

## **First Language Instruction Case Study: Catholic School, Wadeye NT**

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic College is located in the town of Wadeye, approximately 230km southwest of Darwin. With a population of approximately 2,300 people Wadeye is the largest Indigenous community in the Northern Territory. Although the Kardu Thithay Diminin people (the local First Nations inhabitants) speak numerous Indigenous languages, a large proportion speak Murrinhpatha and the local language program at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr offers Murrinhpatha instruction in two contexts:

Murrinhpatha Language maintenance: Students in Transition, Year 1 and Year Two receive two hours of instruction in Murrinhpatha each day and students in years 3-6 receive three hours each week. We utilise the Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures (NT: ILC) curriculum. Specifically, we use the **First Language Maintenance (L1M)** pathway and the **Cultural Knowledge and Content** curriculum. In the early years, monolingual Murrinhpatha instruction accounts for 50% of instruction (alongside a two-way L1 / L2 approach) before becoming a specialist subject area from year 3 onwards. In preschool and FAFT where possible we aim to deliver all instruction in children's first language. We teach literacy through strong Murrinhpatha language and the cultural content of Wadeye and the Thamarrurr Region. Our approach is built upon an understanding that "culture is at the heart of teaching Indigenous languages and cultures in the Northern Territory" (NT: ILC, p. iv). We aim to strengthen and develop children's Murrinhpatha language and that children become literate in Murrinhpatha first with an understanding that these skills can be transferred to the acquisition of English literacy. In-class instruction in the Murrinhpatha classrooms is provided by a fully qualified Murrinhpatha speaking, First Nations teachers working in collaboration with a Murrinhpatha-speaking assistant teacher. There are eight fully qualified Murrinhpatha teachers who qualified under the discontinued, but potentially soon to be reinstated, Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program.

Bilingual / two-way teaching and learning: other learning areas such as English, Maths, Science, HASS, Health and PE, and the Arts are (where possible) delivered through pedagogies of bilingual/two-way teaching and learning. Non-local English teachers and Murrinhpatha speaking assistant teachers work together in these classrooms as team teachers. This method ensures students have opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills through contextual and linguistically responsive ways. Assistant teachers undergo regular (1-2 hours per week) professional development, usually in the form of meetings with other teachers to go through topics being taught within the classroom. Several Assistant Teachers

are currently studying different qualifications, including a certificate 2 in functional literacy, certificate 3 in early childhood education and care and certificate 4 in training and assessment.

A key component of both programs is use of locally produced Murrinhpatha language resources developed by The Wadeye Literature Production Centre (LPC). The LPC produces a wide variety of educational resources made in Wadeye, including videos, ebooks and animations related to classroom learning. The LPC was established during the era of bilingual education (1973-2000) and is one of few LPCs that remain open. It is currently funded by the Catholic Education Office and, in addition to providing resources to the school and local community, also provides employment for local First Nations people.