

Language Policy

Brian Clive Devlin  
Samantha Disbray  
Nancy Regine Friedman Devlin *Editors*

# History of Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory

People, Programs and Policies

 Springer

# Language Policy

Volume 12

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The last half century has witnessed an explosive shift in language diversity not unlike the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, but involving now a rapid spread of global languages and an associated threat to small languages. The diffusion of global languages, the stampede towards English, the counter-pressures in the form of ethnic efforts to reverse or slow the process, the continued determination of nation-states to assert national identity through language, and, in an opposite direction, the greater tolerance shown to multilingualism and the increasing concern for language rights, all these are working to make the study of the nature and possibilities of language policy and planning a field of swift growth.

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Nancy Regine Friedman Devlin  
Editors

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# Foreword

The establishment of bilingual education programs in remote Aboriginal communities Australia's Northern Territory during the 1970s was greeted with enthusiasm by educators, who could see their potential benefits for academic outcomes, and Aboriginal leaders, whose many place-based languages are understood to be sacred, their vitality crucial to healthy relationships between peoples and country.

By the late 1970s bilingual programs were flourishing in the remote desert, the savannah lands, and the northern coastal areas, along with intensive 'both-ways' Aboriginal teacher education, and the local production of literature in dozens of languages.

Australian bilingual education became recognised as world-class, nationally and internationally, as local Aboriginal knowledge authorities, linguists, educators, educational anthropologists and curriculum designers worked together to theorise, develop, document and evaluate distinctive local practices of community education, even though from the beginning, only a relatively small number of communities and languages were chosen for program implementation.

This book tells the unique story of bilingual education in the Australian context, its remarkable achievements of intercultural collaboration and capacity development, of research and professionalisation, and of the continuing wider effects of the programs, now that official funding and policy support has largely been withdrawn.

Michael Christie

# Preface

For some time I had been thinking of writing a book that would draw on my own experiences of Northern Territory bilingual education over the last 36 years. However, a cruel event prompted an abrupt revision of that plan. On November 6, 2012, three people were killed in a crash between a cement truck and a taxi on a main road in Darwin. In addition to the unfortunate driver, two remote-area school principals were killed. One was Greg Crowe, 71, Principal of Ltyente Apurte School at Santa Teresa, south-east of Alice Springs. The other was Leah Kerinauia, Acting Principal, of Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School on Bathurst Island, about 150 kilometres north of Darwin. The principals had been on their way to a meeting at the Catholic Education Office. The principal of Murrupurtiyanuwu had been planning to present a paper advocating stronger support for the bilingual program at her school, so several people told my wife and me before we attended the funeral on Bathurst Island shortly afterwards. On the way home in our small plane, Nancy and I grieved over the loss—not only of those in the car accident, but the many friends and colleagues who had worked in bilingual programs around the Northern Territory, but who were no longer alive or very ill.

“We should think about putting together a book that gives those who are still alive a chance to tell their story”, Nancy suggested, and so the idea for this particular compiled book was born. My initial project was shelved, and we began contacting a range of people to see if they were interested in contributing. A husband-and-wife team can have some real strengths, but I felt certain that we needed the involvement of a trustworthy scholar who could identify with the vision we had vaguely projected. Samantha Disbray had worked as a regional linguist supporting bilingual programs, after many years as a community and research linguist. She had started to research bilingual education as it evolved for the Warlpiri, and other groups in Central Australia. In 2013, she approached me to seek advice about developing a history of bilingual education in the centre. At our first meeting we found much shared ground. When I proposed that we collaborate, and draw together narratives and case studies from some of the people who had committed their time and energy to the program, she readily accepted. Nancy, Samantha and I have continued to work closely on this project ever since.

Anyone presuming to compile a book such as this needs to have some credibility, some relevant experience in connection with the topic, and some professional ability to address it. Samantha's professional life of language work in Central Australia spans two decades and she has presented and published in this field. Nancy, whose expertise is inclusive and special education, has on-the-ground experience working in bilingual classrooms as a teacher. In my own case I will simply allude to 36 years of involvement in this field, successively as teacher linguist, principal, university-based teacher and researcher, consultant, policy analyst and advocate, and now principal investigator working with Michael Christie, Cathy Bow and others to develop the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages.

Whenever we enter a new discipline or field of study, especially when taking up a challenging cross-cultural role for the first time, we naturally look to sources of guidance and inspiration. In that connection I acknowledge the role played by Joshua Fishman, Jim Cummins, Stephen Harris, Joy Kinslow-Harris, M. Yunupingu, R. Marika, Marta Rado, Michael Christie and Beth Graham, in enlarging my understanding of what contribution bilingual education could potentially make in expanding life opportunities for students, parents and community members in remote Northern Territory schools. Some of those who inspired me I am no longer able to thank in person.

Darwin, Australia

Brian Clive Devlin



# Acknowledgements

We, the editors, would like to acknowledge all people who have inspired, helped and supported us with the writing of this book. First and foremost, we would like to thank many people in remote communities of the Northern Territory, with whom each of us have worked and collaborated over the years.

We would also like to thank all the contributors, as well as their families and friends who commented informally as the chapters were taking shape. It has been a real privilege to work on this book as we have received such warm and responsive feedback along the way. This was true also of the chapter reviewers, who kindly dedicated their time and expertise to critique and improve the chapters in this book. Our thanks go to Rob Amery, Paul Bubb, Jo Caffery, Margaret Carew, Kathleen Heugh, Marilyn and Peter Kell, Margaret Miller, Georgie Nutton, Cos and Sue Russo, Marion Scrymgour, Nick Thieberger, Adriano Truscott, Jill Vaughan and Don Zoellner.

A special mention must be given to Paul Black and Peter Jones for commenting on two different early versions of the whole book. Charles Darwin University and its faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts in particular provided in-kind support while we were writing. We also received a small grant from the School of Education to cover the cost of designing the maps in the book. Our thanks to Brenda Thornley for producing these maps. Michael Christie and Jim Cummins are also to be acknowledged for their support, and their contributions at the beginning and end of this volume. Chuck Grimes customised a font for us (GentiumPlusAuSIL) so that we could use Yolŋu orthography in a way that is familiar to people in several Northern Territory communities. Finally, we are grateful to Nick Melchior and Ang Lay Peng at Springer for being enthusiastic about the book right from the very beginning.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>A Thematic History of Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
	Brian Devlin, Samantha Disbray and Nancy Devlin	
<b>2</b>	<b>A Glimmer of Possibility</b> . . . . .	<b>11</b>
	Brian Devlin	
<b>3</b>	<b>Reflecting on Team Teaching</b> . . . . .	<b>27</b>
	Beth Graham	
<b>4</b>	<b>‘Bilingual Time’ at Willowra: The Beginnings of a Community-Initiated Program, 1976–1977</b> . . . . .	<b>35</b>
	Petronella Vaarzon-Morel and Jim Wafer	
<b>5</b>	<b>Lessons Learned from Bilingual Education</b> . . . . .	<b>49</b>
	Kathryn Gale	
<b>6</b>	<b>Starting Out at Bamyili: Factors Specific to the Development of the Kriol Program</b> . . . . .	<b>61</b>
	Dorothy Meehan	
<b>7</b>	<b>Boom and then Bust: Lessons Learnt from My Time Teaching in Three Bilingual Schools in the Northern Territory</b> . . . . .	<b>73</b>
	Mary-Anne Gale	
<b>8</b>	<b>The Policy Framework for Bilingual Education in Australian Indigenous Languages in the Northern Territory</b> . . . . .	<b>85</b>
	Graham McKay	
<b>9</b>	<b>Consolidation, Power Through Leadership and Pedagogy, and the Rise of Accountability, 1980–1998</b> . . . . .	<b>101</b>
	Samantha Disbray and Brian Devlin	

<b>10</b>	<b>The Development of Successful Bilingual, Biliterate and Bicultural Pedagogy: Place for Tiwi Teachers and Tiwi Language in Learning</b> . . . . .	113
	Frances Murray	
<b>11</b>	<b>Developing Local Curriculum Materials—Learning Metaphors, Insightful Collaborations, Community Involvement</b> . . . . .	127
	Michael Christie	
<b>12</b>	<b>The Quest for Community Control at Yirrkala School</b> . . . . .	141
	Trevor Stockley, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Dhungala Munungurr, Multhara Munungurr, Greg Wearne, W.W. Wunungmurra, Leon White and Yalmay Yunupiju	
<b>13</b>	<b>Language Revitalisation in a Bilingual Program—The Case of Numbulwar School</b> . . . . .	149
	Therese Carr, Melanie Wilkinson and Philippa Stansell	
<b>14</b>	<b>Threatened Closure: Resistance and Compromise (1998–2000)</b> . . . . .	165
	Brian Devlin	
<b>15</b>	<b>Defending Our Program at Wadeye</b> . . . . .	179
	Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe	
<b>16</b>	<b>Sources of Evidence on Student Achievement in Northern Territory Bilingual Education Programs</b> . . . . .	185
	Brian Devlin	
<b>17</b>	<b>Policy Change in 2008: Evidence-Based or a Knee-Jerk Response?</b> . . . . .	203
	Brian Devlin	
<b>18</b>	<b>The Areyonga Case: <i>Utulu Kutju Nintiringanyi</i> ‘Learning Together’</b> . . . . .	219
	Leonard Freeman, Neil Bell, Tarna Andrews and Peggy Gallagher	
<b>19</b>	<b>Policy and Practice Now</b> . . . . .	237
	Samantha Disbray	
<b>20</b>	<b>Starting Out at Yuendumu School—Teaching in Our Own Language</b> . . . . .	247
	Tess Ross and Wendy Baarda	
<b>21</b>	<b>Stories from Central Australian Indigenous Community Schools in the Pintupi-Luritja Region</b> . . . . .	259
	Meg Mooney	
<b>22</b>	<b>Yipirinya School: That Generation, This Generation</b> . . . . .	269
	Inge Kral	

**23 The Program at Wadeye, Past and Present. . . . .** 285  
Deminhimpuk Francella Bunduck and Teresa Ward

**24 We Did It! A Case Study of Bilingual/Bicultural Education  
at Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School. . . . .** 293  
Ailsa Purdon and Imelda Palmer

**25 Forty Years on: Seeking a Way for the Future—*Dhawal’yurr*  
*Yuwalkku Dhukarr*. Reflections on Bilingual Education at  
Shepherdson College, Galiwin’ku. . . . .** 307  
Noela Hall

**26 Reminiscences: Working Together in a Bilingual Classroom. . . . .** 325  
Nancy R.F. Devlin and Dorothy Gapany

**27 Reflections on My Years at Elcho and Mäpuru (1978–2015). . . . .** 331  
John Greatorex

**28 Digital Futures for Bilingual Books . . . . .** 347  
Catherine Bow, Michael Christie and Brian Devlin

**Afterword . . . . .** 355

**References . . . . .** 363

**Glossary . . . . .** 365

**Places Index. . . . .** 367

**NT Languages Index. . . . .** 369

**Other Languages Index . . . . .** 371

**Subject Index. . . . .** 373

## Government Support for NT Bilingual Education: A Short Timeline

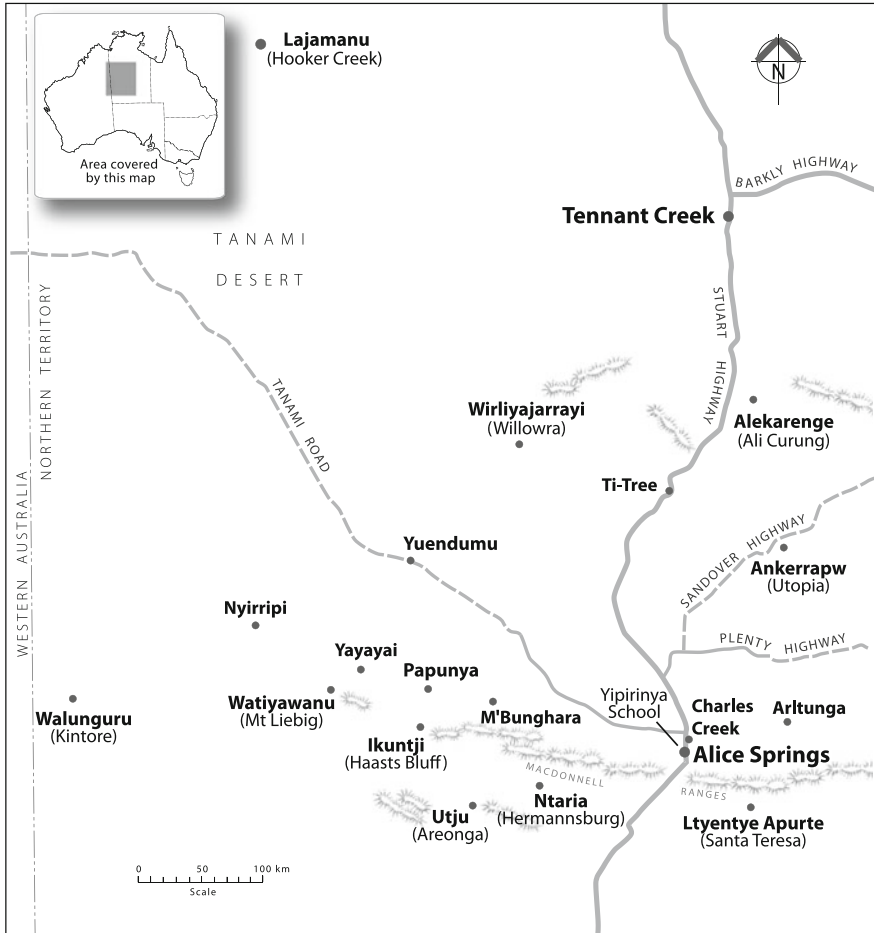
- 1950 The Australian Prime Minister and other key officials acknowledged that bilingual education would be ‘desirable’ for remote Aboriginal students in some circumstances (Devlin, Chap. 2, this volume)
- 1972 The Australian Government launched a plan to give “Aboriginal children living in distinctive Aboriginal communities ... their primary education in Aboriginal languages” (Whitlam, 1972)
- 1973 The Australian Government set up the first five pilot bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory at Angurugu, Areyonga, Hermannsburg, Milingimbi and Warruwi acting on advice from the Watts Committee and with considerable assistance from Missionary linguists. The first languages chosen for use in these programs were Anindilyakwa, Arrarnta, Gupapuyŋu, Maung and Pitjantjatjara. Head office assistance was provided from Darwin
- 1974 Six additional programs were established: St Therese’s (now Murrupurtiyanuwu), at Shepherdson College on Galiwin’ku, Oenpelli (Gunbalanya), Pularumpi (formerly Garden Point), Yayayi (a Papunya outstation), Yirrkala and Yuendumu (see Table 2.1, Chap. 2, this volume). The languages were Gumatj, Kunwinjku, Pintupi-Luritja, Tiwi, and Warlpiri.
- In December Cyclone Tracy destroyed much of Darwin, killing 71 people. Half of the senior Bilingual Education advisory staff left Darwin.
- 1975 Bilingual programs were commenced at Pularumpi (formerly Garden Point) in Tiwi and English. Experimental oral Kriol pre-school programs were authorised at Bamyili (now Barunga) and Roper River (Ngukurr).
- 1976 Programs commenced at Barunga (formerly Bamyili) in Kriol, at Haasts Bluff in Pintupi-Luritja, at Numbulwar in Nunggubuyu (Wubuy) and Wadeye in Murrinh Patha (See Table 4.3 in Devlin 2011 for more information).

- On August 16 the Secretary of the Department of Education directed that further expansion be limited, that existing programs be consolidated and evaluated. This began a period of consolidation.
- 1977 New bilingual programs were introduced at Umbakumba in Anindilyakwa and at Willowra in Warlpiri
- 1978 On July 1 the Australian Government ceded its control over education to the Northern Territory.
- A new bilingual program in Ndjébbana commenced at Maningrida.
- 1979 A Pitjantjatjara-English bilingual program began at Docker River.
- 1981 Bilingual Pintupi/Luritja programs commenced at M’Bunghara Homeland Centre and Waityawanu.
- 1982 Lajamanu (formerly Hooker Creek) began a Warlpiri-English bilingual program.
- The NT Department of Education revised the eight aims of bilingual education (see McKay, Chap. 8, this volume), shifting the focus to English literacy and Mathematics.
- 1983 Walungurru (Kintore) began a Pintupi/Luritja program. Yipirinya became an official independent Aboriginal school with bilingual programs in Arrernte, Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri and Western Arrarnta.
- 1984 At Papunya a Pintupi-Luritja program was started.
- 1986 Maningrida added a second bilingual program in Burarra.
- 1987 A Pintupi-Luritja program commenced at Mt Liebig.
- 1989 Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa) began a bilingual program in Eastern Arrernte.
- 1996 A Nunggubuyu program was re-established at Numbulwar.
- 1998 On December 1 1998 the Northern Territory Government (NTG) announced on that it would be phasing out specific purpose funding for bilingual education programs. This decision was strongly contested.
- 1999 A review of Aboriginal education (Collins and Lea 1999) was commissioned in response to the outcry which followed the NTG’s 1998 decision. Some bilingual programs were discontinued. Others were rebadged as ‘two-way learning’ programs.
- 2005 The Northern Territory Government announced in August that it was putting bilingual education back on the agenda (Devlin 2009)
- 2006 The Education Department developed a strategic plan which aimed to expand the Bilingual Program (NT DEET 2006).
- 2008 On September 12 the first set of national skills test results (NAPLAN) were released. On October 14 the Minister for Education and Training announced that all schooling in Northern Territory schools was to be conducted in English only for the first four hours of every school day. Step-model biliteracy programs would no longer be supported. All schools were directed to teach in English for the first four hours of every school day.

- 2009 The NT Government introduced the 4 hours of English policy. All schooling in Northern Territory schools was to be conducted in English only for the first four hours of every school day, including pre-schools where Aboriginal students understood little or no English (Devlin 2011; Simpson et al. 2009)
- 2015 The Northern Territory Department of Education appointed a Bilingual Education Coordinator to oversee remaining programs.  
On May 15 Country Liberals Government launched a 10 year Education Strategy, introducing the US-based Direct Instruction program into remote NT Aboriginal schools.
- Note* Interested readers are advised that a much more detailed timetable of events is available online at [foibl.net.au](http://foibl.net.au).

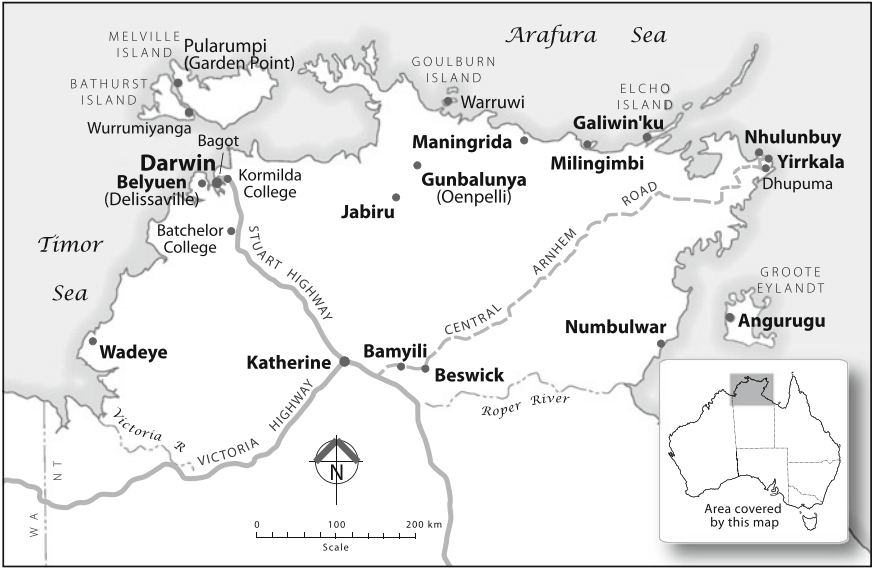
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**Map 1** Central Australian region





**Map 2** Northern NT region (or ‘Top End’), Australia

# Editors and Contributors

## About the Editors

**Brian Clive Devlin** is Honorary Professorial Fellow at Charles Darwin University. Formerly Associate Professor of Bilingual Education and Applied Linguistics at CDU, he was also Visiting Professor and first holder of the Dr. R. Marika Chair in Australian and Indigenous Studies at Cologne University, Germany (October 2009–February 2010). He is now helping to build a digital archive of the texts produced in the Literature Production Centres (LPCs) during the bilingual era of education in the NT (see [www.cdu.edu.au/laal](http://www.cdu.edu.au/laal)). In the 1970s and 1980s he worked as teacher-linguist, principal and principal education officer (Bilingual) in the Northern Territory Department of Education. His research interests include the use of vernacular languages in educational programs, interactive e-learning for isolated communities and bilingual education policy in the NT.

**Samantha Disbray** is a Research Fellow at Charles Darwin University and the Australian National University, researching language in education and carrying out language documentation in the Northern Territory. She has worked as a community and research linguist in Central Australia and has carried out language documentation and resource development work with speakers of traditional and contemporary Aboriginal languages. While employed as regional linguist for the Northern Territory Department of Education, she supported schools with bilingual and Indigenous language and culture programs. From this experience she became fascinated with the history of the bilingual program, and its place in the history of education and languages policy in Australia.

**Nancy Regine Friedman Devlin** is a lecturer at Charles Darwin University in the School of Education. She works primarily with students in the professional teaching degree programs. Her areas of interest are focused on providing an education for students that will enable them to have choices and feel good about themselves. She joined CDU in 2002 to help establish certification for students interested in

education support due to her long time association working with teaching assistants in government and non-government schools, in bilingual and special education programs in Australia and the United States. She has also taught in China, Germany and Papua New Guinea.

## Contributors

**Neil Beil** was a head teacher and teacher-linguist in the bilingual education program at Areyonga school from 1975 to 1981 when he became the local member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. After retirement from the legislative assembly, his legal practice and associated interpreting work have involved several matters affecting the Areyonga community.

**Catherine Bow** is a linguist with research experience in both descriptive and applied linguistics. She has described the sound system of an African language, investigated language development in children with impaired hearing, explored endangered language documentation, and researched the language and communication needs of international medical graduates. She has worked as a trainer and coach for language learners, and currently works as project manager for the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages at Charles Darwin University.

**Wendy Baarda** started work as a post-primary teacher in Yuendumu school in 1973. The bilingual program started in June 1974. She was given a position with the title, Coordinator of the Bilingual Program for 2 years. Since then she has been employed as teacher-linguist, senior teacher early childhood, outstation teacher, and mentor until retiring as an Education Department teacher in 2005. She continued to work voluntarily in the printer and also supporting singing of Warlpiri songs in classes. She then was given a shared position of literacy worker. She is now employed by the school council to continue this work.

**Deminhimpuk Francella Bunduck** belongs to the Kardu Yek Neninh clan. Her own language is Magati Ke and she is also a speaker of Murrinhpatha—the language of her mother, her husband and children. Deminhimpuk worked as a teaching assistant at OLSH Thamarrurr Catholic College, Wadeye then trained at Batchelor College and later obtained a teaching degree through Charles Darwin University. She has been teaching in the vernacular side of the bilingual program at Wadeye for about 20 years and continues whilst also working as a writer in the literature production centre.

**Therese Carr** worked as a teacher-linguist at Numbulwar 2003–2008. It was the first time she had lived and worked consistently by the sea and she thoroughly enjoyed learning about the coastal foods and lifestyle, as well as an exciting new language. Before that she worked in Western Australia, first with language workers on small community-based language projects for the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, then supporting school-based language revitalisation programs in remote Kimberley communities. After completing further research studies with an

in-depth study of Wunambal, she taught in Batchelor Institute's Diploma of Languages and Linguistics program.

**Michael Christie** started work as a teacher at Milingimbi in Arnhem Land in 1972. He was appointed as the first teacher-linguist when the bilingual program started in 1975. He took up the position of teacher-linguist at Yirrkala in 1986 before moving to Darwin to set up the Yolju Studies program at Charles Darwin University in 1994. He is currently Professor in the Northern Institute, heading up the Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance research group, working on collaborative research and consultancies in a range of areas including health communication, 'both-ways' education, resource management, digital technologies, and contemporary governance.

**Jim Cummins** is Professor Emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. His research focuses on literacy development in educational contexts characterised by linguistic diversity. In numerous articles and books he has explored the nature of language proficiency and its relationship to literacy development with particular emphasis on the intersections of societal power relations, teacher-student identity negotiation, and literacy attainment. He is the author (with Margaret Early) of *Identity Texts: The Collaborative Creation of Power in Multilingual Schools* (Trentham Books).

**Leonard Freeman** has worked in Indigenous community schools in the Northern Territory as a classroom teacher, teacher-linguist and principal. He began teaching at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School in 2005 before taking up the position of teacher-linguist, then principal at Areyonga School. In 2011 Leonard moved to North East Arnhem Land, where he was school Principal of Yirrkala School and then Baniyala Garrangali School. Leonard recently completed a thesis as part of Masters of Education (International) at Charles Darwin University, which confronts and exposes the flaws in the 'evidence', which constructs the deficit positioning of the Indigenous-language-speaking students within today's education system.

**Kathryn Gale** is currently employed as Deputy Principal at Worawa Aboriginal College and has previously worked as an Education Advisor in the Stronger Smarter National Partnerships Program at Independent Schools Victoria. She has worked as a teacher, teacher-linguist, education advisor, cross-cultural trainer and training manager in primary, secondary and tertiary education, as well as in non-government organisations. She has worked across three states, and has over 40 + years' experience in education.

