and culture is one of the basic principles of self-determination and sovereignty” (Behrendt and Vivian, 2010; Behrendt, 2019).



3.2.1.3 Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Related to situating Aboriginal Standpoints is the importance of the Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) movement and recognition of the importance of Aboriginal leadership and control over the data relating to their communities. The approaches that are discussed in the IDS movement provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to assert ownership over data broadly from “creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous Data” (Maia nayri Wingara and Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, 2018). The movement responds to historical legacies of data being collected without the appropriate level of Aboriginal participation. Walter and Anderson (2016 pp.35-36) have written extensively on the failure of statistical data (for example, in the context of the Australian Bureau of Statistics) adequately capturing the reality of Indigenous people’s experiences or situations, and instead they argue that the “evidence base” for Indigenous statistics is “methodologically embedded within a dominant middle class, coloniser settler ontological, epistemological, and axiological frame. Not surprisingly, it produces data that conform to its underpinning assumptions, values and ways of understanding Indigenous reality.” IDS principles help support transparency in research processes in a holistic way so that data is not weaponised against Aboriginal people. The management of data in language reclamation processes, across language documentation to collecting and analysing data, and reporting on benefits should align with IDS principles.

3.3 Scope

We have reported on the literature under the four key research questions which we sought to answer in the review. These were:

1. What are the wellbeing, educational, economic and other benefits of using Aboriginal languages for Aboriginal people and their communities?
2. What are the benefits of learning language, or otherwise being involved in the revitalization of language, for Aboriginal people and their communities?
3. What are the benefits or potential benefits of the use and revitalization of Aboriginal languages for the greater NSW community?
4. What, if any, gaps exist in the literature and what topics might be explored in future research projects?

4. Situating the Review of Literature in an International and National Context

4.1 The International Context

4.1.1 United Nations Declaration on the Rights on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) were endorsed in Australia in 2009. While broadly the UNDRIP defines the collective rights of Indigenous peoples internationally to protect and control their cultures, it also includes specific reference to the importance of the revitalisation of culture and language.

Article 13 (1) Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

Article 14 (1) Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

4.1.2 2019 Year of Indigenous Languages, extended to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022 to 2032)

In recognition of the importance of the diversity and cultural importance of Indigenous Languages, the United Nations, based on the advice of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, designated 2019 as the *Year of Indigenous Languages* (IYIL2019). A key theme of focus was the promotion and protection of Indigenous Languages and support for the people and communities who speak them. The action plan aligned to the IYIL 2019 sought to build mechanisms for Indigenous people to realise their rights as expressed in the UNDRIP (UNESCO, 2019). AIATSIS who lead the work of supporting and building momentum for IYIL2019 activities in Australia, noted the broad significance of the year in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural resurgence: "IYIL2019 was an opportunity for all Australians to engage in a national conversation about Indigenous languages and their role in supporting cultural resurgence and shaping our national identity." (AIATSIS, 2019)

Building on the momentum of IYIL2019, UNESCO proclaimed the *International Decade of Indigenous Languages* (IDIL) from 2022 to 2032 to promote and support Indigenous peoples' rights to preserve, revitalize and promote their languages (UNESCO, 2021).

4.2 The National Context

The engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in language reclamation activities is evidenced across education, the arts and widely through participation in cultural activities. At the foundation of these projects is the connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to their communities, and to Country. There is also work being undertaken across academic research, and within government that is bringing more visibility to the area of language use and revitalisation.

4.2.1 National Indigenous Languages Surveys and Report

The most recent *National Indigenous Languages Report* ('NILR'; DITRDC, 2020) which includes data from the *3rd National Indigenous Languages Survey* (NILS3) was published in 2020 as a collaboration between a number of agencies in the Australian Federal Government (including the AIATSIS) and the Australian National University (ANU). One of the key findings of the report was that: "Language is a fundamental part of Indigenous culture and identity, even for those who do not speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language" (DITRDC, 2020 p.9).

Where appropriate, we have provided an outline of NSW-based findings in our review of literature, including from *Section 2* of the NILR, *Benefits from Speaking Language*. The results of the 2020 NILR include new approaches to data collecting and reporting, and in the context of the data reporting the report's authors note that "The way some data is collected may not reflect the full relationships Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with language" (DITRDC, 2020 p.10). The NILR and NILS3 extend the work of the second National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS2, conducted in 2014), and the first (NILS1, conducted in 2005).

In the NILS2, respondents "were unanimous about wanting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages to be strong well into the future, to have their languages taught in schools, and for their languages to have better recognition in Australia" as the recent Mayi Kuwayi project reports (Salmon et al. 2019 p.20).

In addition, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities produced a national report entitled *Our Land Our Languages* (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 2012). Amongst other things, it recommended that the federal government develop an implementation plan for the international treaty, UNDRIP, (Recommendation 9 and "that the Commonwealth Government include in the Closing the Gap framework acknowledgement of the fundamental role and importance of Indigenous languages in preserving heritage and improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples" (Recommendation 1); this was included in the 2020 Closing the Gap Targets; see the overview of those targets, below. It also recommended "developing strategies for training Indigenous language teachers to ensure improved access to full qualifications, accreditation and career pathways" and "improving community access to language materials through a dedicated Indigenous languages archive at AIATSIS and the sharing of resources with schools and educational institutions" (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 2012 p.viii).

4.2.2 Protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) Rights

Concerns for the protection of Indigenous tangible and intangible heritage are also increasing due to the fact that Indigenous people are asserting rights to reclaim their culture. The *True Tracks* framework developed by Terri Janke (Janke, 2021) provides for the protection of language through an Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) framework. In the context of supporting language awakening in Australia, Janke and colleagues developed the *First Languages, Law & Governance Guide* (Janke et al, 2019) to assist Indigenous Languages Centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the language sector to manage legal and governance issues within language projects. The resource is intended to assist in “the development of language projects and to continue learning, teaching and speaking their languages with strength and pride” (Janke and Company Pty Ltd, 2019).

4.2.3 AUSTLANG

Austlang <https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/search> is a database that can be searched using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language names, placenames or codes. The resource contains information on each language such as multiple spellings, dialects, numbers of documented language speakers and links to online resources. The Austlang language codes given to each language are unique and stable identifiers, that have been increasingly used in institutional online catalogues to improve findability of Aboriginal language documentation and material held in collections.

4.2.4 First Languages Australia

On a national level, organisations such as *First Languages Australia* (FLA), which was formed in 2013, help to build support for Indigenous languages with a range of community partners, across “government departments; peak bodies in the areas of health, education, media, justice, tourism and the environment; and our Indigenous organisations and colleagues undertaking relevant work in these areas” (FLA, 2021a). In 2015, FLA published the guide, *Junyirri: A framework for planning community language projects*, a resource centred on communities being able to reflect and map out aspirations aligned to local language projects. The report cites Ken Walker (then Chair of Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative in NSW), who described the history of Muurrbay in building a long-term approach to support community language work, and also summed up the benefits of being committed to this work for future generations:

“The benefit of that [research] now, all that process we went through, is shown in the children we teach and in the adults we teach, because it gives them a sense of pride, and esteem in their self and their culture and their language that never existed before. Work for language is never ending, it’s always going on, there’s something new happening all the time. You’ve got to modify and move with the times. You’ve got to be flexible in your language use, so it’s a continuous thing ... Muurrbay or places like it will never really die out if the people don’t want it to. It’s a hard road to hoe, but you gotta start somewhere, and don’t expect miracles first up. It doesn’t work. We started in ’85 and we’re still going, we’re still learning. Don’t give up, don’t lose heart because the rewards at the end are beneficial for you and your community.” (Ken Walker, cited in FLA, 2015 p.2)



The Junyirri framework provides examples of how local community language projects might be planned, and also how benefits and outcomes might be defined. They include examples of benefits ranging from 1) Model, business plan or strategy developed; 2) Model, business plan or strategy implemented; 3) Increasing language use; 4) Networks and partnerships; 5) Training; 6) Employment; 7) Capacity building; and 8) Increased public awareness (FLA, 2015 p.47).

An additional resource of note from FLA is the recently developed interactive map, *Gambay*, which means ‘together’ in the Butchulla language, which displays and promotes the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages through a community controlled digital platform. It is available at <https://gambay.com.au/> A collaborator to the project, Wendy Holden, described the importance of the site for language workers noting, “What I love the most is that the map is interactive. It allows our language warriors to tell their story on their country” (FLA, 2021b).

FLA emerged as a nation organisation from the Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group (ESALG), which was established in 2008 “to identify and address issues which are common to Eastern Australian Aboriginal Language communities [...because] it became apparent that a different set of needs have emerged for Aboriginal communities in those parts of Australia which were the earliest and most heavily colonised” (ESALG, 2011 p.1). ESALG itself emerged from an earlier organisation, the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL).

4.2.5 Indigenous Alliance for Linguistic Research (IALR)

The formation of the Indigenous Alliance for Linguistic Research (IALR), in 2019, marks a significant moment in linguistic research. Formed initially through the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language (CoEDL), the group now partners with the Australian Linguistics Society (ALS) to promote ethical linguistic research with Indigenous people. A recent initiative of the group has been the formation of a ‘study group’ called Decolonising Linguistics: Spinning a New Yarn to support dialogue and discuss on topics related to Indigenous communities, aligned to human rights agendas. (CoEDL, 2021).

4.2.6 Closing the Gap Targets

There is a national-wide *Closing the Gap* (CtG) Target (#16) that “By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken” (Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and Australian Governments, 2020 p.40). This year, in its first CtG Implementation Plan, the federal government has identified more specific (but not fixed) targets of 15 strong languages and 125 languages being spoken by 2031 (Australian Government, 2021 summarised in Grey, 2021). The corresponding NSW CtG Implementation Plan does not specify numeric language targets, but it identifies a “sustained increase” as the “change required to reach CtG target” (NSW Government, 2021 p.154).

5. Wellbeing, Educational, Economic and Other Benefits of Using Aboriginal Languages for Aboriginal People and their Communities

5.1 Wellbeing benefits

“It is the belief of the members of the Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group that connection through language is at the core of our cultural identity. That from the point of reconnection to that which has been lost, people can begin to heal the wounds that bleed us of our collective strength, our sense of self-worth and our rightful place in the community.” (Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group, 2011 p.1).

5.1.1 Defining Indigenous wellbeing

A useful starting point to understand wellbeing in the context of Indigenous health is the description provided by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) which describes Aboriginal health broadly to include social, emotional and cultural wellbeing:

“Aboriginal health’ means not just the physical well-being of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.” (NACCHO, 2021).

A recently published, national report, *Defining the indefinable: Descriptors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ cultures and their links to health and wellbeing* (Salmon et al., 2019) developed by Mayi Kuwayu and The Lowitja Institute provides an in-depth overview of literature on the descriptors used to link Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ culture to health and wellbeing. (The background to research into the “cultural determinants of health” is provided in *My Life My Lead*, Cth of Australia Department of Health, 2017 pp.6-7.) The Mayi Kuwayu report suggests:

“six main domains for describing culture specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia” to use when researching wellbeing: Connection to Country; Indigenous beliefs and knowledge; *Indigenous language*; Family, kinship and community; Cultural expression and continuity; and Self-determination and leadership” (Salmon et al., 2019 p.31, our emphasis).

Moreover, that report (p.29) notes that “the Wharerata Declaration—a framework to develop Indigenous mental health leaders in Canada, the United States, Australia, Samoa and New Zealand — led to the development of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration” in Australia, and that “based on the key principle of self-determination, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in mental health is paving the way for improving the health and wellbeing of First Peoples” (see further Dudgeon et al., 2016).

An Aboriginal perspective on wellbeing is also reflected in Williams’ (2011b p.vii) previous literature review on language renewal, wellbeing and education in NSW, which found that: “Indigenous cultural identity remains enmeshed within language even when mother tongue is no longer spoken [and] Indigenous language continues to hold psychological primacy identity as the spiritual conduit between identity and country.” Williams was commissioned by the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs to recommend, on the basis of that literature review, “Courses of action to maximise the benefits of expanding language and culture learning in NSW, based on the available evidence” (2011b p.2). The review produced 40 principal findings (Williams 2011b pp.vii-ix) and principal recommendations for NSW on the themes of community health and wellbeing; education; policy and legislation; and research and strategic planning (Williams 2011b pp x-xi). The recommendations from William’s review remain relevant today.

We recognise the importance of Indigenous-led approaches being developed for framing, assessing and supporting the beneficial impacts of language renewal in order to move the focus of both research and policy away from gaining second language fluency or from improvements in the economic, educational, health and other impacts of colonisation, cultural dispossession and trauma and instead back to the heart of the matter: decolonisation, cultural reclamation and healing of trauma.

Becoming fluent in an Aboriginal language is just one way of knowing or renewing that language, and not always what communities desire or will benefit from (it is also a very long term process). For example, some literature suggests running both “local language awareness programmes” and “fluent Indigenous/Aboriginal language programmes” (Williams, 2011b p.x). Further discussion of culturally appropriate ways of knowing, using and maintaining responsibility for an Aboriginal language are discussed elsewhere in our review. Moreover, as this review emphasises, measuring improvements in Aboriginal people’s economic, educational or health indicators captures only part of the picture, and in fact distracts from (and instrumentalises) the more fundamental wellbeing benefits of Aboriginal language renewal. Williams asserted, in the midway report for the NSW literature review (2011a, p.10; see also Williams 2011b p.59), that:

“

there is an imperative to protect Indigenous languages and cultures from further disintegration. [...] it can be broken down into three distinct categories:

i. a human rights imperative, ii. a reconciliation imperative, iii. a scientific imperative.

[...] The need to show evidence of socio-economic advancement of Indigenous participation within mainstream society should not overshadow or otherwise usurp the moral and ethical premise of these imperatives.”

Williams (2011b p.7) calls this a “reconciliation and human right gateway into this research”. This is aligned with some of the other literature, for example a foundation in “a claim of right” also underpins academic suggestions for Aboriginal language policies of “Native Tongue Title” (Zuckermann et al., 2014) and “Reparative Linguistic Justice” (Todd, 2015).

Our Literature Review includes many types of wellbeing. Aboriginal perspectives on wellbeing have not been sufficiently included in all national and NSW reporting and research, and each recent model has certain strengths and weaknesses. For example, in addition to the Mayi Kuwayu cultural indicators listed above, the literature includes wellbeing models from the NILR, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and from research papers published by the ANU’s Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR). Wellbeing, according to the 2020 NILR, is Spiritual, Land-based, Cultural identity, Emotional health, Physical health, Educational, Economic, Restorative, but these wellbeing categories and indicators “do not necessarily correspond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, which tend to conceptualise well-being in a more holistic manner” (DITRDC, 2020 p.25). The NATSISS 2014-15 uses: spiritual wellbeing and cultural identity; land-based wellbeing; emotional wellbeing; social wellbeing; economic wellbeing; safety; and access to services. Dinku et al. (2019 p.5), in their report on Aboriginal languages and wellbeing in NSW and the ACT, use: cultural wellbeing; emotional wellbeing; physical health; education; economic wellbeing; social wellbeing; and justice and safety. (See further our appendix, Diagrams of Wellbeing Models)

5.1.2 Aboriginal languages and wellbeing

Research has started to focus on the impacts of Aboriginal languages use and renewal on wellbeing. *The My Life My Lead* report notes that overall, “there is strong evidence that language has a significant influence on wellbeing, self-worth and identity formation and how these foundational attributes impact throughout a person’s life” (Cth of Australia Department of Health, 2017 p.26).

