

Chapter 13

Language Revitalisation in a Bilingual Program—The Case of Numbulwar School

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the development and consolidation of the language revitalisation program at Numbulwar School. It covers the period from the early 1990s, when school and community members undertook steps that led to their bilingual program being reinstated, until 2009 when an abrupt shift in policy resulted in a decline in support for bilingual programs (see Part 3, this volume). The growth of the program in this period can be attributed to both a vocal and pro-active community and its connection with Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DoE) Bilingual Program, and the resourcing and recognition this attracted.

Numbulwar is unique among the official bilingual programs as it is the only one which operates a language revitalisation program. *Language Maintenance* programs are designed for situations where all generations are full speakers of the language. *Language Revitalisation* programs, on the other hand, are for situations where a language is spoken by the older generations but needs special support in order to be transmitted to younger generations (See Indigenous Languages and Culture section in Northern Territory Department of Education and Training 2009;

All of the authors have worked with the program at some time during the period described. We would like to express our deep gratitude to all of those we worked with. While the views expressed are our own we hope what we say attests to the remarkable developments during this time and reflects how much we learned from our collaboration.

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Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia 1996). With the pressures of language shift and uptake of Kriol, by the late 1980s a revitalisation program was required at Numbulwar School.

Developing a local school program is complex and requires attention to many intersecting areas. In the case of Numbulwar these included:

- community aspirations and departmental requirements
- local program goals, school priorities and the relative importance of the revitalisation program in the school curriculum
- understandings and communication between Wurruwurruj ('Indigenous') and Dhurrabada ('non-Indigenous') stakeholders
- the skills of key personnel in light of evolving teaching and learning practices, new curriculums and associated system wide reporting tools and resources.

In this chapter we start by describing the language context and some historical background, and then present nine elements fundamental to the consolidation of the program during this period. They are grouped together in four sections. The first focuses on the people involved: securing positions and strengthening skills and communication. The second looks at the school program: strengthening the teaching-learning cycle and working towards a local curriculum. We then discuss the importance of external recognition and accountability, through access to a language revitalisation curriculum, student assessment and the biannual review required of NT Bilingual Programs. The fourth section considers the importance of oracy in teaching and learning, through attention to particular teaching strategies. This is followed by a comment about Kriol in the school and some concluding remarks. We close with a postscript about more recent developments.

Language Context

Numbulwar is a complex language setting. There are ancestral languages still spoken by older people. Wubuy has the greatest number of speakers (228 in the 2011 census) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Other ancestral languages that have had a place in the program are Anindilyakwa, Ngandi and Ritharrnju/Waagilak. The most widely spoken language is the contact language Kriol (see Meehan, this volume). English is spoken as an 'additional' language (687 in the 2011 census) mainly by Indigenous community members and as a first language (59 in the 2011 census) mainly by non-Indigenous members of the community.

Wubuy, Ngandi and Anindilyakwa are morphologically complex prefixing languages (Heath 1978, 1984). Ritharrnju/Waagilak designates a cluster of Yolŋu clanlects which typologically belong to the less morphologically complex Pama-Nyungan languages (Heath 1980; Wilkinson 2012).

Historical Background

A bilingual program in Wubuy¹ and English was introduced at Numbulwar School in 1976. For a number of operational reasons it was formally suspended in 1979. The genesis of the current revitalisation program at Numbulwar School took place from the late 1980s. By this time Kriol had become widely used in the community. Nicholls (1994, pp. 230–232) describes the program as a “new model” for Aboriginal programs, emphasising the active moves by community elders to have their languages and culture included in their school program. She describes the persistent efforts of a group who were concerned about the loss of their language in the community and school. The group was known as the Numbulwar Linguists, and ‘Linguist’ or ‘Community Linguist’ remains the term reserved for senior Wubuy speaking Elders working in the program. The founding group of elders were Langayina Nunggumajbarr/Rami, a Wubuy speaker with some Ngandi, Anne Gawirra Manggurra/Rami (dec.), a Wubuy and Waagilak/Ritharrŋu speaker with some Ngandi, Elizabeth Wurragwagwa (dec.), an Anindilyakwa and Wubuy speaker, Galijliwa Nunggarrgalu, a Wubuy speaker and Ginyibuwa Murrungun (dec.), a Wubuy speaker. Alongside them was a group undertaking teacher training through Batchelor Institute Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) in the Northern Territory. In the early 1990s six of them joined the school as new teachers. Two of these, Edwin (Bundurr) Rami/Nunggumajbarr and Faye Manggurra are still with the school.