**Mary-Anne Gale** is a research fellow at the University of Adelaide, working in language revival, particularly with Ngarrindjeri people of southern South Australia. In recent years she wrote training courses for Aboriginal adults wanting to learn and teach their own languages. She has experience as a teacher or teacher-linguist in Northern Territory bilingual schools, where she acquired skills and understandings about Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal education, working with Yolju people at Milingimbi and Yirrkala schools, and Warlpiri people at Willowra. Mary-Anne

has also learnt much working with Pitjantjatjara people, the last remaining fluent Aboriginal language speakers in South Australia.

**Beth Graham** began teaching Indigenous children at Yirrkala in 1963. Returning in the early 1970s she worked with a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers to implement bilingual education. In 1979 as a Bilingual Education adviser she focused on the early years of schooling, publishing widely and developing curriculum in all areas. Postgraduate study enabled her to extend, clarify and consolidate this work. Throughout these years she refined a team teaching model to empower Indigenous teachers and enable more effective student learning. Her *Team Teaching* handbook allowed schools could do their own professional development. After retirement she still campaigns for bilingual education.

**Dorothy Gapany** has lived and worked at Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island all her life. She worked at Shepherdson College for a number of years. She has also helped Alan Maratja, husband and Margaret Miller on bible translation for many years. For the past few years she has been working as a liaison officer in a program for children from birth to school age. As well as this she has been continuing her religious studies at Nungalinya College in Darwin. She is the mother, grandmother and great grandmother of many children and is a highly respected member of her local community.

**John Greatorex** began teaching at Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku in 1978, later working as specialist ESL teacher, teacher-linguist and Assistant Principal. After leaving the Northern Territory Education Department in 2003 he was appointed Coordinator of the Yolŋu Studies program, Charles Darwin University (CDU). In 2015 he left CDU and continued working as a member of a team collaborating with Mäpuru families to establish a school. He has a particular interest in schools, schooling, education and governance in contexts in particular where Yolŋu are living on their ancestral estates.

**Noela Hall** has over forty years' experience in education in two states. She has worked as a teacher, teacher-linguist, teacher-librarian, tutor, study skills advisor and lecturer in Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education contexts. She taught at Shepherdson College on Elcho Island for 11 years between 1972 and 1985 and returned to teach there again from 2008 to 2015. Highlights of her teaching career have been opportunities to work with Yolŋu teachers, seeing their delight as they have become more confident in their ability to express themselves through their developing ability to read and write in their 'very own' languages.

**Inge Kral** has some thirty years' experience in Aboriginal education as an educator and researcher. She worked as a teacher-linguist in bilingual education during the 1980s and 1990s. She started work at Yipirinya School in 1987. She has been a researcher at Australian National University for the past decade where her research in linguistic anthropology has mostly taken place in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands communities in the Western Desert of Australia. She is now a Research Fellow at

the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and the Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language.

**Graham McKay** carried out linguistic research to establish the Ndjébbana Bilingual Education Program at Maningrida, NT from 1975 to 1982. He then trained Aboriginal literacy workers at the School of Australian Linguistics in Batchelor NT until 1985. He taught linguistics at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia 1986–2011. He is currently Dean of Humanities and Education at St John’s University of Tanzania, with a concurrent honorary appointment at Edith Cowan University. His publications include studies of the Rembarrnga and Ndjébbana languages of Arnhem Land, a review of Indigenous language maintenance in Australia, and papers on Indigenous languages policy.

**Dorothy Meehan** taught early childhood classes in Melbourne. In the Western Highlands of PNG she was involved in Enga vernacular literacy and ESL programs in the primary school, and Pidgin adult literacy classes. As teacher-linguist at Barunga in the NT she coordinated the setting up of the Kriol Bilingual Education program. In Darwin at Kormilda College she was a language/literacy advisor. After retiring in 1997 to take care of her father, who had Alzheimer’s, she helped with the home-schooling of her grandchildren. She remains keenly interested in the increasing recognition of Aboriginal creoles and of current developments in their use in the classroom.

**Meg Mooney** was the last Literature Production Supervisor for the Pintupi/Luritja bilingual program for Papunya, Mt Liebig, Kintore and Haasts Bluff Schools. She was based at Papunya School from 1987 to 1990. Since 1998, Meg has worked for Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs, from 2002 working on Land & Learning, which supports the teaching of Indigenous ecological knowledge linked to Western science in Indigenous community schools. Meg has worked with Land & Learning in remote community schools all over central Australia. She was originally a geologist and is also a poet.

**Frances Murray** began working in the NT in 1978 at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic Bilingual School. She has worked as a teacher, teacher-linguist, lecturer in teacher education, curriculum advisor and writer/developer, across primary, secondary and tertiary education in government and non-government school sectors. She currently works as an education consultant in multilingual education, providing professional development for teachers in English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D), teaching in bilingual education and cross-cultural training, as well as school policy development and planning for inclusive practices for minority-language-speaking students.

**Ngardinithi Tobias Nganbe** is a Rak Kirnmu man whose language is Murrinhpatha. He worked as an assistant teacher and then trained at Batchelor College and later obtained a teaching degree through Charles Darwin University. Before the bilingual program began at Wadeye he did a literacy course with the SIL and wrote much contributing to the pre readers, primers and other reading material that was used at the beginning of the program. He worked as a teacher and later

became co-principal for a number of years before becoming head of Culture and Language at OLSH Thamarrurr Wadeye up to his retirement three years ago. He is now the CEO of Thamarrurr Development Corporation.

**Ailsa Purdon** has been working in multilingual and intercultural education for nearly 40 years in Australia and overseas as a teacher, curriculum consultant and teacher educator. She is currently based in Darwin, Northern Territory and is working on policy and curriculum for the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in the NT.

**Tess Ross** worked in the bilingual program at Yuendumu for over 20 years. She has taught at every level in the school from early childhood to secondary age classes. She resigned from school after losing her sister and worked for Night Patrol for about 10 years. She has been back at school working as a literacy worker for the last 3 years. Tess is a very knowledgeable and respected woman in Warlpiri communities.

**Philippa Stansell** has been working in the Northern Territory, in remote Indigenous community schools, since 1998. She was first employed as a teacher linguist in the Warlpiri language maintenance program at Wirliyajarrayi (Willowra) in the Tanami desert. She then transferred into the same role at Numbulwar, on the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, within the Wubuy language revitalisation program. She currently works with Early Years students in Mangarrayi country, at Jilkminggan, on the banks of the Roper River.

**Trevor Stockley** is a Gumatj speaker who worked for 14 years at Yirrkala and Laynhapuy Homeland schools (NT), focusing on Yolngu control, the inclusion of Yolngu knowledge in a balanced curriculum, implementing Yolngu ways of working, and community-based teacher training. He currently works in North Queensland as a specialist in Aboriginal languages, teacher and program writer for the Warrgamay and Gudjal language revival programs.

**Petronella Vaarzon-Morel** (M.A. Indiana University) is an anthropologist with long-term experience working with Indigenous people in Central Australia. Her association with Warlpiri began in 1976 when she taught with Jim Wafer at Willowra School. Since then she has worked closely with Willowra families on land claims, oral history (*Warlpiri Women's Voices*), cultural mapping and other Warlpiri life projects. Currently, she is Research Associate at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the University of Sydney, where she is working on the Central Land Council cultural media project. She is also a lecturer in anthropology and Indigenous art at New York University Sydney.

**Jim Wafer** began working with Aboriginal languages in 1976, when he and Petronella Vaarzon-Morel worked at the two-teacher Warlpiri school of Willowra, 350 km north-west of Alice Springs. From 1978 he coordinated the Language Program at the Institute for Aboriginal Development, in Alice Springs, then in 1981 moved to the USA to study anthropology at Indiana University, graduating with a

Ph.D. in 1989. He is currently a conjoint senior lecturer at the University of Newcastle and co-author of *A Handbook of Aboriginal languages of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory* (2008).

**Teresa Ward** locally known as ‘Namapen’, is the teacher-linguist at OLSH Thamarrurr Catholic College at Wadeye. She worked at Wadeye (then known as Port Keats) from 1978 to 1983, and again from 2009 to the present. Previously at Bathurst Island she produced ‘Toward an Understanding of the Tiwi Language/Culture Context’, contributed to a Tiwi dictionary, and initiated the collections which for Patakijiyali Museum. She also spent 12 years in Timor Leste, with the Mary MacKillop East Timor Mission, working on a Tetun literacy program for primary schools. Tess trained as a teacher then studied linguistics with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and missiology and anthropology, and applied linguistics at Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University).

**Melanie Wilkinson** spent 1991–2009 working as a linguist for the East Arnhem region, based in the Northern Territory Education Department’s regional office in Nhulunbuy. During those years she worked closely with the development of the revitalisation program at Numbulwar school. She recalls a stark contrast in the availability of technology over this time, beginning with tracking down the only A3 copier in the community in 1991 to having access to the internet. But light plane still remains the regular means of travel between Nhulunbuy and Numbulwar. She is currently based in Darwin in a support role for Indigenous Languages and Cultures and Bilingual programs.



# Chapter 1

## A Thematic History of Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory

Brian Devlin, Samantha Disbray and Nancy Devlin

We are extremely impressed with the Northern Territory Bilingual Program—so much so that we are inclined to assert that this program constitutes one of the most exciting educational events in the modern world. It is, of course just the beginning and had a long and difficult road ahead of it. However, an increasing number of dedicated and highly competent Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people are becoming committed to the program and devoting the total range of talents to it.

O’Grady and Hale (1974)

In 1950 Robert Menzies, then Prime Minister of Australia, was party to a little known, high-level agreement which acknowledged that in some circumstances a bilingual approach in education might be the best way to reach more traditionally oriented Aboriginal students in remote areas of the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia. Some 23 years later a second prime minister, Gough Whitlam, publicly announced that he was endorsing this approach, and wanted to see it implemented. This set in motion an eventful sequence of developments. Five pilot programs were initially set up. By 1995 there were 21 programs in individual schools operating (Northern Territory Department of Education 1997). Now only a handful of programs are left. Some would go further and say that the ‘Bilingual Education Program’, the coordinated, territory-wide initiative that was managed by the Bilingual Education Unit staff in Darwin is now finished (see Graham, this volume).

This book traces the history of bilingual education in the NT. In a period of great educational innovation and enthusiasm 29 schools in the NT designed and implemented bilingual education programs in local Aboriginal languages and English. Some endured, others were short-lived. Surviving or thriving in different places and at different times, they were variously celebrated, nurtured, castigated and/or abandoned. Most were administered by the NT Department of Education. However, bilingual programs also ran in a number of Catholic schools and in one independent school.

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The thematic history in this book draws together local perspectives of practitioners and researchers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. These are sometimes aligned with, sometimes at odds with, top-down education policy that set the parameters for action. The fine-grained local accounts detail bottom-up aspirations, achievements and reflections, which have been little documented until now, but are crucial to a full understanding of the diverse motives and meanings that have guided different players, and the deep contestations that would eventually lead to the demise of most bilingual programs. For the NT Education Department bilingual programs were deemed the best way of delivering learning for Aboriginal children in remote schools, within the limits of the resources it was prepared to commit to the task. They were designed to allow students ‘the best of both worlds’, underestimating the complexity of such a vision (Department of Education 1973; Northern Territory Department of Education 1986). The committed efforts of many educators, language workers, administrators, linguists and community members, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are a critical part of this history, and their accounts are detailed in the chapters that follow. They provide important insights into teaching and learning, as well as the challenges in developing effective bilingual education programs.

But the history of bilingual education must be set as part of a larger story of Aboriginal people’s struggle to take back control of their lives, to express and live their own identities, and to organise their communities according to their values and aspirations. The active involvement in education that bilingual education programs afforded Aboriginal people was an important manifestation of this transformational moment in Australia’s history. Schools were a site for Aboriginal adults, not only to take an active role in educating their children, but also to take up meaningful employment, as well as leadership and authority roles. This larger struggle was for the right to choose to use their own languages in formal education settings, to retain and pass on knowledge and cultural practices, which were all part of determining how they should live as Aboriginal people.

The bilingual education movement in the NT was made possible by forward thinking writers and policy makers in the 1950s and 1960s and it came to the fore in an era of Land Rights, the outstation movement and the establishment of Aboriginal corporations, which provided housing, infrastructure, health and legal services for Aboriginal people (Burgmann 2003). The radical change in Australian Aboriginal Affairs policy from assimilation to self-determination created new ideological and implementational spaces for innovation in language policy (Hornberger and Johnson 2007, discussed below) along with other domains. It was part of a larger national, indeed international, movement with social and ideological shifts evident in the 1960s, triggered by decolonisation movements in the Third World and Civil Rights movements in the First World (Clark 2008). Just as these global moves allowed the openings for bilingual education in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory, later global shifts, both political and economic, such as the rise of neo-liberal economic policy, and the consequent emergence of a ‘culture of accountability’ (Biesta 2004), posed challenges to bilingual programs in remote Aboriginal schools.

This book is organised chronologically and thematically, with the early period of bilingual education set as an ‘establishment phase’, followed by a period of ‘consolidation’, then as pressure mounted against the program, a ‘resistance’ phase. In the final section, chapters offer reflections across time, to the present and into the future. However, a number of themes cross cut the historical periods, increasing in prominence for different stakeholders at different times. These include human rights, maintaining language and culture and staff development along with different notions of a good education, defined by the Education Department as one that provides the best of both worlds, along with academic performance and relatedly accountability and financial sustainability.

## **A Thematic History Told Through an Ethnographic Lens**

Many of the chapters in this book reflect an ethnographic approach to language policy; that is, one which is situated, systematic, and grounded in long-term, in-depth, first-hand accounts which aim to uncover the situated logic of implicit and explicit policy making (McCarty 2011, p. 3). These explain, on the ground, “why practice takes shape the way it does” (Stritikus and Wiese 2006, p. 21). The complex historical moves of practice and policy that we observe in bilingual education efforts in the NT are the outcome of multiple, intersecting levels; not only do they result from the interactions between diverse individuals and ideological positions, but they are inevitably linked to the actions and orientations of disparate communities of practice, and the discourses and actions on the national stage as well as global forces beyond (Combs et al. 2011; McCarty 2011).

Policy involves action and power, underpinned by different players’ ideological positioning of particular languages, their value and their speakers, which often create and reveal contradictions and tensions between policy and practice. Policy can be the decisions and decrees made from the ‘top-down’, but also the responses and actions from educators and language speakers from the ‘bottom up’. The chapters in this book explore these levels and their intersections, in some cases theorised by the author, and in others this is implicit in the personal/professional practitioner account.

Critical approaches to language policy and planning emphasise power dynamics. Tollefson, for instance, posits language policies “as mechanisms for creating and sustaining systems of inequality that benefit wealthy and powerful individuals, groups, institutions, and nation-states” (2013, p. 27). Furthermore, dominant-group language ideologies act as templates, which policymakers use to justify policies that restrict educational access, and privilege particular ethnolinguistic groups, assigning value to certain language practices, to certain languages and their speakers, with resultant ‘invisible’ discourses and policies that keep less prestigious languages and their speakers invisible (cf Blommaert 1999; Shohamy 2006; in relation to Australia, Truscott and Malcolm 2010).

Other research has investigated decentralising practices such as the power of educators and other language policy actors to develop and satisfy local policy goals (Flores and García 2014; García et al. 2008; García and Menken 2015; Hornberger 2002, 2005; Hornberger and Johnson 2007). Such approaches capture both the power of institutions and the agentive role of local educators, language speakers and others, as they respond to the settings they encounter (see the studies in García and Menken 2010, 2015). In the NT, moves to develop local curricula and supporting materials and to take up leadership roles in schools are instances of this (see chapters in Parts 3 and 4). Educators themselves open up learning opportunities by recognising, respecting and drawing on the identities, language repertoires and multilingual practices of learners and developing new responses and practices (Flores and García 2014; Gutiérrez et al. 1999). Team-teaching and the development of Aboriginal pedagogy provide examples from the NT bilingual program (in this volume, see in particular Graham, Murray and Hall on team teaching and Disbray and Devlin, Christie and Purdon on local Aboriginal pedagogies).

However, the relationships and practices teachers created at the local level were perennially fragile. In many cases, programs were so often subject to the whim of school principals. Menken and Solorza (2015) have investigated the role of school administrators in shaping language policies and practice, noting that “principals in particular wield tremendous power in determining programming for emergent bilinguals. [...] and that] school leaders act as gatekeepers for reform policies, playing a vital role in their translation, interpretation, support, and/or neglect in schools” (p. 18). Similarly, Johnson and Johnson (2014) detail the dynamics in the micro-meso-macro levels in language policy and practice processes. They investigate the implementation of bilingual programs at the school district level in response to state-level policy in one US education jurisdiction and highlight the role of ‘arbiters’, administrators and officials at the different levels, as distinct from educators. The attitudes, power and agency of district-level administration staff is found to be pivotal in the implementation of programs.

Theorising the interactions between multilingual policy, competing discourses and actions, Hornberger and colleagues draw on a model of ‘ideological spaces’ and ‘implementational spaces’ (2002, 2005; Hornberger and Johnson 2007). Ideological spaces contain attitudes, understandings, awareness and discourses, which can be triggered and promoted or restricted by multilingual language and education policies. Pro-multilingual and minority language education and languages policy in South Africa and Bolivia, for instance, open ideological spaces for multilingualism, while the enactment of the 2002 *No Child Left Behind Act* in the US, with its monolingual focus, closes this space (Hornberger 2005, p. 606; Menken and Solorza 2015).

The space in which practice takes place, the ‘implementational space’, informs and is informed by ideology. Implementational space extends “beyond the classroom [...], at every level from face-to-face interaction [...] in communities to national educational policies and indeed to globalised economic relations” (Hornberger 2005, p. 606). Both educators and language users are agents in the interaction between the two spaces, as they can

fill up implementational spaces with multilingual educational practices, whether with intent to occupy ideological spaces opened up by policies or to prod actively toward more favorable ideological spaces in the face of restrictive policies. Ideological spaces created by language and education policies can be seen as carving out implementational spaces at classroom and community levels, but implementational spaces can also serve as wedges to pry open ideological ones (Hornberger 2005, p. 606).

The situation for bilingual education in remote NT schools is no less complex, with competing discourses, players and system elements creating, opening and closing spaces for bilingual teaching and learning.

## **The Northern Territory: History and Languages**

The NT is a vast, ecologically and linguistically diverse area of Australia. It covers an area of 1.33 million km<sup>2</sup>, and includes the arid zones in Central Australia, the semi-arid and sub-tropical plains of the Barkly region, and the tropics in the north, a region dominated by a wet/dry season climate (Williams et al. 2001). Of its 227,900 inhabitants 30 per cent are Aboriginal, the highest proportion of Aboriginal people in any of Australia's states or Territories. Approximately 140,000 inhabitants live in one of the four urban centres (106, 255 in greater Darwin, 24,208 in Alice Springs, 6,094 in Katherine, 3,061 in Tennant Creek (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Most of the remaining population lives in remote and very remote communities, where Aboriginal people continue to live on their traditional country or places their forebears were affiliated. Some were forcibly to in the early settlement of the NT. The distances between communities, and between communities and regional centres, can be hundreds of kilometres, accessible only by dirt road, or light airplanes for parts of the year. Remote community populations overwhelmingly comprise local Aboriginal people. A small proportion of non-Aboriginal people live in these communities, usually for relatively short periods of time, to access employment. Some, such as a few non-Aboriginal authors in this volume (Wendy Baarda, John Grotorex, Noela Hall, Teresa Ward, and Michael Christie) have lived for decades in these communities.

The history of colonisation in the NT is relatively short. Early explorations took place in the 1840s–1860s, with Darwin established as a permanent settlement in 1869, just as the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line began. Completed in 1871, this line ran north to south, linking Darwin in the north to Port Augusta on the coast of South Australia (Reynolds 1987). The expansion of the pastoral and mining industry in the inland followed with disastrous impacts for many Aboriginal people (Jones 1987). The history of frontier conflict and massacres is recent and in many locations people were forcibly resettled, often among speakers of unfamiliar languages (Read and Read 1991). Many Aboriginal people managed to stay on their traditional country in remote locations, with less contact and incursion than in more urbanised locations, thereby supporting the continued use of traditional languages.

According to the NT Interpreter Service, more than 100 Aboriginal languages or dialects are currently known or spoken (Aboriginal Interpreter Service 2015). Rates of bi-/multilingualism in Aboriginal languages in the NT are significantly higher than elsewhere in Australia, due to the relatively late patterns of European settlement, and the remoteness and isolation of much of the NT, whereas many Aboriginal languages and their speakers were decimated across Australia. In 2015 of the 14 languages still spoken by all generations and by more than 900 people in Australia, 12 are in the NT (Biddle 2014). Most are languages that were used for instructional purposes in bilingual education programs. However, the impacts of colonisation have meant that many languages, including these ‘strong’ ones, have undergone language shift and change.

The Northern Territory was still very much a frontier province when the bilingual program started. In 1974 its population was just 105,000, falling temporarily to 90,000 in 1975 after a devastating cyclone razed the Territory’s capital, Darwin, in December 1974 (Population Studies Group 2008). In locations outside of the main towns infrastructure was undeveloped, with few covered roads, and communication limited to a communal radio, a weekly mail plane and no television transmission. The colonisation of remote Northern Territory was relatively late and gradual, as was the introduction and spread of formal education. In many areas the first schools were established in the 1940s, initially by missionaries. Government schools did not start until 1950 and gradually spread. In some sites schools opened in the 1980s. Initially government schools were under the control of the Commonwealth government, and after self-government for the Northern Territory was declared in 1978, this shifted to the Territory government. Thus the NT Bilingual Program was founded by the Commonwealth government and effectively inherited by the NT government.

## Parts and Chapters

This book is divided into four parts, which are organised chronologically and thematically. Each begins with an anchoring chapter to provide a thematic thread throughout, and to link the diverse and fine-grained case studies in the volume to the history of the bilingual education program. Inevitably, there are gaps in this book, in the geographic spread, the treatment of prominent themes and the array of contributors. Many expert and committed people have worked in schools with bilingual education programs in the NT. It is hoped that this book may encourage them and others to research this rich and important period of Australia’s history.

Part 1, ‘Starting out’, covers the events and influences that guided the inception and early developments of bilingual education in the NT. It spans the period from the lead up to the first NT Education Department programs in 1973 to the end of that decade, when the programs began to consolidate. The anchoring chapter by Brian Devlin sets the scene. Beth Graham documents the beginnings of the team-teaching method at Yirkala, which would provide teachers with an essential and enduring

framework for the fledgling program across the Northern Territory. Petronella Vaarzon-Morel and Jim Wafer situate their case-study of the establishment of the program at Willowra in the local and national, social and political movements. Starting-out stories from practitioners on the ground reveal the demands and challenges faced, and innovations designed. Kathryn Gale reflects on her time at Milijinbi, Willowra and Yirrkala schools and the lessons she learnt. Dorothy Meehan details the particular demands of starting a program in a contact language, Kriol, at Bamyili. Mary-Anne Gale, who like her sister worked in the bilingual programs at Milijinbi, Willowra and Yirrkala, shares her personal account and reflects on bilingual education and language maintenance. The final chapter, by Graham McKay provides a comprehensive survey of the policy settings in the early years and draws parallels with contexts outside of Australia.

The 1980s and 1990s was a period of program consolidation, the topic of the chapters in Part 2. The anchoring chapter by Samantha Disbray and Brian Devlin maps the key themes of the period; power, aspirations for Aboriginal leadership, pedagogy and the rise of accountability. While a number of programs closed during this period, it was a high point in the program, with significant numbers of Aboriginal teachers qualifying and taking positions of authority and leadership in schools, and there is evidence of a real exchange of knowledge and power among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, and the development of innovative pedagogy and curriculum. Fran Murray focusses on the development of biliterate and bicultural pedagogy at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School on Bathurst Island, and Michael Christie traces the process of developing local curriculum and its intersection with Aboriginalisation at Milijinbi and Yirrkala schools. Stockley and Banbapuy Ganambarr, Dhungala Munungurr, Multhara Munungurr, Greg Wearne, W.W. Wunujmurra, Leon White and Yalmay Yunupijju follow by detailing the dynamics of Aboriginalisation at Yirrkala school. Finally, Therese Carr, Melanie Wilkinson lay out the moves involved with restarting the Wubuy revitalisation program at Numbulwar school.

The chapters in Part 3, titled 'Backlash', chart campaigns against the Bilingual Program in 1998 and 2008 and responses to this. Brian Devlin analyses the significant winding-back of the Program between 1998 and 2000. This is followed by Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe, and Members of the Wadeye Community with Teresa Ward, who argue for continued support for the Murrinh-Patha program at Wadeye. Brian Devlin then reviews the evidence for student achievement from the bilingual programs in Chap. 16 and then explores the announcement of the 2008 'Compulsory teaching in English for the first four fours of each school day' policy in Chap. 17, while Freeman, Bell and Andrews describe the impact on and resistance to that policy at Areyonga school.