Building on such literature, the recent and overlapping approaches to wellbeing which we summarised above have been further developed in regard to the role of language in the *Well-being and Indigenous Language Ecologies (WILE) Report Literature Review* (Angelo et al., 2019). The WILE Report is consistent with acknowledging a “right to reawaken one’s heritage language” (Angelo et al., 2019 p.11; and see the 2007 UNDRIP Article 13.1). These approaches are intended to be “based on the premises that: Indigenous languages are a strength for communities and individuals, and for all Australians [and that] by making languages and their speakers visible we see their strengths” (DITRDC, 2020 p.12).

The term “language ecologies” here comes originally from academic linguistic literature, but it had not been integrated into policy until the 2020 NILR. It is a conceptualisation of a multilingual environment that emphasises the many different contexts and ways in which languages are used, and the socially-embedded knowledge that structures how and when languages are used and by whom. In this way, it emphasises that there is no one, abstract purpose for learning or using a language and that whether or not a language can appropriately be used for specific contexts or with specific people is not solely dependent on an individual speaker’s choice or proficiency. In a briefing paper related to the NILR from that report’s researchers, they describe their intention in introducing a language ecologies perspective into the policy and report discourses:

”Understanding the language ecologies in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live and work is critical for appropriate policy development and implementation for different groups. For traditional languages, this respectfully recognises the heartfelt work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are revitalising their languages. It emphasises the importance of planning for better communication” (COEDL, 2020 p.1).

On the intended benefit of introducing the language ecologies approach specifically in studying links to wellbeing, the NILR (DITRDC, 2020 p.16) says:

“ANU researchers have developed an [ecologies] approach to describe some of the most prevalent kinds of language situations. They have used this system to show how language interacts with the well-being and productivity of people and communities. [...] An individual’s ability to interact with others or to access and benefit from services depends on their language matching the language in each interaction. While this may seem self-evident, the fact that it is not reflected in current approaches to policy and program design, and service delivery, indicates that it is not widely understood or appreciated”.

Further research undertaken in Aboriginal community contexts evidences the broad wellbeing benefits of people being involved in developing their language knowledge and skills. Whether from strengthening connections to Country or building a sense of identity and pride (ORIC, nd; Webb, 2020). Others have described the link between how involvement in language revival work can support healing from trauma (Roxburgh, 2017; Jacobsen & Seiver, 2018).

5.1.2.1 Health research on language and wellbeing

A useful approach to studying language and wellbeing that is grounded in Indigenous perspectives is that used by the in-progress, National Health and Medical Research Council (HMRC) funded South Australian research project, *Examining the impact of language reclamation on social and emotional well-being among the Barngarla*. That project is investigating community perspectives on the wellbeing impacts of reclaiming an Aboriginal language, and reports (Sivak et al., 2019 p.12):

“The main themes emerging from interviews with Barngarla people about the wellbeing impacts of language reclamation revolved around experiences and expressions of connectedness—in particular, connection to spirit and ancestors, Country, culture, family and kinship, community, mind and emotions, and self. [...] In the context of Aboriginal health, the concept of ‘social and emotional wellbeing’ may be defined as a ‘multidimensional concept of health that includes mental health, but which also encompasses domains of health and wellbeing such as connection to land or ‘country’, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community’. This is consistent with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation’s definition of health”.

Emerging research from this project including a forthcoming publication, entitled *Developing the Indigenous Language and Wellbeing Survey* expected in 2022, will translate the Barngarla study's themes into domains of impact, as well as provide a detailed description of the development of the psychometric assessment tool, for use in policy and research contexts. While there has been significant research undertaken on the impact of colonisation and efforts to address disadvantage on Aboriginal peoples (see for example: Sherwood, 2013; Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart, & Kelly, 2014, p.167), there is limited academic research on the links to Aboriginal language separation and reclamation.

Currently working to fill this research gap in regards to health indicators of wellbeing which are developed through an Indigenous research paradigm, the "Mayi Kuwayu Study [National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing at ANU] aims to improve the understanding of the role cultural factors play in wellbeing and their interaction with standard health risk and protective factors" (quoting one of that study's publications so far, Lovett et al., 2020 p.8); we noted that project's suggested six cultural indicators of wellbeing at the beginning of this section. Similarly, a recent Monash University research project, "*Connection to Culture Is Like a Massive Lifeline*": *Yarning With Aboriginal Young People About Culture and Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, which examined the links between culture and social and emotional wellbeing in the context of recovery from colonisation in South-Eastern Australia, found that Aboriginal youth expressed feelings of being underconfident in their cultural identity if they had disrupted connections to their communities, language and practices (Murrup-Stewart, Whyman, Jobson and Adams, 2021).

All the wellbeing frameworks outlined include language as a factor, but as the following section explains, we have found an overarching gap in the literature in terms of foregrounding language and its wholistic and fundamental relationship to culture, Country and identity within wellbeing studies.

5.1.2.2 Wellbeing and the fundamental place of languages

"Language is a part of us all, it's a part of our soul, it's deep. Our language is not just about communication, it's about connectedness to all living things, our identity, where we come from and our responsibility and relationships for everything and everyone. We all have gifts, we all have our own strengths and weaknesses, we are all in this together to learn to share and to live" Rhonda Ashby, Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay and Yuin educator (Morelli, 2017)

"If you know your language you know who you are. You don't have to prove yourself and you don't have to explain yourself, and it's your connection to your Ancestors and to your country, to your culture. It's not performative it is just the true essence of what I was born into." Sandy Greenwood, Dunghutti, Gumbaynggirr and Bundjulong actress, on Word Up, AWAYE! (Bremer, 2021)

"Language is both part of culture and can be the most central means of expressing culture—communicating it to others and transmitting it to the next generation" Mayi Kuwayu project (Salmon et al. 2019, p.18).

5.1.3 The language reclamation movement in NSW

The Indigenous language reclamation movement in NSW has been in progress for several decades across many communities, with variation of support and resources, including grassroots initiatives and research collaborations (Walsh, 2005). Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative is an example of an organisation that has been a central site of language revitalisation in NSW since its beginning in 1986. Muurrbay's Gumbaynggirr language classes started in 1997 and continue to provide support for multiple language communities including 'Awabakal – Wonnarua, Bundjalung, Darkinyung, Dhanggati, Gathang (Birrby, Warrimay & Guringay), and Yaygirr – Yaegl' (Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, n.d.)

Currently, there is significant language renewal activity in NSW, for example, six of the top ten languages (by speaker numbers) being renewed or reawakened in Australia are in NSW (DITRDC, 2020 p.66). These are: Wiradjuri, Bandjalang, Gamilaraay, Gumbaynggirr and Paakantyi/Paakantji are being renewed (Paakantyi is being renewed amongst NSW-SA cross-border communities), and Yorta is being reawakened (in NSW-Victorian cross-border communities). Other sources (e.g. Green 2010) attest to the active renewal of Dharug language, contrary to the NILR classifying it as "a sleeping language [i.e. no longer spoken]" (DITRDC, 2020 p.20). In a 2019 Writing NSW panel discussion titled *Talking Writing: Indigenous Languages*, Yuwaalaraay storyteller and performer Nardi Simpson comments on the positioning of Indigenous language as "lost" as misrepresentative and lacking truth-telling regarding how many Indigenous languages came to need reclamation,

"that's so unfair, because losing something implies that you didn't take care of it, but it was a systematic stripping of- we didn't lose it." (Writing NSW, 2019)

The NILR (DITRDC p.62) provides the following three different terms for different language reclamation processes and contexts of language support:

- **Revitalisation:** "has a generation of older speakers left and children are likely to have a good passive knowledge of the language".
- **Renewal:** "there is still an oral tradition, but there are no fluent speakers, and children are likely to have little or no passive knowledge of the language".
- **Reawakening/Revival/Reclamation:** "there are no speakers or partial speakers and reliance is on historical sources to provide knowledge".

The Mayi Kuwayu project notes certain tips for language renewal (nationally):

"Essential elements for the successful delivery of language activities are involvement of, and commitment by, community members; adequate funding; and access to language resources, including children's books. Australian and Canadian research has shown that radio and television network broadcasting in an Indigenous language has been crucial for raising awareness of Indigenous languages among the general public, strengthening language use and empowering communities" (Salmon et al., 2019 p.20, citations omitted.)

In addition, the NILR (DITRDC, 2020 p.63) includes a flow chart of the general stages of language renewal work: see our Appendix, Diagrams of Wellbeing Models.

As part of taking a wide and Indigenous-led approach to wellbeing, this review makes a point of noting language reclamation from creative and artistic activities in NSW. This is in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation's work and the Mayi Kuwayu project's observation that:

“Singing in language is part of spirituality and connection to Country and ancestors, since ‘it awakens the ancestors and brings the Country to life’ [...] Language, song and dance, particularly as part of ceremonies, not only promote cultural learning, the transmission of cultural knowledge and spiritual awareness, but are also important for the healing process”

(Salmon et al., 2019 pp.26-27 quoting Dwyer, 2012 p.12).

5.1.4 Spiritual connections to language and culture

The NILR, in recognising the trauma associated with separation from language, discussed that there are identity and spiritual ties for Aboriginal peoples in connecting with language, for example through cultural ceremonies (DITRDC, 2020 p.17). The process of people participating in a *Welcome to Country* or an *Acknowledgement of Country* provides opportunities for connections between language and spirituality in the context of renewal/ reawakening/ revival/ reclamation. In this context, Lowe (2010) discusses how the connection with language also represents a spiritual connection with people's Ancestors: “the revitalization of Indigenous languages is part of the larger renaissance of indigeneity where a community's involvement is an act of reasserting their sovereignty in their own country and maintaining it, even when living elsewhere” (Lowe, 2010 p.54). The engagement in language reclamation is sometimes considered as an act of decolonisation, as Callum Clayton-Dixon, an Ambeyan (southern clan/dialect of the ‘Anaiwan’ tribal/language group) explains in *Our history of resistance involves revitalising our traditional languages*:

“Language belongs to land, and we as Aboriginal people are custodians of land and language. It is therefore our inherent right and responsibility to revitalize our mother tongues, along with the healthy relationships they engender with kin and country. Like language revitalization, the reclamation of our history is vital to the decolonial process. It's our history of resistance and survival that's been stolen and suppressed, and we must take it back.” (Clayton-Dixon, 2018)

In the paper *A Language Community Perspective on Adopting Accelerated Second Language Acquisition (ASLA) as the Primary Teaching Method of Gumbaynggirr* (2020) Clark Webb has discussed the importance of language bringing a “cultural worldview” noting also that: “Given that many Indigenous language programs depend on western methods of teaching, which require reading and writing, comment is often made for the need to decolonize the way in which Indigenous languages are taught and learned.” (Webb, 2020, p.353).

The recent ANU CAEPR study by Yonatan Dinku and others, *Relationships between the Use of Indigenous Languages and Well-being Indicators in New South Wales and The Australian Capital Territory 2014–15*, used NATSISS 2014-2015 data for 1,312 respondents aged 15 or over (Dinku et al., 2019). This report looked at the relationship with wellbeing indicators of Aboriginal languages as a means of everyday communication, and as a marker of identity. The report found that: “speakers of Indigenous languages [in NSW and the ACT] are more likely to: be involved in cultural activities; feel as if they are having a say in the community, report having excellent health status, complete a post-school qualification and earn income from cultural activities than English-only speakers” (Dinku et al., 2019 p.3).



The report also notes a positive relationship between language and connection to Country (discussed in our Language and Culture section, below). However, the report states that there are still limited findings regarding the positive association of speaking an Indigenous language with “other measures of well-being” such as emotional wellbeing (Dinku et al., 2019 p.14).

In addition, because the NATSISS data “show that almost all (99.85%) of the people aged 15 years or over in the NSW and ACT sample reported that they do not have difficulties communicating with English speakers”, English proficiency was not analysed as a variable. That is, Dinku et al.’s (2019) reported benefits relate to speaking an Aboriginal language – whether a little or well – in addition to English; it was only in regards to self-reported health status and post-school qualifications that wellbeing increased significantly as level of proficiency in an Aboriginal language increased (p.11).

These findings mirror the findings of a related study of the nation-wide 2014-15 NATSISS data, in both Indigenous first language and second language, English first language (AKA English-dominant) language ecologies (Dinku et al., 2020 pp.8, 20).

5.1.5 “Traditional” Aboriginal languages, “New” Aboriginal languages and “Aboriginal Englishes”

This section explains some of the different grouping of Aboriginal languages used by academics, including Indigenous academics. The literature also includes voices of Indigenous people who assert an Aboriginal Standpoint and holistic view of language, avoiding use of labels or linguistics approaches to language more generally.

We will begin this explanation with the group called “Aboriginal Englishes”. About 80% of Aboriginal people in Australia are reported to speak an Aboriginal English variety (Rodríguez Louro and Collard, 2021 p.1). The literature notes efforts to recognise, give value to and develop services in currently spoken Aboriginal varieties of English (more commonly referred to as “Aboriginal English(es)”, eg DITRDC, 2020 p.17) in NSW, to support the wellbeing and Aboriginal identity of their speakers (see further Angelo, 2021 pp.251-256; and the chapter on NSW in Qld Department of Education, 2020 pp.22-33). The purpose of this is to push back against prejudices about people who speak localised varieties of English, which may be stigmatised both as ‘bad English’ and also as inauthentic Aboriginal languages and yet are a language – sometimes the only language – which people learn at home and speak in school and work. It is in the context of recognising the social position of Aboriginal Englishes that Williams (2011b p.vii) found that, “Where Indigenous languages have been severely diminished or no longer spoken, Aboriginal English has a strong linguistic role to play in positively reinforcing Indigenous identity.”



The term “Aboriginal Englishes” is used to refer to the many systematically distinct ways of speaking English by Aboriginal communities, in NSW and elsewhere in Australia, and typically as a daily or dominant language. (This draws on the international linguistic understanding that there are many varieties of English, or “Englishes”; the body of scholarship about their features but also their social stigma is often called “World Englishes”: see e.g. Kachru [1990] and the journal, *World Englishes*). Particularly in some areas of North-Western NSW, Aboriginal English varieties are referred to as ‘heavy’ because they are very different from Standard Australian English (SAE) (Angelo 2021: 267). By contrast, other Aboriginal Englishes are close to SAE and can be used by speakers to evoke identity without those speakers facing communication barriers. Aboriginal Englishes and SAE may be mutually intelligible and usable for those with exposure to SAE, but not necessarily to others (e.g. local children). The publication, *Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English as an Additional Language or Dialect (AL/D) Learners – A national review of programs and approaches* has a chapter on NSW (Qld Department of Education 2020: 22-33) which mentions such varieties without specifying them, in the context of reviewing resources produced since 1987 to improve the education of Aboriginal students whose first language is not SAE. “Murri Talk” is an example of a recognised Aboriginal English variety; it is spoken on the NSW-Qld border around Goondiwindi and Toomelah (see e.g. Omeenyo 2011). Older linguistic literature largely from the 20th Century indicates other distinct Aboriginal English varieties in various NSW towns: Wilcannia (Sharpe 1990); Bourke (Kamien 1978); Moree (Hitchen 1992); and Sydney (Eagleson 1978, 1982), as well as “NSW/QLD Pidgin” (Allridge 1984), which Gourlay and Mushin (2015) note in their recent study of a particular particle (la) used in Aboriginal English varies in both Qld and NSW. For recent work on changes in Aboriginal Englishes, see Malcolm (2018), and specifically on the La Perouse grammar (in Sydney), see Malcolm (2017).