At a Numbulwar School Council meeting in 1990, support was given to the teaching of Wubuy, Anindilyakwa and Ritharrŋu within the school day. From 1991, the Numbulwar Linguists took on the task of developing resources and delivering lessons, initially with no payment. In 1993, the Numbulwar Linguists and members of the School Council sought to have the school’s bilingual status reinstated to access ongoing systemic support from the Department. These early moves were supported by the principals of the school at the time (Richard Jeeves and Jean Guernier). Consultations with Departmental representatives and community members were held in June 1993 and the school’s Bilingual status was reinstated in 1994. This officially confirmed community languages within the school curriculum and, while other languages were to be included in the school program, Wubuy was identified as having priority, by all clan groups, in the formal community consultations.

People in the Program

There were many people involved in the program. Within the school there were two main teams: those who delivered lessons in classrooms and those developing the program and resources. In addition there were the Community Elders who were

¹Wubuy is the language name. It has also been referred as Nunggubuyu but this is the name for the people.

regularly available for consultation, the School Council who made directional decisions and the school leadership team who oversaw the running of the school. At times, Numbulwar-based teams were joined by people from outside the community e.g. Regional Linguists, the Manager of NT Bilingual Programs and others working on special projects. There was a continuous need for all members of each team to grow their own skills as well as to support each other.

Securing Positions and a Physical Space for the Program

The school-based positions, provided by the Department when Numbulwar regained its bilingual program were a specialist senior teacher position (Teacher-Linguist/ET2 Two Way Learning) to oversee implementation and development of the program, a Literacy Worker position plus an extra classroom Assistant Teacher. The Literacy Worker position has always been a shared position. Additional funds were identified each year through the school budget to employ 'Community Linguists' on a part-time or casual basis.

In late 1995, the specialist senior teacher, Ludo Kuipers, was appointed to the school. Together with the Literacy Workers Ginyibuwa and Galiliwa, two of the original Numbulwar Linguists, the new team was assembled. With Ludo's technical expertise, documentation and resource development for use in the classrooms flourished. Between 1995 and 2009 there were three further Teacher-Linguists, Jan Jardine, as well as the co-authors of this chapter Therese Carr and Philippa Stansell. Literacy Workers during this period were Anne Rami (dec.), Yambunija Nunggarraluj (dec.), Leonie Murrungun, Hilda Ngalmi, Yidangga Ngalmi and Lynette Nunggarraluj. The Literacy Worker position is the one most closely identified with the role of the original Elders and a keen interest was taken in identifying strong candidates for the position. Their role was to assist with the delivery of lessons, make resources and collaboratively oversee the program and the facilitation of training. Collectively they developed, maintained and upgraded a large collection of Wubuy theme boxes and bags, lesson plan formats and programming guides.

Department Regional Linguist, Melanie Wilkinson (as well as the co-author of this chapter) began supporting the program in 1991, first with occasional visits, and then for up to 2 weeks each term. She provided ongoing linguistic input to developments in the program and her knowledge of the program helped with continuity when school-based staff changed. The Manager of the Bilingual Programs, Paul Bubb, was also an important contributor. With his long experience, in bilingual programs in the Northern Territory he oversaw the formal processes that made the program accountable.

