

Do Aboriginal Languages Matter?

This year's NAIDOC theme is '*Our Languages Matter.*' In a contemporary, digital society, do Aboriginal languages still matter? Are they archaic, museum pieces - no longer relevant?

Humans think and comprehend by using a mixture of words, images, sensations, smells and feelings. Language shapes our identity and in turn our identity shapes the language. Language is inextricably linked with our core identity.

People are hard wired to think in a language through the growth of dense neural matter during childhood. Their core identity is expressed through that language. In order for a language to be used, it also needs all the cultural information that makes it work as a communication system.

Aboriginal languages matter every bit as much now as they did 200 years ago in pre colonization times. These languages communicate self-expression, identity and cultural information. They express ideas, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and identity.

Aboriginal intellect is expressed through oral language. It's engrossed with systems for retrieval through oral sources and recall. There are folk stories, dreamtime stories, songs, dances and songlines which form the books, encyclopedias and libraries of information. Each Elder held a 'chapter of a book' through ownership of a story or song. When a group of Elders got together there would be all the 'chapters' of a book together in one place culminating in an encyclopedia of knowledge.

Songlines are an incredibly sophisticated forms of storing and sharing information. Songlines frequently pass through a dozen or more Aboriginal nations. They are a form of indigenous mapping- they carry the information about the country, water places, food sources, people, history of those areas. All this information was kept in songs. Certain people had the right to hold certain versus of the song; the versus that were about their nation's land. When all of the singers gathered, all of the versus could be sung with each song owner taking the lead when their section came up.

This way Aboriginal people would sing the country. They would sing an encyclopedia of information. This information is very important therefore Aboriginal languages matter immensely not only because they are people's core identity but because they carry a library of information and knowledge that once gone, can never be recovered.

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