Aboriginal Englishes may or may not be counted as “new” Aboriginal languages in the literature. In order to communicate across disciplines, it is important to be aware of the possible categorisation of Aboriginal languages specifically into Traditional and New (a well-recognised “new” Aboriginal language outside NSW is the Torres Strait’s Yumplatok). Similarly, it is important to be aware of the possible categorisation of any languages into first or second/subsequent (sometimes abbreviated to L1 and L2). The terms of reference for Williams’ 2011 literature review in NSW used these categorisations for Aboriginal languages (Williams 2011b p.2). However, it is not essential for this review or the Trust to make the same categorisations if these do not accord with Indigenous knowledges.

Aboriginal Englishes are a post-contact language variety. Munro and Mushin (2016) argue that some Aboriginal Englishes may be better understood as a different kind of contact variety, a “creole”, but either way they are systematically distinct from both Standard Australian English and traditional Aboriginal languages. Rachel Nordlinger and Harold Koch, academic specialists in Australian Aboriginal languages, have a chapter on post-contact language varieties in their book, *The Languages and Linguistics of Australia: A Comprehensive Guide* (Koch and Nordlinger, 2014 Ch2). They also have a chapter on the “traditional Indigenous languages of Australia” (Ch1).



The label “traditional” is used in the research and report literature, for example the NILR, for “Australian languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prior to colonisation, and the directly descended language varieties spoken today. Some are strong languages still spoken by children; others are being learned or renewed” (DITRDC, 2020 p.17). In opposition to traditional languages, the label “new” is applied to “Australian languages [which] have formed since 1788 from language contact between speakers of traditional languages with speakers of English and/or other languages. New languages have historical influences from their source languages, including [traditional Aboriginal languages and] English, but they are not automatically understood by Standard Australian English speakers” (DITRDC, 2020 p.17, see further Troy (1992, 2019) on “the Sydney Language” and Angelo (2021, pp.251-256) on its spread to many other parts of Australia). Scholars who make this distinction generally do so to increase the visibility of new Aboriginal languages and their speakers in an effort to valorise these ways of speaking, recognise their speakers’ distinct group identities, and advocate for education and service provision in the appropriate, well understood new language for each specific community instead of exclusionary education and services in Standard Australian English (e.g. Angelo 2021). Specifically in relation to Aboriginal Englishes, an example of such recognition and positive reinforcement work is the visualisation of the “Murri Talk” variety (named as an example above) Omeenyo (2011), which is a community collaboration language poster.

ANU researcher, Denise Angelo, (2021 p.263) points out that a strengths-based approach can be taken to new Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal Englishes instead of the colonisation-induced prejudices against them, noting that “Students whose mother tongue is a contact language are, at times, recognised as ‘3-way strong’ multilingual learners, who are speakers of a contact language, learners of English as an additional language and of their traditional language(s) too (e.g. [by the 2011 Qld] Department of Education Training and Employment).” Moreover, Angelo (2021 p.259) points out that “Local Indigenous ways of talking are indexical for local status, and insiders use these varieties with a strong sense of agency, efficacy and pride, although such affirming and positive attributes are less visible in the literature”. Further, ‘heavy’ Aboriginal Englishes, in particular, will likely be repositories for features of traditional languages that renewal is targeting (Angelo 2021), i.e. they are a useful source material and a bridge to language learning in renewal projects.

5.1.6 The interrelation of identity and culture for wellbeing

“We use the word Aboriginal and that’s a Latin word, we don’t even use our own words to identify ourselves. Using language, it’s better to see how we look at the world and how we express ourselves through language [...] It’s crucial that we do this [Poetry In First Languages program], it’s our identity, self-expression and empowering the younger generations.”

Jacob Morris, Gumea-Dharrawal, Language Custodian and Poet, (Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019).



To quote the Mayi Kuwayu project, “Cultural identity may be described as connection to community, respect for Elders, kinship and family connections, gender and age roles, identity, language, art, and ceremony and connection to Country (Salmon et al. 2019 p.25). *My Life My Lead* (Cth of Australia Department of Health, 2017 p.9) notes that “practising culture can involve a living relationship with ancestors, the spiritual dimension of existence, and connection to Country and language”. It places culture as the *first priority* in addressing social and cultural determinants of health for Aboriginal people in Australia, in an approach called “culture at the centre of change” which emphasises that “connection to culture, language and country (and its manifestation as cultural identity) are protective factors that provide a powerful moderating effect against the impacts of racism and discrimination, and provide a foundation for stronger communities and healthier lives” (Cth of Australia Department of Health, 2017 p.10), quoting the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory).

The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) Inc, which has a key focus of ‘community first’ within the context of educational rights, is working to support the practicing of NSW Aboriginal languages through a partnership with the NSW Department of Education (AECG, 2019 p.14). A number of initiatives are currently underway to facilitate connection between schools and local Aboriginal communities. Data collected by the AECG identifies a number of areas of strength between the interrelation of identity and culture for wellbeing.

In discussing the interrelation of identity and culture for wellbeing, the organisation Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation (BMNAC), which works to support Gumbaynggirr language programs, describes how:

“Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan translates to ‘two path strong’ in the Gumbaynggirr language which sets the tone for the goals and vision of our organisation. The programs that we deliver are designed to ensure that Aboriginal youth are strong in terms of both cultural identity and educational success. It is our goal that our children complete and achieve at school at the same rate as all Australian children in order to compete for real jobs whilst also being knowledgeable and proud of who they are as Aboriginal people.” (BMNAC, n.d)

Dinku et al.’s (2019 p.2) NSW and ACT analysis suggests that:

“Indigenous language use has stronger associations with domains of well-being (for example, indicators relating to culture, identity, emotional and spiritual well-being) most strongly determined by individual, family and community decisions than with those aspects of well-being (such as employment, education and health) most strongly determined by external structural factors (for example, employment outcomes are shaped by labour market conditions including discrimination; educational attainment reflects in large part the quality, accessibility and cultural competency of the education system; and health outcomes are highly dependent on the operation of the healthcare system).”

A link to Country comes to the forefront of the interrelation between language, identity and culture in the literature.

5.1.7 Language and Country

“Especially living in Sydney and away from Yuwaalaraay, the language is a way I can be there without physically being there. And so listening and thinking about those words, and then writing them down, is a very profound thing for because in that moment I’m being taught”

Nardi Simpson, Yuwaalaraay songwriter, storyteller and performer (Writing NSW, 2019).

In this section, we look closer at the links between language and Country which are discussed in the literature. The Mayi Kuwayu and the Lowitja Institute recently reviewed national literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures, health and wellbeing, as reported in *Defining the Indefinable: Descriptors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ cultures and their links to health and wellbeing* (Salmon et al., 2019). In a section on caring for Country, they note:



The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (Hill et al. 2013; Putnis, Josif & Woodward 2007) reports that Indigenous land management (ILM) programs have a wide range of benefits for Aboriginal people and communities. *Caring for Country is linked to the maintenance of cultural ties, identity, autonomy and health [nationally]. This results in benefits for the socio-political, cultural, economic, and physical and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Altman & Whitehead 2003; Burgess et al. 2009; Garnett & Sithole 2007; Altman 2003; Preuss & Dixon 2012; Green & Minchin 2014).”* (Salmon et al., 2019 p.X, our emphasis; original citations not included in Literature Review reference list.)

That report also notes that “Connection to Country is critical to the wellbeing of Aboriginal children [... including] Aboriginal people [who are] are not physically located on their Country” (Salmon et al., 2019 p.5).

It is therefore relevant that “there is a positive and statistically significant relationship [in NSW and the ACT] between use of Indigenous languages and participation in activities that connect people with traditional country” (Dinku et al., 2019 p.13). In addition, the national survey notes that “speaking an Indigenous language well as a first or second language is associated with a higher likelihood to return to Country for participation in on Country activities (described by Dinku et al., 2019 pp.13-14, as returning to homelands or traditional country for hunting, fishing and gathering).

Aboriginal people’s connection to language and Country are inextricably linked, which is part of why each can have a powerful impact on wellbeing. The late Yolŋu linguist community leader, Dr Raymattja Marika, is quoted by Williams (2011b p.29) in relation to NSW as follows:

“the language of our old people is esoteric. It defines the land where they come from. It has boundaries. It has boundaries out in the sea also—the sea and the land; there is nothing different about that. I would like to tell you that the land has multilayers of literacy for Yolngu. It is text. It is what these old people sing and dance. It is what they educate our children about. [...] land and language go hand in hand. It is all linked together, because without language we cannot define our land.”



Williams (2011b p.29) himself then further explains the continuing link between language and Country:

“This is not an idealistic statement about what language once was for us, it is a forthright cultural declaration that I make so that there is no lingering doubt over the reality that for us Indigenous peoples *language remains omnipresent within our spirit memory, even in those of us who have been forcibly excised from language. Language for us has spiritual presence and spirit. It is not a singular or isolated entity of culture and it cannot be culturally intellectualised outside the ontological mainframe of country*” (our emphasis).

This connection is acknowledged in, e.g., the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs’ Aboriginal Languages Policy from 2004 (Williams, 2011b p.30) but NSW-specific research on links between language, Country and wellbeing are needed to supplement the national research. Williams (2011b, p.x) suggested that NSW look to learn from the “from Country” pedagogy used to assist students transition between Country and classroom at Charles Darwin University in the NT; such research could also now be undertaken.

As previously mentioned, learning to do a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country in the language of that Country is important as it is an embodied act of cultural and language reclamation and of connection to Country. This (and perhaps other culturally situated language practices) can be seen as an increase in skills development and pride, whether or not the speaker is also learning/has also learnt to use the language for other practices and domains. Jakelin Troy makes the related but separate point in a recent short video teaching a Gadi Acknowledgement of Country, developed with speakers of the Sydney Language: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOuUU5zckAY> (Sydney Law School, 2021). In the video, Troy explains that it can be an important act of respect and engagement with the culture of a particular Country to hear people from outside one’s Country (including non-Aboriginal people) acknowledging in language: “if you don’t speak in the language of country, it will have a different nuance, a different meaning [...] When you speak somebody’s language, you become part of that cultural world [...] for respect] there’s nothing quite liking speaking to someone in their own language”.

5.1.8 Truth-telling and wellbeing

The literature attests to the trauma and triggering that Aboriginal people may experience through language renewal (e.g. Sati 2019; Nicholls et al., 2016), while also revealing that this is potentially both a negative impact and a positive impact on wellbeing as part of healing. For example, NSW's OCHRE policy is founded on an approach which contextualises wellbeing within healing (Aboriginal Affairs NSW and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2014). Such healing involves “recognition of the harm, acknowledgement of the impact now and into the future, and the restoration of choice, trust, justice, re-empowerment and hope” (quoting Lorna McNamara, p.18) as well as “facing often difficult and confronting issues” (Aboriginal Affairs NSW and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2014 p.14) and is centred on cultural restoration. This is specifically understood to include reconnection to Aboriginal languages: “healing is part of strong Aboriginal culture and tradition. Reconnecting with culture involves building respect and pride; and connecting to language, lore and Country – as individuals, as families and as communities” (Aboriginal Affairs NSW and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2014 p.4). These findings were also reiterated in the OCHRE Review Report (2019), with the NSW Ombudsman recognising, “The implementation of Aboriginal languages legislation has also focused attention on the connection of culture to healing, and prompted an ongoing dialogue promoting cultural revitalisation in NSW.” (State of NSW, 2019).

The Mayi Kuwayu project emphasises that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation (ATSIF) concluded “that language and its revitalisation are key to healing from intergenerational trauma due to colonial settlement. The ATSIF Development Team (2009) recommended that language be incorporated into cultural renewal initiatives with the re-establishment of song, dance and ceremony” (Salmon et al., 2019 p.20). The need to address intergenerational trauma is also noted in the My Life My Lead report (Cth of Australia Department of Health 2017, p.14.)

In a NSW Government context, Jacobsen and Siever have noted the importance of the symbolic recognition of Aboriginal languages within state legislation, explaining for example, “Land in the State of New South Wales was traditionally owned and occupied by Aboriginal people and [...] is of spiritual, social, cultural and economic importance to Aboriginal people” (Jacobsen & Siever, 2018 p.23).

A further, Indigenous perspective on healing is offered through a recent Mayi Kuwayu publication:

“The Akeyulerre Healing Centre, run by the Arrernte people in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, conceptualises healing in terms of: spiritual, social, physical and emotional wellness that is connected to family, culture, language and Country. Healing is achieved through a combination of what on the surface may seem to be simple activities, such as bush trips, collecting bush medicines and bush tucker, barbecues, story-telling, singing and dancing. However, surrounding these activities is a spiritual dynamic that is expressed through the work of Angangkere [healers], in ceremonies, and in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. *It is about keeping culture strong, reconnecting with Country, and building a sense of belonging.* (Salmon et al. 2019, p.11, citing Arnott et al. 2010:vi, our emphasis)



This symbolism enables recognition of Aboriginal peoples' deep connections with Country, and also creates opportunities for truth-telling to bring visibility to Aboriginal people's diversity and histories, including the history of impacts of colonisation. Similarly, Janke (2021 p.34) discusses the restorative work that is enacted when Aboriginal people engage with cultural revitalisation. Drawing on the words of Melissa Kirby (Wayilwan Ngiyambaa, Yuwaalaraay and Paakantyi Maraura), Janke situates language reclamation in a restorative framework: "We are all obligated and accountable to maintain our language. Being interested, talking a few words in the language and sharing it with the family is the beginning of reclaiming our mother tongue." Melissa Kirby, cited in Janke (2021 p.34)

Janke (2021 p.41) also cites Wiradjuri author, Tara June Winch, who argues "We must have open truth telling of our history in order to change the status quo, which for a significant portion of the population has been one of pervasive apathy toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, connection to land, politics, and language." Winch incorporated Wiradjuri language, with support from local language custodians, into the award-winning novel *The Yield* (2019). Reflecting on the importance of the representation of language, Winch describes the balance between pride and truth-telling:

"I think as a nation there is an opportunity for all of us, as Australians, new and old, to embrace the mother tongue of where we live – whether it be by supporting local language centres and linguists or lobbying for First Nation language programs to be taught in our local schools and early childhood curriculums – feeling proud of our cultural history as a nation, acknowledging the horrors openly and giving all of us a real fighting chance to be so proud of our country's future and the resilience of our first peoples." (Winch, cited in Janke, 2021 p.42).