Along with secure positions came a secure space in the school, a room next to the Principal's office. It came to be known as the Linguists' Room. The original 'Linguists' had been repeatedly moved around the school, often with the loss of materials in the process, so this was an important advance. The Linguists' Room was comfortably accessed by both Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada. Interactions

were conducted as readily in Wubuy and other community languages as in English. Everyone in the room worked around one table. It became the hub for collaboration and open practice; a place for the Linguists' Room team to develop resources or discuss new directions for the program, for individual visitors to work on special projects, for teaching teams to plan or assess and for professional development sessions. Over time, the Linguists' Room became too small to house the Linguists' room team and all the program related documents and resources and, by the end of 2009, plans were approved for a new purpose built facility.²

Strengthening Skills

The on-going professional development for the whole school community was a significant feature of this era. It had to serve students and Elders, Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada, teachers and non-teachers, the highly literate and the highly oral, as well as speakers of different languages. It took various forms, through collaborative planning and assessment, 'Learning Together' (Graham, this volume), targeted professional development and through enrolment in formal courses. 'Learning Together' were timetabled sessions for all staff, Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada, to exchange knowledge about culture and important aspects of the school's program, English as a Second language (ESL) and Maths, as well as Wubuy. They were important adult learning times and, alongside the scheduled planning and assessment sessions, were responsible for shifts in the staff's skills and understandings. Each small adjustment took some time to become embedded in practice, whether it was introducing a new theme or resource, devising a new assessment task or activity, or extending understanding of language learning in the school context. Targeted professional development in the Linguists' Room with the Wurruwurruj included introducing new classroom strategies, stages of language learning, Wubuy grammar, editing steps in the production of resources and attention to literacy skills in community languages. Partial speakers of Wubuy benefitted from both the focus of the session and from the Wubuy interactions that took place during the session.

Formal learning was undertaken by the Wurruwurruj staff in linguistic courses targeting Indigenous languages and teacher or educational support training. Some Dhurrabada teachers also undertook extra training in areas such as applied linguistics and Teaching English to Speakers for Other Languages (TESOL).

Groups of staff attended workshops and meetings, such as the regional Aboriginal Languages in East Arnhem Schools (ALEAS) forum (Northern Territory Department of Education 1994) and Language Revitalisation Workshops, networking with other Indigenous staff working in their own languages and specialists such as teacher-linguists and linguists. These forums were especially important for developing personal networks and allowing ongoing input and

²The facility was completed and now houses the Wubuy resources and Linguists' Room team.

discussion with people from other places. Another important recurrent forum was the annual professional development meeting for specialist staff in all NT Bilingual/Two Way Learning programs.

Strengthening Communication

A multi-lingual and cross-cultural team needs time for all members to be able to think, and to both develop ideas and express them. Although the use of Wubuy noticeably increased when the school had a Wurruwurruj principal, the people in the school leadership teams were normally English-background speakers and communication through English in general school communications tended to dominate. Providing space to ensure understanding when a substantial number of school staff communicate through other languages was a challenge.

Most Wurruwurruj staff also operate within an oral tradition where knowledge is gained and held through talk. This also needs to be actively provided for. For those coming from a highly literate tradition it can be a real challenge to shift away from a reliance on print. Providing opportunities for rich ongoing talk, particularly in the Linguists' Room, was recognised and deliberately encouraged through:

- prioritising an issue and planning for ongoing attention to it over a period of time
- consulting with Wurruwurruj Wubuy program leaders prior to discussion so they could facilitate talks with others
- unpacking complex ideas within education e.g. 'learning pathway' or 'teaching-learning cycle' by using a graphic or a shared activity
- using Plain English
- inviting discussion in community languages after an idea has been introduced in English
- including time to reflect on what has been covered and to identify the next step
- putting up displays in the workplace to support ongoing work on a complex idea
- learning to listen if not a speaker of community languages
- involving external experts who have learnt a community language to monitor conversations and assess how these are progressing.

Documentation was also an important and complementary goal for communicating information about the program: Local handbooks, School Languages Policy and the biannual review reports were produced, in addition to the documentation related to the teaching-learning cycle. This aspect of communication contributes to sustainability over time.

