Seeing the positives in assessment. Contributing to a "literature of doing" school-based Aboriginal language revival programs

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In this paper, the authors, Seymour, an Aboriginal language teacher and researcher of Dharug, the Sydney language, and Angelo, a non-Indigenous Aboriginal language teacher educator, explore the present context of "doing assessment" in Aboriginal language revival programs in New South Wales schools. Language assessment is a critical but very ordinary part of planning for teaching and learning, giving feedback to students and reporting to parents. Plus, assessment is required if students are to receive academic credit for their learning. Indeed, assessment is involved in many potential future developments and pathways for Aboriginal language revival programs. Yet, there is a paucity of language assessment guidance available through the generic (not language-specific) state and national Aboriginal language curriculum documents and the scarce professional training opportunities for Aboriginal language teachers. Additionally, there is potential unease amongst some Aboriginal community members. To address this situation, the authors recommend accessible information and tangible examples about assessing the language taught in class be made available to Aboriginal communities. The authors also propose a bank of language assessment tasks suitable for adaptation, a process they illustrate via two sample tasks, as well as an institutional commitment to support the development of language specific scope and sequence documents with associated assessment items where communities wish to move to a more formal language program.

Key words: Aboriginal language teaching and assessment, Aboriginal language curriculum, Indigenous language revival in schools, Indigenous language education policy, Dharug language

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Introduction

The significance of Indigenous languages to Indigenous peoples all over the world is profound and well-attested. Recently, in 2019, we celebrated the International Year of Indigenous Languages. This was closely followed by the United Nations announcing the International Decade of Indigenous Languages from 2022-2032, in recognition of the immense value of Indigenous languages and their communities' real need for ongoing support in maintaining or reviving[2] their languages (UN General Assembly, 2019). In Australia, the 2020 National Indigenous Languages Report likewise pointed to the importance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples[3] place on their traditional languages, regardless of whether they are in the process of reviving their languages or whether they are speaking them as their main everyday language (DITRDC et al., 2020). In the state of New South Wales (NSW), where this article is set, the long-awaited but ground-breaking Aboriginal Languages Act has been legislated, acknowledging the importance of Aboriginal languages for Aboriginal peoples and the obligation to support language revitalisation (State of NSW, 2017). The traditional Aboriginal languages of NSW are all at various stages of being revived because NSW is the site of the first British invasion of Australia and where settler-colonial occupation of this continent began in 1788. From the perspective of the first author of this paper, Seymour, it is also where my Aboriginal ancestors have lived continuously for millennia and where I now work at reviving my language, Dharug, the Aboriginal language of the Sydney area, now the capital city of NSW.

The growing recognition, advocacy and legislation to support Aboriginal languages are enablers of language revival and are a very welcome change from previous stances excluding them. Nevertheless, as supportive as these actions and sentiments are, they are not the stuff of on-the-ground language revival work (Hobson, 2010). In language revival, the target language is being re-introduced back into its language community, by re-building it from archival sources and remembrances, and learning and teaching it. This is a long-term and painstaking endeavour, "a hard road to hoe", according to

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[2] Throughout this paper we use the terms 'revive', 'revival' etc, but other terms, including 'reawaken', 'renew', 'revitalise', amongst others, are also common.

[3] Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent the two broad cultural groupings of Indigenous peoples in Australia. Aboriginal peoples' lands encompass the Australian mainland and islands, outside of the Torres Strait (between Papua New Guinea and the tip of Australia), which is the homeland of Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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Ken Walker an Aboriginal Elder with extensive experience working to revive his language Gumbaynggirr, from the mid-northern coast of NSW (NSW Board of Adult and Community Education, 2006).

Language revival work is vastly different from situations where an Indigenous language is "strong" and is automatically used by the language community for their everyday purposes and learned by children as their main language. The language revival context even differs in many significant ways from situations where intergenerational language transmission has been disrupted but fully proficient older speakers are available, because where languages are being revived, there is no "ready made" language available for learning and teaching. Instead, these languages-in-revival are being researched and rebuilt, by locating and analysing archival sources, and – piece by piece, in a long and iterative process of gathering and evaluating the evidence – assembling what can be reconstructed of the original lexical items, morpho-syntax and phonology of the language. Some language communities are further along this road than others. However, in language revival contexts, everybody – young and old – is a learner of the target language, and everybody has to work hard at growing their language proficiency. This is the nature of language revival.

The need for attending to the stuff of on-the-ground language revival work has again been highlighted in a recent review initiated by the Aboriginal Languages Trust, the Aboriginal authority established under the NSW Aboriginal Languages Act 2017 to serve the approximately 35 Aboriginal languages in this state (Aboriginal Languages Trust, n.d.). The review found a wealth of material by Aboriginal peoples in NSW documenting the heartfelt importance of their languages (Angelo et al., 2022a). However, it also found much less material guiding the processes of researching and documenting Aboriginal languages for revival purposes (p. 16), and even less of a practical nature about teaching and learning these Aboriginal languages (p. 23). Language learning and language teaching are the backbone of active language revival endeavours so, even though they are fundamental, the actual efforts put into these areas are little in evidence. The clear message is that there is a dearth of material documenting and supporting on-the-ground language revival work like language teaching and learning, even though this is key to supporting the resurging revival

aspirations of Aboriginal language communities. This paper explores one component of this language teaching and learning "gap", classroom-based language assessment.

As a Dharug woman, classroom teacher, Dharug language teacher and researcher and the first author of this paper, I, Seymour, seek to contribute to a literature of doing language revival. By "doing", I mean the active work of language revival which creates and grows a community of learner-speakers, one major area of this active work being school-based Aboriginal language teaching and learning programs. Likewise, my co-author, Angelo – a non-Indigenous linguist and teacher who has worked with and supported many Indigenous language teachers and researchers – also sees the need for literature that supports day-to day Aboriginal language teaching practices. We both recognise that, while numerous Aboriginal language revival programs are delivered in NSW school settings (and in Australia more generally), there is minimal information about practical classroom implementation, including assessment.

This paper therefore examines issues around assessment for school-based Aboriginal languages education in NSW language revival settings, but we believe it is also relevant to language revival settings nationally, and likely further afield too. We make the case that assessment should be viewed as an ordinary but necessary and valuable component of developing and delivering Aboriginal language programs, while acknowledging that the matter of assessment of Aboriginal languages can potentially touch a raw nerve for some Aboriginal community members. The paper first provides background information about the authors' positioning to this topic and about the languages and curriculum context. It then unpacks how, at many levels, school Aboriginal language revival programs are under-resourced and under-supported, inclusive of guidance for assessment. It offers up tangible and transparent assessment tasks both as a useful step towards addressing this situation and as a model of adapting language assessment items to enhance teaching and learning for an Aboriginal language revival program. The final discussion revisits potential Aboriginal community concerns about Aboriginal language assessment and points to the positives of assessment for the future of Aboriginal language programs.