Williams' literature review also reflected on the loss of language described the first wave of impact that Aboriginal people encountered in NSW, describing the impacts as experiencing "enforced suffocation of our languages and cultural praxis" (Williams, 2011b p.7). Likewise, the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody National Report* (Johnston 1991) and the *Bringing Them Home, Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (HREOC, 1997) both evidence the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal people's identity, with the former specifically noting the special place of language in reconciliation in Recommendation 55.

Language renewal is therefore considered part of truth-telling and supporting wellbeing. This has informed the kinds of gaps in the literature that this review identifies. The literature identifies a general need for more research linking the socio-economic indicators of wellbeing to language renewal (e.g. Angelo et al., 2019 p.33; Dinku et al., 2019 p.1; Bourke et al 2018), and we note that any such research should be Aboriginal-led research, but here we are identifying a more significant and overarching gap in Aboriginal-led research that is grounded in Aboriginal conceptualisations of the integral and foundational place of language in being, in wellbeing and in healing. Our understanding of the relationship between language renewal, decolonisation, healing and wellbeing has also informed the inclusion of a broader range of literature that is drawn from Aboriginal voices in NSW.

5.1.9 Recognising the restorative work of language reclamation

“I was fifty years old, the author of sixteen books and so many other words; a commentator; a professional speaker; a runner of marathons. But no amount of academic achievement, creative output or life in community had prepared me for learning my Wiradjuri language. I was the first in my immediate miyagan (family) to do so. As my head throbbed, I felt my self-esteem disappear as fast as my capacity to learn. The first task to master was having to stop ‘thinking’ in English – the language I had grown up learning and relied on every day [...] On the verge of yung (tears) of disappointment and failure, I looked at the many resources lying next to me on my bed and said aloud, ‘I am never going to get this.’”

Dr Anita Heiss, Wiradjuri author (Heiss, 2020)

Recognising the context of language reclamation in relation to colonisation, the literature also gives insights into the challenges that Aboriginal people face with language reclamation and discusses negative impacts on wellbeing. Rhonda Radley has shared how she experienced elements of trauma and loss during the revitalisation process, “Initially when I started learning my language it brought up a lot of trauma for me because historically we weren’t allowed to speak our language...When I learnt the language, I realised how much we had lost, not being able to continue our culture.” (Radley quoted in Sati, 2019).

Gumbaynggirr Elder, Gary Williams, Chief executive of the Murrumbidgee Language and Culture Cooperative in Nambucca Heads, has been working in the field of NSW revival and teaching of languages for many years. Speaking about the restorative work of language reclamation, he says: “Hearing the stories in language meant details that weren’t able to be given in English were able to be given in language, [...] as Sometimes English doesn’t quite explain it all”. He also stresses that the “Transfer of knowledge, culture and language is vitally important to the next generation of Aboriginal storytellers”, because “Language brings the stories alive. It teaches you the nuances you look at things differently.” (Lindsay, 2020).

Moreover, it is important to note that views on the goals of renewal, along with methods and approaches that are suitable to a local community, may involve tension regarding authority in decision-making. Williams’ (2011b p.vii) NSW literature review found that “Indigenous tensions over linguistic veracity in language revitalisation and reclamation significantly convolute the Indigenous language revival process”. On a related note, various sources attest to the long and sometimes emotionally difficult process of language renewal, e.g. Williams’ (2011b p.14) reflection that “there is a long pathway to be travelled in language revitalisation and reclamation, and it is further swathed in other issues to do with cultural shame and the like” and the NILR’s (DITRDC, 2020 p.64) note that “The community must be ready to undertake the journey of language reawakening as this can involve dealing with memories, histories of trauma and other confronting matters that produced the need for this work”.

Academic Michael Walsh also identified an additional challenge that language revival work as being a drawn-out process, and that keeping momentum on this journey can be a contributing factor for decreased well-being because of the long nature of revitalisation. He argued, “Full-blown language revival is a long and arduous journey, and in some cases may decrease Indigenous well-being rather than improve it. Given the sensitivities connected with language loss, it seems to me that there is an important role for Indigenous health professionals in future studies of links between language revitalization and health and well-being” (Walsh, 2018 p.8). Similarly, in earlier work, Green and Oppliger (2007 p.85) raise how the “emotional dimension” of language revitalisation is a vital and core element of the language revitalisation process and needs to be considered when in engaging in language work.

5.1.9.1 Connections between language and cultural revitalisation

Language “goes to the heart and soul of one’s identity and gives connection to family, country and community. It instils a sense of enormous pride and provides the strength from which to see the world”

Gumbaynggir leader and former Australian senator, Aiden Ridgeway, quoted in Williams (2011b pp.30-31).

“Language classes give our people a sense of identity, connection and belonging, it provides us with a new profound purpose, while reinforcing our own personal and cultural values”

Dr. Raymond Kelly, Dhangatti and Gumbaynggir, Deputy Head of the University of Newcastle’s Wollotuka Institute (Wollotuka Institute, 2020 p.2)

Language forms a key part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, culture and wellbeing. The connection between language, culture and wellbeing has been recognised recently by the NILR (DITRDC, 2020) and earlier reports (Williams, 2011a, 2011b). In addition, the NILR recognises that language is vital regardless of the extent to which language is spoken.

The work of language and cultural revitalisation is also linked to the broad interests of communities of self-determination in the context of (healing) from colonisation. Terri Janke also recognise broad links between culture and language, and notes that “Given that languages are integral to Indigenous culture, revitalisation is a key pathway for cultural revival” (Janke, 2021 p.33). Recently, Gamilaraay author and linguist, Donna Gayford McLaren (Writing NSW, 2019), asserted: “When we’re talk about reclaiming languages, we’re talking about reclaiming entire knowledge systems that go along with that”. The inseparability of language and culture is reinforced by those people who engage in the revitalisation and reclamation of their own community’s language (for example, see Stebbins, Eira & Couzens 2018; Writing NSW, 2019).

This builds on earlier work that goes beyond the time scope of this review, but which is summarised by the Mayi Kuwayu researchers (Salmon et al., 2019 p.24, citations omitted):

“Cultural education comes through passing down languages, dance, family and cultural history, music and knowledge relating to sites, food sources and bush skills. [...] Cultural healing or ‘cultural intervention’, reclaiming history and therapeutic interventions are the pillars of healing developed by First Nations peoples in Canada and subsequently by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. [...] Cultural healing is, therefore, crucial to health and wellbeing”.

5.2 Educational benefits

“Aboriginal Elders have told us that transmitting language is crucial to teaching culture and respect, building confidence and strengthening a sense of identity in young people.” Ombudsman of NSW (OCHRE Review Report, State of NSW, 2019)

“It’s only right that new generations of Aboriginal people have an educational path to learning the language of their people.”

Ronald ‘Uncle John’ Lane, Wayilwan TAFE Course teacher, in Liddle (2021)

5.2.1 Educational pathways connected to language

There is growing evidence and acceptance that learning Aboriginal language(s) has a positive impact on the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. A NSW Parliamentary committee recently accepted that “for Aboriginal students, learning an Aboriginal language strengthens their identity and engagement at school” (Mitchell, 2017). Dinku et al. (2019 p.20) found that in NSW and the ACT, “Indigenous language speakers and English-only speakers are equally likely to complete Year 12” but that “speaking an Indigenous language is positively associated with completing a post-school qualification”. Moreover, they found that “the relationship is stronger at higher levels of Indigenous language proficiency. Those speaking an Indigenous language well are 20 percentage points more likely than those English-only speakers to complete a post-school qualification” (Dinku et al., 2019 p.20). However, the reason is not something their data could reveal.

The NSW Government recently commissioned an evaluation through the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation to assess Aboriginal student outcomes, including aspirations for further university studies. Using the *NSW Tell Them From Me* data the report found that the drivers for Higher School Certificate (HSC) attainment were linked to student aspiration, and notably that 1) Aspirations to finish school and aspirations to go to university improve the likelihood that students attain the HSC, 2) Positive student engagement in school increases the likelihood that students attain the HSC, and lastly 3) Advocacy at school and at home improves the likelihood that Aboriginal students attain the HSC (NSW Government, 2021, p.9) The report went on to note specifically that there was a link between student outcomes and Aboriginal students “feeling good about their culture”.(p.9) In light of these findings, the report has recommended continued strategies to support culture in schools, and include reference to the importance of schools working to “Incorporate local Aboriginal languages into lessons by developing material in collaboration with Aboriginal Education Officers”. (p.11)

In addition to this positive relationship between Aboriginal language use and post-school qualifications in NSW, the literature hints at educational benefits at all stages of education. For example, the NSW Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest case study notes that “Adult education in Gumbaynggirr is available through Muurrbay’s [Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative’s] Certificate III course in Gumbaynggirr Language and Cultural Maintenance. A number of initiatives also focus on developing language and cultural capital for Gumbaynggirr people outside mainstream education options, such as Muurrbay’s newly released online learning course, and the Goori Learning Centres, which offer after-school programs and community-based language revitalisation classes” (DITRDC, 2020 p.31).

The OCHRE Review Report (2019) noted that the development of the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) 2015 Aboriginal Languages Stage 6 Content Endorsed Course Syllabus for students in Years 11 and 12, provided incentives for student enrolment through to the end of high school and to further tertiary education. It was reported that, “As at Term 2 of 2018, there were 38 students enrolled in the Stage 6 course, studying Gamilaraay (20) Wiradjuri (13), Gumbaynggirr (4) and Paakantji (1). In 2017, three students completed the Stage 6 course in Paakantji (2) and Gumbaynggirr (1).” (p.69)

Two reviews of NSW Language and Culture Nests have been undertaken the first by the University of New South Wales’s Social Policy and Research Centre (SPRC) (Katz, et al, 2018) and the second by the Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) (NSW Government, 2019). Both reviews found that the nests are broadly supported by Aboriginal communities and that they are making a positive contribution. (Katz, et al, 2018, pk; NSW Government, 2019, p.11) The Deputy Ombudsman OCHRE report also highlights how the language activity has increased since the development of the language nests and how the benefits of having the language activities have influenced other learning activities, or aspirations for learning activities, across the NSW. They note, “Since the Nests commenced, there have been substantial increases in TAFE enrolments in Aboriginal language courses and considerable growth in Aboriginal language teaching qualifications.

There is a strong appetite for expanding Nests to other communities, with many community members speaking positively about what has been achieved so far.” (p.11) One broad findings of the SPRC evaluation, which focussed specifically on two participating nests, Gumbaynggirr and North West Wiradjuri, in relation to student success was that students participating in the Language and Culture Nests were enthusiastic about learning and describe an increased sense of identity and belonging. (Katz, et al, 2018, p.k & p.25). While these responses speak to individual benefits from the Nests the report also identified benefits more broadly for the community including providing opportunities for families to connect more with culture and their communities (Katz, et al, 2018 p.4).

Williams’ (2011a, 2011b) NSW literature review reports focused on Aboriginal language renewal and educational benefits. We will not re-state all of Williams’ findings (see 2011b pp.vii-ix), but note the finding that:

“Indigenous medium immersion education, particularly in the early learning years, evidences reversal of language shift away from mother tongue. There is no convincing evidence to suggest that Indigenous medium education impedes the acquisition of Standard Australian English literacy skills. [Rather] There is evidence to suggest that Indigenous students learning through Indigenous medium immersion acquire academic competencies at a standard equal to and better than students studying through English medium education.” (Williams, 2011b p.viii)

Additional research clarifies the role of such immersion for children who already speak and Aboriginal language differs from those who are just starting to learn one:

“current research suggests that children who begin their education in their first language achieve better in both of their languages. Importantly, they also maintain their first language, whereas children exposed early to an L2 [a second language] may lose access to their first language which can result in subtractive bilingualism. Early L1 [first language] education means that the first language is maintained, the second language is learned, and the process is additive in both languages” (Wigglesworth, 2020 pp.99-100).

Further, Williams makes the point that, from Indigenous perspectives, literacy encompasses “spiritual literacy” and the command of many modes of languages that is, not (only) writing but visual symbolism, song, dance etc. These are Indigenous viewpoints of literacy that are communicated through various forms of creative practice and contextualised in local contexts. As it is predominately Western conceptualisations of literacy which underpin formal education, educational attainment in an Aboriginal language and educational indicators of wellbeing may be measured or evaluated differently by non-Aboriginal policy-makers and Aboriginal peoples.

Finally, Williams (2011b) asserts that education for Aboriginal language renewal and its wellbeing benefits must include both formal and informal, and child and adult opportunities. More recently, the Commonwealth Department of Health’s *My Life My Lead* publication (2017 p.26) reported that nationally, in 2017,

“all Education ministers ha[d] endorsed the Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages, which caters for foundation to Year 10. The Framework is designed to be flexible in use for developing language-specific curricula and programs. It is intended to be used by jurisdictions, schools and communities to develop language-specific curricula and programs in partnerships with local communities in the teaching of Indigenous language.”

That report (*My Life My Lead*) goes on to suggest, however, that “the ‘middle years’—typically between Year 5 and Year 8 of school—are emerging as a period where a greater focus is needed” (Cth of Australia Department of Health 2017 p.27).

5.2.2 Cognitive benefits of bilingualism

There is also general linguistic research on the cognitive benefits of being bilingual. Australian researcher, Livia Gerber (2015 p.12), summarises: “bilingual competencies are associated with a range of cognitive, health, personal, and economic benefits for individuals and the society”. Some of these benefits are related to particular ages of becoming bilingual (as a child or as an adult) and with length of bilingualism, for example the claim that “lifelong bilingualism protects against age-related cognitive decline, and may even postpone the onset of symptoms of dementia” (Bialystok, Craik & Luk, 2012 p.10). Most of the research (internationally and in Australia) focuses on bilingual children, for example, studies finding that “bilingual skills have been associated with increasing children’s self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as fostering their cross-cultural understanding” (Gerber, 2015 p 13 citing King and Mackey, 2007) and that early second language immersion schooling “enhance the performance of the attentional/executive control network” (Nicolay and Poncelet, 2015). Some of the literature relates to the benefits of bilingualism in various internationally-used languages for adults gaining employment overseas or in multinational companies; while that research not relevant in our context, the related finding that bilingualism can increase cross-cultural understanding (eg King and Mackey 2007) may be relevant. In terms of whether bilingualism creates non-linguistic cognitive benefits, specifically, the literature is inconclusive. In a recent international publication, three psychologists note that “the question whether being bilingual yields cognitive benefits is highly controversial with prior studies providing inconsistent results” and their “study suggests that, if existing, cognitive benefits of bilingualism are not as broad and as robust as previously assumed” (von Bastian, Souza and Gade, 2018).

5.2.3 Connecting to language digitally

Digital tools are increasingly being engaged with for language revitalisation and language learning initiatives across NSW, with the success of the biennial PULiiMA Indigenous Language and Technology Conference showing the interest in and broad use of digital technologies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language initiatives. While some people have access to connect with language and culture on Country, for others connection is through digital means. For example, teaching programs provide opportunities for Aboriginal people who are not living on Country to connect with culture. In the case of the Ngiyampaa language from Western NSW, language resources have been shared digitally and via social media in order to support language revival. The online delivery of materials supports the connection of Ngiyampaa people together because they live in different parts of the country (DITRDC, 2020 p.66).