Some of the Wurruwurruj developed skills in communicating in English about the program outside of the school context. In 1991 a seminal meeting was held at Batchelor NT. It inspired at least one member of the team to speak publicly in English for the first time and it was an opportunity to share views and struggles

regarding something that was so important to everyone there: keeping their language strong. Since then, Wurruwurruj and the senior specialist teacher have represented their program and participated in a number of regional, national and international forums, both in the NT and in other parts of Australia.

Developing the Program

As well as impacting upon the people involved in the language revitalisation program at Numbulwar, regaining the bilingual status enabled a stronger delivery and documentation of the program. During this period, Wubuy became entrenched as part of the daily curriculum and all staff, Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada, came to have a role within a regular cycle of planning, teaching and assessment.

Strengthening the Teaching-Learning Cycle

From 1993 to 1995, Wubuy lessons for primary students increased from once a week to four times a week (Monday–Thursday). The Friday lesson time was whole-school wungubal ‘traditional dancing’ instruction. The increase to daily lessons was a significant advance on the few lessons per term in the early 1990s. However, lesson times ran from just 30–40 min and concerns remained about this being long enough. Language revitalisation experts advise that one hour a day exposure to language is necessary in a school program if children are to develop fluency (Hinton and Hale 2001, pp. 7–8).

Provision in the secondary program was more uneven. The most successful strategy for older students was to work in blocks of time on project style work with elder speakers and musicians. In some years students were enrolled in Certificates in Aboriginal Language Work delivered by Batchelor Institute.

It is important to note that while Wubuy classes were delivered by Wubuy speakers, the other lessons at Numbulwar were taught by a qualified teacher, generally a Dhurrabada, teamed with a Wurruwurruj Assistant Teacher. During Wubuy classes little or no English, and very little Kriol, was used. The Dhurrabada classroom teachers had to switch to a supportive, but active role, in the Wubuy program; the Assistant Teacher’s role depended on their Wubuy skills.

In addition to the daily Wubuy lessons in the primary section, a Language and Culture week for the whole school took place each semester. It was planned for with community members, and students were grouped according to clan groups. A significant part of each day, during these weeks, was given over to Indigenous Language and Culture activities. They were an opportunity to bring other ancestral languages into the school program and teaching programs, and many resources were developed in Ngandi and Ritharrŋu/Waagilak for them. Unlike Wubuy, however, the learning was not assessed.

With more frequent lessons, it was considered essential to establish shared planning times. Timetabling for this was often a challenge and required some juggling on the part of the principal and school leadership. However, these sessions were crucial for including the classroom teaching teams and incorporating their ideas into the Wubuy program.

Weekly planning sessions brought the classroom teams and Linguists' Room teams together. The time was used to review lessons taught in the previous week and to fine tune lesson plans, including target language, for the coming week or fortnight. Weekly plans were written and displayed for reference in both the classroom and the Linguists' Room. This was a major advance from the beginning of the 90s, when planning and recording of lessons was ad hoc, if it happened at all.

Work Towards a Local Curriculum

The objective of the Numbulwar language revitalisation program has always been for the learning of both culture and language. The identification of the outcomes for this learning was organised through cultural domains referred to locally as themes. They included:

- ngurrलगurmanyjina 'family kin relationships'
- ana-lhaal-yinyung 'homeland and country ties'
- awubani-yunggaj ... 'old days—new times' (including modes of travel)
- a-gugu-yinyung 'about water'
- ngujija 'fish' (freshwater and saltwater fish, parts of the fish)
- ngalaaligi 'turtle'
- ama-lhagayag 'the sea', shells and shell fish, seasons
- directions
- dhaagadaj marrya 'bush fruit'
- lhawumag 'yams' (teaching how to collect and cook)
- lagu 'wild honey' (teaching about the native Australian honey bees, parts of the hive, searching for, chopping, getting and eating it)
- wungubal 'songs and dance'
- old and new storytelling.