Background

About my language, language work and co-writing

For the Dharug community –and other Indigenous readers too– I, Seymour, am first establishing my connection to the Dharug language and Country and to community language work, thereby indicating I am an insider Aboriginal language teacher researcher (Bell, 2007) with lived experiences on matters addressed in this article.

Ngaya giyara Jasmine Seymour. Ngaya Burubirangal dhiyin Dharugbirang Ngurra. 'My name is Jasmine Seymour. I am a Burubirangal woman belonging to Dharug Country.'

Foregrounding my Dharug identity in this way is an act of acknowledgement by myself and my co-author of the principle "nothing about us, without us", significant in a paper focussing on Aboriginal language matters (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2023).

The Dharug language and Country encompasses an area in Sydney which was one of the hardest-hit sites of first contact and colonial occupation. The archival sources of our language from the early days of the colony record some of the first moments of contact. This is tough reading and speaks to the violence our ancestors experienced. Fast forward to modern day Sydney, which is now the longest established city in Australia, we see a much-changed language ecology. People from all over the world live in Sydney nowadays and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now also call it their home, although their ancestral Country is elsewhere. In comparison, the Dharug community in Sydney is tiny (Seymour et al., in press). The Dharug language community consists of Dharug-affiliated people who are actively engaging in language revival.

Until recently little contemporary language description and documentation has been undertaken on Dharug language. Four decades ago, the publication of a Dharug language word list (Kohen, 1984) first enabled the Dharug language community to have access to language from some archival sources. This was followed by grammatical notes (Wilkins, c.1990 - unpublished but disseminated freely); documentation of early

language contact in Sydney (Troy, 1992); a Dharug vocabulary compiled from multiple sources (Troy, 1993); an analysis of an archival source document and its language (Steele, 2005); and papers and blog posts on ethnographic, lexical and phonological points (e.g. Nash, 2009, 2010; Wilkins & Nash, 2008) (see also Wafer & Lissarague, 2008). Throughout this whole time, community members such as Richard Green, Jacinta Tobin and Aunty Edna Watson have constantly drawn on Dharug language resources available to them and augmented their language knowledge. In the years since this initial Dharug language work, language descriptions of many related NSW languages have significantly expanded and more knowledge and understanding have developed, which in turn provides models of language resources which inspire the Dharug language community.

In addition to my Dharug heritage, I am also speaking from both the position of a Dharug language activist working with a Dharug language revival team and the role of a Dharug language educator, trainer and researcher. Dharug language activists are building language expertise with assistance from linguists, David Wilkins and Denise Angelo, my co-author, and support from other language teachers and educator allies. We have been stepping up language research and investigating the grammatical structures of our language which helps re-ignite Dharug through communicative sentence building. We have actively created a learning and teaching community and are busy resource building. The importance of language for the Dharug community is immense. Dharug people in Sydney have a saying that we are the first colonised and the last recognised (Seymour & Norman, 2022). We face a significant challenge in being visible in our own Country, in the context of the modern-day metropolis of Sydney (Seymour et al., in press).

Turning now to the education research focus of this paper, as an insider educator, I am a qualified and practising teacher, currently working as a school-based Dharug language teacher (one of few) in a high school in western Sydney. I am also engaged in informal and formal adult education contexts, as a Dharug language teacher for the Dharug community; as a Dharug language teaching trainer in a pilot program for educators from surrounding schools; and as a sessional lecturer on a postgraduate course offered nationally to qualified Indigenous teachers wishing to teach their languages. In my own research I am investigating effective approaches to Dharug

language education, a topic which requires engagement with language assessment amongst many other aspects.

In my own Dharug language teaching, as a reflective practitioner I have always sought ways of assessing the language gains of students in my classes (previously with early childhood and primary-aged children and now with high school students), but have found little guidance in the literature on Indigenous Australian languages for informing my teaching practice. In this, I am not alone. Other Aboriginal language teachers encounter the same problem, given the generic approaches to state and national Indigenous language syllabuses (discussed below). Through my research, I hope to assist with innovation in the Aboriginal language education space, informing content, pedagogy and assessment in language revival courses which are developed within generic syllabus frameworks.

As an intentionally decolonising stance, academic ventures between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants require a transparent examination of positioning to each other and the subject matter. My co-author, Denise Angelo, is a non-Indigenous classroom and language teacher, linguist and researcher with extensive experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teachers and language programs, as well as researching Aboriginal languages with and for community members. We have chosen to work together on various language research and language teaching projects associated with re-igniting Dharug Dhalang 'Dharug language', often with other Dharug language activists. In addition, we are both co-researchers in an Australian Research Council project team looking at 'Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Ecologies' across Australia, which involves in-depth case studies around Australia, including in Sydney with the Dharug language community. One element which these case studies have foregrounded is the varied contexts of teaching and learning Indigenous languages. Clearly no one size fits all. Yet again and again, with our language teacher hats on, Angelo's and my conversations have returned to the positivity Indigenous community members feel for their language programs but also to the little systemic planning and support available for current and would-be Aboriginal language teachers in the classroom. The focus on language assessment in this paper tackles one aspect of this gap. It reflects my ideas and experiences as a Dharug language teacher which my co-author and I have

discussed extensively, and together we have drafted, developed, revisited and re-drafted this piece, in an iterative process of collaborative writing.

About Aboriginal language programs in revival settings

In Australia, many Aboriginal language programs are in the early stages of revival, focusing mainly on community engagement and student well-being (Marmion et al., 2014; Sivak et al., 2019). Aboriginal language revival involves pushing back on language shifts caused by invasion, occupation, and the marginalisation of Aboriginal peoples and their languages. Reviving a language consists of rebuilding it from archival sources and community remembrances to create language documentation and resources which the contemporary language community can use. The adult members of the language community, along with their allies, learn and teach others in order to reintroduce the language back into people's lives. Reviving an Aboriginal language is a long-term endeavour that requires the development of the target language itself. In school settings with a language revival program, language curriculum and all the associated teaching and learning resources also need to be developed, often from scratch. Adult language teachers in revival settings, as language learners themselves, also need access to resources that support their own language learning as well as their teaching (Lowe & Giacon, 2019).

