

DHURGA DICTIONARY AND LEARNER'S GRAMMAR JOURNEY

WAINE DONOVAN & KERRY BOYENGA

Waine Donovan and Kerry Boyenga give teachers an insight into the journey they took to create the Dhurga Djamanj (We all talk Dhurga) Language Program in NSW public schools. They inspire us with the story of how their dictionary, a wonderful and extremely valuable resource for anyone who wishes to learn the traditional language of the Dhurga speaking people of Yuin Country, was written . . .

The Dhurga Dictionary and Learner's Grammar (Ellis, P et al., 2020) was borne from the belief of the authors' grandmother, Ursula Connell, and mother, Patricia Ellis Sr, that education is the key to everything. So much so, that seven of the children in their immediate family are employed in education in one form or another. They strongly believed that if you have an education, you become a confident, strong contributor to society.

Up until the year 2000 at Broulee Public School, German was taught as a Language Other Than English (LOTE). German was taught to the students during their classroom teacher's RFF (Release from Face to Face). This meant that the classroom teacher could not consolidate the language that was taught during the following week.

Eventually the teacher moved away leaving the school unable to provide LOTE (Languages Other Than English).

Kerry Boyenga, an Indigenous teacher employed at the school, proposed to the then Principal, Mr Jeff Ward, that they teach a Community Language Other Than English (CLOTE). That language being Dhurga. Over the next 2 years, discussions took place about the amount of language we had and, if indeed, there was enough to teach it.

At the same time teachers from Vincentia High School wanted to do a similar project. Since Vincentia is on the cusp between Dharawal and Dhurga, they decided to teach Dhurga because there was more information about it than there was for Dharawal. Gary Worthy (brother-in-law to the authors of the dictionary) had several discussions with Kerry. Over that period of time, funding avenues were also sought by both schools. It

was then decided that the two schools would work together as partner schools and the process began.

Dhurga is still taught as a one-hundred-hour course at Vincentia High School to this day.

In 2003, staff from Broulee Public School joined Vincentia High School to research and develop a Community Language Program to teach the Dhurga Aboriginal language that was traditionally used, and is still being used, by Aboriginal communities of the South Coast including the Walbandja people of Batemans Bay, Mogo and Broulee, the Murramarang people from Ulladulla and the Brindja yuin people of Maurya.

A number of linguists supported the research, including Luise Hercus, who originally recorded Aboriginal people speaking the Dhurga language from the South Coast during the late 50s and early 60s. Her research was integral in the formation of the Dhurga Djamanj (We all talk Dhurga) Language Program at Broulee Public School. These recordings are held at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra. Broulee Public School and Vincentia High School language groups attended a two-day workshop at AIATSIS, coordinated by linguist Jackie Troy.

Ms. Jutta Besold was employed, by the joint schools, through grants received from the Department of Education and Training and The Board of Studies (now NSW Standards Authority - NESAs). Jutta was instrumental in the research and reclamation of the language. Her thesis Aboriginal Languages of the South East Coast was instrumental in the production of the Dhurga Dictionary and Learners Grammar. (Ellis, P et al., 2020).

She visited the South Australian Museum with community consent, to search for evidence of the Dhurga language. Jutta's involvement was pivotal in presenting and clarifying the sound system and orthography of the Dhurga Language.

In 2004, Pip Dundas and Susan Poetsch, from the Board of Studies, supported the program and, in 2005, Dr Jennifer Monroe, another linguist joined the team. Jennifer's role was to assist the schools with programming the language into the Human Society in Its Environment (HSIE) curriculum and putting it onto the Board of Studies Website as an example for other schools to follow. It is still on the NSW Education Standards Authority's (NESA – the current iteration of the Board of Studies) website to this day.

A number of formal and informal meetings were held with Broulee Public School, Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA), Cobowra Local Aboriginal Land Council, Djuwin Women's Lore Council and local Elders. From these meetings two golden rules were established: It was decided that the Dhurga language would only be initially taught to Aboriginal People, at a TAFE level, to ensure our people got their language back and were the ones to be employed to teach it. The decision was also made that words would not be made up to fit with the times, for example words for computer, televisions, cars etc. This has been done in other language reclamations. Those decisions were made to ensure the language was kept pure and the English versions of those words would be included in conjunction with Dhurga. As is done in other languages around the world.

In 2005, at Broulee Public School, the Dhurga Djamanj Language Program commenced, delivered by Indigenous teachers Kerry Boyenga and Waine Donovan, strongly supported by Jutta Besold and Jeff Ward. The program was designed to teach basic Aboriginal language to all students from Kindergarten to Year 6 as well as the classroom teachers.

Each Thursday, Waine taught seven of the classes ranging from Kindergarten to Year 6. Each Friday, Kerry taught the remaining seven classes ranging from Year 1 to Year 4. The program was delivered within the context

of the team-teaching model, with every class having a 30-minute lesson each week, this was then consolidated during the week by the classroom teacher.