A key advantage of the theme approach was that it allowed the Elders to provide the culture content. Using the same cultural theme across the school made it easier to plan and develop graded activities and assessments for related language learning. Many of the 'Linguists' taught more than one class, so it helped them too. At home, siblings could support each other's learning and families were more likely to become aware of what their children were learning at school and assist them.

The culture knowledge and language learning recorded in the planning, resources and assessment, for the each level of learning, laid the foundation for a local curriculum. A local curriculum cycle evolved over the years to ensure

coverage across cultural domains and to manage the timing of when particular themes were taught. There were also opportunities to extend Wubuy culture and language learning into other key learning areas. Concepts such as number, technology (making things) and healthy living were introduced through Wubuy. Extensive work in these areas was aligned with the Remote School Curriculum and Assessment Material (Northern Territory Government of Australia 2014) utilised by the school in 2009. The range of local curriculum documentation that was available by the end of this period established an important guide for newcomers to the program.

System Level Recognition and Accountability

The appearance of a new Territory-wide curriculum for Indigenous Languages and Culture (ILC) was a highly significant development which helped frame ongoing work on the local Wubuy culture and language and revitalisation curriculum.

Accountability of student learning through the introduction of student assessment was a major advance for the program. Accountability of the school program occurred through a biannual formal review required of all official bilingual programs.

Access to a curriculum for language revitalisation

During 2000–2002, the NT Department of Education developed an outcomes based curriculum framework (NTCF). It was organised around what students should progressively be achieving and included an Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) component with separate sections for Culture Content and Language Revitalisation.

This system level initiative had important repercussions for Numbulwar. It provided a formal learning pathway specific to their context—revitalisation of a language which still has some speakers. The Language Revitalisation section was informed by Numbulwar's Bilingual Program. It was fortuitous for Numbulwar that this system level initiative coincided with a Wurruwurruj Principal, Didamain Uibo, and a highly capable and experienced specialist senior teacher at the school, Jan Jardine.³ It became the focus of much activity in the Linguists' Room for two years

³The key Numbulwar contributors to the curriculum work at this time were the Numbulwar Linguists: Anne Rami, Yambunija Nunggaragal, Nganamugayi Murrungun, Assistant Teacher Faye Manggurra, Principal Didamain Uibo, and Teacher-Linguist, Jan Jardine. Working with the Numbulwar contributors were three linguists, two employed by the Education Department Melanie Wilkinson (East Arnhem) and Rebecca Green (West Arnhem) and Jen Munro from Ngukurr Language Centre as well as the curriculum writing team led by Kathryn McMahon in Darwin.

and there was a lot of work done at Numbulwar to develop understandings around how learning was framed within the western education system. The working knowledge of the program helped raise questions about language development, and it became apparent that the contexts for language learning of the existing Wubuy speakers and the children they were teaching were quite different. Time was spent considering just what the children were learning and what their pathway as Wubuy learners could be. Another related topic to get attention was Wubuy grammar, to assist with targeting specific language at the different stages of schooling.

Assessment

Formal assessments had not been part of the early phase of the program. This was introduced during the late 1990s and expanded in 2000, with folders containing evidence of learning that are passed on as students progressed through the school.

Following the introduction of Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) in 2000, students' Wubuy assessments were entered into the system wide recording and reporting tools aligned to the curriculum. There was a requirement to report to the system, and to parents, twice yearly using the NTCF band levels.

Learning how to assess, and how to make use of oral language assessment data, involved the 'Linguists' team making a significant step forward. They had to shift from informally observing familiar children's Wubuy language development in their own families to using the NTCF Band Levels (or targets) to assess all students in their classes. A number of strategies were introduced: audio or digital clips, rubrics, informal observations and individual student interviews as well as timetabled assessment meetings between classroom teams and the 'Linguists' team. The 'Linguists' also learnt to provide comments when reporting to families.