The development of several Language Apps has also assisted people to connect with language regardless of their location. In 2019, the NSW AECG launched mobile language apps for six NSW based languages, Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, Gamilaraay, Murrawarri, Paakantji and Wiradjuri. Each language app features a dictionary and associated games to support the revitalisation initiatives of NSW language communities. The former NSW AECG President, Cindy Berwick described the importance of the apps to be used by community but also to bring visibility to NSW Aboriginal languages to broader audience:

“This app is for our community so that we can ensure survival of our languages as First Nation peoples ... But we also want non-Aboriginal people to use the app to support an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal histories and cultures and the unique place Aboriginal people hold as the oldest living culture of humanity.” Cindy Berwick (NSW AECG, 2019 p.16)

Other opportunities for digital connections are being made available online, for example, the Muurrbay online course for Gumbaynggirr language teaching, cited in the section above, or the work done to develop and sustain digital Gamilaraay language resources. Smith, Giacon and McLean discuss the development of digital-assisted learning materials for Gamilaraay language revival, using a ‘combination of free online tools ... through a partnership between academic researchers and Gamilaraay community members’ (Smith, Giacon & McLean, 2018 p.491). Using a range of free online tools and social media, the project team created a interconnected array of language learning and teaching devices. The authors raise that many Gamilaraay community members they spoke to during the project noted that they were Facebook users, so this became a central place to share project information and links to digital language resources created using other online tools, such as Memrise (2018, p.502). However, there remains a need for further research to be undertaken on understanding the outcomes of engaging with digital tools for language revival, as social media data could provide reports of increased language visibility across Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences, and there still needs to be a ‘more formal measurement of uptake and effectiveness of the materials’ (Smith, Giacon & McLean, 2018, p.506).

5.3 Economic benefits

While economic benefits are sometimes directed toward individual opportunities for engagement in employment there are also economic benefits associated with the overall positive wellbeing and health of communities. While overall, the NILR found that “[t]he primary economic benefit of [Aboriginal] language is to the individual” (DITRDC, 2020 p.27), the benefits to groups and society are less well researched. The literature search identified evidence from of economic benefit related to employment of Aboriginal language speakers in Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, however, these are highly reported examples of language projects because of the nature of them being government funded. Limited data is available on other community based economic benefits.

5.3.1 Employment / Teaching

The NILR drew on the language revival work of the Gumbaynggirr community to demonstrate the links between language, land and culture as well as connections to economic benefits and employment. In a case study, the report discusses how languages “affirms identity and enhances the wellbeing” of the Gumbaynggir people. The aspects of wellbeing discussed include connections to Country, spirituality, culture and to community. In a revival context, the revival of the Gumbaynggir language has had direct benefits with employment (DITRDC, 2020 p.31). Long established links between the community and the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative has developed a strong foundation for the language work. The NILR notes that “Gumbaynggirr people are employed in various directing, administration, research and teaching roles at Muurrbay” (DITRDC, 2020 p.31). Other initiatives outside of formal learning are noted as relating to Aboriginal Tourism ventures within, for example, the Coffs Harbour area, and sharing of cultural performances to the local community at different intervals throughout the year.

The establishment of Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests in NSW sought to develop a link between language teaching and school-based learning (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020, p.29). The Nests were also envisaged as providing opportunities for employment of local language speakers and custodians. The NILR noted that employment opportunities were developed at five Nests throughout the state, namely, to support Bundjalung, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/ Yuwaalaay, Gumbaynggirr, Wiradjuri and Paakantji language connections. Each Nest employs a coordinator, a head language teacher and Aboriginal language tutors. The NILR cites as examples the Bundjalung, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalaay, Gumbaynggirr, Wiradjuri and Paakantji Language and Culture Nests in NSW (DITRDC, 2020 p.29). It emphasises that these and other “School-based language renewal programs are a further source of employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. The Nests are firmly focussed on Aboriginal employment, with a coordinator, a head language teacher and Aboriginal language tutors” (DITRDC, 2020 p.29). Similarly, the NSW Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest in NSW “has provided employment opportunities for Gumbaynggirr teachers/tutors in schools throughout the region since 2014” (DITRDC, 2020 p.31).

5.3.2 Tourism

The economic benefits of Indigenous cultural tourism may be as available in NSW as elsewhere. In their *New South Wales Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2017-2020*, Destination NSW pointed to the popularity of NSW as an international and domestic tourist destination and the increase of NSW Aboriginal cultural tourism, specifically to their own increased support and expanded promotion of Aboriginal cultural tourism from the previous *NSW Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2013-2016* (Destination NSW, 2017). The NILR notes that tourists’ “experience is enhanced by having guides who speak an Indigenous language, [and] by interpretive signage which brings in language” (DITRDC, 2020 p.29). Within this, guiding can be done by those with only limited Aboriginal language knowledge, because tourists are likely to need to communicate primarily in English, and Aboriginal language signage can be produced as a community resource by those with the most knowledge rather than being an individuated task of each learner or non-speaker. However, Dinku et al.’s (2019 p.21) NSW study found that “Indigenous language speakers and English-only speakers are equally likely to work in the tourism and hospitality industry. However, the overall employment rate in the sector appears to be very low among Indigenous persons.” (The national study finds similarly: Dinku et al. 2020 pp.24-25). The NILR notes Tourism Research Australia data showing a growth in the last decade in the Indigenous cultural tourism sector for international visitors, but the extent to which this growth is occurring (or could occur) in NSW and for domestic tourists needs further research. For example, the NSW Gumbaynggirr case study in the NILR (DITRDC, 2020 p.31) notes the prominence of this Aboriginal language in mid-north coast tourism initiatives, but other NSW cases are not provided. Other examples of projects linking tourism are experiences offered by the Tribal Warrior in Sydney, and Gumaara in the Illawarra. The NILR also reports a few Australian (but not NSW) examples of “language tourism” i.e. people paying to do short courses in Aboriginal languages, including through universities in cities (p.30). This raises a future research question: how can such economic benefits be increased and realised by language learners and speakers in NSW? Specifically, can language reclamation initiatives in NSW further support individuals and communities to integrate local languages into opportunities such as guiding, produce signage in local languages, or run for-profit language courses for visitors, in order to grow NSW’s Indigenous cultural tourism?

Other examples of engagement with tourism include projects of the Gujaga Foundation, based in La Perouse. This organisation works with the community to instil a strong sense of cultural identity and belonging in the children of the La Perouse Aboriginal community. In addition to support provided for immersive early childhood programs, the foundation has also taken up opportunities to connect their stories with tourists and visitors arriving in Sydney. The foundation recently collaborated on a project to produce Aboriginal content related to the story of Sydney Airport telling the stories before European settlement to the present day. This project, *SYDStories*, (<https://www.sydstories.com.au>) includes recognition of the continuous connections of the Dharawal community to land, language and community. The reach of a project such as this, to extend to international and domestic tourism is significant (The Gujaga Foundation, 2019).



Literature in the NT, however, warns that Indigenous tourism can also cause stresses for communities, for example when “the community did not know what was happening on Country, approval was not sought to access Country, and burial sites and sacred places were being disturbed” (Salmon et al., 2019 p.11).

In terms of other economic benefits, Dinku et al. (2019 p.21) found that “Indigenous language speakers [in NSW and the ACT] are significantly more likely to report earning income from cultural activities than English-only speakers.” However, on the limited data available to them, Dinku and his co-authors could not prove that speaking an Aboriginal language opens up employment opportunities or other routes to increased income (Dinku et al. 2019, p.21). While those same authors briefly suggest a reason when looking at similar data on the national level (Dinku et al., 2020 p.25), whatever is stopping this engagement cultural activities from creating more financial benefits for Aboriginal language speakers is not well understood in the literature.

6. Benefits of learning language, or being involved in the revitalisation of language, for Aboriginal people and their communities

6.1 Learning Language

“Learning language makes me feel proud of my ancestors, and myself.”

Nikeysha, spoken in ABC Indigenous, ‘Reviving Aboriginal language of south coast elders’, (ABC, 2019).

Some of the literature notes the “responsibility to language” of Aboriginal peoples in NSW (Williams 2011b p.46). Broadly, this relates to a deep respect to care for the knowledge of Ancestors, and the connections between language and Country. This conceptualisation may highlight for readers why language renewal can have beneficial impacts on people beyond any impacts directly related to their own progression in language learning; it can be the fulfillment of a responsibility. And yet despite the responsibility and enormous personal and community investment that language renewal can require, the literature from the Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement attests to the lack of control that Aboriginal peoples have had over the design of research projects and other forms of data collection that relate to them (including linguistic data such as language documentation), and notes the control of those who are commissioning, analysing and using the data sources (Walter, 2010, p.49). In light of this, this review does not engage specifically with the literature on measurements of languages (across for example, considerations of fluency, learning). Instead, language learning is positioned broadly to acknowledge that very few people involved in revitalising a language would say they have not been engaged in language learning in some capacity through the process. Moreover, most people are still learning language throughout their lifetime, whether it is their first/main language or a second/subsequently language. Therefore, the review has not engaged in, or imported a judgement as to who counts as a learner, who instead counts as a language user (language users are asked about in Question 1), and who counts as neither but is involved in language revitalisation. Moreover, the literature only very rarely distinguishes benefits for each of these three groups separately.

Language learning and practice does not only happen in formal language classes at school, it can also happen in organised “out of school learning” and informally, in everyday life. For example, “the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children found that more children used an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language during oral storytelling and swimming than in any other activity” (Salmon et al., 2019 p.20, citing McLeod, Verdon & Bennetts Kneebone 2014). Adult education also happens beyond the school context.



There are some general findings in Australian research which the Mayi Kuwayu researchers recently summarised, saying:

“The benefits of teaching Aboriginal people, especially children and youth, the languages include better outcomes in English language education and employment, and reduced substance abuse and suicide... However, there have been few formal evaluations or studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention programs, and those that have occurred are inconclusive.” (Salmon et al. 2019, p.19)

Importantly, in a NT study just over a decade ago when bilingual education was hotly debated and reformed in the Territory, researchers concluded the following, still worth noting today in a NSW context: “in order to give authority to the reclaiming of official space for language in schooling, it will be necessary to adopt strong bilingual models of education, along with community- anchored leadership” (Salmon et al. 2019 p.20 citing Simpson, Caffery and McConvell, 2009). That is, adding an Aboriginal language to schooling should be paired with local support and leadership.

The next section of the review outlines the literature that discusses the benefits of learning language for both individuals and communities. Examples of projects are highlighted through a series of case studies to contextualise the diversity of approaches that are being taken up across NSW to support locally defined and community controlled projects.

6.1.1 Links between learning language and identity

“Learning Language ... builds identity and confidence in ways that I have never seen before.”

OCHRE Evaluation, Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest, in Katz, Idle, Bates, Jopson and Barnes (2018 p.9).

Learning language can bring benefits to Aboriginal peoples in a number of ways including increasing people’s sense of pride in culture and identity. “What has been largely ignored [in research] is the role that traditional language plays in the lives of people who may not speak it” (DITRDC, 2020 p.8). Dinku et al suggest, “for people who are engaged in reviving or re-awakening a traditional language, the activity itself can have positive effects on their well-being, with ripple effects throughout the lives of Indigenous language speakers” (2019 p.1).

To further explain this significance of both the dispossession and reclamation of a language even for those who do not speak it, in NSW, we can turn to Williams' (2011b pp.38-46) reflection, on the connection between knowing of your own language (without necessarily speaking it, learning that language (without necessarily becoming a fluent speaker), and cultural identity:

“how can my cultural identity be so strong when I don't have my full mother tongues? This question is particularly applicable to us the Aboriginal peoples of New South Wales because of our diminished access to our full mother tongues; one of many legacies we now live with because of the impositions of colonisation. [...] in reference to our Indigenous values, here in Australia in cases where our languages have been lost or damaged, our core values have remained strong. [...] Through my analysis of collectivism I can see that cultural identity, although informed very directly by language and culture, nonetheless seems to have a more overarching presence [...] The difficulty is not so much the fact that language loss and culture loss go hand in hand; it is whether or not they then signal identity loss. [...] We maintain our cultural identity through the very name of our cultures, through the kinship to language that these names assert, through our reverence of language as cultural knowledge and cultural praxis and through our unending feeling of responsibility to language and the relationships that are interwoven into this because language denotes land; our country. So what we don't lose when we lose language is our cultural identity. Does the ability to speak mother tongue matter? - YES, but not because we have lost knowing who we are, it is because mother tongue underpins our spiritual responsibility to country.”

One thing that a renewal program can be is a visible form of respect and recognition for an Aboriginal language. In that sense, renewal programs may lead to the types of benefits that the NILR says arise from language recognition in communities:

- “Increased regard and trust for institutions that engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
- Increased student confidence and engagement.
- Increased community pride in the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture.” (DITRDC, 2020 p.24).

To this end, the NILR recommends showing respect for renewed and reawakened languages, not only those spoken as languages of communication, “by making languages more audible and visible” (p.83), that is audible and visible to the wider community including language learners and non-speakers. This can include “use in schools, in broadcasting, and in public events, such as through acknowledgments of Country [...] and] naming of places (including dual naming), organisations and programs”. Similarly, Dinku et al. (2019 p.2) observe that “Implementation of certain non-language policies may be improved by addressing the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples in NSW to speak their own languages while increasing access to services.”

In a review of the Gumbaynggir Language and Culture Nest, community members described the importance of language as linked to identity: “It is important to know your tribe and where we stand in our Country. If we forget about Aboriginal heritage we would not know who we are. It's the way we are.” (Katz et al., 2018 p.7).



The benefits of speaking and learning language and/or being involved in the revitalisation of language for Aboriginal peoples and communities is addressed in the NILR as inclusive of significant social and economic benefits, particularly related to income and employment, and as beneficial to wellbeing and health. The focus in NILR on wellbeing as linked to economic access, growth and sustainability is important, however this view negates more holistic understandings of wellbeing and benefits (DITRDC, 2020 p.25). The NATSISS 2014–15 wellbeing indicators illustrated and engaged with in the 2021 NILR, broadly address the arts sector and ‘arts and crafts’ output as related ‘economic well-being’ (DITRDC, 2020 p.26). As identified in the NIRL, this lack of holistic view regarding the interconnection of languages, arts, and wellbeing, therefore leaves a gap in recognising the importance of arts and cultural practice and output for other forms of wellbeing that fall outside of economic benefits. The NATSISS data and NIRL do however address participation in cultural activities and events as related to supporting ‘spiritual well-being and cultural identity’ (DITRDC, 2020 p.26), but do not go into detail regarding the breadth of what arts, crafts and cultural activities/events may include beyond the following: “Cultural activities included arts, crafts, dance and music. Cultural events included ceremonies, funerals and/or sorry business, NAIDOC week activities, sports carnivals, festivals or being involved with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations in the last 12 months” (DITRDC, 2020 p.36).

In NSW, there are limitless examples of dynamic and wide-ranging arts and cultural practices that engage with NSW languages from communities across the state, covering literature, poetry, visual arts, digital arts, dance, theatre and opera, music and song writing and filmmaking.