The final section, Part 4, 'Reflections across time—the present and a future for bilingual education' is introduced by Samantha Disbray, who reviews recent policy developments and new spaces for bilingual teaching and learning. Many of chapters that follow span the life of individual programs, leading us to the present and into the future. Wendy Baarda and Tess Ross recall starting out at Yuendumu and reflect on the Warlpiri bilingual program's impact and future. Meg Mooney depicts the

past and present for Pintupi-Luritja language programs at Haasts Bluff, Papunya, Watiyawanu and Walungurru schools. Inge Kral considers different life trajectories across the generations of those involved with Yipirinya school in Alice Springs, comparing the lives of the leaders who founded the independent school and those of the next generation. Deminhimpuk Francella Bunduck and Teresa Ward tell the history of Wadeye school. Ailsa Purdon shares professional reflections and the development of the Eastern Arrernte bilingual and bicultural education at Ltyentye Apurte. In her chapter, Noela Hall reflects on a professional lifetime at Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku. Nancy Devlin recounts her early encounter with bilingual education at Shepherdson College and team teaching with Dorothy Gapany, who writes of her reminiscences and current work at Galiwin'ku. John Greatorex looks back on his long history of involvement with bilingual education in Northeast Arnhem Land and describes a new future for bilingual learning at Mäpuru Independent School. In the final chapter, Cathy Bow, Michael Christie and Brian Devlin present the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages, a digital repository for vernacular materials developed in the bilingual and other language programs in the Northern Territory, and the future possibilities this space presents.

We are grateful to Prof. Jim Cummins for the afterword that concludes this volume.

### Note

Those of us who worked in Yolŋu communities of North-east Arnhem Land had to use two spelling systems or orthographies when we worked with clan language varieties such as Gumatj, Gupapuyŋu or Djambarrpuyŋu. The orthography for English does not go beyond the Roman alphabet, whereas Yolŋu texts make use of special characters such as ä, ŋ, and ƚ to represent meaningful sounds. The same is true of the Pintupi-Luritja and Pitjantjatjara communities.

So, in mainstream settings English spelling would be used, but otherwise the local spelling system was preferred. This poses a dilemma in a book such as this. Those who deplore inconsistency might be surprised to see that the same place name can be variously rendered as Milingimbi or Miliŋinbi or that the same surname might be spelt Wunungmurra or Wunujmurra. As our authors' orthographic preferences tended to vary, it has been our choice as editors to allow some latitude, and so both variants appear in this book.

Our ground plan in developing this history of the NT Bilingual Program was to set up a chronological frame, hence the timelines we have prepared (a short one at the beginning of the book, and a longer one online). We conceived a thematic history, with the sections of the book reflecting phases in the history of the Bilingual Program, but we wanted to avoid doing so in a way that impeded the development of other perspectives. In particular, we envisaged some key themes that would be treated more laterally and would cross cut phases; team teaching was one that we pinpointed quite early. We have intervened lightly when our authors, charged with writing about the 1980s, couldn't stop themselves from anticipating the events of 1998 and 2008, and so on. The result, like a good conversation, is a book that is richer, more interesting and more thought provoking than we could ever have designed it to be.



We wanted a good cross-section of authors. In one sense we managed that, as we have Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal voices, Catholic and Government systems represented, plus both the centre and the north of the NT have been given some space. Yet, we are troubled by the omissions and oversights. Too few authors are Aboriginal. We did not manage to include an author from Maningrida, a large community school which had a bilingual program with two Aboriginal languages and English, and so our book has a gap there. As this single example testifies, our book can in no sense pretend to be a definitive, comprehensive history. Nonetheless it is the only book available which draws together a coherent account of NT bilingual education over four decades or so since its inception in 1973.

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# Chapter 2

## A Glimmer of Possibility

Brian Devlin

### Introduction

By way of introducing Part 1, ‘Starting Out’, this chapter sketches the evolution of bilingual education policy in the Northern Territory from 1950 to 1975. This choice of time span is not arbitrary, for it was in 1950 that the Commonwealth Office of Education first formally acknowledged that bilingual instruction for Aboriginal students would be ‘desirable’ in some circumstances. The choice of the second date, 1975, is partly for convenience, but there is a reason for it as well. In 1975, when the *First progress report on the bilingual education program in schools in the Northern Territory* was released, Federal Government funds were still available, but the first students enrolled in remote school bilingual programs had not begun to read and write, so the potential of the approach had not yet been demonstrated. All policy-makers, educators and linguists could point to was a glimmer of possibility. This glimmer of possibility is the stepping off point for events detailed in the chapters that follow.

Our focus in exploring this time frame from 1950 to 1975 is on the formulation of government policy for publicly funded schools for Aboriginal students in rural and remote areas. Relevant pioneering efforts by missionaries in earlier years are therefore not covered in any detail here. (However, see Elkin 1953, which summarises the bilingual literacy plans of missions at Hermannsburg, Goulbourn Island, Bathurst Island and Roper River; McGrath 1976; Kretschmann 1988; McKay, this volume; and McKenzie 1976). It is relevant though to acknowledge the key role which missionary linguists and teachers played when government-sponsored bilingual programs began in 1973.

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## The 1950 Agreement

The first government schools for Aboriginal students were opened in the Northern Territory in 1950 at Delissaville (Belyuen), Bagot, Alice Springs and Yuendumu with a combined enrolment of 153 Aboriginal children. These schools were under the control of the Commonwealth Office of Education (Harris 1990, p. 45), which assumed responsibility for Aboriginal education in the Territory until 1955. The basis for this agreement was a memorandum, dated January 5, 1950, from R.C. Mills, Director of the Commonwealth Office of Education to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department (Mills 1950). This memorandum records that a conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare authorities held in Canberra in February 1947 had resolved that the governments concerned should make "increased provision for the education of natives". Since "the South Australian Education Department, which at present controls schools for white children in the Northern Territory, could not see its way clear to provide teachers for native schools", the Minister for the Interior recommended that "the Commonwealth Government should accept direct responsibility for the provision of education in the Northern Territory". This, along with four other recommendations, was accepted.

What is of particular interest is that, in the agreement that was signed by all the responsible authorities, including the Prime Minister, the Commonwealth Government acknowledged that "the language of instruction in Native schools shall be English, except where local conditions (e.g., where natives are still in a tribal or semi-tribal state) render bilingual instruction desirable". Further, it was resolved that the subjects "should include English Language, [and] Native Language (where appropriate)..." in the "special curriculum" that would be needed. This is the first recorded Commonwealth Government decision to recommend bilingual instruction for Aboriginal children in certain circumstances. The 1950 agreement was approved by Robert Menzies, as the Minister responsible for the Commonwealth Education Act. Other signatories included A.R. Driver (the Administrator), R.C. Mills (Director of the Commonwealth Office of Education) and P.A. McBride (Minister responsible for the NT Administration Act).

The 1950 agreement also noted that the Commonwealth Government, through the Director of the Commonwealth Office of Education, would accept responsibility for administering the education of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory with respect to "staffing; inspection; curricula; school classification; recommendations for the establishment of new schools; the training, appointment and control of teachers; the classification of teachers; the inspection and supervision of mission schools; [and] recommendations concerning mission school standards".

So, although it is customary to say that bilingual education in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia, began in December 1972 as a result of a Federal government initiative, it is apparent that the foundations of this policy change were formally laid in 1950, at a time when assimilation was still the accepted policy. In

support of that policy, Elkin (1964, p. xiii) explained how important it was to formulate “policies and methods designed to assist the Aborigines in the task of adjusting themselves to the great changes which have come upon them. ... Their very presence in the country imposes on us a dual mandate to seek their good as well as our own”. To assist with that ‘dual mandate’ Elkin had, in 1947, “called for a bilingual education system with a fully planned curriculum, as part of a policy for the training of both children and adults aimed at economic self-sufficiency in a context of increasingly westernising material culture” (Cited in Etherington 1986, p. 33, drawing on Cole 1975, pp. 58–59). The Commonwealth’s position in 1950 was not in conflict with this view, though from 1950 to 1975, always in the background, “the White Australia Policy... was still largely in place” (Catley 2005, p. 8).

## **The Decision to Introduce Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory**

The *Watts-Gallacher Report* advocated bilingual education as the ideal approach for the Northern Territory, even though the authors considered that such a program would not be viable (Watts and Gallacher 1964, p. 71). In their view non-Aboriginal teachers could not really be expected to learn Aboriginal languages, there were too many languages anyway, and preparing textbooks in many languages was thought to be unreasonably difficult. Nonetheless, this report was later adopted as the NT’s guide in developing these programs (letter from Hedley Beare, Director of NT Education to the Director of ACER, June 13, 1973. NTDE File 89/2392).

In 1968 Joy Kinslow-Harris wrote a paper arguing that bilingual education was definitely possible, provided Aboriginal people were allowed to do the teaching in their own languages through a system of team-teaching in partnership with qualified non-Aboriginal teachers (Kinslow-Harris 1968; see also Graham, this volume). Her proposal was picked up in 1971 at a National Workshop, *Aboriginal Education: Priorities for Action and Research*, organised by Professor Betty Watts in Brisbane, where it was recommended that “Pilot projects be established to test the efficiency of teaching literacy in the vernacular following the proposals put forward by Mrs. Kinslow-Harris” (Watts 1971, p. 104). The Labor Party obtained a copy of these workshop recommendations, and in December 14 1972, within hours of being elected, and after 24 years of Labor being out of office, Gough Whitlam announced the beginning of the NT bilingual program. The Prime Minister declared that the Commonwealth Government would “launch a campaign to have Aboriginal children living in distinctive Aboriginal communities given their primary education in Aboriginal languages” (Whitlam 1972).

Kim Beazley Snr. was appointed Minister for Education in the Whitlam Government. Years later, in 1985, when he was visiting the Northern Territory to see for himself the program he had started, Beazley told staff in the Bilingual Unit in Darwin that he had begun to think about bilingual education 14 hours after the election, while shaving (Harris and Devlin 1999). He had then suggested the idea to Gough Whitlam, who subsequently announced the policy change over the parliament's loud speaker system on December 14, 1972.

Beazley explained that bilingual programs were favoured at the time because they were considered to be the best route to mastery of English as a second language:

I had seen the truth of this at Hermannsburg mission in Central Australia, where the primary pupils were taught in Arrernte. When I visited the mission in 1961...the quality of spoken English at Hermannsburg was vastly superior to that of Aboriginal children in government schools (Beazley 2009, p. 205).

To guide the establishment of bilingual programs he set up a three-person Advisory Group on Teaching in Aboriginal languages in Schools in Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory (the Watts Committee). It was headed by Betty Watts (Reader in Education at the University of Queensland), W.J. (Bill) McGrath (Inspector of Schools in the Northern Territory's Aboriginal Education Branch) and J.L. Tandy (from the Department of Education in Canberra).

The Watts Committee convened for the first time on January 22, 1973. The three advisers visited potential bilingual schools and put forward some influential recommendations. Their report (Advisory Group 1975), was tabled in Parliament by the Minister for Education on March 15, 1973 and unanimously accepted. When presenting that report, Beazley confessed that

We knew then that this would not be an easy policy to implement. There are more than a hundred Aboriginal languages and dialects in active use in the Northern Territory alone. Only a very few of them have been linguistically analysed and written down. Furthermore, in some communities a number of different languages is spoken. There are few trained teachers available to do the job, and nowhere near the quantity of written material in these languages needed for school work (Commonwealth of Australia 1973a).

Given these challenges, the Minister continued,

the wise course seemed to be to have a small advisory group of people to go to the Northern Territory and, as quickly as possible, look into the resources of trained manpower, the teaching materials available and the state of linguistic analysis reached in the various languages and dialects. They were to discuss the matter with educationists, linguists, administrators, and with the Aboriginal people themselves, and in the light of all this, to make recommendations for a program of teaching in Aboriginal languages which would incorporate the teaching of traditional Aboriginal arts, crafts and skills (Commonwealth 1973a).

For the benefit of his fellow parliamentarians Beazley summarised the Watts Committee's report as follows, making particular note of the team-teaching approach that would be employed, and the expected benefits of teaching bilingually:

They advocate a bilingual approach with most of the children's early schooling in the appropriate Aboriginal language, leading to the acquisition of literacy skills in that language. This will be followed by a transition to literacy in English and the use of English as the medium of instruction for a substantial component of the children's later schooling. There will be increased emphasis upon the teaching of traditional Aboriginal arts, crafts and skills and this will continue through the entire period of the children's schooling. The teaching will be done on a teaching team basis, the Aboriginal member teaching the Aboriginal language component of the curriculum, assisted as required in the preparation of lessons and so on by the non-Aboriginal member, who will also teach the English language component (Commonwealth 1973a).

The authors envisaged that schools with bilingual programs would be "agents of cultural continuity" (Advisory Group 1975, p. 1), which fostered pride in ethnic identity and facilitated English reading and writing through initial vernacular literacy. The need for subsequent literacy in English was strongly emphasised (Advisory Group 1975, p. 1, §1.4). Continued study of Aboriginal languages was also advocated. For example, on p. 11, they stated that "the Aboriginal language would remain as the appropriate language for arts... and for Aboriginal Studies".

Programs were intended to be bicultural as well as bilingual. Schools were intended to be integral to the communities they served. However, at least one of the recommendations in the Watts, McGrath and Tandy report was never picked up by authorities and endorsed; namely, §5.4.4.2: "Children's mastery of literacy skills in the Aboriginal language must also be assessed".

The Watts Committee stipulated that creating a rich reading environment in the school was essential if a bilingual program was to succeed. What it recommended, in order of priority, were (1) traditional stories, as told by parents to young children; (2) stories of high interest to young children; (3) graded reading books and (4) stories of high interest to various age groups (Advisory Group 1975).

## Justification for the Decision

Why then did the Government commit to such a difficult undertaking—"the first large scale implementation of bilingual education in Australia" (McGrath 1976, p. 2)—when it knew that there were insufficient written materials in NT Aboriginal languages, insufficient trained teachers were available to do the job, and of the more than a hundred Aboriginal language varieties in active use in the Northern Territory, few had been linguistically analysed and written down?

The first reason had to do with the requirements of international human rights conventions. The Labor Government recognised that initially educating children in their own languages was in accordance with Australia's obligation as a member of international organisations. When he addressed Parliament on March 27, 1973, Beazley, explained that

Australia is a member nation of the International Labour Organisation. Article 23 of the ILO Convention Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-tribal Populations in Independent Countries reads as follows:

- (1) Children belonging to the populations concerned shall be taught to read and write in their mother tongue, or, where this is not practicable, in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong.
- (2) Provision shall be made for a progressive transition from the mother tongue or the vernacular language to the national language or to one of the official languages of the country.
- (3) Appropriate measures shall, as far as possible, be taken to preserve the mother tongue or the vernacular language (Commonwealth 1973b)

Accordingly, the Federal Minister for Education lamented the fact that, until 1973, “little 5 and 6-year-old Aboriginal children ... going to school for the first time, have been faced with a European teacher speaking to them in English—which they must very soon learn to read and write or drop hopelessly behind in all of their school work” (Commonwealth 1973b).

Second, although he did not use the term, Beazley saw a need to help maintain Aboriginal languages, believing that “One can also confidently expect psychological benefits from this recognition of the children’s language and culture, and more enthusiastic support from the parents for the schooling their children are offered” (Commonwealth of Australia 1973b). In a rhetorical question put to parliament, Beazley asked:

What of their own language, the language their mothers and fathers speak, the language the old people speak, the language of the tribal stories, myths, legends and ceremonies? The schools have turned their back on that language and it is no wonder that the shocking comment has been heard from a 10-year-old Aboriginal boy: ‘Ours is a rubbish language, isn’t it’ (Commonwealth 1973b).

Third, Beazley had become convinced, as a result of his own observations, that well-conducted bilingual lessons had the potential to engage children deeply:

During a recent visit to the Northern Territory I saw the first steps being taken towards this form of schooling. The 2 classes being taught in their own language were the most entranced classes we saw on the entire trip. In one class, young children were so riveted by a lesson being given in their language by an Aboriginal woman teacher that they paid no attention to the invasion of their classroom by more than a dozen adult Europeans. The second case was where a distinguished Aboriginal bark-painter was used as an art instructor, teaching senior boys the art of bark painting. They obviously had for him a reverence, even awe; they thought it a great privilege to be taught by him. This is the very essence of the matter and I have had no hesitation in accepting recommendations which will have the effect of implementing this quality in education in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities (Commonwealth 1973b).

As a result, and this was the fourth reason, such an educational approach should lead both to vernacular literacy and to greater proficiency in English:

The educational aim of such an approach is the development of children who are thoroughly competent in their own language and able to read and write it, who are more proficient in English than they would have been under the present system, and who are better at all their school subjects because their schooling, and their early schooling in particular, has been more interesting, enjoyable and meaningful to them (Commonwealth 1973b).



The fifth reason had to do with fostering the all important support needed from parents. Beazley believed that “One can also confidently expect psychological benefits from this recognition of the children’s language and culture, and more enthusiastic support from the parents for the schooling their children are offered” (Commonwealth of Australia 1973b).

Finally, the Government was convinced that thoughtful and sensible planning measures and a graduated approach (“This is not a program that can be implemented immediately in schools in all Northern Territory Aboriginal communities”) could overcome many of the obstacles that were apparent. For example, in relation to the question of which language should be chosen for a school program, given the multiplicity of languages available, Beazley reassured his parliamentary colleagues that a start could be made

where only one language is spoken or where there is a dominant language acceptable to that community, where that language has been linguistically analysed and recorded, where there are Aboriginal people able to teach in it and where the Aboriginal people themselves want it to be used in their school (Commonwealth 1973b).

In the same parliamentary session Sam Calder, Member for the Northern Territory, guardedly praised Beazley’s initiative and the work done by Watts, McGrath and Tandy, but added, “Whilst it is difficult for Europeans to teach many of these languages I think that the Government will have quite a lot of trouble in getting the Aboriginal people themselves to teach these languages correctly, as is envisaged” (Commonwealth 1973b).

The introduction of bilingual programs and the prospect of more being established, prompted a call for more linguistic work to be done in Aboriginal languages to support these educational efforts (Northern Territory Education Division 1973, Appendix E). Accordingly, the School of Australian Linguistics (SAL) was established in October 1973.

## **The ‘Bilingual Unit’ Is Set up in Darwin**

Early funding allowed the formation of a head office advisory team, which became known as ‘the Bilingual Unit’. It comprised five key positions: a Principal Education Adviser (W.J. McGrath), a Senior Education Officer (SEO) Linguistics (Toby Metcalfe, who later became the first head of the School of Australian Linguistics); an SEO Early Childhood (Beryl Edmunds), SEO Anthropology (Maria Brandl), and an SEO TESL (Keryn Lynch). Five linguist positions were set up in the field and others were created in the School of Australian Linguistics (SAL), then part of Darwin Community College. At first it was very hard to recruit linguists and so only three were appointed at the beginning: M. Laughren, V. Leeding and G. McKay. When Cyclone Tracy destroyed Darwin in December 1974, half of the senior Bilingual Education advisory staff left and the Head Office team was not properly rebuilt until late 1977.

## Starting Out

By March 1973 the NT bilingual education program had begun to be implemented in line with the recommendations of the Watts, McGrath and Tandy report. The first sites were those where mission linguists had already developed orthographies for the Aboriginal languages, and where the people agreed to choose one language variety for use as the language of instruction in the school together with English: for example, Gumatj at Yirrkala, even though up to 12 clan language varieties were spoken in that community.

Experimental bilingual programs commenced in five schools in 1973 in line with the advisory group's recommendations: at Angurugu in Anindilyakwa and English; at Areyonga in Pitjantjatjara and English; at Hermannsburg in Arrernte and English; at Milingimbi in Gupapuyngu and English; and at Waruwu, Goulburn Island, in Maung and English. However, the program at Angurugu never really got underway, nor did the one at Hermannsburg.

In each of these schools bilingual programs were introduced to children in pre-school and Year one. Senior students were generally given literacy instruction in an Aboriginal language as well.

During the time frame covered by this chapter it was generally agreed, on the grounds of efficiency, that one vernacular language should be chosen per bilingual program. However, this principle was later overturned in the 1980s, when more Aboriginal control in the three large Arnhem Land schools was asserted, and some school time was set aside for other clan languages. In 1993 Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School at Wadeye also began including additional languages in its program.

By 1975 larger, school-based bilingual programs generally had access to four specialist positions: linguist, teacher-linguist, printer, and Aboriginal literacy worker, but this infrastructure was not in place in 1973 when the first programs began.

Similarly, the first bilingual education handbook was not produced until December, 1975 and only then "as an interim measure". The Watts, McGrath and Tandy Report advocated two frameworks for bilingual education programs in schools: Model I, which incorporated reading and writing in Aboriginal languages, and Model II, which did not. That is, the aim of a Model I program was to achieve literacy in two languages (English and an Aboriginal vernacular), whereas Model II meant that an English literacy program was supported by oral use of an Aboriginal language. While Model II programs were always a possibility, Aboriginal communities mostly opted for Model I.

Programs were not started without evidence of community support; for example, a letter sent to the NT Department of Education requesting a bilingual program would typically be signed by a dozen or more community-based people. Once official approval had been given, it wasn't so difficult for a school to begin a bilingual program. This only required commencing the program in Pre-school and

**Table 2.1** The establishment of NT school bilingual programs (1973–1975)

Years	Schools	Languages
1973	1. Angurugu	Anindilyakwa and English
	2. Areyonga	Pitjantjatjara and English
	3. Hermannsburg	Arrernte and English
	4. Milingimbi	Gupapuyngu and English
	5. Warruwi, Goulburn Is	Maung and English
1974	6. Oenpelli (Gunbalanya)	Kunwinjku and English
	7. Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku	Gupapuyngu and English
	8. St Therese's (now Murrupurtiyanuwu)	Tiwi and English
	9. Yayayi (Papunya outstation)	Pintupi-Luritja
	10. Yirrkala	Gumatj and English
	11. Yuendumu	Warlpiri and English
1975	12. Bamyili(now Barunga)	Experimental oral Kriol pre-school program
	13. Pularumpi (formerly Garden Point)	Tiwi and English
	14. Roper River (Ngukurr)	Experimental oral Kriol pre-school program

*Source* Various NTDE documents, including file 93/483, folios 27, 40–1 and 176, and suggestions made by Paul Bubb and Peter Jones

Year 1, then adding an extra year every 12 months. Preparing materials for bilingual programs became harder and more complex beyond those initial grade levels. Table 2.1 gives a brief listing of the first NT programs, indicating the years they commenced.

Following the wording of the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII ESEA), and advice from the Watts Committee (Advisory Group 1975, p. 1), this working definition was adopted by the Northern Territory Education Division for its bilingual-bicultural programs:

Bilingual education is the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well-organised program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes a study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and the legitimate pride in both cultures.

The general aims of the bilingual programs as set out in 1973 were:

- (1) To present subject matter of the school program in the language most suitable for the instructional purpose, bearing in mind the language proficiency of the children and the special needs of specific areas of study.
- (2) To develop competency in reading and writing in the Aboriginal language.
- (3) To develop competency in reading and writing in English.

- (4) To develop sufficient skill in the use of oral English before attempting to teach specific subject areas in that language.
- (5) To foster greater proficiency in school work, and better understanding of it, by use of the Aboriginal language where appropriate.

These aims were “not arranged in any particular order”. (McKay, this volume, has further to say about the aims and how they were changed).

## Missionary Linguists Provided Considerable Assistance

Bilingual teaching in English and an Aboriginal language had been introduced by missionaries at various places in Australia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These pioneering efforts are outside the scope of this book—which is to examine *government* policy and practice with respect to NT bilingual education—but they were of foundational importance nonetheless.

A fuller treatment of his subject would explore the pioneering roles missionary linguists played in conceptualising team teaching (Joy Kinslow-Harris), developing the first orthography (Beulah Lowe), formulating the key reading program used in the early years (Sarah Gudschinsky), preparing conversational lessons (Beulah Lowe, Joyce Ross), as well as the grammars, lexicons and primers that were to prove indispensable in the early years and were innovated over time (see Murray, this volume). McKay (this volume) alludes to some of these efforts. With respect to the various missions and missionaries concerned, this short overview only hints at the range of work undertaken to facilitate the use of vernacular languages in schools such as Yirrkala, Milingimbi, Goulburn Island, and Bathurst Island.

Just as SAL was established to assist with the linguistic work needed to support bilingual education, it became the role of Batchelor College not only to offer a range of vocational training for Aboriginal people but to provide the qualified teachers, literate in a vernacular language, that Watts, McGrath and Tandy (Advisory Group 1973) had called for (see Disbray and Devlin, this volume). Uibo (1993, p. 17) notes that

The large intake of assistant teacher trainees for the commencement of the 1974 academic year, the year the assistant teacher course moved to Batchelor, reflected the interest and enthusiasm in the remote communities by Aboriginals to take on the extra responsibilities associated with teaching in the bilingual program.

In 1974 a ‘crisis of stagflation’ began occurring in developed countries, including Australia, resulting in increased inflation, more unemployment, an imbalance in fiscal accounts and negative growth. One contributing factor had been the sharp rise in oil prices initiated by OPEC. The resulting global recession stymied the growth needed to finance Whitlam’s initiatives, which had included an improved deal for Aboriginal people, expanded industrial training, a larger

university sector, and more regional development. Nonetheless, six new bilingual programs were commenced in 1974:

- (1) Oenpelli (Gunbalanya) started a Kunwinjku and English program.
- (2) At Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku, a bilingual program in Gupapuyŋu and English was introduced into Year 1 and Year 2. Adult education and linguistic work also began in Djambarrpuyŋu.
- (3) St Therese's (now Murrupurtiyanuwu) began a Model 1 program in Tiwi and English.
- (4) At Yayayi (Papunya outstation) a Pintupi-Luritja and English program was introduced.
- (5) Yirkala School commenced a bilingual program in Gumatj and English.
- (6) Yuendumu School began a Warlpiri and English program.