At this point in time, many Aboriginal language programs in revival settings in NSW could be usefully described as "celebratory" in nature. They are often associated with cultural and identity benefits for Aboriginal students and community, as well as reconciliation and social cohesion for the school and wider community. Although there may be a perception that language activities are primarily aimed at increasing proficiency levels and speaker numbers, the Language Activity Survey data does not support this assumption. Rather, the survey found that respondents most commonly conduct language activities in order to strengthen people's connection with their language and culture, to build a sense of culture, identity and well-being, and to increase language awareness (Marmion et al., 2014 p.19).

The presence of Aboriginal languages in schools and their focus on student well-being and engagement marks significant progress compared to historical policies that actively worked against Aboriginal people and their languages, excluding them from

education and punishing their use (Bell, 2013; Freeman & Staley, 2018). In general, numbers of NSW school-based Aboriginal language revival programs have increased over the past two decades, with a positive disposition towards Aboriginal languages in the wider community as well as in Aboriginal communities. Some Aboriginal language programs have a longer presence in NSW schools. These languages have been comparatively well supported with more language resources to draw on through collaborations between linguists and the community, and in some cases, a Commonwealth funded Aboriginal Language Centre and/or a NSW government funded "language nest"[4] (Lowe & Giacon, 2019). However, many NSW Aboriginal languages, including Dharug, have lacked that level of support so the trajectories of their language programs are more recent (Seymour et al., in press).

About Aboriginal language curriculum for schools

In Australia, there are two tiers of curriculum development - the national Australian Curriculum developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the state/territory jurisdictions which implement the curriculum, often with curriculum documents of their own (Angelo et al., 2022b, pp. 39-42). In the national Australian Curriculum there is a generic F-10 [5] syllabus available, the Framework for Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages (ACARA 2016). It distinguishes three different learning pathways based on the context of the target Indigenous language, including a Language Revival (LR) Learner Pathway.

This Australian Curriculum for Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages is not language-specific, so descriptions of learning intent are worded generically. This means, for example, that no vocabulary or structures are specified.

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[4] NSW "language nests" differ from the well-known initiatives of the same name in Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai'i which involve older language speakers interacting with very young children to bridge a shift in language use. NSW "language nests" are hubs with a language teacher and a manager. Each one services an Aboriginal language. They were conceived as a partnership between Aboriginal Affairs NSW, the NSW Department of Education and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)) (Aboriginal Affairs NSW 2013). Most NSW Aboriginal languages, including Dharug, do not have a language nest/hub.

[5] The school entry year is known by different terms, e.g. 'Kindergarten', 'Prep' etc, in the different states and territories of Australia. The national Australian Curriculum refers to this year as 'Foundation'. There is a suite of syllabuses for F-10, covering primary school years (grades F-6) and high school until year 10 (grades 7-10). There are separate syllabuses for senior years of high school (grades 11-12).

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nor guidance on the order of teaching, and no exemplars of student work are available. If we contrast this with language-specific curriculum resources, for example German, German teachers can view a student portfolio showing a Satisfactory level of achievement for Foundation to Year 2, Years 3-4, 5-6, 7-8 and 9-10, with a differentiated set for students who commence learning German in high school (ACARA, n.d.). There are no student portfolios for any Aboriginal language or Torres Strait Islander language (ACARA, 2016). Likewise, student learning achievement standards in the German curriculum specify target German language and provide tangible examples of this but not in the Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages framework (ACARA 2015a; 2015b). There are illustrations of the target German language, for example, in Foundation-Year 2 of simple sentences (Das ist…, Ich wohne in… Ich mag…) and target language features like subject pronouns (ich, du, er, sie, es. wir) and possessive pronouns (mein/e, dein/e) etc, but there are none in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language (ACARA 2015a; 2015b).

State and territory education authorities similarly provide no language-specific curriculum for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages (Angelo & Poetsch 2019; Disbray 2019). The first ever Aboriginal languages (K-10)[6] syllabus for schools in NSW came out just two decades ago (Board of Studies NSW, 2003a). The early years of its implementation were accompanied by school-based trials, workshops with their school teams including language specialists and community members, and development and sharing of example units of work (teaching plans). An accompanying document, Advice on programming and assessment for Stages 4 and 5, demonstrated how the syllabus could be implemented (Board of Studies NSW, 2003b). A teaching program outline, including information on formative and summative assessment, is sketched out for two specific Aboriginal languages, Gumbaynggirr and Yuwaalaraay, with some indication of target language items only in the latter. Although a valuable resource and the first of its kind in NSW, this represents just 2 of around 35 Aboriginal languages in the state, and most would recognise them as better resourced and further along in the revival journey. To date, there has been no such advice for primary schools

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[6] In NSW, the school entry year is termed 'Kindergarten'. Syllabuses are written for K-10 or senior years. K-10 syllabuses group school years in stages. In primary school these are Stage 1 for grades 1-2, Stage 2 for grades 3-4, Stage 3 for grades 5-6; in high school these are Stage 4 for grades 7-8 and Stage 5 for grades 9-10.

(Stages 1-3). Furthermore the 2003 NSW Aboriginal languages syllabus is being phased out.

In 2024, a new Aboriginal languages syllabus will be implemented in NSW for implementation (NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), 2022). Like the national curriculum, it acknowledges that there are diverse language learner pathways depending on the context of the target Aboriginal language, but the new NSW syllabus splits these differently. As all Aboriginal languages in NSW are involved in language revival, the NSW syllabus differentiates two revival pathways: students with significant prior learning (Prior Pathway) versus those without this background knowledge (Additional Pathway).

It is early days, so it is as yet unclear what support materials might become available in the future for this new Aboriginal languages syllabus in NSW. Currently, apart from the few 2003 resources noted above, any resources for the new Aboriginal languages curriculum are general and generic with no examples of a target language, student work samples etc, which makes descriptions of intended learning difficult to interpret. By way of illustration, the new NSW syllabus Stage 1 learning statements for each revival pathway of the Composing strand under Bilingual and/or multilingual texts are identical even though the underlying language proficiencies of students in each pathway would not be:

- Additional: create bilingual texts for classroom and school environments
- Prior: create bilingual texts for classroom and school environments

Some learning statements from the two pathways differ a little more explicitly. However, the point still remains that there are no tangible examples to guide educators' interpretation and application of the syllabus learning statements for planning, teaching and assessment purposes.

Present positioning of assessment in school Aboriginal language revival programs

It would be a fair observation that the language content and the teaching and assessment practices for delivering the Aboriginal language curriculum in each

specific language are not well-worn paths. For instance, there is no large body of legacy materials, nor tried and true teaching resources, nor learning activities for students of different ages and proficiency levels, nor assessment tasks in any Aboriginal language from NSW in the "old" syllabus or the "new". Admittedly, some language programs would be further along than others, but even so, unlike large overseas languages, Aboriginal languages cannot simply draw on a vast supply of existing materials developed by specialist languages teachers in schools and universities, or by publishers in textbooks and/or online. Nor, at this stage, is there dedicated funding and staffing for the specific purpose of developing such materials, but this would certainly be a most welcome initiative.