6.1.2 Links between creative practice and language learning and use

In the next section, we provide a brief snapshot of some of the creative language work happening across poetry, song and other performative arts in NSW. Drawing attention to the connection between language, arts and wellbeing, the literature discussed in this section is representative of a small percentage of the people, programs and projects dedicated to strengthening and reclaiming NSW Aboriginal languages and cultures through creative forms.

6.1.2.1 NSW Aboriginal languages in First Nations poetry

In NSW, poetry has also been used as a medium for teaching and transmission of Aboriginal languages through the embodied practices of reading, writing, speaking and hearing poetry. Red Room Poetry, based in NSW, is a leading organisation in Australia supporting emerging and established poets, poetry and poetic projects across a range of forms and styles (Red Room Poetry n.d). Red Room Poetry have committed to support First Nations poets and poetry, which includes poets engaging with their own languages, as well as unique and dynamic projects that support the learning and reclamation of Aboriginal languages through poetry (Red Room Poetry & Leane, 2020; Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019). In 2015, Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi multidisciplinary artist Lorna Munro, who uses language extensively in her work, designed and created *'Sydney's—and possibly Australia's—first initiative to teach Aboriginal language through poetry'* in partnership with Red Room Poetry (Red Room Poetry, n.d). Additionally in 2018, Gunai poet Kirli Saunders developed and launched the program Poetry in First Languages (PIFL), with Red Room Poetry. The PIFL program aims to support Indigenous language reclamation across Australia through the creation and publication of on-Country poetry and “to strengthen the connection of First Nations students to country, language and community in order to empower them to feel pride in their cultural identities resulting in enhanced overall wellbeing.” (Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019, p.5). In its pilot year the program was delivered at 39 schools and communities across NSW, bringing together students, poets, Language Custodians and Elders, with workshops taking place on Gundungurra, Gumea Dharawal, Dharawal, Yuin and Gadigal Country (Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019, p.8). A key finding of the pilot year for PIFL was the unmet need for the delivery of creative Indigenous language programs to engage school students, particularly First Nations students, with First Nations languages:

“PIFL addresses a clear gap in the educational and cultural offer for First Nations students in NSW. The program was a one-of-kind opportunity for almost all of the First Nations participants. 95% of the schools and communities involved in PIFL had no other access to First Nations language programs.”

(Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019 p.3)

In the evaluation of PIFL, it is apparent the accessibility and creativity that the medium of poetry provides students of all ages, and the social and cultural benefits of intertwining of poetry and Aboriginal languages on Country with community and language leaders. The evaluation of the program showed an increase in most of the student's emotional and social wellbeing through the increase in confidence 'about their language, identity and culture' and supporting connection to Elders, poets and Country (Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019, p.4). Aunty Jodi Edwards, Yuin woman and Dharawal language custodian was one of the key Language Custodians in PIFL, supporting students in the workshops on Dharawal Country engage with Dharawal language in their poetry. For Edwards the use of Dharawal language in the poems strengthens wellbeing and artistic output:

“it strengthens not only their poetry but strengthens them and strengthens their heart. I think at the end of the day when I hear those poems or see those poems with the language in it, I just feel so connected to country and then so connected to our mob” (Edwards quoted in Red Room Poetry, 2019)



Although the PIFL program is aimed at school aged students, it also brings in community members, Elders and Language Custodians. During the 2018 pilot year, the program employed 24 First Nations poets, Language Custodians and Elders. Engaging with language through poetry instilled First Nations students participating in the workshops with positive emotional benefits such as an increase in confidence, pride and feelings of further connection to their cultural identities (Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019, p.15). Emotional wellbeing benefits extended to the program facilitators, poets, Language Custodians and Elders, who also reflected on the benefits of the programs support of intergenerational knowledge transfer for the 11 languages engaged with. Wiradjuri poet and Red Room Poetry First Nations Advisory Council member Jeanine Leanne reflected on the positive effects of working with the PIFL program on her own confidence regarding writing in language:

“For me the PIFL project was like a release. I had long thought of writing some language poetry, but did not have the confidence, until this opportunity came my way. Country where the language belongs. It was also another way in which I connected with Country, through learning some of the words that were born on her soil and flow through her waters.” (Bailey, BYP Group & Red Room Poetry, 2019 p.19)

Poetry engaging with Indigenous languages, in both written and spoken form, is a tool for language reclamation, that supports not only the writer of the work but also the readers in engaging with language creatively outside of a class-based learning environment. Similar to how song is used in teaching Indigenous language as an accessible and enjoyable learning technique (Green, 2010), poetry is lyrical, dynamic and suited language education environments across of range of ages and language capacities.

“Our languages are very poetic in the way they sound, they are very melodic – unpacking all of those things, there’s a real synergy between poetry and language learning. When they come together, it’s really beautiful.”
(Saunders quoted in Knowles, 2019)

Poet Joel Deaves, a Gumea Dharawal man and Dharumba Dhurga descendant from the Yuin people, writes and speaks *Banggang Cundu (Old Tree)* in Gumea Dharawal, providing an English interpretation of the Dharawal poem. The poem is published in *Guwayu – For All Times* (Red Room Poetry & Leane, 2020) which provides English interpretations of the poems written fully or partially in Indigenous languages, many from across the southeast. Jeanine Leane asserts the purposeful use of the term ‘interpretation’ rather than another more expected term such as translation, as it speaks to Indigenous Sovereignty.

“The term speaks more faithfully to the complexity of each of our languages that are unique and refuse direct classification and translation into the coloniser’s introduced language of English.” (Red Room Poetry & Leane, 2020 p.xiv)

The process of re-learning, reclaiming and revitalising Indigenous languages is not only a curriculum to be taught by teachers or analysed by linguists alone. Rather, language and language reclamation can be found across so much of the First Nations arts and cultural sectors in NSW and Australia more broadly. As language and culture are so deeply intertwined, for a better understanding of where support is needed for Aboriginal languages in NSW, there should be a broadened scope of the ways in which language is championed, for example within the poetry and prose of First Nations poets across NSW.

6.1.2.2 NSW Aboriginal languages in First Nations song and song-writing

Song, song-writing and singing is used widely as a tool to support learning and wellbeing in Indigenous language revitalisation efforts. Song and singing are accessible ways to engage with language for a variety of age groups, therefore making it suitable to the many different scenarios in which language revitalisation may take place. As an oral and embodied practice, that can be used with or without the inclusion of English as a teaching aid, song is used a dynamic tool for supporting language reclamation, as can be seen in the use of song with both school aged learners (Green, 2010) and the high number of cross generational choirs forming across the state (Fryer, 2019).

One example of a choir engaging in language and language reclamation is the Ngarrgan Mirriilyn (Morning Star in Gathang language). Ngarrgan Mirriilyn choir is part of the Diiyagan Dhanbaan (Strong Sister in Gathang language) movement founded by Gathang and Dunghutti woman Rhonda Radley to support cultural and relational wellbeing for Aboriginal women and is driven by Gathang language. Arlene Mehan, Birpai woman and Gathang speaker, sings in the choir Ngarrgan Mirriilyn (Morning Star), and describes the process: “Singing in language, we are singing up the land and we’re spreading Gathang...We’re actually learning as we go because we’ll write songs and translate them into Gathang” (Arlene Mehan quoted in Sati, 2019).

Another example of the connection between NSW Aboriginal language revitalisation initiatives, songwriting and community choirs is the Four Winds Koori Choir Djinma Yilaga, who wrote and gifted a song titled ‘Ganbi’, written in Dhurga language of the Yuin Nation, to the children at Bermagui Public School. The Four Winds Koori Choir Djinma Yilaga have been supported in writing and performing songs in Dhurga by composer and Indigenous Language Scholar Dr. Lou Bennett, as well as engaging with *The Dhurga Dictionary and Learners Grammar*, which was published through the AIATSIS Indigenous Languages Preservation: Dictionaries Project (McKnight, 2020).

7. Benefits or potential benefits of the use and revitalisation of Aboriginal languages for the greater NSW community

7.1 Connecting people to Country and language

“What does the country lose when it loses individuals who are comfortable with themselves, cultures that are authentic to themselves, the capacity to secure sensitivity, wisdom, and some kind of recognition that one has purpose in life? What is lost to a country that encourages people to lose their direction in life?’ I can’t help but feel spiritually emotional reading Fishman’s questions, since these trigger within me a train of thought that leads me to stop a while and meditate upon what our forebears went through as they were made to give up mother tongue of country.”

Shayne T Williams, reflecting on a quotation from the Jewish-American founder of the academic field, Sociology of Language, Joshua A Fishman (Williams 2011b pp.39-40).

The 2017 *Uluru Statement from the Heart* generated significant public discussion about the recognition of Indigenous people’s long history of over 65,000 years of continuous culture in Australia. A part of the dialogue on voice and recognition centres on the importance of the wider Australian population connecting with these long histories instead of situating Australian history in the context of British invasion and colonisation. The use of Aboriginal languages brings vibrancy to these critical areas of representation and recognition. Examples of broader public engagement with NSW are provided to demonstrate the benefits of building these connections.

7.1.1 Dual naming and placenames

An area that has been significant for increasing the recognition of Aboriginal languages in NSW has been through dual naming of placenames. The NSW government “has supported a dual naming policy for geographical features and cultural sites [...] to give prominence to Aboriginal place names alongside European counterparts” since 2001 (NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, 2021). Anyone can propose an Aboriginal place name and if it has community support, the dual name is officially given by the Geographical Names Board, which the Trust now consults to under the *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* (NSW).

In addition, the national Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 2012) recommended that “the Commonwealth Government include in the National Indigenous Languages Policy 2009 a commitment to support and progress signage of place names and landmarks in local Indigenous languages” (Recommendation 2).



In NSW some of this audibility and visibility has been increased, but its impact has not necessarily been studied. For example, Gomeroi woman Rachael McPhail led a successful public campaign for Australia Post to provide guidance and physical space on postage for the inclusion of Traditional Placenames, which was implemented by Australia Post during 2020 NAIDOC week (Sta Maria, 2020). The specific benefits arising from increased visibility and usage of Traditional placenames in public spaces and services in NSW, such as postal services, are yet to be examined.

Other initiatives developed by NSW Government collecting institutions have focussed on innovative ways for Aboriginal communities and the wider public to engage with historic language collections. For example, following the development of the *Rediscovering Indigenous Languages* project at the State Library of NSW (State Library of NSW, n.d), two projects were developed through the Library's DX Lab to enable greater access to transcribed word lists, including those documenting place names. The projects *Muru View* (<https://dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/muruview/>) and *Weemela* (<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/blogs/weemala-project>) provided opportunities for Aboriginal languages to be shared with broad audiences, including within the Library's public programming and educational programs.

7.1.2 Indigenous knowledges and links to language assisting ecological knowledge in the current climate crisis

“Single words function as pathways into Language and cultural meaning. For example, place name research raises questions about traditional practices, the resources of the land, Dreamings and ancient journeys, leading to new understandings and practices for the present” (Stebbins, Eira & Couzens, 2018 p.238)

The NILR notes that “Knowledge of natural history, place and ecologies is embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages” (DITRDC, 2020 p.30) and that, as a result, both language and such knowledge can be integrated together into school curricula. This is a form of benefit to everyone, and likely to (socially) benefit the Aboriginal communities whose languages are integrated. The NILR does not identify the extent to which this is already occurring in NSW, but other existing studies may.

Further research is needed, but a recent media example from beyond a schooling context drawing attention to this issue is that of Worimi farmer Joshua Gilbert, who notes that “climate change and agriculture [are] more strongly linked with Indigenous issues than people realised, since Aboriginal people own 40-60 per cent of the continent’s landmass” (Fitzsimmons, 2021). In Gloucester, NSW, where Mr Gilbert farms, the Aboriginal Land Council is the largest landowner and Mr Gilbert says “My ultimate goal is that we have young, proud Aboriginal farmers, hopefully Worimi farmers farming Worimi country, for the next 60,000 years [...] we have to [...] acknowledge the work that’s happening at the grassroots” (Fitzsimmons, 2021).



Earlier work also identifies important links between Aboriginal languages and the ability for Indigenous knowledge to contribute to scientific ecological knowledge. Williams cites Tom Calma, Australia's former Race Discrimination Commissioner, who argued, "Indigenous cultural knowledge is increasingly playing a role in preserving the biodiversity of Australia's fragile eco-system" (Williams, 2011a p.11). The links between Indigenous knowledges, ecological knowledge and Aboriginal languages is an emerging area of potential benefit. The recent 2019-2020 Australian bushfires that severely impacted NSW brought attention to the importance of understanding the fire management practices that were used for millennia in Australia by Aboriginal people. Projects such as the *Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation* are leading efforts to facilitate cultural learning pathways with fire and land management (Firesticks, n.d.).

7.1.3 The visibility and use of Aboriginal languages through arts, creative practice and sport

First Nations writers, artists, performers and creatives bolster the use and visibility of Aboriginal languages across NSW to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences via a range of platforms. In addition, there are examples of Aboriginal language engagement in the major Australian Football codes, including the National Rugby League (NRL).

Indigenous poetry, both written and performed, is playing a key role in driving the visibility and reclamation of Indigenous languages across Australia, particularly in NSW. Indigenous poets use a combination of Indigenous languages as well as Aboriginal English and Standard English in their work, further establishing the dynamism of language and the interconnection between language, Country and identity. First Nations poetry collections such as *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today*, edited by Gomeroi poet and academic Alison Whittaker (2020), and *Guwayu: For All Times*, edited by Wiradjuri poet Jeanine Leane (2020), show the array of form, techniques, stories and languages engaged with by First Nation poets across Australia.

The Yellamundie Festival is a biennial showcase of national and international First Nations performing arts and artists produced by Moogahlin Performing Arts, an NSW-based First Nations performing arts company. Since 2013, Yellamundie Festival (Yellamundie a Dharug word for storyteller) has supported and platformed numerous First Nations Playwrights, Composers, and Choreographers, many of whom work in language. Liza-Mare Syron, Biripai woman, Co-Founder & Senior Artistic Associate at Moogahlin Performing Arts, researches the engagement with Indigenous language revival in Indigenous theatre:

"While most discussions about language and preservation focus on extinction, dictionaries and digital records, I am interested in how technologies of liveness can – like theatre and performance – enable First Nations languages to live. I believe that that theatre plays a significant role in the revitalisation of languages. Also, that the process of writing and speaking language shifts other aspects of theatre making, including the rehearsal context as well as acting and directing." (Syron quoted in Create NSW, 2021)

Other examples of the intersection of the arts, creative practice and language have been shown in programming such as Bayala, meaning 'speak' in Dharug language, at the Sydney Festival (2017-2019); works by Indigenous musicians across a range of styles and genres, for example the TEDxSydney 2019 performance titled 'Wirrangintungiyil' by Ngiyampaa, Yuin, Bandjalang and Gumbangirr artist Eric Avery accompanied by his father Graham King, or the use of Aboriginal languages in hip-hop or within choirs; to increasing the visibility of language through the national sporting codes which are broadcasted to large audiences for example in the Australian Football League (AFL) and NRL Indigenous rounds.