Examination of student results alerted the teams to areas of difficulty in student learning. Students were plateauing at about Band Level 2, and neither the classroom teams nor the Linguists were able to confirm, with confidence, whether students could use the language independently. Some responses to this were to:

- clarify expectations early in the unit of work
- scaffold towards the expected outcomes in ways to ensure student were successful or comfortable to take risks
- increase student understandings of what was required to demonstrate learning
- fine-tune the assessment practices to capture this learning
- identify learning strategies that extend the language learnt into different contexts.

Biannual Program Reviews

The Biannual Bilingual Program Review involved extensive reflection by the school on the program and led to a report that included setting clear objectives for the next two years. This included targets based on NTCF levels for Years 1, 3, 5, and 7 in Wubuy ILC-Language Revitalisation, English as a Second Language and Maths. A panel, made up of the Manager of Bilingual Programs, senior Departmental personnel and community leaders, visited the school and produced an evaluation of the program based on this visit and the report. Their recommendations addressed areas such as the organisation of the program, time allocation, the way personnel in the program were being used, or tackled an area of perceived weakness in student performance. An example of the latter was a suggestion to make better use of home language, including Kriol, in the teaching of Maths.

The Importance of Oracy

Wubuy is embedded in an oral tradition and the focus of language revitalisation at Numbulwar was naturally on oracy. It was especially important to the Wubuy-speaking generations and partial speaker young parents that the children learn to communicate in Wubuy and continue to follow associated cultural ways.

Targeting oral language teaching practices was a significant shift in the way Wubuy language was used in early classes. The older Wurruwurruj teachers had learnt Wubuy as their first language and were not initially conscious of the needs of second language learners and the consequent differences in the learning pathway.

Literacy in the programme had a secondary role, to scaffold teachers in the use of activities, in recording and documenting, and as a goal for students when they were ready. It was used by most members of the 'Linguists' team in their daily work in the Linguists' Room.

All the original Numbulwar Linguists had some literacy in their own languages, gained through experience in the earlier bilingual program that had introduced literacy in Wubuy, working in Bible translation or study within language and linguistics courses.

Kriol, the home language for most of the students, was also part of the contemporary oral culture at Numbulwar and gained some attention as to its role as a language of instruction.

Oral Language Teaching and Learning Strategies

Initial ideas for oral language teaching strategies were informed by the Framework for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in Primary School (Ministry of Education, W.A. 1992). These included the use of games and chants for encouraging use and practice of language. Other activities were introduced over time and many were documented in local handbooks and lesson plans.

One important method adopted was the ‘4 times strategy’.⁴ It is a strategy to assist with fluency that is helpful when learning new language structures and longer sentences, dialogues and/or narratives without needing to depend on the written word to aid memory. The idea was to spend a few minutes using this strategy in each lesson. It was particularly appropriate because it was designed to teach a language that, like Wubuy, has long words made up of different parts. Wubuy is an inflecting language with complex morphology. The teacher models a sentence, or part of a dialogue, four times, while students listen without responding. Only then do students say the sentence. They must repeat the sentence, or portion of dialogue, four times while the teacher listens for fluency. As confidence grows, smaller groups in the class can then take on the roles of repeating and listening to each other. This method was used to perfect dialogues, role-plays, chants and stories quite successfully.

Songs, chants and role-plays had always featured strongly in the Numbulwar program. These provided effective ways of learning pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary and language structures in fun and meaningful contexts through listening, singing, natural speech and rhythmical chanting of set pieces of language. In fact, the thoughtful incorporation of language in new songs and chants in class activities was a key strategy for encouraging students to produce extended chunks of language, rather than shy one-word responses.

From 2004 the place of songs and chants in the program and the quality of production was strengthened. Songs in particular were enthusiastically embraced by students and the wider community. Local musicians including members of Yilila band (www.yilila.com) worked with the ‘Linguist’ team to write and produce two collections of songs:

- Ngalaaligi: a 2007 CD for children related to the cultural themes taught 2002–2004
- Waayin and Arrjambal: a 2008 CD and DVD set featuring new songs and children’s chants for bush foods, water, health and a ‘natural science’ bird theme taught that year.