If Aboriginal languages have been included in schools as an activity promoting outcomes such as reconciliation, community connections and student well-being, and not as a language program with more formalised planning, teaching and reporting, then there has been no demand for a more formalised approach to assessment. In these situations, the language program is reported as an (extra-curricular/well-being) activity and student learning is recorded in terms of their participation and engagement. Hence, although many Aboriginal language programs have been delivered in NSW, there has been no consistent history or school culture of assessment and reporting for Aboriginal language learning. In sum, in such informal language programs there has been little need for assessment, as language teaching/learning has not been linked to student achievement, teacher feedback to students, reporting back to families on student learning, or reflective teaching practices focussing on how to improve student learning.

Attitudes about Aboriginal languages and assessment

Aboriginal peoples in language revival settings have little opportunity to hear and use their traditional language, and few Aboriginal language teachers in NSW would have had the experience of learning their language during their own schooling. This is certainly Seymour's own experience. The actual presence of Aboriginal language programs in schools is thus worth celebrating, as they are a sign of overcoming the exclusion from education settings that Aboriginal people have faced historically. But, when it comes to assessing learning in Aboriginal languages, there is considerable

nervousness, and for good reason. Take for example the situation where mainstream Australian society, including its educational institutions, has treated Aboriginal English(es) as deficient varieties, even though for the Aboriginal speakers these varieties index identity, express community membership, and represent linguistic and cultural continuity (Dickson, 2019). According to Eades (2014, p. 61) "Aboriginal English reflects grammatically the structure of traditional Aboriginal languages…" This precious connection could be regarded positively, but this has not been Aboriginal peoples' experience. Many Aboriginal people have experienced negative judgements (Malcolm et al, 2020) instead of applause for their resilience in maintaining this lingering echo of the diverse Aboriginal language communities across Australia who under duress adapted to a colonial nation with a "monolingual mindset" (Clyne, 2005). It is no wonder, then, that Aboriginal communities might feel apprehensive about allowing their children's learning of their much cherished ancestral languages to be assessed in the hostile environments that Standard Australian English-only education systems have created.

From Seymour's perspective, as a teacher who is delivering Dharug language programs in schools, it can feel like education systems now support harnessing Aboriginal languages for the purposes of Aboriginal community engagement and student well-being, but are not yet equally willing to support Aboriginal languages for educational outcomes for students. As someone who has embarked on an Aboriginal language teaching career, I see little to support my professional development with an ever-increasing range of language teaching skills, nor the academic ambitions of Aboriginal students who might begin to consider Aboriginal language teaching as a career path. Including assessment as an integrated part of Aboriginal language programs would contribute to building a career pathway for Indigenous students, as is the case with other subjects. Learning an Aboriginal language could count towards students' academic records. Also, greater visibility of language assessment tasks, and transparency about how they would be implemented, along with the benefits of assessment for students and families receiving feedback, would likely assuage Aboriginal community members' fears. In particular, tangible exemplars of language assessment items tend to look very ordinary and reasonable in actuality, certainly not injurious to a students' or family's identity. Well-designed and -implemented assessment is most likely to have positive and beneficial effects for learning and

teaching (as we show below). Assessment could become a normal and supportive process in Aboriginal language programs, used to improve teaching and learning, and to provide another step towards embedding Aboriginal languages in future opportunities and pathways for students.

Guidance for Aboriginal language assessment tasks

For an Aboriginal language teacher, such as Seymour, who is considering what assessment might like look like in an Aboriginal language revival classroom, a logical first step would be finding some models. An extensive search of education websites for language assessment tasks – involving public domain education department curriculum websites; Scootle (a national digital repository of digital resources aligned to the national curriculum for Australian schools); websites run by language teacher associations; and just teaching idea websites – uncovers very little on assessing Aboriginal languages.[7] In a review of Canadian and Australian Indigenous language assessment, Baker and Wigglesworth (2017) likewise acknowledge that assessment receives little attention. The Advice on programming and assessment (Board of Studies, New South Wales, 2003b) referred to above, includes two summative assessment tasks for high school Stage 4 students, one for Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay, 'A family day at the river' (pp. 35-6) and one for Gumbaynggirr, 'Describing a beach scene' (pp. 45-6); however, these are not aligned to the new NSW syllabus to be implemented in 2024.

A search of Google Scholar uncovers lots of academic material about language assessment, but little by way of actual, practical examples or models of school classroom-based assessment tasks with sufficient detail for a classroom teacher to implement. Preston and Claypool similarly observed "there are many explanations, but limited examples of how to improve assessment for Indigenous students" (2021, p. 7), although they are talking across the curriculum, not exclusively about Indigenous languages. More language assessment ideas are available for English language learners, presumably because of larger student numbers.

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[7] In a similar vein, the recent Productivity Commission Report (2022) for the National School Agreement Reform recommends a national curation of curriculum resources (including lesson plans and assessment tools) as a response to classroom teacher requests and notes that Scootle has not achieved this purpose (pp. 196-7).

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The underspecification of a generic syllabus coupled with few illustrative resources is ill-suited to the NSW language context, where, additionally, there are few professional learning opportunities. Given the dearth of language assessment models in Aboriginal language revival programs, there must be the expectation that all Aboriginal languages teachers will be able to develop all their own assessment tasks, from the ground up, as they generally do with all other aspects of their language programs due to generic syllabus documents (Angelo & Poetsch, 2019). Yet, Aboriginal language teachers' own language education and training in NSW revival settings is largely unsupported. Their professional training and development opportunities are few and far between, especially given the language revival ecologies in which they are teaching and learning. The opportunities for adults to study Aboriginal language courses are few, in adult Technical and Further Education (TAFE), Aboriginal organisations, and at university.[8] Of those Aboriginal language courses that are available, they develop participants' language skills in a specific language and would provide them –as students– with experiences and models of language teaching and assessment. They do not, however, upskill participants specifically as language teachers with planning, teaching and assessment toolkits. Access to Aboriginal language teaching training is also limited in NSW, with the Masters of Indigenous Languages Education (MILE) the only current qualification pathway, but one which is open only to qualified Indigenous classroom teachers (Hobson 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011; Hobson et al. 2018). Guidance in implementing the Aboriginal languages syllabus, including the assessment component, and especially language specific guidance, would provide much needed support given the constraints posed by the lack of other training and professional learning opportunities.