7.1.4 Building mutual understanding

Community views of success expressed in the 2018 review of the Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest demonstrated the importance of language revitalisation for building connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people: “Many non-Aboriginal people are also getting involved in Gumbaynggirr Language learning and this is big for building mutual understandings” (Katz, Idle J, Bates, Jopson & Barnes, 2018, p.17). As previously noted above, however, whether people outside the community should be able to learn language, is a decision that should be discussed and made at a local community level.

In delivering a high school based Dharug Language Program, Dharug language speaker and tutor Uncle Richard Green and linguist Amanda Oppliger found “that the central issue for those involved in introducing Aboriginal language programmes into Australian schools is to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and to be prepared to do this in ways which are often new and possibly not entirely comfortable for many non-Indigenous Australians.” (Green & Oppliger, 2007, p.86). The language programme was considered as existing in an interconnected and relational teaching and learning environment that did not, and could not, separate Indigenous ways of knowing and language. Green and Oppliger share that it was a slow process of learning and understanding how to work together through “*listening more intently to one another, to the land and to the spiritual dimension of the task*” (Green & Oppliger, 2007, p.82).

More recently, the OCHRE Review report (2019, p.68) discussed school participation in the sharing of Aboriginal languages, noting that “Most activity during the first five years of the Nest initiative has taken place in schools and pre-schools. By Term 2 of 2018, there were 57 schools and pre-schools, including 6,759 students (2,214 Aboriginal and 4,545 non-Aboriginal) being taught Aboriginal language and culture across the Nest locations.”

7.1.5 Links to the school education under the NSW *Aboriginal Education Policy*

Savage (2020) discusses principles of teaching and learning within NSW Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and notes that, “One of the most important aspects of learning and engagement for Aboriginal students is for a school to be not only a place of cultural safety, but a place where Aboriginal culture is taught, is visible, and is respected by staff and fellow students.” (p.16) Savage considers the approaches of the NSW Aboriginal and Language and Culture Nests, including principles of respect and engagement, to be critical effective program design. Savage also points out the link between the works of the Nests and partnerships between the NSW AECG being critical to implement the Department of Education *Aboriginal Education Policy*. While Savage frames the aspirations and principles associated with teaching and learning, there is no mention of program evaluation. There are opportunities to further evaluate programs that are taking place broadly across NSW Government in relation to teaching Aboriginal Language and Culture.

7.1.6 The relationship between language renewal and racism

The relationship between language and racism is complicated – it can be a positive or a negative relationship – and it depends on many factors. The literature indicates that there may be certain negative impacts on wellbeing associated with Aboriginal language renewal. For example, as Aboriginal language proficiency and visibility increases in NSW, the possibility of discrimination also increases, thereby reducing wellbeing in this regard (Dinku et al., 2019 p.27). This backlash may be related to the phenomenon of “Indigenous language denialism” which Roche and Troy (2020) have identified in Australia, or racism more generally. Furthermore, the existing literature reveals that the relationships between Aboriginal language renewal and wellbeing are affected by structural factors beyond the individual or specific language community. Dinku et al. (2019 p.2) report that Aboriginal language use and reclamation efforts have to simultaneously contend with ongoing structural disadvantage and discrimination. A consequence of this is that language renewal should anticipate and attempt to change a language environment as well as social structures and policy structures (such as changing those which reproduce racism or the prestige of Standard Australian English/monolingualism), not only attempt to change individual or communities’ language knowledge or usage.

In the report *Relationships between the Use of Indigenous Languages and Well-being Indicators in NSW and The ACT 2014–15*, Dinku et al. (2019 p.27) conclude that “the existing imperative for policies to counter racism among non-Indigenous people may become more urgent in a context of widespread Aboriginal language revival and re-awakening.” They further explain: “the use of Indigenous languages is significantly associated with increased exposure to racism. This relationship is likely to result from language use increasing the visibility of Aboriginality to non-Indigenous people, although the report’s authors suggest that because these data are self-reported it is also possible that Indigenous language users may have a different perception of the nature of discrimination” (Dinku et al., 2019 p.27). The relationship between speaking an Aboriginal second language in an English-dominant language ecology and unfair treatment is even clearer in Dinku et al.’s (2020 p.27) nation-wide study.

Suzy Taylor (2012) in ABC Open reported on the case of Wiradjuri language learning in Parkes and how language had helped bridge the historical gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people locally as they engaged in language learning together at school (Taylor, 2012). Further, Walsh (2018, p.10) indicates that further research needs to be undertaken to establish clear links between language use and the reduction of racism in broader Australian society drawing on words from Aboriginal writer and poet, Kerry Gilbert, who observed a much more dynamic school education system that included references to Aboriginal culture, explaining that this was not the case historically, especially in regional towns in NSW. Kerry Gilbert (cited in Walsh, p.10) noted, “Working in the classroom, I don’t see it now. It blows me away. I think the language lessons have completely changed people’s views on Aboriginal people”.

8. Future Research Agendas

“Although there have been no Australian studies completed to date that could demonstrate causal links between Indigenous language use and other outcomes, and whilst the findings of cross-sectional studies should be interpreted with care, the research [...] supports the hypothesis and community view that future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples could substantially benefit from efforts and policies enacted now to maintain Indigenous languages.”

Commonwealth Office for the Arts, submission 127, ‘Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities, Commonwealth of Australia (2011, p.2)

In line with the work associated with the UN *International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022 to 2032)* there are opportunities for the Trust to develop future research agendas that nurture and extend current programs in support of NSW Aboriginal Languages.

The following recommendations address the project’s brief and the Trust’s goal of strengthening Aboriginal languages, culture and identity and to improve the well-being of First Peoples.

Emerging areas recommended for future research are:

- Critical reflection on research and research methods to date
 - o Strength and relevancy of data for NSW
 - o Measurement and method innovations
 - o The need for further Aboriginal-led conceptualisations of wellbeing and language for NSW communities
 - o Wellbeing research related to language reclamation initiatives needing Aboriginal-led and interdisciplinary collaboration
- The connection of language and wellbeing to the health sector

8.1 Critical reflection on research and research methods to date

8.1.1 Strength and relevancy of data for NSW

A possible area for future research is to increase the strength and credibility (from a policy-making perspective) of studies on the topic of the benefits of Aboriginal language use and revival in NSW. Many of the reports we have reviewed carefully consider their data limitations and the overarching point is made by Angelo et al. (2019 p.33) that “there is a shortage of empirical studies of the connections between language, culture and well-being”. On a related note of relevancy, Dinku et al.’s (2019 p.1) report on the relationships between language and wellbeing indicators in NSW and the ACT using 2014-2015 NATSISS data notes that the relationships found could be further studied with updated data, when available. Specifically, research could investigate whether changed conditions since 2014-2015 have affected the relationships or show new relationships between wellbeing and Aboriginal language use and reclamation. In a more judgemental work, Bourke et al. (2018) evaluate whether studies in this field have been “weak” or “strong” (from a particular and non-Indigenous standpoint) and find that no qualitative studies are “strong”. By contrast, Williams (2011b p.3) sees qualitative research as valuable, particularly in research such as this where standpoint and cultural positionality are important, because it “is principally concerned with delving deeply into, and explaining, human social and cultural phenomena.” This brings the decision to be made about future research to the fore: do future studies need to continue to be tailored to largely quantitative academic/policy-making epistemologies and “strengthen” their evidence within those paradigms, or should future research seek to change the paradigm around the strength and value of testimonies, ethnographies, socially-situated studies and other qualitative data? Indigenous-led research projects, informed by participatory research design which is contextualised in local cultural contexts could assist the development of appropriate methodological framing of projects based on Aboriginal ways of knowing.

The literature review also identified a lack of evaluation data on the outcomes and benefits of language reclamation projects and programs in NSW. Additionally, Jacobsen and Seiver (2018 p.33) explained that the findings of the 2012 Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs community consultations noted a lack of monitoring and evaluation of language policy enacted by government, particularly in relation to measuring success.

There are also gaps in the available evidence of the links between language use and student success. Williams talks about the lack of data in 2011 about student outcomes, suggesting that there is a gap in current research and points to the need for a longitudinal study to strengthen the evidence base for further support of language reclamation (2011b p.18). Although Williams (2011b p.18) comments in his report that the based on his own personal experience as an Indigenous community person that there are positive impacts of teaching and learning languages and cultures, the evidence drawn upon comes again from national and international studies, namely, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. One of the studies referenced looked at the correlation between the rates of language use and a decrease in youth suicide rates in Canada.

8.1.2 Measurement and method innovations

How are wellbeing benefits going to be measured, evaluated and reported? Is there a need for further research on methodological/technocratic aspects in order to support the Trust's work in funding, evaluating and reporting language renewal initiatives that create social capital and decolonisation benefits?

Research should (continue to) be careful not to conflate language use with cultural affiliation. As Dinku et al. (2020 p.34) note in regard to their nationwide study, "rates of cultural identification are high across the entire [NATSISS] sample. Almost half of those who do not report speaking or understanding any words in an Indigenous language still report identifying with a clan, tribal or language group. Indigenous language proficiency is not equivalent to Indigenous cultural affiliation, although the two are closely related." All the report data we have surveyed finds correlations rather than causal relationships between Aboriginal language use/learning/renewal, on the one hand, and wellbeing on the other. In order to shape renewal projects (and other policy) to increase wellbeing, causal relationships need to be researched and identified, through socially-situated, local studies.

The literature review is also identifying aspects of discourse in research and policy that are discouraging and harmful. We recommend that future research projects align with the principles of the AIATSIS Code of Ethics (2020) to embed principles of ethical research practice relating to Indigenous research and research impacting on the lives of Aboriginal people. The four guiding principles of the Code include 1) Indigenous self-determination 2) Indigenous leadership 3) Impact and value, and lastly, 4) Sustainability and accountability which all promote ethical and responsible practice for conducting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research. Earlier research undertaken nationally on the connection between language reclamation discussed links to Aboriginal peoples' wellbeing and suggested that the benefits to the broader Australian community were "immense" (Zuckermann & Walsh, 2011 p.112). However, these sources draw on deficit discourses of Aboriginal people gaining benefit from a position of empowering "people who have lost their heritage and purpose in life" (p.113) to discussing stark claims that engagement with Aboriginal language can transform "disturbed individuals" (p.123). Decolonising, and ethical Indigenous research approaches are required to ensure that Aboriginal people have agency and self-determination in research that relates to them. Again, there is a clear need for participatory research approaches to be designed so that research is not *about* but rather *by* or *supported by* Aboriginal people in NSW.

8.1.3 The need for further Aboriginal-led conceptualisations of wellbeing and language for NSW communities

The current literature employs diverse understandings of 'wellbeing'. All have overlapping elements and aim to include Indigenous worldviews and perspectives. However, there is a lack of literature specific to NSW Aboriginal communities on definitions of wellbeing and language use. There is a need for further Aboriginal-led development of frameworks that conceptualise Aboriginal wellbeing and languages that are specific to NSW. A further gap in the current research is understanding and evidencing the wellbeing benefits of language use and reclamation in line with areas of truth-telling and healing; although the 2014 Healing Forum final report did note that "Healing is aiming to ... 'address the underlying causes of trauma – not just treat the symptoms – with programs that revitalise language and culture and give autonomy back to Aboriginal communities'" (quoting then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Victor Dominello MP, p.27).



Wellbeing research related to language reclamation initiatives needing Aboriginal-led and interdisciplinary collaboration

“Language strengthens culture and our self-commitment to remember who we are and our ancestors. The sad reality of linguicide in Australia and internationally requires visibility, celebration and programs supporting and strengthening Indigenous languages.”

Brook Andrew, Wiradjuri Artist and Artistic Director of the 2020 Biennale of Sydney (Fairley & Watts, 2019).

While some educational, economic, health and other tangible benefits are attested in the literature (Lowe 2010, p.53; Salmon et al, 2019; Dinku et al., 2019 pp.20-25; DITRDC, 2020 p.31, and see also DITRDC, 2020 p.24 on the benefits of language recognition), there is not only a need for more research on such wellbeing impacts and their connection to language renewal specifically in NSW, but also a significant need for foregrounding the wellbeing benefits of language renewal in aspects that are less tangible and potentially longer-term/intergenerational in their flourishing (or at least less recognised or measurable so far). In particular, these include the role of language renewal in community-building rather than its impact on individuals, the role of language renewal as part of decolonisation, truth-telling and healing (although this may also involve trauma, that is, negatively impact wellbeing), and the role of language renewal in providing social capital to Aboriginal people associated with that language, including increasing the visibility of Aboriginal cultural strength and pride to broad communities. Foregrounding these benefits is consistent with taking the Indigenous approach to wellbeing raised above.

The identification of increasing social capital as a form of wellbeing in the NILR approach may be a useful way to frame this. As it explains:

“there is clear evidence that Indigenous language use is positively associated with social capital formation, which in this Report is taken to mean the building of an environment of trust that facilitates cooperation [...] On an individual level, people with higher social capital often feel emotionally supported and ‘healthy and happy’ [...] On a community level, the social benefits of learning traditional language may include healing and enhanced family and community functionality” (DITRDC, 2020 p.32).

The NILR points out that this may in turn reduce health and welfare needs, but such reductions are just part of the benefit; the increase in social capital for individuals and communities is the larger benefit, which is quite possibly enduring but also potentially hard to gauge.

The literature review identified that the arts, education, and cultural sector provide significant opportunities for language reclamation and use. As discussed below, these existing programs that connect Aboriginal people to culture and language across a variety of areas are vibrant and provide connection to language through interdisciplinary approaches. There are opportunities to build collaboration and enhance the rich meaning of language use in NSW by forging connections between communities with research and practice across health, education, the arts and cultural sector, cultural and language tourism, and linguistics.

What is prevalent in the literature, as it stands, is a tendency for scholarship in the field of linguistics to be leading language reclamation work, without the necessary collaboration with health/wellbeing researchers and practitioners. Current developments in research including the national *Mayi Kuwayu: The longitudinal study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing*, and the NHMRC research project in SA, *Examining the impact of language reclamation on social and emotional well-being among the Barngarla*, are examples of research that can provide insights on the link between health, wellbeing and languages. The NILR (DITRDC, 2020 p.64) explains how linguists could better play an auxiliary role:

“Reawakening a language is likely to be successful when language knowledge held by community members is able to be shared across the community. There must be sufficient materials available to underpin the work of language reawakening. This work involves assembling all known materials, including knowledge held in the community. While it is likely to be useful to work with a trained linguist in this process, it is crucial that community members have the lead role both in guiding the work and in learning with the linguist. [...] This work supports the writing of a ‘grammar’, a document laying out a technical description of the language. [...] While few will be able to read this, it is necessary as it provides a detailed analysis of the language and lays out aspects such as the sound system. [...] The grammar provides the information needed to produce the full range of materials to support language learning, whether by children or adults.”

Enabling Aboriginal-led participatory approaches to research, through an interdisciplinary lens, would provide opportunities to address these gaps in the research.

