

Being inclusive of languages in your centre

The most comprehensive dictionary produced so far of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language is for the Warlpiri language northwest of Alice Springs. It includes over 10,000 entries.

Previously, there were hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in active use.

Some estimates put it at as many as 800, depending on how you divide languages and dialects, although most of these are lost now as there are no more remaining speakers.

If we assume there are around 800 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, each with a vocabulary of around 10,000 words, then we can have a guess at a wealth of eight million words spoken across the whole country! ([Source](#))

Check out the [50 Words Project](#) to begin your exploration of Australian and Torres Strait Islander languages all across the country. Find your local area on the map and begin to learn some words and phrases you can assimilate into your everyday practice.

Unfortunately, there's no easy or catch-all set of resources we can provide you with when it comes to introducing Australian and Torres Strait Islander languages, because each language group will have a different word (although perhaps similar) for the same thing:



So when you've made these connections with the local Country you're working and living on, return here and we'll show you how to start incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages into your centre.

Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a) (Source)

The Abecedarian Approach was originally developed in America as a way of producing significant benefits in language and learning for children from highly impoverished, multi-risk families (who were known to be at risk for poor school achievement).

3a (as it is referred to in Australia) is a set of evidence-based teaching and learning strategies for early childhood educators and parents to use with children from birth to five. Research has shown that 3a delivers enhanced educational outcomes by enriching and enhancing educator practice.

The principles behind these strategies can be applied to language acquisition and seamless incorporation of Aboriginal language in Early Learning centres – but they're also a fantastic guide to language acquisition of any kind for young learners.

The approach consists of only four elements (some more useful to use here than others):

- **Language priority:** Put language at the top of your list of things to do with your child. Language Priority can turn an ordinary event into a chance for learning.
- **Use rich, interesting language with children of every age.** Do not wait until children are “old enough” – they already are.
- **Show what words mean.** Use words in a practical context when you are interacting with those things or doing those things, rather than only abstractly trying to associate language with the written form or symbol.
- **Notice.** Tell children that you notice what they are doing, and include Aboriginal language. For example, “I notice you are playing with the boondaburra (platypus) toy.”
- **Be aware of emphasising language in every event of the day.** No matter what context you are currently engaged in with children, incorporate some Aboriginal language.
- **Conversational Reading:** like a conversation, asking the child to do something and not always following the words in a book.
 - Read anywhere and anytime. Indoors, outdoors, and in any corner of the room, not just at dedicated storytimes. See our list of [recommended texts](#), and also [explore telling stories through song, dance, art, and sand drawing](#).
 - Conversational reading goes back and forth.



- **Name anything your child sees or touches in the book. Say the keyword first.** For example, “Boondaburra. Swimming in the creek is a furry boondaburra.”
- **Point to lots of pictures. Say interesting things about them.**
- **Sometimes make “mistakes” and let the child correct you.**
- **Ask your child to “show” in interesting ways.** For example, “Put your finger under the picture of the boondaburra.”
- **Sometimes invite them to “act out” the answer to a question about the book.** For example, “How does the marlu move?”
- **While reading, leave a word or two out of a sentence. Let children supply them.**
- **Let children do something (look, point, talk) when you read together.**
- **Enriched Caregiving:** Each routine or activity of the day can include learning. Your day has many routines. Incorporate language and ‘snippets’ of learning into these routines, the same way you would English language and facts.
- **Learning Games:** fun, simple adult-child interactions that go back and forth between partners, for practising language. [Ideas can be found here.](#)

See further: [An Abecedarian Approach with Aboriginal Families and Their Young Children in Australia: Playgroup Participation and Developmental Outcomes](#)

Practical approaches for your centre:

- Place a symbol for waterhole near water bottles, running water near taps, meeting place near group time location. Incorporating culture into practice.
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