In Aboriginal language programs there are also multiple layers of community involvement and cultural expectations to be negotiated, a factor in common with Indigenous languages in settler colonial societies in other countries too (Tulloch et al., 2022). In NSW, this is relatively new terrain, so it is hardly surprising that some matters are not settled and are still being explored. Nevertheless, broadbrush generalisations and advice about Indigenous approaches to Indigenous language

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[8] At the time of writing, just two NSW languages, Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri, are offered at university but neither can be studied as a major subject at this stage. Nor are all NSW Aboriginal languages available for study in the TAFE system.

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assessment should be treated with great caution. They cannot suit the particular individual context of each language revival program, including Dharug. In Canada, for instance, Baker and Wigglesworth (2017) write that there has been an increasing expectation that community elders will help facilitate language assessment in school-based Indigenous language programs. This approach might not be feasible for language revival programs as all language community members are learner-speakers, elders too. Dharug elders actively support our school language programs in many ways, but assessing students would require language content knowledge that is not to be expected of elders in language communities working to revive their languages. Another example of thinking on assessment in the Indigenous language space is by Aboriginal academic, Yunkaporta, who asserts that the "...link to land and country should always be present [to ensure] cultural integrity" (2010, p. 76). He suggests that assessment tasks in Aboriginal languages should be designed through culture-specific activities, for example, with students responding orally to sand symbols or creating message sticks, artefacts associated with traditional culture. However, from the Dharug point of view, there is always an element of culture involved in language revival because the language is an intrinsic part of the culture. With or without these tangible, traditionally oriented artefacts, culture is authentically expressed through language. In the Dharug language revival context in urban Sydney, community language lessons have focussed on using the language, purposefully considering how our growing community of adult language learners can be present again in modern life. This is an act of cultural defiance, which is in keeping with the Language building strand of the new NSW Aboriginal languages syllabus (NESA, 2022).

To summarise, then, assessment in Aboriginal language programs is not yet firmly embedded as part of the usual cycle of teaching, learning and reporting in NSW schools. Aboriginal language programs have entered the schools thanks to tireless Aboriginal advocacy and are serving important reconciliation, well-being and engagement purposes, not requiring assessment. However, assessment will play a part in taking Aboriginal languages to another level, informing teaching and allowing the languages to count as an academic subject. There is as yet little by way of useful assessment guidance for Aboriginal language teachers, neither in the curriculum, on teaching websites, or in the Indigenous research area. While assessment could touch a raw nerve amongst Aboriginal community members due to historic and ongoing

alienation from mainstream education, this would be less likely if the community is sensitively but well informed about the role of assessment in effective language learning and teaching for their children.

Tangible samples of Aboriginal language assessment tasks

In so many respects, then, it is still early days for developing language-specific Aboriginal language teaching and assessment resources. Developing Aboriginal language assessment needs a collaborative team approach at this stage - all hands on deck (Angelo et al., 2022, p. 32-3; First Languages Australia, 2015). There is a tiny Aboriginal language teacher workforce and many relatively new and under-resourced language programs, like those for Dharug. From Seymour's perspective, despite differences between Aboriginal languages, there are many synergies in Aboriginal language teachers' work and expectations in revival contexts. Likewise, there are potential similarities with the work of languages teachers more broadly, despite sometimes vastly different teaching and learning contexts. In my experience, models of language assessment are hugely beneficial. They help to get us started, give us something to work with. What would be immediately helpful for Aboriginal language teachers is a compendium of formative and summative language assessment tasks (in the context of well-planned and sequenced teaching programs) to serve as models for Aboriginal language teachers, who can adapt them. A bank of language-specific assessment tasks and student work samples would be ideal in the long run.

In this spirit, in this section we have written up two small, tangible language assessment tasks. This serves a twofold purpose. It exemplifies actual assessment items, including conditions of use, illustrating what assessment might mean, as a potential tool for allaying community concern. It also illustrates what a bank of model language assessment tasks might include – these are in Dharug but the idea can be adapted for other school Aboriginal language revival programs as their design is explained. These assessment tasks have been used by Seymour in class. One is for assessing student acquisition of the sound system of Dharug, and the other is for assessing student comprehension of Dharug vocabulary items and sentence structure. The target high school student cohort is in their first semester of learning Dharug and would be considered at a beginner proficiency level in second language assessment.

Both tasks are connected to a Term 2 unit of work in my teaching program about going and being places.

Assessment bank item. Minimal pair assessment task

Task rationale

In language revival contexts in NSW like Dharug, everybody is an English speaker, so there are predictable difficulties with some target language sounds e.g. the velar nasal 'ng' in word initial position. Most English speakers default automatically to 'n', an alveolar nasal, that does occur at the start of English words, unlike 'ng'. Budyari garaga 'good pronunciation' is essential for the Dharug language community as a sign of respect. In our language community of learners, where everybody has been "Englished" and we have little exposure to our language outside of teaching situations, an explicit focus is required for us to "notice" and to develop our target language pronunciation. Aboriginal languages have distinctive sound systems, very different from English, and they are beautiful to hear. Knowing about this difference and "un-Englishing" how we say Aboriginal words is important. Many parents and community members have told me about how impressed they are with how fluent and authentic their children sound. They would understand the purpose of an assessment activity like this one and support it.

Task design

The assessment task in Figure 1 below asks students to aurally identify target language sounds in order to discriminate between two similar-sounding Dharug words provided in written form. Each pair of words represents a minimal pair, differing only by one sound/phoneme, or otherwise a close minimal pair, differing by two sounds/phonemes. The Dharug word pairs contain one or more sounds that are challenging for English speakers and which are the focus of explicit instruction in the program. The task assesses language sub-skills required for the receptive language strands in the curriculum. As the task is currently structured, it is suited to students who have basic English phonics knowledge [9] and are beginner Dharug language

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[9] Like other Australian Aboriginal languages, the orthography developed for Dharug uses the Roman alphabet and where possible employs these symbols with values familiar to English speakers, to facilitate transfer of literacy skills.

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learners who have been introduced to Dharug sounds and writing, including how long versus short vowels are represented. A minimal pair task can be carried out as a supportive collaborative process, scaffolded and practised many times in class, in groups, with the teacher modelling and observing students' performance and students engaging in self-assessment and sharing their experiences and strategies.