In June 1974, at the invitation of the NT Department of Education, two linguists—Geoff O'Grady from the University of Victoria, British Columbia in Canada and Ken Hale from MIT in the US—visited four of the new bilingual programs in operation, and one in preparation. A report of their visit, *Recommendations concerning bilingual education in the Northern Territory*, was released on July 1 and tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament by Kim Beazley Snr, the Minister for Education, on November 12 1974 (O'Grady and Hale 1974).

The report included 25 recommendations to government. One (#18) was “That the introduction of literacy in English be adjusted according to the proficiency of children in vernacular literacy and English” (O'Grady and Hale 1974, p. 5). These scholars emphasised “the academic promise of bilingual education”, which was that “vernacular literacy greatly accelerates the acquisition of basic literacy skills”.

Following their visits the authors stated that they were “extremely impressed with the Northern Territory Bilingual Program—so much so that we are inclined to assert that this program constitutes one of the most exciting educational events in the modern world” (O'Grady and Hale 1974, p. 1). With some prescience they added, “It is, of course, just beginning and has a long and difficult road ahead of it”.

The two linguists asserted that “one of the goals of bilingual education should be to enable Aboriginal communities to gain local control over the education of their children and young adults with the role of non-Aboriginals becoming more consultative in nature” (O'Grady and Hale 1974, pp. 3–4). Unfortunately, this just did not happen over the decades that followed, despite efforts by Aboriginal leaders, educators and community members to achieve this. (See also individual chapters by Disbray and Devlin, Stockley and Christie in this volume). If anything the role of non-Aboriginals became more and more directive. Another important goal (p. 15) was that of “enabling an Aboriginal scholar to write or talk about literally any subject under the sun”.

Stagflation was not the only problem to limit the scope of what government could provide in 1974. All areas of activity were impacted by the natural disaster that occurred later in the year, for on Christmas Eve, 1974, Darwin was devastated by Cyclone Tracy.

In early 1975 Hedley Beare, Director of NT Education, who greatly assisted the people of Darwin in the aftermath of the cyclone, left the Northern Territory. James (Jim) Eedle was appointed to the Commonwealth Department of Education as First Assistant Secretary with responsibility “for all school education in the Territory during a period of rapid change and growth” (Carment et al. 2008, p. 168).

In March 1975 Film Australia spent 3 weeks on location at Mililingimbi, Yuendumu and Yayayi shooting footage for the film *Not to lose you my language*, but they did not record any reading or writing in English, as the programs had not advanced that far yet, as mentioned earlier.

It should be noted that pilot bilingual programs had commenced in the NT at the same time as the School-based Curriculum Development model was being introduced. Ten years later this was described by the head of the NT Education Department as “a disastrous situation” (memo from Geoff Spring to Janet Margon, February 2, 1983, NTDE File 14/81 Part II f. 152). This meant that, with respect to some areas of school operation, teachers had to be the pioneers to some extent. (See also Graham and Murray, this volume). Off-the-shelf answers to teaching-learning questions were not so readily available. In setting up these pilot programs, international advice had to be sought.

The bilingual program had few supporters in the Department hierarchy above PEO level (Harris and Devlin 1999). Virtually since their establishment bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory were opposed by most senior education officers.

Nonetheless, three NT schools began bilingual programs in 1975. Pularumpi (formerly Garden Point) commenced one in Tiwi and English, but it only lasted two years. Bamyili pre-school began an experimental oral Kriol program. Numbulwar commenced an official bilingual program in Nunggubuyu and English at its pre-school (Lewis et al. 1975; Nicholls 1994; also Carr, Stansell, Wilkinson this volume).

Late in 1975 there was a move within the Department of Education to reduce the bilingual program to a small pilot project (Harris and Devlin 1999). This proposal was set out in a document which ‘fell off the back of a truck’ and reached schools. David McClay, Principal of Mililingimbi School, publicly challenged the Secretary of the NT Department of Education at the annual bilingual staff conference, held that year at St. John’s College. The Secretary denied any such plans and confirmed Departmental support for the program. Among the reasons the program wasn’t toppled then, these seem to be likely explanations: (1) It was imagined that there would be a loud outcry from academics ‘down South’; (2) it was thought there would be a huge revolt on the part of Aboriginal schools; (3) bilingual advisors and linguists in the Department were highly qualified and the hierarchy assumed they knew more than they actually did; (4) there was respect for the obvious hard work and commitment of school staff; and (5) during the first few years of the program, there were annual Territory-wide conferences where many staff could meet for mutual support and ideas-sharing. These in turn created a wide basis of support for the program.

From August 1976 onwards NT bilingual programs entered a consolidation phase. ‘Consolidation’ was essentially understood to mean that there was no money

available to establish new programs. On August 16, 1976 James Eedle, the Secretary of the Department of Education, directed that “Further expansion be limited and existing programs be consolidated and evaluated prior to an eventual decision as to which should be maintained indefinitely” (Eedle 1976, p. 2). He also called for “a shift in emphasis so that the bilingual programme is recognised as providing a bridge to English once lasting grounding in the local language has been established” (Eedle 1976, p. 2)

## **Self-determination**

The Prime Minister (Whitlam) had stated on April 6, 1973 that “The basic object of my government’s policy is to restore to the Aboriginal people of Australia their lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs”. He went on to say that: “An opportunity for self-determination and independent action would serve little purpose if Aboriginals continued to be economically and socially deprived. The Government therefore plans to help them as individuals, groups or communities, in crafts, trades and professions and as business entrepreneurs” (quoted by Dawkins, in Commonwealth 1975). So self-determination was a key framework influencing government thinking. For example, the Whitlam Government officially handed back land to the Gurindji people at Daguragu on August 16, 1975. This was in line with the Government’s view that it was important to restore “to the Aboriginal people their lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs”.

Monolingual, monocultural attitudes and mindsets did not disappear when bilingual education was introduced in 1972. For a time though, during Whitlam’s brief ascendancy, they were not so readily apparent. In time they soon resurfaced.

After the Whitlam Government lost power in November 1975 as a result of a constitutional crisis, this principle of self-determination was set aside. The Liberal and National Country Party Government announced that it supported self-management instead, declaring “Aborigines and Islanders should be free as other Australians to determine their own varied futures”.

## **Conclusion**

The early 1970s could be regarded as a fragile beginning for bilingual education in the NT; although a honeymoon period in some ways, there was a natural disaster to contend with. Several programs had been established in 1973 and 1974, but after Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Eve 1974, time had to be set aside over the next few years for rebuilding. In addition, the program was always politically vulnerable, given the number of politicians and bureaucrats who were opposed to it.

Setting up bilingual programs in the Northern Territory turned out to be a formidably challenging exercise. Devlin (2011a) has explained another reason why:

Australia took the plunge in 1973 when it initiated bilingual education in the Northern Territory. The task of setting up new language programs was logistically challenging, for sufficient materials had to be written and printed. Appropriate specialist staff needed to be appointed—literacy workers, literature production supervisors, linguists, teacher-linguists—to support the other regular school staff. A number of languages were spoken by at least a few thousand people: Pitjantatjara, Murrinh Patha, Arrente, Warlpiri, Tiwi and the Yolngu Matha dialects, for example. However, these languages were really only known by the speakers themselves and by a few non-Aboriginal people such as missionaries and ex-patrol officers. Few written materials in those languages existed.

Economic problems (stagflation in particular), a natural disaster (the cyclone) and a political crisis (the dismissal of the Federal Government in November 1975) were not the only challenges limiting the growth of bilingual education in remote NT schools in the years that followed.

**Acknowledgments** Parts of this chapter draw on “The Northern Territory Bilingual Education Program: Some historical reflections”, dated July 12, 1999, by Stephen Harris and Brian Devlin.

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# Chapter 3

## Reflecting on Team Teaching

Beth Graham

The Watts Tandy Report (1973) recommended a ‘team teaching’ approach to implement bilingual education in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools. Not much detail was included about the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of this strategy, apart from the fact that each would teach in his or her own language. Advisers at that time, most of whom had come directly from other colonial situations, had little more knowledge than staff in schools about the approach, so each school worked out for themselves, what it meant to ‘team teach’. It was not always easy, given the vastly different linguistic, cultural and academic backgrounds of team members. As a result, the team teaching approaches that emerged in the bilingual schools in the Northern Territory differed markedly from that of mainstream schools and at times from each other (see Murray, Purdon, Hall, Devlin and Gapany, this volume). To give a comprehensive history of team teaching in those early years of bilingual education is difficult. In view of this, I have begun this brief paper on team teaching by describing how I grew in my understanding of the strategy.

### Developing Team-Teaching in Arnhem Land

My personal journey into team teaching began in the early 1960s at Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land. Against all the practices of the time, but necessitated by a continuing shortage of trained teachers from down south, I had convinced all concerned that two young Aboriginal men would do a far better job than I could in teaching the intake year. It wasn’t team teaching as I later came to understand it, for they simply taught the western curriculum in their own language and I helped them

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with the teaching of Oral English and with their preparation. However, it demonstrated that teaching and learning in your mother tongue opened up the possibility of real interaction about whatever it is children needed to learn.

That was not the only insight I gained from that experience. As we prepared for each coming week, other matters became clear. I learned that although these very successful young men had been schooled, they had only a minimal understanding of what we think of as the kind of learning that goes on in school. In their school experience, getting answers right, even if you didn't know why they were correct was, they thought, quite acceptable. Also, they hadn't always understood why some answers had been marked wrong by their teachers, when in their view they were right. It was, in their minds, just part of the mystery that surrounded school education. In addition, the kind of thinking that we regard as the successful outcome of a western type school education, which comes through the kind of talking that promotes thinking, had rarely been available to them in school. That level of communication requires teachers and students who speak the same language.

So, as we spent time together, I came to realise that planning had to include not only what we would do next week and how we would do it, but that more and more the 'why' needed to be addressed. I was also becoming aware of the conundrums that were created for these teachers and their students, particularly in the areas of mathematics, because teachers like me failed to understand the Yolŋu way of looking at the world. The times we spent together were usually fun, but often exhausting, because we were being forced to address basic questions about the 'why' of school education, when we had really only gathered to look at the 'what', 'when' and 'how'.

I left Yirrkala after these early years, convinced of the necessity of using the children's mother tongue as well as the value of Aboriginal teachers if children were to learn more effectively in school. I also knew that the programs we offered would not be effective unless teachers had time, not only to plan, but to also address the many academic, cross-cultural and linguistic issues involved. Finally, I had come to believe that while what I taught children in this situation was important, it was the development of all the *adults* involved, as we learned from each other, that in the long term would have the most lasting results.

I returned to Yirrkala in 1974 and began working with Aboriginal teachers and others to develop bilingual education in that community. The challenge was to teach children while at the same time we developed literature, solved mathematical conundrums, began to develop curriculum related to the Aboriginal way of being and doing, acquired printing equipment, and struggled to make sense of the charge to 'team teach'. The value of much of the early learning being in the children's mother tongue was immediately clear, but the value of team teaching from a classroom perspective was also soon apparent, for it enabled children to work in small groups rather than in classes. The children found it hard at times to keep on task, and being in a small group meant that more contact time was actually spent teaching/learning than in class management.

From the teachers' perspective, it was obvious that the 'how', and 'what' of school education had to be addressed. Planning times needed to be allocated and all teachers came to understand that we had to stay after school until we were ready for the next day or week. A visiting Maths adviser had given us a wonderful approach to planning lessons, and this eventually came to be known as the 'learning triangle'. When planning for children to *learn*—or develop *ideas* (concepts/understandings)—we planned for them to have *experiences, to talk about these experiences and to record what they understood*. This, in turn led, to more experiences, more talking, and more recording (Do-Talk-Record, Murray, this volume). It was a great strategy, as it was simple and moved relatively untrained teachers away from their view of school, which seemed to be about what the teacher said and not what happened inside children's heads. It also made planning and preparation times more a delight than a chore. But, as before, it soon became obvious that effective planning was only possible if, before we planned, the 'why' question and any of the other cross-cultural and linguistic issues had already been addressed. There just wasn't the time or energy at planning time to sort out 'these' complex matters and another time was needed to make this possible.

With a little creative timetabling and some help from teachers in other parts of the school, so that the children were still involved in real learning, such a time was found. It was then possible for a small group composed of several teams to be involved in more in-depth learning. The significance of groups gradually dawned on us. It can be quite hard for two new team members thrown together by timetabling arrangements to plan lessons. To have in-depth conversations about culture, the way languages work, the manners and expectations of each culture and the 'why' of school education is even more difficult. It soon became apparent that *groups* allowed members from both cultures to be both teachers and learners and old hands could encourage newcomers to participate, or to be quiet, if that was necessary. To our joy the old 'learning triangle' came to our rescue. We didn't need to have experts to provide answers if we, as a group, experienced, talked and recorded and together worked out strategies and understandings to take back to planning and teaching times.

It also became clear that at times we needed to learn in separate groups. Newcomers to the school from elsewhere needed crash courses in such matters as the philosophy of the school, the reason for working in teams, an introduction to the language, an overview of relationship systems, and other matters of vital importance in a bilingual school. They also needed to understand that, because we were constantly training new teachers from both cultures, change needed to be slow. New ideas were welcome at the school, but people needed to see what was happening and why, before they tried to make changes.

Aboriginal teachers also needed time as a group so that the more experienced teachers could help new, would-be teachers understand what it meant to be a teacher, rather than an interpreter or a helper as it had been in the past. They also had to begin the enormous task of developing curriculum related to their own

culture and language. They may have needed help to work out frameworks, but what to teach, when to teach and who would teach, were questions for them to answer.

We also found that the group of teams which learned together needed to have fun and to develop strong relationships. So we shared morning tea, celebrated birthdays, gossiped, and the assumption was that newcomers from elsewhere would come to know and relate to their Aboriginal family. Effective teams and groups don't just emerge, they need to be built. So together in those early years at Yirrkala, as in other schools, we experimented and slowly laid the foundations for strategies that not only resulted in better teaching/learning for the children, but also created effective teams, who were themselves teaching/learning units. Team teaching was emerging as a successful way of delivering bilingual education in the Northern Territory. However, at this stage we were all doing it intuitively, as yet the process had not been formally described.

## **Developing a Northern Territory Approach to Team Teaching**

After five years of discovery at Yirrkala I moved to Darwin in 1979 and began visiting schools as an adviser. Professional development initially began with helping teachers with familiar queries about school learning. How does a preschool demonstrate to the children, parents and everyone else that it is bilingual? How can our approaches to reading be more effective? Why should we teach children to understand that subtraction is not signaled in the real world by the words 'take away'? How do we teach English as a Second Language when we've never been taught to do so? Why do the children seem to see the world differently than we do? A seemingly endless list of questions were raised by me and by teachers, and answers were not always easy to find.

But as I watched and listened, it soon became clear that beyond these teaching/learning problems there were other underlying issues that teachers in many places did not even recognise. Many of these issues related to team teaching. Some teachers were endeavouring to team teach, but they were not sure about what they were doing, and frequently they were not 'building' their teams. They had come as newcomers to bilingual schools and been told that they had to team teach, but the 'how' and the 'why' of team teaching had simply not been addressed. In such situations, Aboriginal teachers frequently watched on while a stream of newcomers worked out some approaches that resulted in more effective outcomes, and then left.

In response to this situation, the pattern of professional development changed. We began to help teams address these hidden issues and then develop strategies that could be taken back to classrooms and hopefully schools. In one brief week—the usual time for a professional development activity—we had to help participants

understand how it is possible for two people from vastly different backgrounds to work alongside each other and deliver an effective program for the children in their care. The mantra, that *if children are to learn effectively, teachers have to teach together, plan together and learn together*, soon developed. In time it became more explicit. When we team teach we:

- (i) *teach together* (We teach alone, but are together responsible for the learning of the same group of children)
- (ii) *plan together* (We keep in touch so that, where possible, common strategies can be used, and preparation is in place) and
- (iii) *learn together* (We learn in groups, so we can tackle the endless list of things we need to understand if together we are to be effective).

However, that was just the beginning for that was only the ‘how’ of team teaching. Much more difficult matters needed to be opened up for discussion. If teams were to be effective, they had to be built. Gradually, we found fun ways to help people look at the difficulties of working in cross cultural situations. We developed strategies to assist team members to become better communicators, to trust each other and to look at issues of power. The power in most Aboriginal schools, then as now, was securely in the hands of the ‘whitefellas’ and teams had to demonstrate that power could be shared and that the disempowered could be made powerful. In contrast, those who took power for granted had to experience an unknown world, where they were disempowered. Some very challenging hunting experiences helped a few newcomers realise that there is another world out there, in which they were disempowered, and which they had to learn about, just as they expected Aboriginal people to learn about their world.

Team teaching at its best is a two-way learning experience. Effective teams are those which not only teach and plan for the same group of children, but which learn together about each other and each other’s world. It is only then that they are able to undertake the task of providing an education for the children in their care so that, ultimately, those children can effectively operate in both worlds. On our part, we did not learn this in a moment. It was a challenge to find ways of involving people from both cultures in what was really a change in the way they personally understood their role. And all this had to be done while questions related to the teaching/learning of Aboriginal children were being addressed.

However, out of all these professional development weeks and school visits, a collection of questions and experiences emerged which, in time, were gathered together in a book, *Team Teaching in the Aboriginal Schools in the Northern Territory* (Graham 1986) and later revised (Graham 1999). It was a book designed to be both read alone or used by groups to develop understandings in the local school context. For those who had attended a professional development week it was invaluable, as it extended their understanding of their new roles. For those who had not been encouraged to participate in such activities, the book was often just placed on a shelf and the possibilities contained in the term ‘team teaching’ were probably

never fully realised. By that time, funds for school visits or holding central professional development activities were vanishing. If schools had not begun to 'own' the knowledge related to team teaching, it was no longer readily available.

In the late 1990s Commonwealth funding was secured by Batchelor College to update the team teaching book. That task was undertaken with help from teachers throughout the Territory. The kit, *Working in Teams in Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory*, was developed and prepared for publication. The instructions had been to produce two sets of materials, one with bilingual schools in mind and a second set for the other Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory. However, in December 1998 another attempt was made to discontinue bilingual education in the Northern Territory. A decision was made that the bilingual set was not to be published and all references to that kind of education were to be removed from the remaining materials. I carried out that task with a heavy heart, but I retained a question asking groups using the kit to discuss the influence bilingual education had had on the professional development of Indigenous teachers. In a bilingual context there is great emphasis on early education in the children's first language and this required Indigenous team members to be teachers, not just interpreters or helpers. However, I was told that even that question had to be removed. I wrote and protested, but my letter was not answered.

Apart from a few brave schools that struggle on in defiance of Northern Territory policy, bilingual education, as we knew it, is now gone. The evidence for such a program of teaching and learning for Indigenous children of the Northern Territory is overwhelming, but few listen. With the loss of bilingual education, team teaching, together with the strategies for its implementation, has gone as well. When you work in an English-only program the power is with the English speaker. When you teach in two languages, with two people acting as teachers for the same group of children, not only do the children learn more effectively, but power and control are shared and development occurs. In Australia we constantly claim to want the 'development' of Indigenous peoples, but until they have an effective role in the education of their children, so those children can grow up 'both ways', that development will be slow to occur and schools will continue to be seen as belonging completely to the dominant society.

### **Endnote**

1. Anyone who wishes to know more about team teaching as it evolved in the Northern Territory should consult the kit, 'Working in Teams in Indigenous Schools in the Northern Territory', available at any of these libraries, which are all open to the public: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra; Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Batchelor Campus Library; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Education and Training Library; National Library of Australia.

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## Chapter 4

# ‘Bilingual Time’ at Willowra: The Beginnings of a Community-Initiated Program, 1976–1977

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel and Jim Wafer

### Introduction

For a short period in the mid 1970s a conjunction of exceptional circumstances allowed the community of Wirliyajarrayi (at that time known as ‘Willowra’), in Australia’s Northern Territory (‘NT’), to assume control of its own affairs to a degree that was rare, if not unique, in Aboriginal communities of that era. The level of local autonomy in decision-making was demonstrated through initiatives such as a direct request for the introduction of bilingual education.

Early in 1977 a small group of senior Aboriginal men from Willowra walked across the landing strip at nearby Anningie Station to meet the Commonwealth Minister for Education, who was on his way to open a school at Ti Tree. The men had been tipped off that his plane would land at Anningie, so they requested a meeting to press the case for a bilingual program at Willowra.

They had made the case in writing the previous year, when they sent a letter, dated 28th April 1976, to the Northern Territory Division of the Commonwealth Department of Education. It began thus: ‘We, the undersigned members of the Willowra Aboriginal community, request the Education Department to make a study into the feasibility of a bilingual program at Willowra school.’ It was signed by Long Mick, Jimmy Jungarai, Johnny Martin and George Jukadai for the Willowra Council, and by community spokesman Stumpy Martin (Northern

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We thank Inge Kral, Samantha Disbray and Nancy Devlin for encouraging us to contribute to this volume. We are also grateful to Samantha for providing us with some key archival documents. When we refer to ourselves as individuals in the following text, we use the abbreviations “PVM” and “JW”.

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Territory Archives, Education Department, 74/19, folio 3; also quoted in McGill 1993: 121).

The bilingual program at Willowra was given approval and began operating officially during the first term of 1977. But to understand the exceptional nature of the community's request, and of the circumstances that made it possible, some background will help. Our narrative begins with an account of Willowra, the place, and of the community that began to develop there, on traditional land, around the middle of the last century. It continues with an overview of the policy landscape of the mid 1970s, when we were teachers at Willowra School (1976–1977), and of the lines of tension that affected bilingual education. We focus in particular on the conflict between an educational philosophy that is school-based and community-oriented, and one that is centralised and oriented towards academic achievement. Our record of the inception of the bilingual program is then set within this context. We conclude with some observations about the advantages of educational programs that 'support and are organised by their targets for their own needs' (Bialostock and Whitman 2006, p. 381).

## **Willowra: The Place and the Community**

Willowra is located approximately 350 km north-west of Alice Springs near Wirliyarrayi, a site on the Lander River (Yarlalinji), in the southern Tanami Desert. The school was established in 1968 on what was then a cattle station covering 4,885 km<sup>2</sup> of traditional Warlpiri and Anmatyerr land. At that time the Anglo-Australian owners of the lease, the Parkinson family, had lived at Willowra for 20 years. 'Parkinson time' is remembered today as a period of safety for local people, in contrast to the 1920s when Europeans first invaded the region, relegating the inhabitants to a form of bare subsistence. This earlier period was marked by violent conflict between Warlpiri and settlers over water, cattle (which were degrading the country) and women, culminating in 1928 in the killing of large numbers of Warlpiri and neighbouring peoples in a series of events now known as the Coniston Massacre. Settler harassment of peoples of the region continued into the 1940s, to which elders responded by impressing upon their young the importance of adhering to Aboriginal Law and avoiding outsiders (Meggitt 1962; see also Vaarzon-Morel 1995).

In contrast to the first settlers, the Parkinsons established respectful working relationships with local people, enlisting their help to develop the station in return for rations. In acknowledgement of their immense contribution, when Edgar Parkinson decided to sell the station in the 1960s, he tried to find a way that they could purchase the lease. Under the policy of the time, however, Aboriginal people could not own the property. Determined that his people should not lose their country nor be moved to a Government settlement, Stumpy Martin Jampijinpa, a Warlpiri man who over the years had worked closely with Parkinson, began what was a long campaign to have the pastoral lease transferred to Willowra community.

Jampijinpa's journey took him from Willowra to Alice Springs, where he lobbied Department of Welfare and other bureaucrats and joined Aboriginal activists from eastern Australia, who were enrolling Aboriginal people on pastoral stations to vote and campaigning for their right to have access to schooling.<sup>1</sup> He also travelled widely interstate, lobbying ministers and joining various Aboriginal rights councils to further the Willowra cause (Vaarzon-Morel 2012). Significantly, Jampijinpa was multilingual, speaking three Aboriginal languages and English, but he was not alphabetically literate, having never received formal schooling.

Finally, in 1973, following the introduction of the self-determination policy, the Willowra pastoral lease was purchased by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on behalf of the local Indigenous people (Coombs 1993). Five years later a land claim to Willowra was lodged under the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976. The claim was successful, and in 1983 the traditional owners were granted inalienable freehold title to their country.

It is within this specific historical context that Willowra people's determination to retain cultural autonomy must be interpreted. Their experiences of settler colonialism were in many ways different from those of other Warlpiri who had grown up on government settlements such as Yuendumu (see Baarda in this volume), Lajamanu (formerly Hooker Creek) and Alekarenge (formerly Ali-Curung, and before that, Warrabri). As a result of programs implemented under the assimilation policy, settlement people's daily lives were regulated to a degree not experienced by Willowra Warlpiri. While Willowra people interacted with Europeans in the sphere of work, for the most part everyday sociality continued to be constituted and framed by tradition-oriented cultural practices. Such practices included the regular performance of religious ceremonies, including initiation, the observance of strict avoidance practices between certain kin, and arranged marriages between clans associated with different countries.

Although community stability was valued highly and people were less mobile than today, on occasion people travelled to the settlements to visit kin, to perform ceremonies and for funerals. Relatives from other places who visited Willowra would often remark upon Willowra people's strict adherence to the Law and the strength of their language (referred to as 'high' Warlpiri, cf. note 4, below). The Lander dialect of Warlpiri was regarded as integral to local identity and cultural autonomy.

Yet, at the same time as people adhered to tradition-oriented practices, they were quick to adapt to, and incorporate, new objects and technologies, and praxes that facilitated their survival as a community in rapidly changing socio-economic and political circumstances. It is within this wider historical context that the importance of the bilingual education program for Willowra people during the mid 1970s can best be understood.