8.1.4 The connection of language and wellbeing to the health sector

A recent article by linguist Michael Walsh describes interactions between a NSW community Elder who described the benefits of language use as “Language is Like Food” (Walsh, 2018 p.5). Walsh, using this title in his publication noted that, “He went on to say that once you get a taste for your Indigenous language, you cannot get enough of it.” Reflecting on contributing to language surveys that were conducted in NSW in 1999-2000 Walsh describes a “very strong connection” between language and identity. As has been our experiences in this review of literature, Walsh points out that there is, “no shortage of statements from Indigenous people claiming a link between language revitalization and health and well-being; what tends to be lacking is what counts as “proof”.”(Walsh, 2018, p.6). Walsh identifies studies that proposit to measure both the positive and negative benefits of language use, suggesting to date that the focus has largely been “commentary from health professionals” on language retention rather than looking at community engagement with language revitalisation. The studies that were mentioned by Walsh indeed related once again to either national or international studies and were not specific to NSW. These included reports of studies in the Northern Territory and others in Canada that looked at links between language use and the prevalence of diabetes.



8.2 A note on forthcoming research from NSW on relationships between language and culture

As part of developing this review of literature we acknowledge that there are emerging projects underway that could provide further insights into the benefits of Aboriginal language use in NSW. Current higher degree research being undertaken by Aboriginal peoples in NSW, for example through Doctoral or Master studies could provide insights on the relationship between language and culture.

Other emerging questions related to Language recognition could also be considered by the Trust.

For example, in NSW, does language renewal function socially and politically as a form of language recognition? If so, does it cause the benefits of recognition that the NILR notes in general? These are:

- Increased regard and trust for institutions that engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
- Increased student confidence and engagement.
- Increased community pride in the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture (DITRDC, 2020 p.24).

Further, how does increased language recognition interact with the predicted increase in unfair treatment and racism against those who use Aboriginal languages, there by mitigating the negative attention that Aboriginal language use can draw to individuals or groups?

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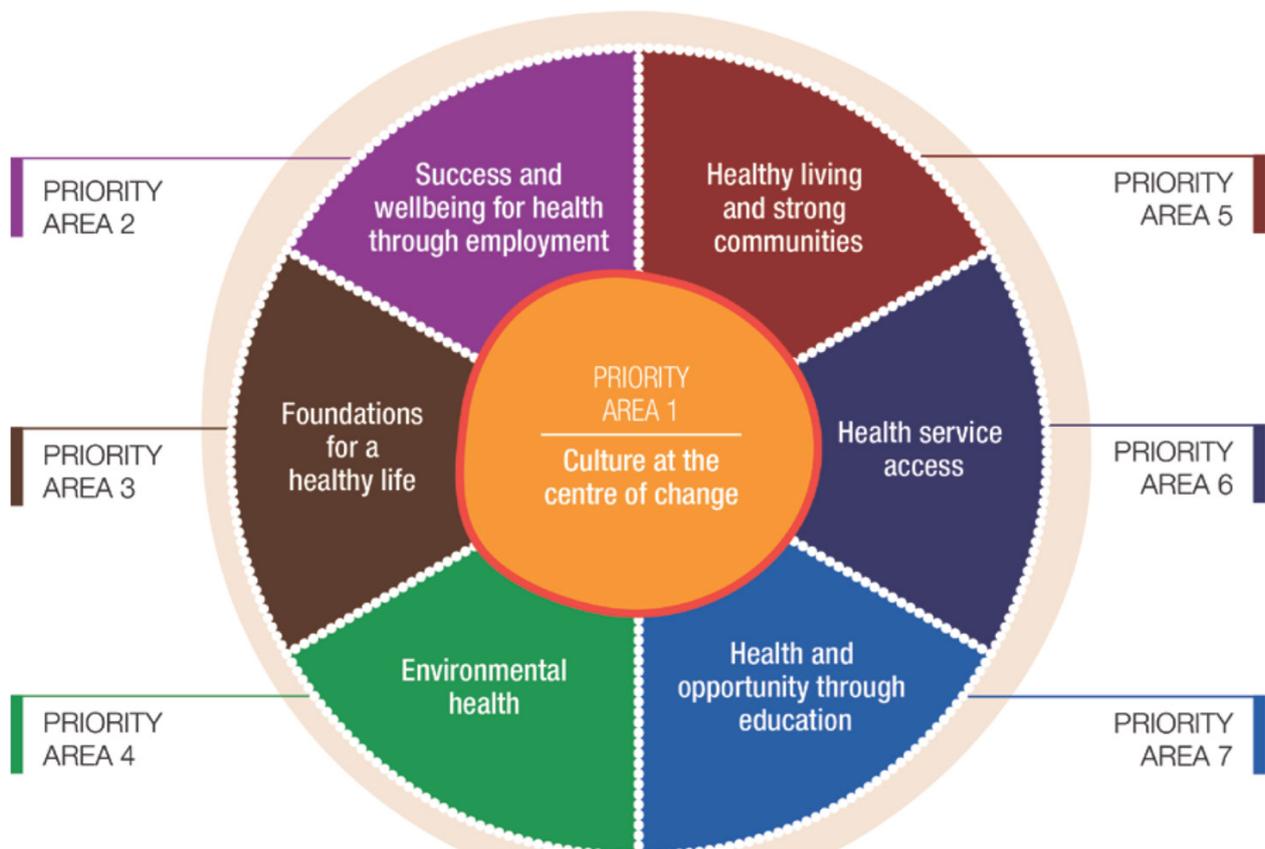
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Appendix: Diagrams of Wellbeing Models

Figure 2: Priority areas to address the social determinants and cultural determinants of health



Australian Government Department of Health, *My Life My Lead*. 2018 p8

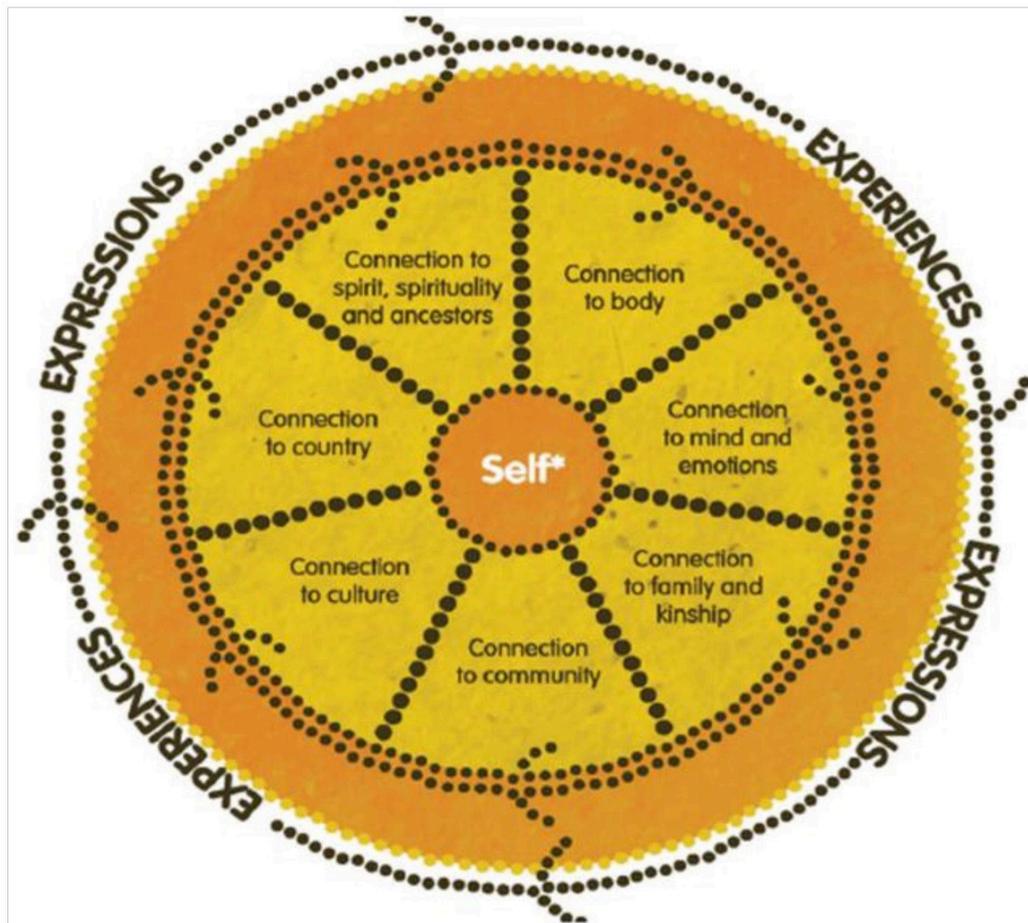
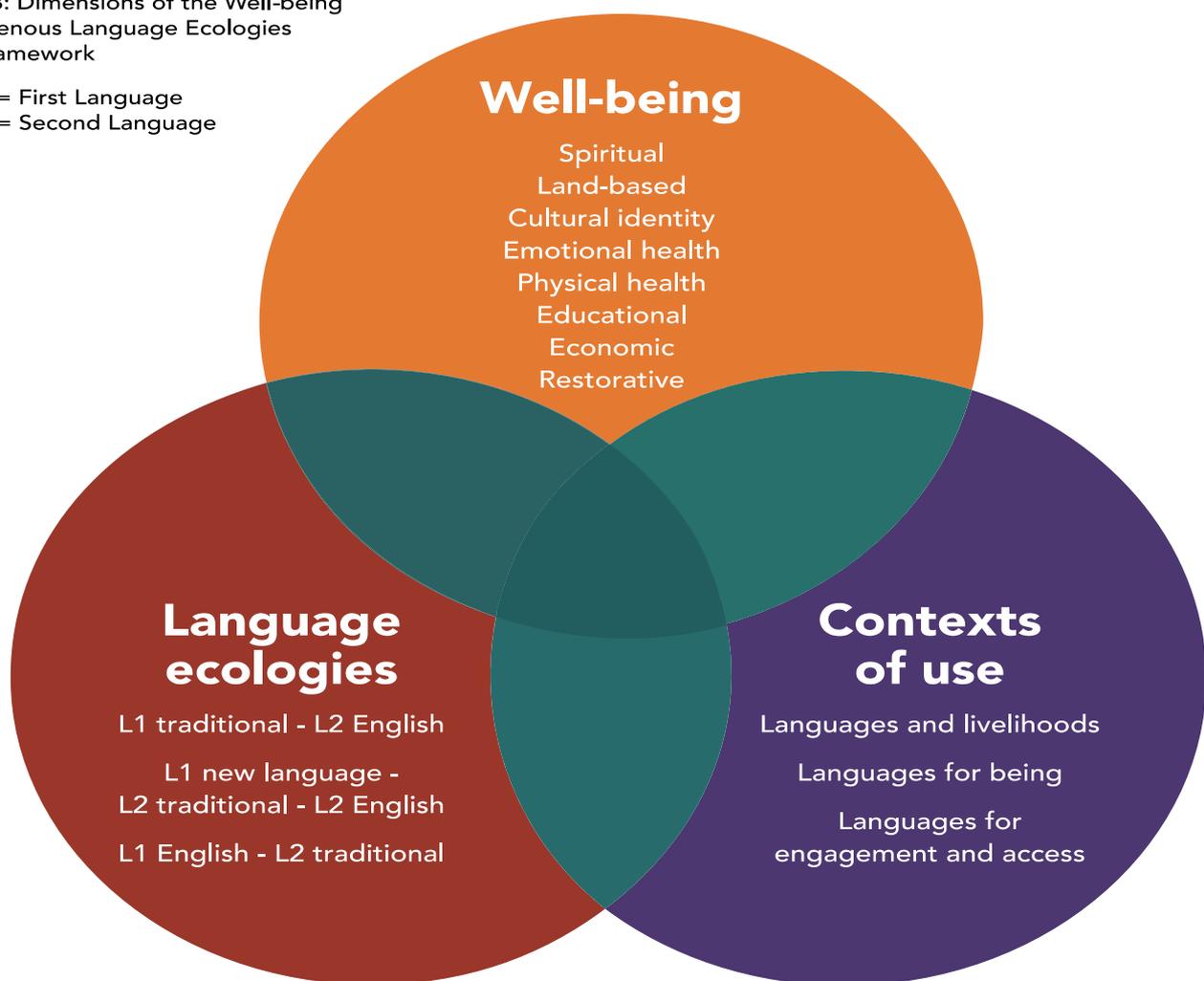


Figure 1. Social and Emotional Wellbeing from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' Perspective.

Sivak et al., *Examining the impact of language reclamation on social and emotional well-being among the Barngarla*. 2019

Figure 1.3: Dimensions of the Well-being and Indigenous Language Ecologies (WILE) Framework

Note: L1 = First Language
L2 = Second Language



DITRDC, *National Indigenous Languages Report*. 2020 p16

L1 & L2 INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, TRADITIONAL & NEW: **LANGUAGES & LIVELIHOODS**

- Land & sea management
- Art & culture
- Language services
- Cultural production
- Languages in Education
- Tourism
- Hybrid economy
- Media

L1 & L2 INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, TRADITIONAL & NEW: **LANGUAGES FOR BEING**

- identity
- culture
- community
- family
- cultural continuity
- public visibility
- health
- drug & alcohol support
- reconciliation

L1 INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, TRADITIONAL & NEW: **LANGUAGES FOR ENGAGEMENT & ACCESS**

- family and community connections
- intergenerational knowledge transfer
- access to everyday in-community services in L1: early childhood, education, health, work, social & financial services, governance, justice...
- support for high stakes interactions in hospital, court...

L1 TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE

L2 ENGLISH

L1 NEW LANGUAGE
L2 TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE

L2 ENGLISH

L1 ENGLISH

L2 TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE

Language Ecologies – community language resources

Language Repertoires – individual's uptake of these and other resources

Angelo et al. *Well-being and Indigenous Language Ecologies (WILE) Report Literature*. 2019, 12

1. GETTING STARTED

This begins only when the community is ready and should be under their control throughout. Includes establishing a language team (and establishing who has authority to make decisions), building familiarity with available resources for the language, organising the available information, and setting up storage and analysis systems (a database).^{220, 221}

2. WORDS AND WRITING

Includes identifying words with similar meanings and similar sounds, developing a writing system and making spelling decisions, making teaching resources (e.g. a pronunciation guide), establishing language aides, and identifying words for regular use.^{222, 223, 224}

3. SENTENCES AND GRAMMAR

Includes developing an understanding of the grammar of the language, developing suitable methods to teach the language (including games, stories, songs, etc.), and developing phrases for use at community gatherings.^{225, 226, 227}

4. LANGUAGE PLANNING

Includes discussing new directions for the language with Elders and those with authority, deciding how to fill in gaps and make the many new words that will be needed, and drawing on neighbouring and closely-related languages to find ways to fill 'gaps' in the understanding of the language. Consider options for teaching the language, whether to restrict access to the community or open it up. Find and support community members to develop skills in linguistics, language teaching, and resource development.^{228, 229}

5. DEVELOPING RESOURCES

Includes developing resources that document the language (e.g. dictionaries and grammars), creating educational resources (e.g. learners guides, curriculum documents, children's resources, flash cards, etc.), developing electronic resources, and creating ways to support the community to use these resources and use the language.^{230, 231}

DITRDC, *National Indigenous Languages Report*. 2020, p63