- You will hear a Dharug word.
- I will say it clearly, at normal speed, several times.
- Mark which sounds you hear in the box.
- Circle or highlight which word was spoken.

m	**a**	**l**	**a**	**mala**
ng	**a**	**l**	**a**	**ngala**

n	**aa**	**l**	**a**	**naala**
ng	**aa**	**n**	**a**	**ngaana**

n	**aa**	**l**	**a**	**naala**
ng	**a**	**l**	**a**	**ngala**

Figure 1. Distinguishing minimal pairs in Dharug

Adaptation process

This assessment task is based on an English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D)[10] one, which Seymour was familiar with as many of the students in my teaching context come from many different immigrant language backgrounds. I applied the concept of minimal pairs to the Dharug language. There are fewer exact minimal pairs in Dharug compared to English because of factors like fewer monosyllabic words and a vocabulary which is not so extensive as English, so I expanded the notion to include close minimal pairs. In the original EAL/D task, the vocabulary items seemed to have been selected on their phonological properties alone. For the Dharug task I also applied semantic criteria and discarded any words that would not be useful for learners in their current unit. Consequently, these items were

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[10] EAL/D has been the term favoured in most Australian documents for around a decade. It encompasses all English language learners, including English as a Foreign Language (such as in remote traditional language speaking communities) and speakers of Englishes which are so distant as to pose barriers in Standard Australian English medium classrooms.

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embedded in my teaching, so they were intrinsically connected to students' learning. They were thus reasonable (i.e. well-practised and meaningful) items for assessing student abilities to distinguish sounds and words. I then selected items from this pool of Dharug word pairs on the basis of the intended learning that I wanted to assess, namely Dharug sounds that are "difficult" for English speakers to perceive (or produce as I was also thinking how I might expand the task to include a productive mode). An example of a target language sound that in my experience many English speakers find challenging is 'ng' when it is in word initial position. I have also noticed that long and short vowels in Dharug, rendered in writing with a single versus a doubled symbol (e.g. 'a' or 'aa'), also present difficulties for English speakers.[11]

The set of (close) minimal pairs of familiar (or familiarisable) words that I collected for this task were:

- ngaana 'who' (ergative case from)
- mala 'man'
- naala! 'look!' (imperative form)
- ngala 'us two' (nominative case)

Task extensions

The Figure 1 activity is currently constructed as a listening and reading activity but it could be adapted or extended in many ways. My initial word selection criteria were phonological, but they could also be orthographic, on the basis of spelling patterns I want learners to focus on. A vocabulary comprehension element could be added, so having identified the word students link it to the matching picture or perhaps to its translation equivalent in English. The task could incorporate the productive oral mode, with students repeating each item in the Dharug word pair with their best attempts at the challenging target language sound(s). The individual target words could also be exemplified in an illustrative sentence during the assessment procedure, although this might be distracting.

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[11] This same issue has also been noted in other Aboriginal language revival contexts, where English speaking learners re-interpret the contrast in vowel length in the target language instead as different tongue configurations as in English, "especially [ʌ] and [a]" (Reid, 2010: 297).

Assessment bank item: Matching sentence and picture

Task rationale

Extracting an assessment task, as an ongoing formative assessment, from a story-based unit is a powerful and purposeful approach and helps to disrupt the idea of a scary test full of difficult print with unfamiliar content and words. Use of relatable images that speak to the beauty of place and culture makes learners more engaged with the language content. The visuals at the heart of this task invite student engagement and support their achievement, in exactly the same way that they scaffold teaching and learning. Images reinforce the content areas selected for units of work, which in Aboriginal language programs would often include culture, Country and kinship. Images are also a support for Story which, in addition to being a valued cultural practice, is an effective methodology for language revival programs (Poetsch et al., 2019). In these settings, teachers (who are learners too) are able to learn, practise and perform language fluently through storytelling, as are the learners who are engaging with the narrative. Story allows a focus on grammar or vocabulary teaching to be drawn from a meaningful context, so students can practise grammar and vocabulary learning activities relevant to the story. Repeated re-tellings and/or re-readings which assist students with internalising the language are enjoyable and confidence-building: students have a scaffolded "can do" experience, while teacher observations provide encouraging and reassuring formative assessment and feedback. Many adult community members' experiences of their traditional language consist of single words, not embedded in sentences or larger discourse. In Seymour's experience, parents are really proud and deeply touched when their children experience a story in language, an opportunity they themselves never had. They too can be motivated by the story format and keen to learn more, growing the language revival community.

Task design

This assessment task asks students to identify the picture that matches the sentence provided orally or in writing. That is, it can be used to assess students' listening or reading skills (Figure 2). The layout is reminiscent of a storyboard format familiar to students: a storyboard is a common language teaching device which involves a sequence of pictures providing a context for students to generate language. In a

language revival program this combination of Story with images serves as a scaffold for language and can be used to integrate learning and assessment. This means that the target language to be assessed has been taught and practised multiple times in teacher-led, whole-class, group, peer-to-peer or individual retellings in this contextualised manner. Likewise, the assessment task can be delivered in any of these configurations. For example, pair work encourages student discussion which activates their knowledge and gives opportunity for teacher feedback too; thus, assessment that promotes learning.

The requisite language consists of vocabulary for people and places and grammatical structures (coordinating nouns, the verbless sentence pattern and the forms and functions of the locative case marker) which are all part of Seymour's Semester 1 beginner Dharug language program. As there is no school syllabus in Dharug (or in any NSW Aboriginal language),[12] the language scope and sequence is determined by individual teachers on criteria of relevance to the context of the topic and notions of difficulty, as well as the current stage of re-building the language. In order to match student beginner proficiency level to assessment task design, we developed a notional scale of difficulty (see Figure 3) which includes general concepts of communicative language proficiency (e.g. length of utterance) as well as classroom learning context (e.g. taught and practised language) and language-specific features (e.g. bound pronouns, case markers).

- You will hear a Dharug sentence. It describes just one of the pictures.
- I will say the sentence three times. I will leave some space between so you can think about what you have heard.
- Decide which picture it describes best and put a tick in that box.

"Mala dhiyin dhurabang-a"

man woman river-LOC

The man and woman are at the river.