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<sup>1</sup>Permission for the establishment of schools on pastoral leases had to be negotiated with the lessees and was not always forthcoming. Many pastoralists shared the view of a neighbouring station manager, who told us apropos of his Aboriginal stockmen that 'the only good station black is an uneducated one'.

## The Historical Context

Among the very early acts of the federal Labor government after its election in December 1972 were the following: disbanding of the Northern Territory Administration and its Welfare Branch, signalling an end to the earlier policy of assimilation; the purchase of Willowra Station for the local Aboriginal people (Coombs 1993); and the introduction of education policies that included school-based curriculum and decision making as well as bilingual education (McGill 1993, pp. 27, 76, 28, 30).

These changes were not necessarily or universally welcomed by the non-Aboriginal population of the Territory, including those members of the education establishment who opted to transfer to the newly formed Northern Territory Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Education. In some quarters the policy innovations were seen as the utopian delusions of out-of-touch politicians and bureaucrats in Canberra, being implemented by the naïve tertiary-educated radicals from the cities who were infiltrating the Territory in increasing numbers.

The invasion of the ‘southern stirrers’, as they were known, was symptomatic of much wider social changes that were occurring in the period from the late 1950s to the mid 1970s, both in Australia and internationally. This time-span has become known to history as ‘the sixties’ and, as Jennifer Clark demonstrates, issues of race were of crucial significance to it, in Australia as elsewhere: “the Australian experience of the sixties must be seen as the local expression of a trans-national phenomenon that was strongly characterised by a changing racial discourse” (2008, p. 12).

This is not the place to review Clark’s fine analysis; but the quote she offers from David Chalmers as “a useful starting point for examining the Australian context of this trans-national phenomenon [of the sixties]” is worth reproducing here:

there was both a replacement of local standards and ways of doing things with more open, national ones; and a search for grass-roots participation and community, a dialectical interaction of changing consciousness and institutions, and the explosion of classic social questions into politics and into the streets (Chalmers 1991: xvii–xviii).

Clark comments that, by 1964,

the underlying features that marked the 1960s in Chalmers’ mind were already evident in Australia as much as elsewhere. Parochial practices were attacked as out of step with national and international standards. A sense of community among Aboriginal people outside of kinship groups was growing exponentially with national organisation and grassroots participation in political action.<sup>2</sup> More tolerant views on race and culture gained support and stood diametrically opposed to the authoritative and historically limiting positions of local, state and federal government, the church, the universities, the family and other powerful institutions in Australian society (2008, pp. 13–14).

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<sup>2</sup>As Martin Jampijinpa’s journey (referred to above) indicates, his involvement in this growing activist network had significant implications for Willowra.

The tension between these forces was still a characteristic of the times when, in early January of 1976, we arrived at Willowra as the new teachers for the two-teacher school. At that moment our optimism was high, and was matched by a similar optimism on the part of the Willowra community. The school-based policies of the time encouraged us to find out from local people what they wanted from education and to respond to that. Willowra people consistently told us that they wanted the skills that would enable them to conduct the affairs of the community themselves; these skills included bilingual literacy. We did our best to accommodate these aspirations.

Fortunately, the community was able to take advantage of a brief window of opportunity that was not to last much beyond our time at the school (1976–1977).<sup>3</sup> In 1979, after the Northern Territory attained self-government (1978), the Commonwealth handed over responsibility for education to the new NT government, which replaced the school-based policy with a re-centralised curriculum and supervisory structure (McGill 1993, p. 33). Since then, this government has also progressively reduced its support for bilingual education, which, at the time of writing (2015) has been largely dismantled in the public education system of the Territory.

The fact that the establishment of the bilingual program at Willowra in 1977 was community driven makes it unique in the early history of bilingual education. It differed in this way from the programs at the five NT schools where bilingual education had been introduced in 1973. Baarda's comment (1994, p. 204) on the establishment of the Warlpiri program at Yuendumu undoubtedly applies to the other four schools as well: it "was a political decision that resulted from pressure from Canberra and a new Labor government anxious to implement reforms as quickly as possible". Similarly Gale (1994, pp. 192–193) observes that "the establishment of bilingual programs in successive schools in the NT throughout the 1970s was largely a "top down" implementation, rather than a grassroots development initiated by Aboriginal people themselves".

## What Was at Stake?

To date, the only extended history of Willowra School is a Master of Education thesis by Graham McGill, who became Principal Education Adviser for Bilingual Education during our time at Willowra, in June of 1977 (Harris and Devlin 1999, p. 39). The thesis is a good source of data for the period it covers that is, up to the date of its submission in 1993. It also brings into sharp focus the issues that were at stake.

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<sup>3</sup>We continued to work with and for Willowra people well after that time. We were co-authors of the documentation submitted under the Northern Territory Land Rights (1976) Act for four land claims that involved Willowra people: Willowra (1980); Kaytej-Warlpiri (1981); Mount Barkly (1983); and Yurrkuru (Brookes Soak) (1991). As an anthropologist, PVM has continued her work with Willowra people to the present day.

McGill analyses attendance and academic achievement data from Willowra School to conclude that responsibility for the low standards of achievement could be attributed to two policies: school-based curriculum and decision making; and bilingual education (1993, p. 120), since both of these led to neglect of the ‘school program’ (essentially, English literacy and numeracy for primary-aged children).

The problem with his argument is not so much that he has got the facts wrong (although we would have grounds to object that the school program was not neglected during our time at Willowra), but rather that making academic achievement the sole criterion of success for an Aboriginal school is deeply questionable and deserves serious critical scrutiny.

The alternative position is well laid out by Bialostock and Whitman (2006, p. 381)

[M]any current literacy interventions intended for indigenous peoples are largely reconceptualizations of earlier colonial projects that were tacitly designed to undermine indigenous cultures and epistemologies. These literacy interventions both depend on and reinforce notions of personal autonomy, independence, and self-fulfillment that conform to the needs of late-modern capitalism but which may not be what the target populations perceive to be in their best interests. Such programs have been instantiated in liberatory discourses of individuality, freedom, agency, and human rights. As a result, even those programs that target maintenance of first-language indigenous literacies, developing ‘from the ground up’ approaches (Hornberger 1996), must contend with and take into account a context that tacitly works to eradicate indigenous epistemologies, practices, and languages.

[W]e offer readers a portrait of the current moment in global capitalism, a new kind of colonial project, where concepts such as empowerment, academic achievement, and excellence through literacy serve to subsume indigenous peoples and epistemologies to service-based capitalism [... W]e lay out a different kind of model—programs that support and are organised by their targets for their own needs.

What seems to us surprising about this excellent summary is that, in 2006, the year of its publication and 30 years after our arrival at Willowra, the idea of ‘programs that support and are organised by their targets for their own needs’ could be regarded as *news*. In 1976, it seemed self-evident to us that we were there precisely for the purpose of fostering such programs; moreover, that the policy regime of the time not only authorised us but *encouraged* us to do so. In 1977 JW wrote that the “Aboriginal people of Willowra want education essentially in order to learn the skills necessary to protect their traditions” (Wafer 1977a, p. 47). Accordingly, we attempted to develop a school program that would make this possible.

## 1976–1977

In 1976 the school was still something of a foreign country for the children and their families. Not only was the educational material provided there irrelevant to them, but little printed matter existed outside of the school, with only a few Warlpiri

adults able to read it. Many people's understandings of schooling derived from visible pedagogic practices characteristic of mainstream institutions; for example, children were required to wear uniforms, sit at desks and learn to write using pencils. Yet, despite the alien nature of school, the community came to embrace it, transforming its relevance and role in their lives through the introduction of a Warlpiri/English bilingual program.

The grounds and infrastructure of the school today are greatly expanded from what we found when we first came to Willowra in 1976. The built environment of the general community has also grown, and the significance of the school in the community has changed. During our time at the school the infrastructure consisted of a demountable classroom and three silver caravans (nicknamed 'silver bullets') comprising a classroom, an ablution block and the teacher's residence. Located near the site of the station homestead, the buildings framed a lawn on which the children played in the shade of Dreaming trees associated with Wirliyajarrayi, the sacred site complex that gave the school its name when the bilingual program was implemented.

The population of the community was approximately 200, of which 50–55 children were enrolled at the school. They lived in family groups a kilometre or more to the west of the school, along the dry bed of the Lander River. Apart from five open-roofed 'houses', people's dwellings consisted of semi-permanent shelters constructed of iron and branches, which were oriented in relation to their traditional country. They had no running water or electricity and, since water was generally dug from the sandy river, the school was the only place most children could shower and wash clothes. Few adults had cars, and there were no street lights, no television, and little technology, apart from the radio telephone that served the whole community (see Vaarzon-Morel 2014). Many people's first experiences of moving pictures were through screenings of feature films on Friday nights at the school, which the entire community attended. The school thus provided people with facilities and experiences not otherwise available, and its material effects on the community were significant. Although we were supposed to cater for primary school age children from age 5 in kindergarten to 12 in grade 6, in fact we taught children from 3 up to 17 years of age.

The Warlpiri staff included a gardener, a cleaner and a teaching assistant. Congruent with Warlpiri cultural values and protocol, the gardener, Jungarrayi, was a senior kirda or 'owner' of Wirliyajarrayi and belonged to the local land owning clan. The cleaner, Nangala, was his wife. The teaching assistant, Sue Napangardi, was the wife of Martin Jampijnpa who, as mentioned earlier, helped secure the Willowra pastoral lease for Willowra community. Jampijnpa was also kurdungurlu for Jungarrayi and for Wirliyajarrayi. This is a customary managerial relationship that entails reciprocity and complementary relations.

For her part, Sue Napangardi, the teaching assistant, had learned alphabetic literacy at Warrabri settlement where, like others of her generation (including Grant Jangala, who also became a teaching assistant at Willowra), she had been caned for speaking Warlpiri in the classroom. Not surprisingly, her attitudes toward Western schooling and English literacy were complex. Outside of the classroom, Napangardi

put her literacy skills to use in practical ways, assisting her husband Jampijinpa (who spoke English fluently, but could not read and write) by reading letters and helping arrange meetings for him in cities such as Canberra. What is important to note here is that Jampijinpa's lack of literacy was not viewed as an impediment to his productive engagement with the wider world and modernity (cf. Bialostock and Whitman 2006). Nevertheless, he strongly supported the school, regarding alphabetic literacy as complementary to the traditional communication modalities of Warlpiri culture, which include oral forms, sign language, and the iconographic system used to inscribe cosmological information on surfaces such as bodies, objects and the ritual arena (see Munn 1973).

Jampijinpa's brother-in-law and kirda, Sammy Johnson Japangardi, was a close friend and key informant of the late Ken Hale, Professor of Linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who devised the initial teaching material for the bilingual program at Yuendumu in 1974 (see Baarda 1994).<sup>4</sup> These people played a central role in facilitating our developing relations with the community and helping us consult parents and family members about their perceptions of Western schooling.

What became clear to us was how poorly the school had served the community to date, partly because of a lack of resourcing and support from the Education Department, and partly as a result of parents' limited involvement. In the main, the young children had little English and were uninterested in the English-only reading material available at the school. This consisted principally of the Bush Books series, with vintage sentences such as 'Here is Dick', 'Here is Dora', 'Here is pup', 'Dick is looking at pup'.

So we set about finding out what community members expected of the colonising power's system for educating the young, which meant trying to understand what they thought about the use of both Warlpiri and English in and outside school, their language ideology, and what content they wanted in the curriculum. This was made easier for us by the fact that people invited us on hunting trips and to ceremonial gatherings, where we gradually became familiar with local beliefs, language and cultural practices.

In response to our inquiries, adults stated that they wanted the children to learn English communication skills, but also to continue to speak strong Willowra Warlpiri. When Willowra was visited by children who had been schooled at Warrabri and spoke little Warlpiri, Willowra parents expressed concern that this might happen in their own community. When JW discussed the idea of bilingual education with them, they were most interested, especially those who had viewed it in action at Yuendumu. While they wanted the children to acquire literacy and numeracy in order to work in the office, clinic and school and, in that way, to

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<sup>4</sup>Recently Sue Napangardi told PVM that Sammy Johnson was Ken Hale's 'adopted son' through their work together on *kurdiji* initiation rites and other ceremonies such as ngajakula and jardiwanpa. Sue first met Ken Hale when he acted as interpreter on the Willowra land claim. She recalled, 'I could hear his voice before I saw him, and I thought, 'Who is this person talking high Warlpiri?'.



strengthen Aboriginal control of the community, they were excited by the idea of children mastering literacy in their own language as well as English. Importantly, they wanted more involvement in the school and greater recognition of Warlpiri culture through the teaching of language, stories and dances. People valued their cultural autonomy and regarded a bilingual program as one pathway to maintaining it.

For our part, we arrived already believing that children are more likely to become literate in their first language than in a foreign language they barely speak, and also that language maintenance is a crucial part of cultural maintenance. JW had a background in languages and a long standing interest in bilingual education, and we were given additional motivation earlier in the year when the teacher-linguist at Yuendumu, Wendy Baarda, shared with us the teaching materials and curriculum used in the Yuendumu bilingual program. By that stage the Yuendumu program had been operating for almost 2 years and had produced a number of Warlpiri books, including primers (see Baarda 1994, p. 207) that could be used at Willowra.

In what turned out to be a first step toward a bilingual program, JW used these materials to teach Sue Napangardi literacy in the vernacular. We also invited parents to the school, encouraging them to become involved through telling stories in Warlpiri to the children. Sue is a highly gifted individual who rapidly mastered written Warlpiri and began writing poems and stories. Reflecting on this time, she recently told PVM, 'I wanted to learn strong Warlpiri. Although I'd lived at Willowra as a young girl, I went to live at Warrabri where I spoke Eastern Warlpiri—Wakiti Warlpiri. It was a happy experience [at Willowra School], being able to talk to the children in Warlpiri in the classroom and hearing jukurrpa stories from the ladies, and which word meant different things. That's where the real stuff [deep knowledge] was. Up to that time the kids had to learn English in the school, but no one understood English properly.' Sue also recalled that 'the first time I wrote a story in Warlpiri—I also drew the pictures—it was a story told by Topsy Nangala about pupungarrka, a boy-man monster. He was a big boy but with whiskers and he was trying to climb Karrynyarra [a mountain peak on neighbouring Anningie cattle station], but couldn't make it and kept on rolling back down.' The story is recorded in the reader Karrynyarra (Nungarrayi and Napangardi 1977).<sup>5</sup>

Enthusiasm for the use of Warlpiri in the school rapidly grew, and at the end of June 1976 JW wrote a letter to the Education Department on behalf of Willowra Community Council<sup>6</sup> requesting that a bilingual program be implemented at Willowra. The letter pointed out that Willowra fulfilled most of the criteria deemed essential for the introduction of the program, including that "the community

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<sup>5</sup>Sue Napangardi Martin to PVM, Alekarenge 2nd March 2015. The story Karrynyarra was actually told by Nancy Nungarrayi.

<sup>6</sup>All the signatories (listed in our introduction) are now deceased, but their descendents continued to have a lengthy relationship with the school. George Jukadai's daughter Aileen Long trained as a teacher and worked for a long time at Willowra School, and Jimmy Jungarrayi's daughter Maisie still teaches there.

supports the principle of bilingual education, and agrees to the use of Warlpiri language as a medium of instruction” (Willowra Council 1976). Furthermore, it pointed out that the school had two Aboriginal teachers<sup>7</sup> literate in both English and Warlpiri who could teach in the program, and that the linguists from Yuendumu and Hooker Creek<sup>8</sup> supported it. As Sue Napangardi remembers it, people wanted the bilingual program to start so as to “to keep their culture going on, so that the kids would not forget about their culture and their language”.<sup>9</sup>

In response, David Raff, then Education Advisor (Bilingual) in the Alice Springs office, advised the community and school that he would undertake a feasibility study in July “relating to the introduction of a bilingual education at Willowra” (Raff 1976a). In the interim, Dr. Mary Laughren, the linguist attached to the bilingual program at Yuendumu, was engaged to visit Willowra to prepare an initial report, advising on two matters: whether the material used in the Yuendumu and Hooker Creek programs would be suitable for Willowra; and if, indeed, the program had grass-roots support. In the event, Laughren (1976) confirmed the community’s serious desire for bilingual education and attested that it had every chance of success. Laughren also noted that Willowra ‘has a strong community spirit. It is more traditional and has stricter “laws” than places such as Yuendumu. The European influence is much less in Willowra than in settlements or missions.’ On the matter of the local language, she commented that ‘Willowra Warlpiri is considered a model of “pure” Warlpiri or “old fashioned” Warlpiri’; also that it had less interference from English than Yuendumu Warlpiri (Laughren 1976, pp. 1–2). Raff, for his part, later reported, after visiting Willowra, that “I have rarely seen such a high degree of interest and enthusiasm expressed [by a community] in relation to an educational innovation” (Raff 1976b).

On 12th August 1976 a letter from Dr Eedle (1976), Director of the Northern Territory Division of the Commonwealth Department of Education, was addressed to Willowra community spokesman Stumpy Martin, advising that approval was given for a bilingual program to start in 1977. Yet the implementation of the program was not straightforward. It was placed in jeopardy when, later in 1976, the Department decided not to expand bilingual education in central Australia. It was also rumoured that some Willowra children might be bussed to Ti Tree (on the Stuart Highway, approximately 125 km to the south-east of Willowra) to attend the newly built school. We could not locate archival documents relating to this development. However, Uibo notes that there was so much unused space at the Ti Tree facility that the Government was look ‘looking for “tenants” to justify the building’ (Uibo 1993: 27). One of the suggestions was that Aboriginal teacher education be relocated there from Batchelor.

It was in response to such uncertainty that Willowra people dashed to the Anningie airstrip (see our introduction, above) to lobby the Commonwealth

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<sup>7</sup>Sue Napangardi and Grant Jangala.

<sup>8</sup>Mary Laughren and Lothar Jagst.

<sup>9</sup>Sue Napangardi Martin to PVM, Alekarengge 2nd March 2015.

Minister for Education about the bilingual program. They were successful in their venture, and the program was implemented at Willowra in early 1977.

The school was under-staffed and under-resourced, so we and our Aboriginal colleagues gathered after school each day, outside the prescribed hours, to work on a Warlpiri literacy program and the associated lesson plans and teaching techniques. By the end of the year the literacy worker had produced a number of high quality readers, the teaching assistants had developed their own teaching materials, and the primary-age students were learning to read and write in Warlpiri. In the major bilingual program at Yuendumu, Warlpiri literacy was taught only to Grade 3. But at Willowra, our post-primary students showed such facility in mastering it that we incorporated them into the school program as potential future teachers. Importantly, the community felt welcome at the school, and many elders regularly participated in school activities, telling traditional stories and teaching students Warlpiri culture.

Over the years, many of those who became literate in Warlpiri in that period have occupied important roles in the local community, working in the fields of health and office administration, as well as in the new adult cultural centre and at the store. At least one of our Warlpiri colleagues from the 1970s continues to teach at the school, where she carries on her task of re-educating the changing parade of non-Indigenous teachers who arrive at Willowra. Some now work outside the community, including a former Warlpiri literacy worker who is now undertaking a law degree in Sydney. Significantly, they continue to regard bilingual education as important, and most want it to be implemented again.

We resigned from NT Education at the end of 1977, after the Department failed to implement a half day program at the school.<sup>10</sup> In the following years the infrastructure of the school expanded substantially, which made possible the appointment of additional staff, including a teacher linguist, and the consolidation of the bilingual program. For a period, the school continued to be regarded as the centre of the community, although this is no longer the case. The low levels of educational achievement among Willowra youth in recent years were paralleled by low levels of engagement of the community with the school. The causes of this alienation are no doubt many and complex, and perhaps include the vagaries of educational appointments. From time to time, non-Aboriginal teachers were appointed to Willowra who had little interest in Warlpiri language or culture and scant involvement with the community outside the school. But if any single factor could be regarded as major, it would probably be the dismantling of the bilingual program in the early 2000s.

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<sup>10</sup>JW had written to the Department in October of that year, requesting a half day program (as recommended by O'Grady and Hale (1975) in their 1974 report on bilingual programs in the NT), for the purpose of systematising the initial literacy program, training staff and further developing the Warlpiri curriculum.

## Conclusion

For our conclusion, we refer again to Bialostock and Whitman (2006, p. 390):

We would argue that all too often the colonial process continues under a different colonizing principle, that of the global citizen, and our ethnographic [and educational] interventions must take this into account.

To make the point, they analyse a list of educational goals formulated by the superintendent of a bilingual reservation school in Washington state and conclude (2006, p. 386) that the list:

points toward the production of citizens who will have certain identity markers: students shall become highly individuated learners, they shall master the latest technology, they shall successfully complete a highly academic curriculum and successfully attend college, and they shall join a global citizenry. These goals define school success, but also echo larger societal beliefs about what it means to be successful members of a global society [in which, as they say elsewhere, '(i)ndividuals become entrepreneurs of themselves' (2006, p. 384)].

This understanding of what 'student achievement' means is no doubt shared by most teachers in Australia, including many who work in Aboriginal schools, and is a clear outgrowth of earlier understandings that we see reflected in McGill's thesis. But Bialostock and Whitman's account (2006, pp. 387–388) of how this works out in practice on the Spokane reservation is telling:

It is clear that many Spokanes want jobs in the mainstream economy. Most Spokane Indians live off the reservation because of the very limited economic opportunities they have on it. But it is also true that the school-based literacy programs, nested as they are in a web of neoliberal mechanisms of individuation, testing, evaluation, and rhetoric, create pathways that systematically deny most students access to those wages. Spokanes—and indigenous peoples generally—may articulate their understandings of autonomy, self-fulfillment, and independence in ways that do not fit well with neoliberal visions of those qualities as envisioned by the state...

Much of what they say about the Spokanes here applies also to the Warlpiri, although, in our time at Willowra, those who wanted jobs elsewhere, in the mainstream economy, could not be quantified as 'many'. In retrospect, what is clear is that Willowra Warlpiri were not rejecting modernity to remain isolated in a nostalgic past, but rather were attempting their own particular 'indigenization of modernity' (Sahlins 1999), through strategies such as the purchase of Willowra station and the introduction of the bilingual program.

There are no easy lessons to be drawn from our time at Willowra. The fact that we were able to help the community realise a small part of its *own* vision of 'autonomy, self-fulfillment, and independence' was, as we have tried to show, due to the conjunction of so many chance factors that it can hardly stand as any kind of model.

Yet, the concept of "programs that support and are organised by their targets for their own needs" appears to have so little support among educators in Australia today that it is at least worth pointing to Willowra as a case where, even if only temporarily and imperfectly, it worked.

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# Chapter 5

## Lessons Learned from Bilingual Education

Kathryn Gale

My bilingual education experience began in 1975, just one month after Cyclone Tracey hit Darwin in December 1974. I had been appointed to Milingimbi Community school after completing a teaching diploma in Adelaide on a Commonwealth Teaching Service scholarship. I had tried to prepare myself as best I could—travelling weekly to the other side of Adelaide to study with Max Hart in his fledgling Aboriginal Studies course at Torrens College (which years later became the David Unaipon School of Education), and also majoring in social geography at Wattle Park Teachers College. This was a naïve attempt to prepare for the experiences ahead, and to learn more about the issues concerning Aboriginal Australians at the time. However, when I became one of ten young single women from ‘down south’ to arrive at Milingimbi in that January, those years of preparation seemed somewhat futile when confronted with the reality of life on a tiny Arnhem Land island. Now, after a 40-year career in Education, I have reflected upon the experiences of those formative years as a young teacher and teacher-linguist working in bilingual programs in the Northern Territory and South Australia, and I recognise the lessons learned from those experiences that have continued to inform and inspire my teaching practice.

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## Lesson 1

*\*Passionate, intelligent and generous leadership, responsive to the needs of the community, and having a clear vision and intent for teachers' and students' learning, will spell success for any school program.*

In 1973 Milingimbi school had become one of the first NT government schools to implement a Model I bilingual program; introducing students to reading and writing in their first language, Gupapuyŋu, before introducing reading and writing in English. This brave and innovative new approach had been a Whitlam Government initiative, acting upon the recommendations of the Watts, McGrath & Tandy Bilingual Education Report, which acknowledged world-wide education theory around the education benefits of first language literacy. At Milingimbi, the program began in the early childhood classes, guided and inspired by a passionate principal (David McClay) and implemented by experienced and talented non-Aboriginal teachers working side-by-side enthusiastic Aboriginal teachers. By 1975, the program was well under way—supported by a teacher-linguist (Michael Christie) working with several Yolŋu literacy workers to produce Gupapuyŋu literature; a literature production supervisor coordinating the illustration and printing of the teaching materials; and a community linguist (Beulah Lowe), who was a fluent Gupapuyŋu speaker with a long history of working in the local community. She had produced a set of Primers modelled upon the work of Sarah Gudschinsky in Papua New Guinea.

For a young graduate, this was an exciting time to be launching into a teaching career. To be surrounded by innovative educators, lead by one of the most inspiring school leaders I have worked with in 40 years, was a privilege. My new colleagues were enthusiastically walking with, and working beside Aboriginal people who were ready to have-a-go at something new and exciting. It was a means to empowerment for themselves and their community. The community elders wholeheartedly supported the program, and willingly participated in the telling of stories and the development of community literature. When the film *'Not to Lose You, My Language'* was filmed in the school and community that year, it was obvious that in the telling of the story about bilingual education, there was a deep community pride and a genuine sense of excitement about the literature being produced to support it.