On Thursdays and Fridays, Waine and Kerry spent the afternoon sessions developing resources for the delivery of the program. Since all of the students and teachers were beginning language learners, the same resources were developed fourteen times. Each student was given a Dhurga Workbook to put their work in, which followed them throughout the time that Dhurga was taught at the school. This gave them a resource to take home to continue using Dhurga beyond school.

Broulee Public School formed a partnership with Cobowra Local Aboriginal Land Council in Moruya, to develop resources and to provide transport for Elders and other community members to observe weekly lessons at the school. Elders often became emotional, displaying their pride and excitement in seeing their language being taught in the school. Their participation validated that the program was being implemented correctly.

The Cobowra Local Aboriginal Land Council members voted to support the use of two Dhurga phrases found by Jutta Besold at the South Australian Museum, as the chorus of the song Eurobodalla, written by local songwriter and musician Jeff Aschmann, about the Eurobodalla waterways. He wanted to include Dhurga words in the song. He was thrilled when presented with the two phrases in Dhurga. Both phrases refer to bringing fish to the camp and the children eating fish at the camp. The Year 3 and Year 4 students from Broulee Public School were recorded singing the chorus for the song.

The Broulee Public School Language Group travelled to Dubbo, Canberra and Sydney to participate in workshops and present at linkup conferences that included other language groups from all over NSW. Kerry and Waine were regularly invited to schools and community groups along the South Coast to present the Dhurga Djamanj Aboriginal Language Program and facilitate workshops. Since then, numerous schools and groups are now running their own language programs based on this model.

The Dhurga Djamanj Aboriginal Language Program was nominated by Broulee Public School staff and was successful in receiving a School Program Award in Excellence from the Eurobodalla Learning Community.

Kerry and Waine presented the Dhurga Djamanj Aboriginal Language program to the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) State meeting in 2006 and received the AECG's endorsement.

The program was also presented to, and endorsed by, the Djuwin Women's Lore Council.

In 2008, Kerry and Waine presented the Dhurga Djamanj Aboriginal Language Program at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Melbourne. The program has received several prestigious awards.

In 2008, the first Certificate One in Aboriginal Languages was delivered at the Moruya Campus of TAFE Illawarra and was called Dhurga Buradja which translates to Dhurga Tomorrow. This course was delivered by Kerry and Waine, strongly supported by Jutta Besold. Eighteen students enrolled with a 100% retention rate throughout the course. During that course, Kerry and Waine delivered the Dhurga Language to elders from their family and the local community. It was a great privilege to do that because traditionally elders from community were the teachers. Since this delivery the Dhurga Aboriginal Languages course has been delivered to communities in Moruya, Mogo, Nowra, Narooma, Jervis Bay, Braidwood and Ulladulla by Kerry Boyenga and Patricia Ellis respectively.

A Certificate Two in Aboriginal Languages is currently being developed.

Patricia Ellis completed her Masters in Aboriginal Languages course through the University of Sydney, which became the impetus for the production of the *Dhurga Dictionary and Learner's Grammar*. She worked tirelessly with Kerry and Waine, other family members and linguists from ANU, to produce the dictionary that is available today.

The authors of the *Dhurga Dictionary and Learner's Grammar* believe that it is the most valuable gift that they could give to their family and community.

REFERENCES

Besold, J. (2012). *Language recovery of the New South Wales South Coast Aboriginal languages*. The Australian National University.

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Ellis, P., Boyenga, K., & Donovan, W. (2020). *The Dhurga Dictionary and Learners Grammar*. Aboriginal Studies Press.

The dictionary is available online [here](#) and in bookstores

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

WAINE DONOVAN



Waine Donovan is currently the NSW Teachers Federation Organiser based in Queanbeyan. He is a proud Brindja Yuin man from the South Coast of New South Wales.

Waine worked for ten years at Mogo Public School as an Aboriginal Teachers Aide (ATA) later changed to Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA). Whilst at Mogo Public School, he fulfilled the role as representative for ATAs/AEAs with the PSA.

Prior to becoming an Organiser, he taught at Bodalla Public School and Broulee Public School on the South Coast for seventeen years. During the last nine years of his time teaching in schools, he was a member of the NSW Teachers Federation Executive.

Waine and his sister Kerry Boyenga both taught the Dhurga Language to all students and teachers at Broulee Public School over four and a half years as well as Certificate 1 in Aboriginal Languages at Moruya TAFE twice, to local Indigenous community members.

Waine held the position of Federation Representative in both schools that he taught in and was also a Federation Councillor for over ten years and an Annual Conference delegate during that time.

KERRY BOYENGA



Kerry Boyenga has been working in Education for over thirty-five years. She studied at the Australian Catholic University and gained an Associate Diploma in Aboriginal Education, a Bachelor of Teaching, and a Graduate Diploma in Adult Education. She has been a teacher at several schools in her local area for over twenty-three years and is now teaching the local Indigenous language, dhurga at Bodalla Public School and Moruya Public School and at night classes to adults. Kerry has represented her community at local, regional, and state levels of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) for over thirty years. Kerry describes her role as teacher of Indigenous language in local schools as her perfect job.