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[12] Syllabus documents even of another NSW Aboriginal language would be of some assistance, because all NSW Aboriginal languages are part of the same language family. Some are members of the same language sub-grouping as Dharug and so are even more closely related and structurally similar.
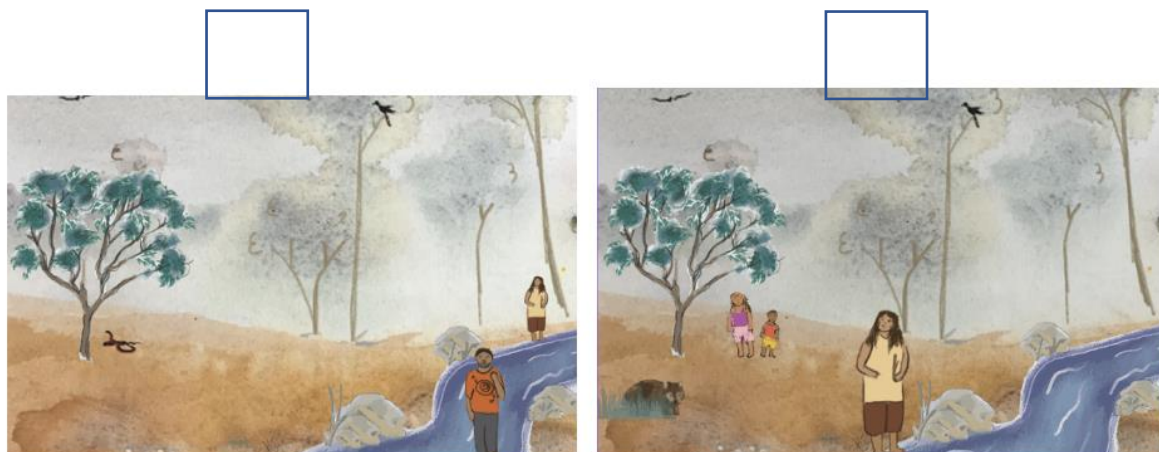
Figure 2. Identifying a picture through Dharug

Adaptation process

To adapt this assessment task I selected images from my own illustrations which I had developed for an existing "storyboard" teaching resource. My criteria were

- culturally appropriate images with people and features of Country
- representing a scene from the curriculum topic connected to taught/familiar language
- entailing some intellectual challenge with distinctive features in each picture, but some overlap and some distractors too
- able to be distinguished by a single sentence but with enough detail to support two or more sentences if required.

In adapting this task for Dharug, my co-author and I considered how to judge the difficulty of the task in relation to students' beginner L2 development. Table 1 shows what we would expect at three different levels of development, with 1 a beginner level. For example, we took into account

- familiarity of vocabulary e.g. people and Country words taught explicitly in the current unit of study
- sentence type and components e.g. verbless (equational) sentence with a locative case marker
- quantity of language e.g. one short sentence (3 words)

- content in task e.g. describing one major distinguishing feature (and not the surrounding countryside or the tiny snake (left) or the children in the background (right) in Figure 2)

Table 1. Dharug language development and assessment task criteria

	Vocabulary	**Sentence type**	**Quantity**	**Content**
Level 1	• taught & familiarised words • drawn entirely from current unit	• verbless sentence • 1 case marker	• 1 sentence • 2-4 words in length	• only most salient feature in picture
Level 2	• taught & familiarised words • drawn from current unit • also taken from well-known texts (songs, recently studied stories)	• verb sentences included • 1 case marker	• 1-2 sentences • 3-5 words in length	• most salient feature in picture • plus some extra but obvious information
Level 3a Level 3b	• taught & familiarised words • drawn from current & previous units & well-known texts • includes 1-2 unfamiliar words	• complex sentence included • 1-2 case markers • bound pronouns	• 2 -4 sentences • 3 or more words in length ------------------ • 5 or more sentences	• salient feature(s) in picture • some extra information, some not entirely obvious --------------------------- • much extra information

Extensions

The Figure 2 task is currently constructed as a receptive listening assessment task, but with a written cue it could instead be used as a reading assessment. It could also be extended into the productive modes of speaking or writing. As a follow-on task, students could describe both pictures in speaking and/or writing. Alternatively, students themselves could design an assessment task with two new but similar pictures (which they produce or select), which they deliver to their group in speaking and/or writing, based on the model they initially experienced.

These sample assessment tasks and the information around their design and possible implementation exemplify both the usefulness and ordinariness of language assessment tasks that are part of a language teaching and learning cycle. These small sample tasks could be a first contribution to a bank of Aboriginal language assessment tasks for revival programs. Future contributions could perhaps follow our format of

rationale, task design, adaptation processes and extensions as this contextualising information would aid in adapting and implementing tasks for other languages.

The case for assessment in Aboriginal language revival programs

We now return to our aim of contributing to the "literature of doing" school Aboriginal language revival programs. We first consider how our recommendations for a bank of practical, adaptable Aboriginal language assessment items and language-specific curriculum material development might straightforwardly address some of the perceptions that might otherwise constrain the implementation of language assessment in language revival contexts. We then point to some of the future-oriented benefits that language assessment could afford school-based Aboriginal language programs in revival settings. These positives go some way towards counterbalancing potential misgivings.

Acknowledging and addressing potential community concerns

As indicated earlier, there are multiple reasons for nervousness around assessment and Aboriginal languages on the part of Aboriginal people. Community members are unlikely to have prior experience of their language as a school subject and so might find the idea jarring. Aboriginal people have also often been researched and written about, sometimes unfairly and without their input,[13] and have understandably little trust in mainstream institutions' ability to implement fair and just assessments (Board of Studies NSW, 2003b, p. 6). In addition, there may be community perspectives that wish to view Aboriginal languages exclusively through a cultural knowledge or identity lens rather than also through a language revival lens where there is a strong focus on learning the language system which is being rebuilt and taught. Although there are many models of protocols promoting the importance of community consultation in Aboriginal language programs, there is no guidance about building understanding and consensus about assessing student language learning in an Aboriginal language (e.g. Board of Studies, 2001/2008; NESA, n.d.).

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[13] The recent Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics for Indigenous research foregrounds the need for active and informed roles of Indigenous peoples in ethical research (AIATSIS, 2020).

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In the authors' view, the knowledge that there are predictable Aboriginal community sensitivities associated with assessment and Aboriginal language revival programs obliges education systems to offer respectful leadership in the area. Clear and accessible information about the role of assessment in Aboriginal language learning would be a good start. A bank of tangible examples of assessment with commentaries from Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal students and Aboriginal parents about the positive and supportive effect of well-designed and thoughtfully implemented assessment would go further in alleviating community disquiet that could arise in this context.[14]

Should an Aboriginal language community wish to consider their language being taught as a school subject for academic credit, then sample units of work and assessment tasks should be available so community members and students can see what is entailed. Initially these could be generic, couched in English, with the offer of developing a suite of language-specific units of work and assessment items if they wish to proceed. This would then be their informed choice. Certainly, anecdotally, in parental and student feedback, Seymour has seen no evidence that the classroom assessment that supports students' Dharug language learning has been misconstrued as somehow evaluating anything else, such as (Aboriginal) students' identity - which nobody would want. If thought is put into the design and implementation of language assessment tasks, then students are most likely to experience this as positive assistance for their language learning.