There was no doubting that we were experiencing what Stephen Harris described later (1985) as 'a quiet revolution in Australian schooling'. Being a part of that 'revolution' meant that we participated in a continuing dialogue across Arnhem Land schools about every facet of our evolving programs. David McClay took every opportunity to facilitate dialogue with and between staff regularly. Besides staying after school for planning and learning together sessions with Aboriginal teachers, the non-Aboriginal teachers were required to stay even longer, for Gupapuyŋu language classes. It was David's reasoning that if we engaged in our own struggle to learn our students' language, then we would more likely understand their struggles in learning English. It worked. Our language learning with the



ever-patient Michael Christie, was far from proficient, but our understanding about the challenges that our students faced daily, was profound.

The ‘Milingimbi Spring Lecture Series’ was another key learning feature for the staff. Each Thursday evening in ‘spring’, we would return to the school after dinner, for an intellectual treat. David would organise for interesting community workers, or for one of the many researchers who happened to be in residence or passing through the community, to deliver a lecture. We heard about the work of the community nurse who had lived on the island for 25 years. We heard from a researcher who was investigating housing designs for remote communities. We were kept up to date with the latest thinking around Aboriginal learning styles and the many other aspects of Stephen Harris’s Ph.D. research. We listened and learned from the wisdom of Michael Christie, particularly following his time in the USA completing his Ph.D. thesis titled ‘The Classroom World of the Aboriginal Child’. We heard from the local Adult Educator about her work with different community groups. Our learning was rich and it was fun—exactly what we hoped for the Aboriginal teachers and students in the school.

Not only was the school leadership inspired and passionate, but there was a generosity of spirit that nurtured the well-being of the school’s relatively young staff, who returned their gratitude through their dedication and commitment to the task at hand—the success of the school program.

## Lesson 2

*\*Empowering Aboriginal teachers to be actively involved in the education of their children, enhances capacity and strengthens culture, language and community pride.*

With a year’s experience working in an English-only classroom, I was asked to teach with two Aboriginal teachers in the bilingual Transition (Prep) class the next year. My responsibilities were very clear. I was to work as part of the teaching team, guiding the planning for the delivery of the curriculum content, as well as empowering the Aboriginal teachers with the pedagogical knowledge to manage our classroom and guide the learning of our students. These responsibilities had been outlined to us from Day 1 of the previous year. David McClay emphasised emphatically, that the prime purpose and intent of our work as teachers at the school was not to educate the students. He said “you are here to work alongside our Aboriginal teachers, to equip and empower them to run their own school. You are here to do yourself out of a job”. I was to be an Adult Educator. Although officially titled ‘Assistant Teachers’ by the Education Department, the reality in bilingual classrooms was, that they were teachers, taking responsibility for the students’ learning in Gupapuyŋu.

Our ‘planning together’ sessions at the end of each day, were crucial to the smooth running of our classroom. Although they were primarily concerned with the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the curriculum implementation, as Beth Graham later

emphasised in her *Team Teaching in Aboriginal Schools in the Northern Territory* (Graham 1986), “unless we answer the question **why**, much of what happens in the classroom is not effective”.

There was no doubting that the questions we were asking, and the conversations we were having daily about the students’ learning development, and about the development of the school’s program, were crucial. Many of the ‘why’ questions however, were engaged with in the wider context of our Early Childhood teaching team. The teachers for the Years 1–3 classes would meet together regularly to discuss our thinking around student progress and their engagement with learning. One discussion early on, was concerning the students’ reading and writing development. Although the students’ reading development, guided through the use of the Gudschinsky primers, was progressing well, there was a tendency for the students to ‘parrot’ as they read. They were seeming not to pick up books and read them for enjoyment. Our questioning around this observation, lead us to create a more vibrant reading culture in our classrooms, where the students experienced a range of different texts. They began to read, respond and enjoy books daily. We soon came to realise, as advocated by Martin and Brogan (1972, in Holdaway 1979) that “emerging readers need a battery of books that they can zoom through with joyous familiarity”.

Although the school’s Literature Production Centre was producing books of an exceptional quality, the rate of production enabling students to ‘zoom through’ the literature could not be maintained. Therefore, we began writing and producing our own class books and materials; student-illustrated story books, class-acted photo books, repetitive sentence readers etc. Supplementing this also was the Language Experience reading program that enabled the students and Aboriginal teachers to jointly construct meaningful texts to read daily. This had a two-fold effect. Not only did it facilitate the production of student-centred stories for them to read, re-read and ‘zoom through’, it also allowed for the Aboriginal teachers to further develop and refine their own writing and transcription skills.

Inevitably, observing the students’ enthusiastic engagement with the growing number of class-made books we produced, it answered the ‘why’ question about student reading development. However, this created a new dilemma that we needed to work through. The Gudschinsky primers had been written in the Gupapuyŋu language, but increasingly, the students were speaking and writing in Djambarrpuyŋu. This then became a discussion school-wide, with the Literature Production Centre producing materials in one language, whilst the student-produced books were in another—often being labelled ‘baby language’. This same discussion was being had in schools nation-wide with regard to the Language Experience approach to reading.

Our classrooms were highly organised, structured and predictable. We had a Reading corner, a Maths corner, a Writing corner, an Oral English room—as well as a class mat for whole-class learning times. The morning’s teaching time was conducted in small groups, with students rotating through their first learning cycle for Literacy activities and Oral English, then through their second cycle for Maths. Each of the activities would have been well planned, with the necessary materials

prepared well in advance of the lesson. If the teachers were not confident with any aspect of an activity or the content, we would rehearse the lessons in our planning time the day before. This would be followed by a review and reflection at the end of the next day. We worked to a weekly overview timetable, planning at the end of each week for the next. Our daily lesson plans and group rotations were also planned daily. Each teaching team developed a deep level of confidence and trust in each other, learning with and from each other every day.

I particularly enjoyed the challenge of taking new and emerging education theory and translating it into a language that could be understood by Aboriginal teachers; then we would work together, to adapt it for the students' benefit in the classroom. For example, when Stephen Harris wrote an article about the teaching of reading titled 'The Lap Method', we looked together at the meaning of formal and informal learning and how we could use an informal approach to immersing our students in reading—especially reading for pleasure.

### Lesson 3

*\*Valuing students' first language and facilitating first language literacy and numeracy, inevitably enhances learning capacity and language maintenance, but it also enhances learning and capacity in English.*

Over a 3 year period, I worked with the same group of students, as well as with five Aboriginal teachers consistently; Nakarran, Ganganuwuy, Nalambirra, Djambutj and later Milmilany. We had decided that consistency of teachers would progress the students' learning more effectively, and so after starting with one class in their first year of schooling, we then followed them up to Year 1 and to Year 2. They were all developing skills as strong Gupapuyñu readers and writers, as well as honing their skills in Maths and Oral English. In fact, it became clear that their learning progress was progressing at an exciting rate. Because I had begun teaching in a Year 3 English-only class in my first year at the school, I was well aware of the levels of literacy observed in those students, compared to the bilingual class we had then taught for 3 years. Although we intuitively knew that their progress was obvious and significant, we needed to show it. We therefore set out to establish a school-wide testing program over a 4 year period, involving students from both the bilingual and non-bilingual classes.

I was asked in 1979, to coordinate the school-wide testing program. As outlined in Gale et al. 1981, (*Academic Achievement in the Milingimbi Bilingual Education Program*) the testing demonstrated what we had intuitively known—our bilingual program was 'successful'. It 'worked'. Overall, on the ten tests administered at Year 7 level, the English only students performed better on two tests, whilst the bilingually educated students had better scores on eight, five of these at 5 per cent significance level and two at 10 per cent. Although the results demonstrated that the bilingual program students generally performed better than the English-only program students by the end their primary school education, 'their standards were still

considerably below the national average' (p. 309). However, as outlined in the article's conclusion 'initial education through the medium of the mother tongue facilitates deeper and more complete cognitive development in the early years which will later pay off in the relatively easier learning of the second language, the culture, and scientific and mathematical ideas of the dominant society'. As Stephen Harris later pointed out (1981), even more significant was the fact that those tests in which the bilingual program students performed better were 'on the whole those that were more abstract or cognitively demanding ... as opposed to the processes which were more dependent on rote learning'.

Despite what we could see and were experiencing as 'success' at Milingimbi school, it was a growing frustration that student 'performance' would inevitably carry more weight in terms of continuing government support, than the myriad of social and emotional benefits for the students being observed. As Stephen Harris wrote (1981), 'bilingual education, along with most other educational innovations that have social as well as academic aims, will stand or fall on its academic performance alone, in spite of the presence of several important non-academic aims such as better child self-concept, more responsibility for Aboriginal staff, maintenance of the child's first language and culture, and improved employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. If these non-academic aims were given more than lip-service, then for the program overall to be regarded as a success where the non-academic aims were evaluated positively, one would expect that on academic measures, the bilingual (program) students would only have to break even with non-bilingual program students'. The fact that so many Milingimbi Aboriginal teachers later went on to Batchelor College to formalise their teacher training, then returned to take up registered teaching roles, was evidence enough of the 'success' of the Milingimbi program in terms of empowerment.

In 1981, after a year travelling overseas, I returned to the NT to take up the position of Teacher-Linguist at Bamyili school. I was following on from the start-up work of Dorothy Meehan who was the first teacher-linguist in the Kriol Bilingual Program. I arrived with enthusiasm and vision, but on my first day, I was left feeling that the success of the Kriol bilingual program had been sabotaged. A decision had been made over the holiday break, to move the literacy centre to a room at the other side of the school. The school ute was backed up to the door of the literacy centre, then shelves and shelves of Dorothy's meticulously organised and levelled books and materials were thrown (literally) into back of the ute, driven to the other side of the school and thrown into a huge pile in the middle of the new room. They were then left for 'the new teacher-linguist' to sort out. It took weeks, but the dedicated literacy workers laboriously assisted, and we set up the literacy centre all over again. This was to be a very different experience from my time at Milingimbi.

With the 'do yourself out of a job' mantra still in my head, I set about organising a training course for the literacy workers at Bamyili. We focussed upon every aspect of being an effective literacy worker; story recording and collation, transcribing and transcription, story writing, language choices, translation, book illustration and production. Over time, as our book production became more proficient,

it was imperative that the literacy workers understood how their work was being used in the classrooms, and that they had an understanding of the appropriateness and applicability of the materials produced. They were therefore scheduled to spend time in classrooms; trialling their stories, talking with students and teachers, working along-side Aboriginal teachers and then reporting back to our literacy centre team about the suitability of their stories and productions.

Students' writing development was a key focus in the Kriol program. We collected student work samples, organised them into progressive levels, and eventually published a book titled *'Encouraging children to write: the Kriol experience at Bamyili'* (1983). These were the 'process writing' days, preceding the functional linguistics 'genre' movement. But it was exciting to watch the growing confidence of students writing fluently in the language they spoke.

From the program's inception, there had always been debate about the validity of using Kriol as a language of instruction—considering the growing number of traditional community languages that were dying. It seemed that with the passing of each successive community elder, there was another language being lost or at least another fluent speaker lost. In a noble attempt to recognise this decline in the number of community language speakers, and in an attempt to slow the process, we organised community language classes for the students, which brought pleasure and hope to the elders. However, one afternoon per week was not going to save eight community languages if they were not spoken fluently every day with the children. Years later, when I worked in Adelaide with the Kurna, Narrunga and Narrindjeri language revival program, I looked back on my time at Bamyili and wished that we could have put more time and resources into making recordings and encouraging the use of those community languages. I had come to realise that it was much harder to bring a language back than to record and learn from those who were still speaking their language fluently.

## Lesson 4

*\*Investing in the development of teachers' learning, particularly in a cross-cultural context, impacts them as life-long learners.*

On-the-job professional learning for the non-Aboriginal teachers was a priority at Milingimbi. Staff room, classroom and over-dinner conversations around language domains, Aboriginal learning styles, purposeful learning, Aboriginal knowledge, teaching methodologies and the like, were commonplace in the early years of the bilingual program. We devoured any article written, any Department publication or international journal featuring bilingual methodologies. We also seized upon any opportunity to share ideas with teachers in other bilingual schools at our rare regional or cross-sector conferences. For teachers with potential for becoming teacher-linguists, they were supported to undertake the 10 week Summer Institute of Linguistics field linguistics training course in Sydney. This I did, in the summer of 1977, returning for a further 2 years in the classroom at Milingimbi

before taking up the teacher-linguist's job at Bamyili. This was a tough gig, but it was preceded by a year's leave that took me to the USA to study at the Linguistic Society of America Summer school in Albuquerque New Mexico.

In Albuquerque I studied with some of the US's great educators in the field of Bilingual and multi-cultural Education—Joshua Fishman and Courtney Cazden among them. Although at the time I was only 25 years old, with only five years of teaching experience behind me, I was surprised to have such eminent educators show interest in what I had to share about Bilingual Education in Aboriginal Australia. I was consequently invited to give several seminars in Courtney Cazden's classes, talking about the developments, methodologies, successes etc. of our experience in the fledgling program in the Northern Territory. As a result of this connection made, Courtney Cazden visited Australia and spent time with Beth Graham and Stephen Harris in the Bilingual Education Unit in the N.T. Education Department, followed by visits to some of our Bilingual schools. It was a connection that would continue for many years to follow.

One highlight of my many experiences in the US, was a visit to Rock Point Navajo school in Arizona. We had read much about this school whilst developing practices at Milingimbi, but the chance to visit and meet the staff and the Principal, Wayne Holm, was a privilege. The evolution of their bilingual program from the late 60s, mirrored what we had also experienced in the NT—the challenges associated with building the capacity of Navajo staff, creating appropriate and engaging reading materials, and setting up assessment schedules to monitor student progress etc.

In the early eighties, teacher-linguists and other bilingual school employees were supported by the services of advisors in the Education Department's Bilingual Education Unit. Beth Graham and Stephen Harris in particular, were inspiring leaders from afar, as well as welcome visitors when they had the funding support to visit us in the field. It was the 'hey-day' for education magazines with a focus upon Aboriginal Education—'The Aboriginal Child at School', 'Developing Education', and the 'NT Bilingual Newsletter', were devoured enthusiastically. The writings of Michael Christie, Stephen Harris and Beth Graham were pivotal to the development of new learning & teaching techniques and practices. It was also the time when Brian Gray was developing the 'Concentrated Language Encounters' approach to the teaching of English at Traeger Park Primary school in Alice Springs. I joined a group of teacher-linguists who spent time in Alice Springs with Brian, learning from his ESL methodologies and adapting them for our languages programs. At Bamyili, the teachers were ready and willing to adopt new ideas and approaches.

In his reflective paper about Bilingual Education, delivered to the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia Congress in Canberra in 1981, Stephen Harris spoke about the social and psychological strengths of bilingual programs, above and beyond the academic benefits that were obvious. He highlighted the close team-work developed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and the 'increased capacity of both groups of teachers to communicate' (cross-culturally).

## Lesson 5

*\*Successful school learning requires teachers and students to act with purpose and intent.*

Armed with experience and confidence from further study in the mid-1980s, I took up an offer to work for the South Australian Education Department and establish a new regional Literature Production Centre in the APY (Anangu/Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara) Lands to produce literature for the seven Pitjantjatjara bilingual schools in the NW of the state. The story of bilingual education in South Australia was a unique one. As early as the 1940s, eminent Presbyterian missionary Dr. Charles Duguid, saw ‘education as a solution for Anangu people’ and his aim was to ‘encourage Anangu people to maintain traditional cultural practices, which included the development of Pitjantjatjara literacy in the school’. Although a bank of Pitjantjatjara literature had been developed over many years, there had not been an opportunity for a coordinated literature production and curriculum development approach across all Anangu schools. Three teacher-linguists were employed in three of the schools, and we very quickly became a tight unit, setting up literacy worker training programs, expanding the scope of Pitjantjatjara literature production and conducting professional development programs for teaching staff across the region. It was an exciting time to be involved in this program, because there was a strength and depth to the Pitjantjatjara program going back decades. Among the Anangu and non-Anangu staff too, there was a collective level of long-standing experience, knowledge and expertise that I had not experienced across any one language group in the NT.

Education theory informing our practice at the time stemmed from the continuing work of Michael Christie, Stephen Harris, Beth Graham, Jim Cummins and Brian Gray. Michael’s work (1982) challenged our understanding of what successful classroom learning looked like for Aboriginal students. He talked about the need to make Aboriginal students’ learning purposeful; ensuring they were goal focussed, they had a sense of learning control, and they could make judgments about their progress towards their goals. We thought in terms of empowering students to write, instead of, as previously written about, ‘encouraging’ students to write. In the Pitjantjatjara schools we took on the challenge, with the understanding that, as Stephen Harris wrote ‘for those Aboriginal children who wish to be successful in the context (of school) and so have access to power inherent in the dominant society, they will need to learn the “language of schooling”’. He and others (Graham and Cummins) maintained that careful consideration was needing to be given to how school-language skills such as ‘being able to reflect on and anticipate events and experiences, and form and justify opinions’ could be ‘developed initially in first language, and then ... simply brought into use in the new medium’—requiring an adaption of Aboriginal languages to accommodate such learning. These thoughts and theories also coincided with teachers’ growing understanding of language ‘genres’ movement, emerging from a functional linguistics base. It was a challenging but intellectually stimulating time as we grappled

with new and forward thinking theories, always working towards our own goals with purpose and intent.

## Lesson 6

*\*Education policies can come and go with changing governments, but it is the commitment and resilience of Aboriginal staff that determines the success of community education programs.*

With each new state or federal government has come a new raft of policies impacting Aboriginal communities, along with a new set of programs recommended as the ‘answer’ for Aboriginal Education. More recently, this includes programs that require the employment of more and more non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal communities, as well as the adoption of hugely expensive ‘fix-all’ programs imported from overseas.

Soon after the October 2008 decree by a former NT Education Minister that “all schooling in Northern Territory Schools is to be conducted in English only for the first four hours of every school day”, I happened to be at a work function in Melbourne where a Federal Government Minister was a guest. I took the opportunity to express my concern about the NT Government’s education policy shift concerning bilingual education in remote communities. Sadly, the response I received was automatic and swift. It was, “they have shown it doesn’t work”.

My first thought was “who are *they*?”

My second thought was “clearly, this person has not taken the time to speak personally to those for whom the NT government’s decision has affected the most—the Aboriginal teachers, literacy workers, students and their families whose languages, meaningful employment, empowerment and education are now under threat”.

Despite such obstacles, however, the continuing determination, resilience, spirit, and courage of Aboriginal people who dare to engage in the Education space today, has been inspirational. Their courage is undoubtedly fuelled by their belief that their children have the right to be educated in their mother-tongue and to gain proficiency in English.

I am currently working as the Head of School at the Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS). In this and previous roles, I have supported young Aboriginal students from remote and regional communities who have chosen to undertake their secondary education in Melbourne. Some of these students are the grand-children of the students I taught at Milingimbi and Bamyili in the 1970s and 1980s. Sadly, because of changing education policies over the years, our students do not have the first language literacy skills that their parents and grand-parents have.

Recently, one of these grand-parents accompanied her grand-daughter to Melbourne to help her settle into her new school. She attended our school assembly where she heard me speak about the importance of celebrating students’ learning



achievements and goals. We recognised one student for her outstanding efforts in progressing five spelling levels in just one semester. We recognised other students for their outstanding achievements in Maths. We also acknowledged students who had made progress in first language literacy. When she realised who I was, and remembered her education experience at Mililingimbi, whilst also contemplating the possibilities ahead for her grand-daughter, she approached me saying “*Kathy-Gale, you make me cry!*”

How far have we come since those early days of Bilingual Education in the 1970s? Not far enough!

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## Chapter 6

# Starting Out at Bamyili: Factors Specific to the Development of the Kriol Program

Dorothy Meehan

The Kriol program had a long gestation period and a difficult birth. My husband and I arrived in Bamyili, which has been known as Barunga since 1984, with our three children at the beginning of 1974. It was an exciting time for Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory. Bilingual education was on the agenda in schools where the children spoke traditional languages. The Bamyili situation was different, however, as the children spoke a new Aboriginal language, now known as Kriol, but then called ‘Pidgin English’. This chapter documents the early development of the Kriol-English bilingual program at Bamyili with reference to the literature and research available to us at the time.

The nature and status of creoles have set them apart from traditional indigenous languages in discussions about whether or not they should be used in the classroom. Resistance from some linguists, Education Department decision-makers, many teachers and the public made it an uphill battle to even begin; so, while we shared many of the experiences of schools with traditional vernacular programs, the focus here is on some of the extra difficulties we faced with the Kriol program.

### The Consultative Committee

At its first meeting, in 1973 the Bilingual Education Consultative Committee decided that there had not been enough linguistic study of the children’s language, or enough evidence of community support, for the language to be used in a bilingual program at Bamyili (Department of Education 1973, p. 5).

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In June 1974 Geoff O'Grady and Ken Hale recognised that the language being used at Bamyili was the children's mother-tongue and a creole, rather than a limited lingua franca used by the different traditional language groups to communicate with each other, as is the case with a pidgin. They recommended that, in communities where children spoke a creole as their first language, the teachers should use it for instructional purposes in the early years of school (O'Grady and Hale 1974, p. 8). They said that it could be helpful to teach reading and writing in Kriol too, but there were also many problems with this.

In November 1974 Maria Brandl reported on a visit to Roper River with John Sandefur, the SIL linguist studying creole. Margaret Sharpe had also recommended the use of Kriol for initial literacy and general instruction in the early curriculum, while pointing out some of the potential problems such as prevailing attitudes, devising an orthography, and differences between dialects (Sharpe 1974, pp. 19–23). By then the Bamyili Council had given written approval for Kriol to be trialed in the pre-school. So the Committee recommended that both Roper River and Bamyili should go ahead and make oral use of Kriol in the pre-school in 1975 (Sharpe 1974, p. 5).

During 1975 the Principal of Bamyili School, Holt Thompson, and an Aboriginal teacher, David Jentian, surveyed Bamyili family groups, who were found to support the use of Kriol in the school, so the Consultative Committee recommended that the school staff should prepare resources and materials in 1976 and consider beginning a full program in 1977 (Department of Education 1975, p. 5).

## First Steps

The school's bilingual program team consisted of non-Aboriginal teachers working with Aboriginal assistant teachers, a team of Aboriginal literacy workers (writers and illustrators) and a non-Aboriginal production supervisor, with a non-Aboriginal teacher-linguist as program coordinator. The non-Aboriginal teachers were young and relatively inexperienced. Along with the production supervisor and the program coordinator, they were English speakers and transient residents in the community. The Aboriginal assistant teachers, Kriol speakers who were culturally and linguistically ideal for the task, had no formal teaching qualifications. We were all keen to learn as much as possible from each other.

In 1976 I was appointed to the position of teacher-linguist with responsibility for developing basic literacy materials as the top priority. This involved ongoing consultation with Kriol speakers, linguists, Bilingual Education advisors in Darwin, and school staff, as there were a number of factors to be considered before we could begin the practical work.

## Language Status

One factor to consider was the status of pidgins and creoles, which have been spoken in various parts of the world for centuries. People often ignored them or thought they were not ‘real’ languages. Educators usually acted as though they did not exist or, if they did acknowledge their existence, thought they should be eradicated (Craig 1976, p. 95). Siegel notes that this is still often the case, but points out that English itself was once considered inappropriate for use in education (Siegel 2006, p. 42).

Pidgins are contact languages that develop when people from different language groups are living or working in contact with each other and need to communicate in certain situations (De Camp 1971, p. 15). They are not the main languages of these speakers (Mühlhäusler 1979, p. 41). When people from different language groups live in contact with each other over a period of time using a pidgin to communicate with each other, the children may grow up using the pidgin as their mother tongue, or main language of communication. The pidgin then becomes a creole. In the creolisation process the language is expanded and enriched, since it is no longer restricted to some situations, but is used for all of its speakers’ communication needs. Creoles are spoken in many parts of the world, and may survive after the original contact situation no longer exists. It is interesting to reflect that no one knows how many of the world’s ‘normal’ languages might have begun through this pidgin-creole process (De Camp 1971, p. 16).

So, we needed to consider the status of Kriol with respect to our bilingual program. Many people in the NT thought it was not a ‘proper’ language. Some agreed it was a real language, but thought it was not ‘really Aboriginal’. I was unsure about it as well when I first arrived at Bamyili, but I soon realised it was an Aboriginal language (see also Sandefur 1980). Kriol speakers have not ‘lost their Aboriginality’ as some people fear. Many Kriol words may have been derived from English, but they are no longer English words. They may sometimes sound like English, but the meaning will be related to the Aboriginal way of thinking. In that sense Kriol provides a way for Aboriginal people from different traditional language groups to live together in contact with English speakers while they still maintain their Aboriginal ways of thinking.

We encountered a wide range of derogatory attitudes to Kriol at Bamyili on the part of non-Aboriginal people and these had been communicated effectively to Aboriginal people over the years. Aboriginal people often expressed similar sentiments in the past but, by this time, were much more prepared to ‘stand up and be counted’ as Kriol speakers.

In the past children were punished for speaking Kriol in school, and an Adult Education class was refused funds for Kriol literacy materials on the grounds that Kriol was ‘not a language’ (Sandefur 1979, p. 19). It is not surprising that Aboriginal people preferred not to use Kriol around non-Aboriginal people, and they often echoed these negative attitudes when questioned about it. However, over time, Sandefur (1979, p. 19) reported a positive change at Roper in the expressed

attitudes of Kriol speakers towards their language. I observed a similar change at Bamyili, where the bilingual program itself helped to generate a more positive attitude towards Kriol. Now there is a range of resources for Kriol, including the Bible, community education and interpreters.