As well as supporting learning in the classroom, the CDs and DVDs were distributed to households to further the benefits of using music to teach oral language, and the young children and teenagers, more attuned to Kriol, could listen to and learn the Wubuy songs whilst they played and socialised in their home context.

Community Linguist/Literacy Worker Leonie Murrungun was a key songwriter. Leonie cleverly captured language in the songs that could be targeted for student learning for particular cultural themes at different language levels.

⁴The ‘4-times’ strategy is an adaptation of purposeful language drilling practices we learnt about from a web-site devoted to the teaching of Navajo language, hence we sometimes also referred to it as the Navajo strategy. The website is no longer available so we have been unable to locate a suitable reference. We think it most probably came from the American Indigenous Language Development Institute website. It may have been closely associated with a particular site or program.

Further collaboration with Tony Gray (music and IT consultant) resulted in good quality recordings of traditional clan songs for each of the family groups that could then be played in class. A similar strategy was adopted to make quality recordings for a Wubuy story-telling theme.

Kriol

Whilst we have focused on the developments around the Wubuy program, we should acknowledge the work that took place with the first language for many of the students: Kriol. The community Elders were resolute in their concern for Wubuy and all their energies were devoted to establishing a strong Wubuy program. This often included negative attitudes about Kriol. As the Wubuy program became more and more secure, the place of Kriol in student learning became something that could be talked about. This shift reflects a widely experienced phenomenon, the sensitivity needed when working with contact languages such as Kriol, which are stigmatised by speakers of other languages (Meakins 2010; Morrison and Disbray 2008; Ponsonnet 2010; Siegel 1999, 2006). During the 2000s, work on awareness about Kriol as a language distinct from English was undertaken with all school staff. Discussions also began with Wurruwurruj about more formal attention to its use in teaching and possible models for use of English, Kriol and Wubuy for instruction.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has outlined key elements that strengthened a school-based language revitalisation program over a period of 16 years. It has highlighted the complexities encountered and the immense learning that needed to take place during this time.

Undeniably Numbulwar would not have its program without the initial ‘walk-in’ by community members and their sustained advocacy and support, but some serious steps in formally incorporating the program within school curriculum were achieved through productive partnerships with Dhurrabada.

We hope the points identified from the experience at Numbulwar will inform, encourage or affirm implementation of other school-based language revitalisation programs.

Postscript 2009–2015

Since 2009 the program has had to contend with the passing of many of the Wubuy Elders who had established the program. Unfortunately, just when community input to the school program needed some reframing, resources were also being weakened.

In 2010 the manager position for Bilingual Programs in the NT DoE was cut and with it regular accountability through annual reporting of student outcomes and the biannual program review process. The long-standing East Arnhem DoE linguist position was relocated to Darwin. While local ‘Bilingual/Two-Way program funded’ positions have been retained, their focus and accountability has shifted. System-wide reporting of student outcomes across the strands of the ILC curriculum stopped being required and gradually the electronic reporting tools to allow this locally became unavailable.

The depth with which the Wubuy program was embedded in school curriculum declined as DoE priorities shifted and the school became more reliant on itself to sustain the program. New staff were no longer able to draw on a team with the strength of knowledge and experience in the program which had characterised the period we discuss.

Things seemed to be edging in a better direction by 2015. In late 2013 an Arnhem regional ILC support position had been established for 18 months and was filled by one of the authors. With her extensive knowledge of the Numbulwar program she was able to facilitate some discussions with staff. Since 2013 Numbulwar has been a site for a project on early maths understandings around number. This looked at the use of Kriol, Wubuy and English by teaching teams, particularly Assistant Teachers, in scaffolding student learning (see Wilkinson and Bradbury 2013).

At the end of 2014 recording of ILC curriculum outcomes was re-established across Bilingual Programs at a regional level. In 2015 a manager position for the bilingual programs in the NT Department of Education was restored. It is hoped that this augurs well for re-invigorated attention to the bilingual program at Numbulwar.

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