Transparent and accessible guidance about the role of language assessment for language learning, along with assessment item exemplars, would engage with the cultural context of Aboriginal languages teachers in revival settings in NSW. The language-Country-culture-identity connections are very complicated for Aboriginal peoples in revival settings. Even though language shift across the continent caused by invasion, occupation, colonisation and systematic minoritisation is not the fault of an individual, Aboriginal language teachers can experience a personal sense of shame, inadequacy, and feelings of not being sufficiently Aboriginal because they and their community do not speak their language fluently, as their vernacular. There can be

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[14] It would also be evidence of equitable treatment for Aboriginal language revival programs in schools, given that such materials have been developed and displayed for overseas languages.

unreasonable expectations on Aboriginal peoples in revival settings about what the extent of their language knowledge should be, including (ironically) from education systems which are now more welcoming of our languages and cultures. On top of this, there is the pressure Aboriginal language teachers place on ourselves, for our community, and our ancestors. Little wonder if the thought of language assessment might push buttons. A genuine and empathetic response on the part of education authorities would be to support Aboriginal language teachers and their communities with clear, accessible and transparent exemplars of language-specific, age-appropriate programs along with models of what assessment would look like and how it would work in practise.

Assessment for the future

Aboriginal people all over Australia are taking up the openings (with perhaps some nervousness) for their languages in schools. A next step for Aboriginal languages education in NSW revival contexts could involve seeing the positives in more formal language programs which would involve assessing language learning. Assessment guides teaching in a quality language program and it enables students to count their learning towards their school qualifications. In so many ways, assessment would raise the status of Aboriginal language programs. Many of these programs are currently not delivered as an actual school subject that counts academically, for example, for the Year 10 Record of School Achievement (RoSA), and are consequently not assessed. Stepping up a language program to be a "real" school subject involves assessment and evaluation. Status as a school subject allows Aboriginal students to have success within the school system as Aboriginal children, in Aboriginal content that makes them and their families proud. Similarly, an Aboriginal language program gains a dedicated staffing entitlement and timetable slot if it fulfils the NSW requirement for high school students to complete 100 hours study of a LOTE. This requires their learning needs to be assessed and reported against the course performance descriptors on the common A-E grading scale. Furthermore, Aboriginal languages must have assessment tasks, with assessment criteria, if they are ever to count towards the Higher School Certificate (HSC), the NSW senior high school leaving qualification, which gives university admission; towards receiving Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in vocational

education; or towards other educational pathways. In short, assessment matters, assessment counts.

Teaching an Aboriginal language in NSW schools is often supported on the basis that this will engage Aboriginal students. Including assessment in Aboriginal language programs could help provide evidence of this benefit. Assessment will show the learning potential of Aboriginal students who, in the authors' experience, show a palpable desire to achieve when learning an Aboriginal language. Those same students are sadly often positioned as unsuccessful learners in classes for many and complex reasons, but often these boil down to hurdles imposed by a mismatched school curriculum that does not reflect Aboriginal students and their communities' knowledges and aspirations. Aboriginal students need visibility as capable and talented learners because that is what they are. Assessment of Aboriginal languages becomes a tool for positive feedback to these students. Without this assessment, their success is minimised - they become invisible again. Assessment has the power to assist students in realising their potential. It can make their potential visible, becoming a powerful agent for change.

The growth of school-based Aboriginal language programs in NSW will be aided by a culture of reflective teaching aided by assessment and evaluation practices. Currently, these programs are guided by a generic and underspecified curriculum, which needs to be interpreted by individual Aboriginal language teachers for their own language context. What the teachers can achieve is influenced by factors such as the revival trajectory of their language, available language resources and what works for them and their students in the classroom, pivotally their own proficiency and teaching confidence and their observations of student engagement and uptake. Any notion of "what works" clearly involves assessment, be it informal or formal. From the authors' discussions with many Aboriginal language teachers, we know that "what works" changes markedly over time. As revival work on a language advances, as language teaching resources are developed, as learner-speaker-teachers acquire more language and gain language teaching experience, so too expectations around students' potential learning gains should be recalibrated in response to these variables. Well-designed assessment provides key evidence here. For Aboriginal communities, growth in what learners can say to each other signals progress in the language revival journey.

SiLA

Aboriginal language teaching and language resource development have the potential to be a real growth industry and a career option that is appealing to Aboriginal students. Language assessment will play a part in the development of employment and professional pathways, for example, for accreditation and quality control. Academic success in an Aboriginal language would provide an entry into education and employment in the field of Aboriginal languages. The demand for Aboriginal language teaching is certainly growing, from and for Aboriginal language communities themselves, spreading outwards into schools and, in many cases, beyond to non-indigenous Australians who want to learn more about the particular place they live, and to learn it from the people whose land they are living on. Seymour's language community is seeing that many workplaces are hoping to engage in an experience with Aboriginal language learning and that there are many potential Dharug language employment pathways for young people. In my view, learning the Aboriginal language of place is also a must for the identity of Australians. All Australians should feel a sense of local pride. Within this growing Aboriginal language revival space, there is a positive and necessary place for language assessment which supports language learning and teaching and provides quality assurance about language knowledge.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the "literature of doing" school-based Aboriginal language revival programs, which are a source of joy and pride for NSW Aboriginal communities and schools alike and an important avenue for Aboriginal communities' language revival efforts. We argue that in any language program, assessment serves very ordinary – but nevertheless important – pedagogical purposes such as informing planning and teaching, and providing feedback to students. For formal language programs, assessment is also the basis for reporting for academic credit, likewise counting an Aboriginal language subject for qualifications and professional pathways. However, the underspecified nature of current national and NSW Aboriginal language revival curriculum materials falls well short of supporting such assessment practices for these developing and growing Aboriginal language revival programs and their workforce. It also leaves a big information gap for Aboriginal community members who might feel some unease about assessment and their languages. This is inequitable

in comparison to materials provided for overseas languages, and unfair given the very recent inclusion of Aboriginal language revival programs in NSW schools and the paucity of professional development opportunities available to Aboriginal languages teachers.

Stepping into this policy breach, we recommend establishing a bank of tangible model language assessment items which are suited to school-based units of work in NSW language revival programs and are amenable to adaptation by teachers to their own language and teaching context. We have provided examples of two such tasks along with our adaptation processes. We also suggest developing information about the role of assessment in language programs, using these tangible examples along with commentary from Aboriginal language teachers and students as conduits of real life experiences, practical information and guidance for the community. Finally, when an Aboriginal language community chooses to support a more formal Aboriginal language program in school, there should be systemic support for Aboriginal language teachers to develop language specific curriculum material, inclusive of assessment tasks. Putting language assessment on the menu for Aboriginal language programs enhances options for meeting Aboriginal language community aspirations now and into the future.

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