## **Kriol and Variation**

The fact that Kriol is a ‘continuum language’ was another factor to be considered. The Aboriginal people brought together through contact and resettlement by Europeans were speakers of some twelve distinct languages and these contributed to the pidgin and creole that emerged (Sandefur 1979, p. 8). European contact began with some early exploration in the 1840s and greatly increased after the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line and the establishment of cattle stations in the 1870s. Non-Aboriginal, Chinese and Aboriginal men came to work on the stations, sometimes bringing with them other Pidgin-English varieties used elsewhere.

In 1906 the Church Missionary Society established a mission on the Roper River, a safe haven for Aboriginal people from across the region, including speakers of many different languages. It developed into the Aboriginal community now known as Ngukurr.

Contact in the Bamyili area increased when tin mining began at Maranboy in 1913. Experimental peanut farming also began and the Australian Inland Mission set up a Flying Doctor hospital base, which later became the Maranboy police station.

More Aboriginal people moved from place to place during the First World War, but during the Second World War the government set up camps, or settlements, to control this movement. Several locations were tried without success before the present site of Bamyili, on the Beswick Creek, was chosen (Thompson 1976, p. 11).

As people from different language groups became integrated into a more settled community and Pidgin became a useful language of communicating between them, this language variety expanded as it was used for everyday interactions of the community. Eventually, a generation of children grew up speaking this language as their mother tongue, and so the creole (later known as the Kriol) emerged.

Creolisation most likely began at Ngukurr because of its earlier establishment as a multilingual community. At Bamyili creolisation would not have been accelerated by the establishment of the war compounds (Sandefur 1979, p. 14).

When the Pidgin was in its formative stage Aboriginal speakers took English words and pronounced them using the sound systems of their own languages. They also used the words to label their own Aboriginal concepts rather than keeping the meaning they had in English. As the Pidgin remained in contact with English, the English sound system began to influence it.

The English-sounding pronunciations did not replace the Aboriginal-type sound system, but supplemented it and expanded it. As the language expanded, it

developed a complex sound system “that can be described as a ‘continuum’ of sounds with an Aboriginal-type sound sub-system at one end and an English-type sound sub-system at the other” (Sandefur 1979, p. 29).

Kriol speakers use the words ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ to describe the Aboriginal-type sounds at one end of the continuum and the English-type sounds at the other end. The word for ‘snake’ is a useful example. It can be pronounced:

(heavy end) jineg—jineig—jineik—sineik—sneik (light end)

Kriol speakers do not speak at any one point on the continuum, but rather within a range on the continuum. Most speakers, while using some heavy and light sounds, generally operate between the two extremes. They refer to this as ‘proper Kriol’. ‘Heavy’ speakers, operating mostly at the heavy end of the continuum, tend to be traditional language speakers who have learned Kriol as a second language. ‘Light’ speakers, on the other hand, tend to be Aboriginal people whose first language is English and who have learned Kriol as a second language (Sandefur 1979, p. 50).

All languages change, and one linguist believed that Kriol, at Bamyili, was “moving rapidly in the direction of Standard Australian English” (SAE), and thought it could possibly merge with SAE in about “one and a half to two generations” (Steffensen 1975, p. 4). Another believed that, although Kriol was becoming “more English”, it would probably not merge with English for three or four generations (Sharpe 1974, p. 20). My own view was that Kriol was not likely to ‘merge’ with Standard Australian English until Aboriginal Kriol speakers’ world view, culture, and way of thinking ‘merged’ with those of the dominant culture.

Pit Corder explains that there are differences in languages where there are differences in cultures (1977, p. 70). To give an example from Kriol: the word *ab—hap—haf* means ‘a portion of a whole’. There need not be only two portions; the portions need not be equal; and it is not used to describe the dividing of the abstract quality of number, but rather the dividing of a real entity into portions. The fact that a Kriol speaker pronounces the word *haf* (so that it sounds like the English ‘half’) instead of *ab* will not indicate a ‘move in the direction of Standard Australian English’, as long as the word is used to label the concept above, which is certainly not the concept underlying the SAE label ‘half’. Kriol speakers have a different way of talking about sharing a number of items into equal portions.

## Variation and Orthography

The continuum, with its many correct ways to pronounce Kriol words, made it difficult to devise an orthography. A breakthrough came when we discussed the problem with two SIL linguists, David and Margaret Bendor Samuel, who were visiting Australia. They suggested that we devise an orthography to cover the full range of the sound continuum, and have a flexible spelling system where words would be spelt whichever way they were pronounced. This was not a problem to Kriol speakers, as the letters always represented the same sounds.

Flexible spelling, though, was a novel idea to English speakers, who are used to words always being spelt the same way with some letters of the alphabet representing different sounds in different words. For instance, the letter ‘a’ is pronounced differently in each of the following words: *man*, *many*, *baby*, *father*, *all*, *watch*, *organ*, *vary*. The English spelling system tends to be rigid but inconsistent, whereas the Kriol system was flexible but consistent.

In 1975 Aboriginal writers from Bamyili and Ngukurr attended a writers’ workshop with John Sandefur of the Summer School of Linguistics and Dr. David Zorc of the School of Australian Linguistics. There they reached agreement on a suitable orthography for Kriol.

Some people asked why a child should be taught to spell a word ‘h-a-f’ in Kriol when they will have to spell it ‘h-a-l-f’ later on in English. But, as noted above, the Kriol word *haf* does not mean the same as the English word ‘half’. They are actually two different words, so spelling them differently can help to avoid confusion, rather than cause it.

There were also the dialect differences to consider. Kriol has many words derived from traditional languages as well as those from English. Different areas were settled by different language groups, so we find that ‘dog’ is *wartdu* at Ngukurr but *rolu* at Bamyili. Both groups, however, also use *dog*. Some pronunciations are also different in different areas. The word for the verb ‘to go’ is usually pronounced *go* at Bamyili, but *gu* at Ngukurr. The Sandefurs report similar borrowing from local vernaculars in the Kimberleys area, and note (1979a, b, p. 10) that in virtually all cases there are synonyms for the vernacular words that are used throughout most of the Kimberleys and Territory. They give the example *yabawandi* (‘children’), which is common in the Fitzroy area, but not used elsewhere. However, the people of the Fitzroy area also use *biginini*, as do those at Bamyili.

It would be possible to produce materials which would be understood generally, by keeping mainly to words derived from English, but it was thought that reading materials would be much livelier, and much more interesting, if they included the locally derived words. So to start with, writers in each area wrote in their own dialect; small printings were done, and samples were shared.

## Designing a Program

Some people were concerned that the concepts and vocabulary of Kriol might not be sufficient for use in all parts of the curriculum. Sharpe (1974, p. 21) reported that Kriol would be able to describe things in many curriculum areas, but there could be problems in some of them.

Different language groups have precise terms for concepts which are culturally important to them. In Kriol *gaggam* means ‘father’s father or mother’s mother’. There is a different word, *mammam*, for ‘father’s mother or mother’s father’. English speakers use phrases, not single words, to refer instead to maternal grandparents or paternal grandparents. Whether they use a single word or a phrase



to describe them, both English speakers and Kriol speakers know who their grandparents are and how they are related to them. In the same way, English has very precise terms for all kinds of measurements, while Aboriginal languages, including Kriol do not, so in these languages such concepts need to be described in phrases or sentences. At Bamyili it was decided to leave some things, such as ordinal number and numeration and notation of numbers over 20, to be taught in English in later grades rather than in Kriol in the early years.

## Teaching First Language Literacy

To begin preparing our resources and teaching materials we needed to decide what method we would use for teaching the children to read and write. Some schools in traditional language areas were using a method developed by the late Sarah Gudschinsky during her years of work in South America. This involves a series of reading books containing a number of ‘key words’, which are learnt by sight. They are then broken down into syllables and the syllables are then put together in different ways to make other words. This method works well with languages where all or most of the syllables are CV syllables, consisting of a consonant (C) followed by a vowel (V), and where there are many words suitable for use as key words (Gudschinsky 1967, p. 29). The key words should be ‘content’ words, like nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs, rather than ‘function’ words, such as pronouns, prepositions or conjunctions. They should be words that will be useful for making interesting stories and also have the syllables needed for putting together in different ways to make many new words.

Kriol, though, has syllables with complicated combinations of vowels (V) and consonants (C), including V, CV, CCV, VC, VCC, CVC, CVCC, CCVC, CCVCC, CCCVC; simpler syllable patterns are found in the function words.

We also considered applying the literacy teaching methods of Paulo Friere, another educator, who worked in South America. He used key words too, which he called ‘generative words’—not in a set of ready-made books, but in a program of socio-political ‘awareness-raising’ discussions about the real life social justice problems of the people learning to read. He saw the literacy-learning program as an integral part of their struggle for social justice. He chose ‘generative words’ that were emotionally and socially relevant and therefore likely to promote lively discussion. They also had to be words with the syllables needed for recombining to form many other words. The Spanish and Portuguese languages in his programs did not have complex syllable patterns, and he said he only needed to use 17 key words to teach adults to read and write (Freire 1975, p. 38).

However, the methods described above were unsuitable, because they were designed for teaching adults. Young children have different needs and different skills. They have a shorter concentration span, and have not reached the same level of language development or cognitive development as adults have. They also spend

more time in school than adults can spare for learning to read. We therefore needed a different method for our children's literacy program.

David Zorc used what he termed a 'Programmed Method of Reading' in the Philippines. He discussed this method with John Sandefur and me as a possibility for the Kriol program, and with members of the Bilingual Consultative Committee in the wider context of the NT bilingual education program. As he described it to us at Bamyili, the children would begin with the letters that were easiest to read and write and the letters that were most significant in the language or dialect. They would learn to read and write words and sentences composed of the letters they had been taught, and since all the letters were taught by the third month, they could then move on to a creative writing program. He acknowledged though that the method "left much to the ingenuity of the teacher", since it involved teacher-made visual aids rather than ready-made books (Zorc n.d., p. 1).

The members of the Consultative Committee were concerned that this method depended too heavily on teacher expertise. They said we should instead develop a set of literacy materials which could be used by teachers who may not have had formal training and extensive experience.

At the regular Bilingual Program conferences in Darwin Stephen Harris discussed his views about important differences between traditional learning styles and formal Western education. In traditional Aboriginal society children are used to learning in real life situations without a great deal of verbal instruction. Western schools set up a sequence of skills to be learnt in a formal setting with much more verbal teaching. Harris felt that traditional learning styles were not necessarily suited to the classroom, and so some current classroom methods are more compatible than others with the learning styles he believed were familiar to Aboriginal children. These methods could therefore be very useful, especially in the early years of schooling.

We had trialed the Van Leer language development program (Queensland Department of Education 1971) from 1974 to 1976 before the formal bilingual program started at Bamyili. It was designed for using with Standard Australian English, but its use of themes, and activities based on the children's 'language experience' looked promising for the Kriol program.

After a great deal of consideration, we decided to adopt a multi-strand, thematic approach, similar to that of the Van Leer program. We chose a series of themes that the members of the teaching team would use to plan activities where the children would spend a lot of time listening and speaking to adults and to each other. Aboriginal assistant teachers would tell stories and read books to the children. They would go for walks with them, in the bush, or around the community, with a Polaroid camera to record the experience. Back in the classroom the photos would be placed on wall charts or made into class books to be 'read' over and over again. Extra story-books and scrap-books would be made by the teachers and the children to add to the collection.

We chose a number of interesting 'sight' words that the children used often in their speech. These were printed on cards to be used in sentence-making activities. Because the sight words and the theme activities were both based on the children's

interest areas, the sentences made with the sight words were ones that the children would most likely to want to use for captioning photos and drawings. Gradually the classroom would be filled with books, captions and useful labels, to surround the children with print.

We adapted phonic puppets from the Van Leer program to use in games and informal play activities to gradually focus the children's attention on specific sounds. Book and chart collections of words with the same initial sound would add to the body of print in the classroom and provide the beginnings of later dictionary work. As the children developed greater awareness of these sounds and letters, the puppet games would be used more to provide variety and fun for reinforcement and motivation. We designed a simple paper-bag type of puppet for each character in case the more elaborate Van Leer puppets were unavailable, and invented extra characters where there were no suitable ones in the Queensland program.

A program of formal 'word attack' skills was an important strand in our multi-strand approach, since in Kriol, unlike English, each letter always represents the same sound. We needed to begin writing the formal teaching materials, but we had to decide what to do about the spelling. A flexible spelling system solved the problem of coping with the phonological continuum and dialect differences, but actually posed problems for the production of beginning literacy materials. Confident literate adults could cope with a flexible system; we had to be sure it would not confuse young beginners.

Margaret Bendor-Samuel helped us decide what to do. She suggested we standardise the spelling used in the early teaching materials. She advised us to choose vocabulary that was suitable for the children, but to standardise the spelling according to the preference of adult, mother-tongue, Kriol speakers. This was to make sure that adults did not reject the materials as childish. The children would not be likely to reject material about subjects that were interesting to them. Later in the program we could teach the children about flexible spelling.

The basic 'work-books' contained teaching and revision units designed so that the children would focus their attention on each of the letters and digraphs in turn. The theme activities, class-made books, sentence-making cards, puppet games and printed books were to help the children become familiar with words containing any given letter for some time before the letter was presented in a formal lesson.

## **Teaching English in the Bilingual Program**

As well as preparing the Kriol literacy materials we had to plan a suitable oral English program. The usual methods of teaching English as a 'foreign' language or a 'second' language were not necessarily the most suitable. De Camp explains (1971, p. 15) that linguists traditionally describe a pidgin or creole as 'based' on another standard language. He points out that a French-based creole is not "genetically related to French in the same sense that French is related to Italian". The word 'related' is used to describe the fact that there are similarities in the

vocabulary. Kriol is called an ‘English-based’ creole because most of its vocabulary has been derived from English. As pointed out earlier though, Kriol words which sound the same as particular English words may have quite different meanings.

The ‘Immersion’ method of teaching English, for example, may be useful in many situations. In this method the teaching is done entirely in the target language and explicit explanations of grammar rules are avoided. However, explaining aspects of the target language can often be more helpful than simply continuing to speak in the target language. I have found that children as well as adults often want specific explanations of ‘how the language works’. I particularly remember an occasion, in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, when my grade six students were having difficulty with direct and indirect speech in their writing. When I finally stopped trying to teach them by the prescribed method and explained how their Enga way of expressing it was different from the English way, one student asked in an exasperated voice, “Why didn’t you say that in the first place?”

I believe this is particularly relevant to Kriol speakers. Teachers, even if they are not fluent Kriol speakers, need to know the differences between Kriol and English, and to be prepared to explain them when needed. Otherwise, as in the case of *haf* and ‘half’, teachers and children may be saying the ‘same’ words to each other without realising that they are, literally, speaking different languages.

The Kriol and English bilingual program incorporated incidental English learning at pre-school and planned informal learning at Transition, followed by systematic daily oral English sessions based on the Van Leer program’s English, but modified to avoid confusion; i.e., we planned separate topics in Kriol and English, particularly where English and Kriol terms have similar forms but different underlying meanings. Teachers would read English story books to the children at each level and the children would learn to sing English songs. We expected that by the time they mastered literacy skills in Kriol they would have learned enough English to be able to extend their literacy skills to include English reading and writing.

## **And Finally, the Program Began**

1976 was a year of intensive consultation, in-service training, team building, problem solving and program planning. And eventually in 1977, Bamyili School on the Beswick Reserve, 78 km south-east of Katherine, began its formal Kriol bilingual education program. We also produced a paper I wrote titled “Kriol Literacy: Why and How...”, which was an account of the factors involved in establishing the Kriol Bilingual Program in the NT. It had been prepared for the use of teachers in Bamyili at the time, and I have drawn on it in writing this chapter.

We moved to Darwin at the end of 1980 and others took over the program, but we have maintained contact with Kriol speakers. Recent years have seen an increasing interest in Australian creoles in different areas of the country, and Aboriginal speakers are conducting research into their own languages, including Kriol. There are still problems for classroom practitioners but there is also great potential; I believe the use of Kriol in education is a story to be continued.

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# Chapter 7

## Boom and then Bust: Lessons Learnt from My Time Teaching in Three Bilingual Schools in the Northern Territory

Mary-Anne Gale

### Introduction

It is now nearly 30 years since I left my job at Yirrkala in one of the stronger bilingual schools in the Northern Territory (NT). So I don't have hands-on experience, nor an in depth knowledge, of the more recent changing government policies, pedagogical trends, recommended teaching methodologies and educational gimmicks that have pervaded NT Aboriginal schools since my departure in 1986. You can read about these (at times disturbing) swings, whims and trends in papers by my respected and enduring colleagues (see Disbray 2014a; Devlin 2009; Simpson et al. 2009). However, I do have vivid memories of my time working in three different bilingual schools in the NT, from the period 1978 to 1986—a time of plentiful funding and a period of ideological and pedagogical excitement. It seems this era of innovation, embedded within an ethos of respect for Aboriginal peoples' aspirations, is a thing of the past. In more recent years, all the soundly researched papers (qualitative and quantitative), reviews, petitions, protests and parliamentary inquiries about the slow demise of bilingual education have fallen on deaf ears, especially within the hallowed walls of parliaments, and by government policy makers.

So in this chapter, I am going to resort to telling three stories of my bilingual school experiences—each reflecting back on a time within 'the boom years of bilingual education'. I trust these reflective recounts will teach just a few lessons to at least some listening ears somewhere.

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## Story 1: Milingimbi

Stepping off the Connair DC3 aeroplane at the Milingimbi airstrip in January 1978, naïve, and with no previous teaching experience, I was bright eyed, enthusiastic and ready to prove to the long serving Balanda principal (David McClay) that he hadn't made a mistake in appointing me as the new post-primary girls' teacher. I can still remember my well rehearsed script that I practised on him as he drove me to my house in bush camp. "Narra djäl nhe dhu marŋgikum ŋarrany Yolŋu matha. Narra yaka marŋgi mirithirr." (I want you to teach me the Yolŋu language. I don't know very much). David just laughed at my feeble attempts, but I'm sure he appreciated that I was making an effort to acknowledge and learn the local Yolŋu language taught in his bilingual school. I also know that my three classes of post-primary girls appreciated me learning to pronounce all their very long Yolŋu names correctly, and not embarrassing them like some other Balanda teachers with horrendous pronunciation.

Milingimbi is one of the Crocodile Islands in North East Arnhem Land, and I had previously visited there three times, as my sister Kathryn Gale was team teaching in the lower years of the bilingual program. I soon decided I also wanted to teach at this innovative school, which was one of the first three Aboriginal schools in the NT to introduce a bilingual program in 1973 (the other two being Areyonga and Yuendumu in the centre). But the principal told me straight on my first visit that my agricultural training was not what he was looking for. Not to be dissuaded, I quickly enrolled to do some Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) electives as part of my graduate year of teacher training, and then took myself off to a Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) summer school in Sydney. That is where I learnt the script I practised on David on that lift from the airstrip.... Obviously, I (or my sister) eventually convinced David that it was worth taking the risk in hiring me, despite my lack of teaching experience.

The next 2 years at Milingimbi were challenging, but rewarding, as I strived to contribute to the bilingual education of my students, and I worked hard to make their learning experiences meaningful, enjoyable and relevant. We started a productive vegetable garden (where we grew huge watermelons), and went for a class trip together down south (by raising lots of money—in defiance of Sister Jess Smith's health orders—largely by selling cans of Coke that we ordered by the pallet full on the barge). We also wrote regular letters to pen pals at Yalata school in South Australia (whom we also visited on our school trip), made biographical, bilingual booklets with lots of photos to send to our billets from our trip, learnt about other parts of the world (especially India), and sponsored a crippled, Indian orphan for corrective foot surgery (by visiting all the gambling circles on welfare day). I spent hours on the weekends turning my classroom into such an inviting, comfortable sanctuary that the girls didn't want to leave it during the week at home time. My job was to teach the girls English, and Maths, but the school policy was to

do it in a way that respected their first language, and built on the skills they already had to speak, read and write in their own language.

What stood out for me on my arrival at Milingimbi was the key role that was played by the Aboriginal teachers in the school. Like all other Balanda teachers, I was to work alongside an Aboriginal teacher—Lawuk. She was highly literate in both English and Yolŋu Matha, was confident, respected and a wonderful role model for the girls in our class—and of course she was related in some way to all of them. The girls I taught did not start their education in the bilingual program, but the school policy insisted they were not to miss out on vernacular literacy lessons. So one of Lawuk’s main tasks was to provide regular vernacular literacy lessons. Yolŋu literacy was not viewed by the school simply as a means to English literacy, but as a right, as stated in the 1953 UNESCO Monograph on Fundamental Education: “It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue” (UNESCO 1953, p. 11).

It soon became quite apparent to me that Milingimbi School could not function without the Yolŋu teachers, despite the fact that not many of them (at that time) had formal qualifications beyond their post-primary schooling. Attending Batchelor College was not yet a feasible or possible reality back then, but there was a well-functioning and effective local Adult Education unit. The school principal put a lot of effort into supporting his Aboriginal staff, and before long he set up a Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program for them at Milingimbi. The children in the school could see the important roles their Aboriginal teachers (and relatives) had in the school, so they believed there would be meaningful jobs for them too when they finished school. It gave them a sense that local employment after school was a realistic possibility.

With a thriving bilingual program, one of the job opportunities for Yolŋu was in the Literature Production Centre (LPC), with its slowly improving printing facilities. This was all pre-computer and pre-photocopier days, but there were still urgent demands on the LPC staff to produce quality literature and resources for the classrooms. I well remember having to learn how to develop black and white photos of the girls, for our trip south, and then struggling with the temperamental gestetner machine for printing our booklet, as the LPC staff were understandably too busy to help. To reproduce the ŋ on the typewriter (what we call the ‘tailed-n’, which features in many Yolŋu words), I had to type the regular n-key, then back space and type over the n with the j-key, and then finally fill in the dot of the j with this volatile, viscous pink liquid. All very messy, and often not successful.

I still keep in touch with ‘my girls’ today, even though we live at opposite ends of the country. I often fantasise about going back to Milingimbi to work for a couple more years, but despair at the stories I hear about the lack of departmental support, and the struggle to sustain a bilingual program that the Yolŋu refuse to give up on.



## Lessons Learnt

- The Aboriginal teachers in the school matter more than the non-Aboriginal teachers—they are the long-term future of the school and won't leave after a couple of years. They are also crucial role models for the children.
- Non-Aboriginal teachers need to be specialist teachers trained to teach English as a second language, as that is their primary job. They also preferably need some experience before they arrive, especially if teaching in small schools with no other experienced teachers as mentors.
- Non-Aboriginal teachers need to commit to staying in schools for at least two years, if not more, in order to build effective working relationships with the community.

## Story 2: Willowra

After two years at Milingimbi, where I was fortunate to observe some very experienced and dedicated teachers using a number of teaching methodologies that really worked, I decided to have a 'desert experience'. The department offered me a teacher-linguist position in either of two small bilingual schools in The Centre—Areyonga or Willowra. To help me choose, I briefly visited Areyonga school on my way back to Milingimbi after the holidays. I am not sure why I chose not to take Areyonga. Maybe it was the overwhelming feeling I had after the very dedicated Jan Capp (soon to depart Areyonga) spent a whole afternoon explaining to me, in minute detail, the sequence of all the Pitjantjatjara syllable cards, flash cards and companion Gudschinsky phonic readers that I would be using (and adding to)—if I took the job.... Or maybe it was the big dog that cocked its very large leg and pissed on me as I sat attentively listening to the school assembly.

Either way, I decided to take the teacher-linguist job at the fledgling bilingual program at Willowra School, 450 km northwest of Alice Springs. I bought a ute<sup>1</sup> in Darwin, and in January 1980 headed off on the long drive to Willowra. On arrival, I found there was nowhere for me to live, and no LPC in which to base myself. But the community were keen, so Janet Nakamarra Long (the chosen literacy worker) and I set ourselves up at a shared desk in the corner of the staffroom. Janet was highly literate in both Warlpiri and English, and a talented artist, as well as a lot of fun to work with—we became firm friends.

Our job was to produce Warlpiri language resources for the classroom (hand-made Big books, syllable cards, sight word cards, etc.) and to prepare Warlpiri books to be printed at the nearby Yuendumu LPC. We had limited facilities, but with Janet's artistic and creative talents, we did the best we could using black Rotring

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<sup>1</sup>Utility van, a tray-backed vehicle handy for transporting goods, such as camping equipment.

pens and stencils. I soon began collaborating with Wendy Baarda (the dedicated and experienced literacy coordinator at Yuendumu) on writing a structured Warlpiri literacy curriculum for both schools. We used the phonic-based principles of the Sarah Gudschinsky approach to vernacular literacy (of teaching each syllable in a systematic order, along with accompanying sight words) but we didn't use the Gudschinsky-style primers with boxes of syllables and letters.

Meanwhile Janet was producing sets of instant readers to support the structured Warlpiri curriculum, with delightful illustrations of donkeys, cowboys, dogs and kids doing things that were familiar and amusing to them. Janet also recorded the old ladies in the community, as they told stories about Dreaming ancestors, and recorded historical stories told by the old men about massacres, or the droving days in the Lander River region. As time went by, a small transportable house arrived on the back of a truck for me to live in, and eventually an even larger transportable arrived to serve as a library and Literacy Centre (without a printer). So the respected story-tellers would regularly come up to the Literacy Centre (LC), and Janet would set them up with a tape recorder to tell their story. Occasionally she would duck off for a *kapati* (cup of tea), complaining that the longer the story the longer it was going to take her to transcribe, and edit into a readable book. She valued the content of the stories, but would often complain that the long ones gave her a 'real proper headache'. I used to feel so sorry for those old ladies, sitting telling their stories to the LC walls, wondering how we could make the whole story-telling experience more relevant, meaningful and productive for all concerned. This and other issues has since been addressed by the 'Warlpiri Triangle' (see Disbray 2014b).

Despite our naïvety back then, I think we can feel pretty proud of the successes we had in the classroom in teaching Warlpiri literacy. We had the support of a strong Bilingual Advisory Team in Darwin (including Graham McKay, Stephen Harris, Beth Graham, Cos Russo and later Brian Devlin). They organised professional in-service training, wrote the Bilingual Education Handbooks (see NTDE 1986), and would visit various bilingual schools (on request). I always appreciated the visits and support of Stephen Harris, and the professional discussions we had about the latest recommended methodology, and whether they seemed to be working in the classroom. I would have a long list of things to ask him, or issues to discuss, on such visits. One thing that worried me at Willowra, was the daily chorus of the junior-primary class chanting the Warlpiri syllables, led by a Yapa teacher (pointing to the syllable chart with a very long stick). I wondered if what I heard was educationally productive: *ma, mi, mu, ka, ki, ku, wa, wi, wu, la, li, lu...* So we discussed how we could translate this oral knowledge into visual recognition of the written syllable cards.... perhaps by using card games (which the children loved) to make the whole learning experience a tangible one, that would eventually help them with their syllable recognition in reading and writing.

At Willowra, I also continued with the 'language experience' approach (first introduced at Milingimbi by the master teacher Merlin McClay)—whereby every Monday morning each child would dictate to their teacher their very own story about the weekend. The Warlpiri teacher at Willowra would write down each child's story in their very own *yimi puku* (story book), like the class production *Pirrarni-rnalu*

*yanu wirlinyi Wirliyajarrai-kurra marnakijiki munu yakajiriki* ('Yesterday we went to the Lander River for bush currents and bush sultanas'). Before long each child had a book full of familiar stories that they could proudly read independently to their teachers. With the additional help of our syllable and sight word card games (bingo, patience and snap), and other 'Break Through to Literacy' activities, and some class 'chorus reading', most children learnt to both read and write independently in Warlpiri by the time they reached the upper primary class.

But by upper primary, things got challenging for the kids. The teacher tried using the same successful methods we used for teaching Warlpiri literacy in the junior primary, with the children dictating their own English stories to the teacher—but it didn't work. The kids just didn't have sufficient oral English skills to dictate stories of any kind to their teacher. In the meantime, we heard about this new method of 'Concentrated Language Encounters' that was just being developed by Brian Gray at Traegar Park Primary School in Alice Springs. He came to visit Willowra one weekend, as he was a friend of the principal's. He was suggesting that we should be helping kids develop their oral English skills by having concentrated experiences together as a class around a single long-running language encounter. Unfortunately, I never got to see this new approach working effectively at Willowra before I left at the end of 1981.

## Lessons Learnt

- For a bilingual program to function there needs to be adequate facilities for the specialist staff, including housing and a functioning Literacy Centre.
- Staff in schools need regular professional development to share and/or familiarise themselves with the latest educational ideas and methodologies.
- The recording of stories and the eventual production of vernacular literacy materials need to be embraced by schools as part of a learning experience for the whole school, preferably with the story being told on country.

## Story 3: Yirrkala

After Willowra, I felt I needed more professional development, so I sought out the best literacy and TESL specialists in Adelaide, and did another year of teacher education. We had some interesting debates, especially as my lecturer Adeline Black promoted Frank Smith's (anti-phonics) methodology (see Smith 1973). Phonics was out, and teaching children to read by using semantic and syntactic cues was in. I argued with my lecturers about the importance of phonics when teaching children to read in a language that is written phonemically. They hadn't heard of Sarah Gudschinsky of the Summer Institute of Linguistics fame (see Gudschinsky 1973), and based all their arguments on the inconsistencies of the

English writing system. I decided to put my ideas into print (see Gale 1982), and to my great pleasure, won myself a scholarship to study linguistics at the Australian National University (ANU).

So with a Masters in Linguistics under my belt, as well as a husband (whom I also acquired at ANU, also studying linguistics), I headed off for my third bilingual school encounter as the teacher-linguist at Yirrkala school in northeast Arnhem Land. Yirrkala was a real challenge. It was in a transition period, with a (notorious and unwilling) outgoing non-Aboriginal principal, and an incoming Yolŋu principal—the late and now famous Mandawuy Yunupingu. Mandawuy was just completing his Masters in Education studies at Deakin University. I think I learnt more at Yirrkala school (about leadership, life and relationships) than I was ever able to offer them as a teacher or linguist. My job was to work with the brilliant (now late) Raymattja Marika in the LPC, but I am not sure what I had to offer. My memory of that time, however, is of Raymattja struggling to balance the demands placed on her time and expertise by both work and family, as well as the community. She had just had another baby, yet the school and LPC still relied on her heavily. Raymattja eventually decided to take some leave, so as I sat alone in the LPC, I decided to write a letter to the Aboriginal Teachers Action Group (this group is a concept from Paulo Freire's work and was promoted by Mandawuy from his 'Action Research' studies at Deakin; see Freire 1970).

My letter to the action group was a plea for a literacy worker to work with. I was eventually provided with a co-worker, who lacked some of the multi-skills required of a productive literacy worker—but she was a delightful person, and we enjoyed our time together. The action group had decided I primarily needed company, and the rest could come later. They were seeing things from a long term perspective while I, on the other hand, was on an urgent mission, and had the (regrettable) pattern of only staying in a school for 2 years. I was driven by the department ideology that the job of the LPC was to 'flood the community with literature', no matter whether they were primers, local newspapers, culturally-based books generated by the community, or translations of popular English books. We received a handwritten letter from Mem Fox while I was at Yirrkala, stating that the translation that the LPC had done into Dhuwaya, of her book *Poosum Magic* was "the best thing that had ever happened to her book".

As my time at Yirrkala went by, more literacy workers came and went, while I decided to concentrate my efforts on writing a school literacy curriculum, on the first ever (Apple) computer in the LPC. The school already had a room full of Gudschinsky primers in Gumatj, produced by the linguist Joyce Ross and her Yolŋu co-workers such as Mutilnga, but they had no appeal for children and weren't being used. So I decided to include in my curriculum document an explanation of all the approaches and activities that I thought could work in teaching Yolŋu Matha literacy to children. In all my teaching, I have always adopted an 'eclectic approach', so I tried to outline all the current recommended approaches, such as: 'Language Experience', 'Look-Say' with sight word cards, 'Break through to Literacy' with syllable cards, Concentrated Language Encounters, and of course phonics. I also tried to encourage use of the latest

approach, developed by Fran Murray of *Walkin' Talkin' Stories*, after an exchange visit to see Fran on the Tiwi Islands (see Murray, this volume). This approach uses story books as the basis for the concentrated language encounter in the vernacular, with each book being sustained over a long period of time.

Another thing that was being promoted by the NT Bilingual Advisory team during this time was the importance of 'team work' and 'learning together sessions', between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff working together in bilingual programs. This was particularly championed by Beth Graham, who had taught at Yirrkala for many years, and held the teacher-linguist position there when its bilingual program began in 1974. She knew from experience that success in the classroom depended on teachers working collaboratively and respectfully together in teams (see Graham 1986).

But after hearing and reading about the innovative, culturally embedded and holistic approaches that were implemented at Yirrkala after my departure, under Mandawuy Yunupingu's leadership, I think I was just keeping the teacher-linguist's chair warm. After I departed at the end of 1986, Raymattja Marika returned to the LPC, and I was replaced by Michael Christie (who was my mentor at Milingimbi in my first teaching appointment). The LPC initiated a community-run newsletter Yän, which shared stories and entertained with purpose and meaning for the Yolŋu (see Gale 1997), and the innovative Garma and Galtha Rom ideologies were introduced into the school. These community initiatives, among others, under Mandawuy's leadership, all made a lot more sense for a school under Yolŋu control (see Marika-Mununggiritj and Christie 1995; Ngurruwutthun 1991; also Gale 1997).

Perhaps one useful contribution I made during my time at Yirrkala concerned the sensitive issue of using the Dhuwaya dialect in the classroom and in the books produced in the LPC. Dhuwaya is a koine language that has developed as the communilect spoken by the younger generation at Yirrkala. It is an amalgam of the traditional clan languages of the Yirrkala region, and is stigmatised because it has no tract of land or songs or designs to call its own. But it was the dialect spoken by the students and teachers in the school, and was easier for them to read and write than the Gumatj clan language that was used in most of the old school primers. My newly acquired husband (Rob Amery) proved useful in this debate, when I organised for him to come and research a Masters thesis at Yirrkala that analysed the structure of Dhuwaya (see Amery 1993). Active discussions we had about Dhuwaya, particularly during our learning together sessions with Yolŋu staff, proved valuable and productive, and also demonstrated the passion and depth of feeling Yolŋu have for their own clan languages.

## Lessons Learnt

- Literature in the vernacular needs to be relevant, purposeful and directed by the literary needs in the community.

- No one approach works in teaching literacy—an eclectic approach, especially when teaching literacy in a phonemically written language, can work.
- No matter what teaching methodology is adopted, or even if an eclectic approach is taken, it is far easier for Aboriginal kids to ‘catch onto literacy’ if it is first taught via their own first language.
- Teaching in an Aboriginal community is all about team work, and building close relationships. Non-Aboriginal teachers and specialists are welcome (and needed) in Aboriginal schools, but only if they are prepared to work as a team and listen to the community and its needs and aspirations.

## Discussion

One thing I have found over the years is that we often don’t truly appreciate something’s worth in our lives until it is taken away from us, and is no longer there for us to enjoy. This seems to be the case not only when we lose people and tangible things, but also for Aboriginal languages. I had to return from the NT to my home state of South Australia (SA) to truly appreciate the worth of an Aboriginal child growing up in his or her community where they can learn to speak their own Aboriginal language as their first language. In SA, there is only one Aboriginal language still being passed onto children as their first language—and that is Pitjantjatjara, in the remote north west of the state. The schools in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, as in the NT, have also suffered from ever changing government education policies regarding their vernacular literacy programs (since they began at Ernabella in 1940, see Gale 1997). They were also re-labelled in the late 1990s as ‘Two Way Schools’, to accommodate the departmental push for more English, and less vernacular education. The Anangu teachers I helped train, within AnTEP (the Anangu Teacher Education Program), on my return to SA, now share the same feeling of alienation as their NT Aboriginal colleagues, as the curriculum becomes more mainstream, and they lose control of their schools.

I currently work in the field of language revival in SA, and have shared many discussions with Ngarrindjeri (and Kaurna) colleagues who envy the people from Arnhem Land, who come to Adelaide to perform at the WOMADelaide music festival. They hear them speaking their language fluently, and singing their traditional songs passed onto them by their Elders. One Ngarrindjeri Elder, Phyllis Williams, with whom I work closely, says “my dream in life is to one day speak my own language fluently”—just as they do in the NT. She has lived and worked in Darwin, and is fully aware of the lack of language opportunities afforded her when she grew up on the Point McLeay mission (now known as Raukkan). Growing up in the assimilation era, she was forbidden to speak her own language at school—the school policy was ‘all English’—just as the NT government Minister for Education Marion

Scrymgeour declared in 2008 that the first four hours of each school day would be in English only in Aboriginal schools in the NT (see Disbray 2014a, p. 129).

But it was not just what happened at school that caused the demise of Phyllis' language over the years in SA. It was the government attitudes of the time. The parents could feel the disrespect the government had for their Ngarrindjeri language, and culture. They convinced them their children's future lay in assimilationist policies, and to only speak English in the presence of their children. Unfortunately, it only takes one generation to stop speaking a community's language for it to be lost. Phyllis, and others (see Brodie and Gale 1997), have told me that when their Elders were speaking their language among themselves at Raukkan, and they saw children within ear shot, they stopped speaking Ngarrindjeri and quickly switched to English. So how could the children learn to speak their language when their parents clammed up in their presence? Language loss was inevitable.... And so it will be in Arnhem Land, and in central Australia, if attitudes towards traditional Aboriginal languages drift towards a negative one, over time. It just takes a gradual shift in language attitudes, across one generation, for a group to stop speaking one language in preference for another. The growth of the Kriol language across Aboriginal Australia in recent years (now the largest Aboriginal language spoken) is living evidence of how language loss and language shift can occur over a short period of time (see Meakins 2014). But I am not arguing that there is not a place for English in schools. The term 'bi-lingual' implies that schooling will embrace both the vernacular and English, equally.

## Conclusion

It seems serendipitous that a few months ago the two grand-daughters of my Ngarrindjeri colleague Phyllis Williams flew from Sydney to South Australia to teach some dances to our newly formed Ngarrindjeri dance group, *Ringbalun Porlar* ('dancing children'). These two talented young dance graduates of the National Aboriginal and Islander Dance Academy (NAISDA), during their own training had previously travelled to Yirrkala, where they learnt some Yolŋu dance styles. So when they came to teach dance to our young *porlar*, they incorporated some Yolŋu dance moves (with permission) into their contemporary choreography. The Ngarrindjeri *porlar* thrived on the experience, and have since performed four times at public events (NAIDOC and Come Out, in 2015). The confidence boost these performances have given to our *porlar*, and the increased pride in their Ngarrindjeri identity, is palpable. But it seemed ironic to me that to bring back dance to southern SA, we had to draw from the dance and musical knowledge that has been maintained in the NT on the other side of the continent. I only hope (and pray) that in 30 years time, the Arnhem Landers do not have to call on the Ngarrindjeri people, from the other side of the continent, to ask them how to go about reviving their own Yolŋu language, should it ever go to sleep.

So, my concluding comment is: We need to learn from the hard won lessons of the past. There are many things to be gained from government policies that show respect for Aboriginal languages and cultures. One obvious way this respect can be demonstrated to the younger generation is by acknowledging and accommodating their first languages in their schooling. I trust this trip down memory lane, reflecting on my current work in SA, and especially on my time spent in the ‘boom years of bilingual education’ in the NT, when Aboriginal languages were respected and valued in schools, will not fall on deaf ears.

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# Chapter 8

## The Policy Framework for Bilingual Education in Australian Indigenous Languages in the Northern Territory

Graham McKay

### Introduction

Since the commencement of a program of bilingual education using Aboriginal languages and English in some isolated Aboriginal community schools in the Northern Territory in 1973, national policy has been the primary determinant of the fluctuating fortunes of these programs. It is therefore useful to look first at the national policy context over time, in order to understand how the Northern Territory Bilingual Education Program fared. In doing so we need to bear in mind that even if there was, at times, no formal language policy, the actions of people and of governments have implemented, and continue to implement, de facto but ‘invisible’ language policies (Bonacina-Pugh 2012, pp. 213–218; Truscott and Malcolm 2010). Basically the trend has been to replace acknowledgement of research and concern for the education and welfare of Indigenous children with an emphasis on uniformity and on English as the national language.

### *The Indigenous Languages in the History of Australia*

At the time of European settlement in Australia at the end of the eighteenth century it is estimated that there were about 250 Aboriginal languages spoken across the continent, many of them with multiple dialects. The people who spoke these languages were nomadic hunter-gatherers, who moved around within their own and neighbouring

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territories. These territories appear to have been relatively small in richer coastal habitats and much larger in the inland desert regions. In some parts of the continent at least, multilingualism was the norm, often with children initially acquiring their mother's language and then their father's language, and adding new languages over time as their range of contacts widened. Into this world came a dominating foreign language, English, spoken by a people whose agricultural and more urbanised way of life came into conflict with that of the owners of the land they appropriated.

While Indigenous languages were forced out of regular use quite early in the southern and eastern areas of densest European settlement, they remained in regular use in the more isolated Indigenous communities of the remote north and centre of the continent, particularly the Northern Territory, north Queensland, Torres Strait, northern Western Australia and northern South Australia. Even today there are Indigenous communities in which Indigenous languages are in daily use and where English is largely a foreign language. It is such communities that were the target for the Northern Territory's Bilingual Education Program.

According to the 2011 Census (ABS 2012), within a total Australian population of a little over 21.5 million, only 11 per cent of Australia's 548,370 Indigenous people reported that they used an Indigenous language at home. Table 8.1 sets out Indigenous language use in each state and territory. While the proportion of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory reporting that they use an Indigenous language at home has dropped since the 1996 census (from 65 to 60 per cent cf. McKay 2009, Table 19.1), the Northern Territory remains the only state or territory in Australia where the majority of Indigenous people use an Indigenous language at home. With 34,084 users of Indigenous languages at home, the Northern Territory has the highest number of Indigenous language users in Australia. The majority (56.3 per cent) of the nation's Indigenous language speakers live in the Northern Territory, with most of these living in the "outback"; that is, in remote areas outside urban centres. (The Australian Capital Territory and offshore territories have been omitted from the Table.) Note that, while a significant majority of Indigenous people across the country are counted in the census as speaking English only, this is frequently an Aboriginal form of English that differs markedly from Standard Australian English.

## Language Policy in Australia

From the earliest days of European settlement in Australia there was conflict over language, and English was imposed as the common language of government and education. There were local exceptions, where Indigenous languages were used in schools, churches and other contexts, particularly by Christian missionaries, who recognised the need to use Indigenous languages for effective communication and for building relationships. But these were not the norm. For instance in the 1830s German Lutheran missionaries in the Adelaide area offered education in the local Kurna language to Indigenous children with the support of Governor Gawler. The next governor, Grey, however, insisted on English-only education and forced these

**Table 8.1** Proportion of Indigenous people reporting that they use an Indigenous language at home by state/territory: 2011 Census of Population and Housing (Based on ABS 2012)

State/Territory	Total State/Territory/region Indigenous population	State/Territory/region Indigenous language users as proportion of total national Indigenous population using an Indigenous language at home (per cent)	Number and proportion (per cent) of total state/territory/region Indigenous population using an Indigenous language at home
Northern Territory	56,777	56.3	34,084 (60.0 per cent)
Northern Territory Outback	45,540	54.3	32,895 (72.2 per cent)
Western Australia	69,665	15.6	9,427 (13.5 per cent)
South Australia	30,432	5.8	3,499 (11.5 per cent)
Queensland	155,824	19.4	11,739 (7.5 per cent)
New South Wales	172,621	2.0	1,194 (0.7 per cent)
Victoria	37,990	0.7	401 (1.1 per cent)
Tasmania	19,628	0.1	62 (0.3 per cent)

missionaries to move their program out of town (Amery 2001, p. 146; Gale 1990, pp. 42–44; Harris 1994, pp. 316–334).

Overall, the treatment of Indigenous languages (and their speakers) by European settlers and governments from the earliest times was harsh and repressive, as summed up by a House of Representatives committee report on Aboriginal language maintenance:

Apart from some very occasional exceptions where Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages were recognised, languages recorded or some missions taught in language, official attitudes to ATSI [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] languages since European settlement were those of repression (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1992, p. 75).

That report outlines the treatment of Indigenous languages that led to the loss of many of these languages (pp. 21–24) and this is complemented by the summary of the oppressive treatment of Aboriginal people given in the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Johnston 1991, p. 8) as ‘deliberate and systematic disempowerment of Aboriginal people starting with dispossession from their land and proceeding to almost every aspect of their life’. Furthermore,

The consequence of this history is the partial destruction of Aboriginal culture and a large part of the Aboriginal population and also disadvantage and inequality of Aboriginal people in all the areas of social life where comparison is possible between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Johnston 1991, p. 11).

Educational policies were consistent with the treatment of Indigenous languages and of Indigenous people in general in these times. In a discussion of early approaches to the education of Aboriginal children around Australia until the 1960s Quentin Beresford writes:

In broad terms, Australian governments up until the 1960s held that Aboriginal children should be offered only minimal schooling consistent with the perceptions about the limitations inherent in their race and their expected station in life at the lowest rungs of white society. In States with large Aboriginal populations, this limited provision was greatly affected by policies which sought to separate Indigenous people from social contact with whites.

In shaping provision for Aboriginal education, governments responded to three forces: theories of racial inferiority, which were widely used to justify limited provision of education; community views on the need for segregation of Aboriginal people away from whites, which underpinned the inadequacy of educational provision; and the official policy of assimilation of Aboriginal people within the broader Australian community, which governed the type of instruction offered to children (Beresford 2003, p. 43).

Leitner (2004, pp. 219–220) has suggested that language policy in Australia can be thought of in seven stages, though these have primary relevance for the relationships between English and other “immigrant” languages, rather than for Indigenous languages. The seventh period (g) is still current.

- (a) A *laissez faire* period to the 1870s
- (b) An assimilationist policy from the 1870s to the 1960s
- (c) An integrationist policy that foreshadowed multiculturalism from the 1960s to the mid-1980s
- (d) A short period of multiculturalism that centred around community aspirations to the early 1990s
- (e) A shift to an economically driven acceptance of plurilingualism to the mid-1990s
- (f) An Asian-language-focused policy to the turn of the 21st century
- (g) A return to seeing plurilingualism as a problem and a shift back to literacy in English at the present time.

The high point of language policy at the national level in Australia, as far as recognition of Indigenous and community (immigrant) languages is concerned, was the adoption of the *National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco 1987) by the Hawke Labor government. This policy offered unprecedented recognition of Indigenous and other community languages and saw multilingualism as a valuable community resource to be supported and developed in a ‘two-way’ relationship with English, following the four guiding principles set out in the Senate Standing Committee report on *A National Language Policy* (Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts 1984, p. 4):

- competence in English
- maintenance and development of languages other than English
- provision of services in languages other than English
- opportunities for learning second languages.

Within a few years, however, government priorities changed with respect to languages, beginning with the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP)* (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991a), which prioritised literacy (in English) and a small number of foreign languages, including Aboriginal languages. Within a few more years the “Rudd report” (Council of Australian Governments 1994) further narrowed the priority foreign languages to four Asian trade languages: Japanese, Mandarin, Indonesian and Korean.

The development of the *National Policy on Languages* and the transition to the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* is analysed by Moore (1996), who argues (pp. 481 ff.) that the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* was designed to eliminate the support for pluralism [and multilingualism] that was the essence of the *National Policy on Languages*.

Moore shows that the main focus had shifted significantly. For example, when launching the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, John Dawkins, the minister responsible, said: “the starting point is that Australia is a nation of many cultures but Australia has but one national language, that being Australian English” (Dawkins 1991, p. 1, as cited by Moore 1996, p. 479).

Moore goes on to note that:

He [Dawkins] stresses that “English language education, English language training, is by far in a way [sic] the most important part of this policy document” (p. 1) and that the government’s second priority is “that more Australians should speak foreign languages” to enhance Australia’s role “as a trading nation” (p. 2) (Dawkins 1991, as cited in Moore 1996, p. 479).

Such an emphasis on English was echoed a decade and a half later by the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, who, while “not asking Aboriginal children to give up their own languages”, was quoted as saying in 2007:

Too many [Aboriginal children] still only have a rudimentary understanding of the language spoken throughout the country [English] and can only speak their own language, which perhaps is only known to 200, 300 or 400 other people ... That must end (ABC Newsline 2007, 25 May).

Starting with the *National Policy on Languages*, there has been funding from the Australian Government for various Indigenous Languages programs, including Regional Language Centres, Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records (MILR), and most recently Indigenous Languages Support (ILS) (Ministry for the Arts 2014).

**Nevertheless** the fundamental policy provisions, despite sometimes sounding very supportive of Indigenous languages and cultures, are often fundamentally focused on English language literacy in order to bring Indigenous people into the mainstream. For instance, McKay (2011, pp. 303–305) analyses the website supporting the 2009 *National Indigenous Languages Policy* and shows how a prime aim and major funding target for an Indigenous Languages Policy turns out to be literacy and numeracy (implicitly) in English, a non-Indigenous language. And bilingual education, an approach widely supported by research as improving

English literacy levels for minority language speaking children, is not even mentioned.

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) noted significantly in 2006 that:

The home language, whether an Indigenous language or a contact language like Aboriginal English, not only carries the culture of Indigenous students but also encapsulates their identity. For schools to put standard Australian English in an oppositional relationship to the home language, for example, by making it the only recognised vehicle of oral communication in schools, will be to invite resistance, whether active or passive, on the part of Indigenous students (MCEETYA 2006, p. 17).

McKay (2011, pp. 309–310) shows that MCEETYA’s own recommendations, however, include no substantive use or teaching of Indigenous languages in school programs but only, at ages 0–5, “educational programs for Indigenous children that respect and value Indigenous cultures, languages (including Aboriginal English) and contexts” while “explicitly teach[ing] standard Australian English and prepar[ing] children for schooling” (MCEETYA 2006, p. 20). If Indigenous languages are not actively used, English effectively becomes the only recognised vehicle of oral communication in the school, with potentially serious consequences.

The 2008 introduction of NAPLAN testing (the *National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy*) by MCEETYA was yet another national policy decision that further promoted English at the expense of Indigenous languages. As a national testing program, NAPLAN assesses English literacy. It was early results of these tests that gave the Northern Territory’s Minister of Education at the time, Marion Scrymgour, the pretext to severely curtail bilingual education programs in Northern Territory bilingual or ‘two-way’ schools by insisting that the first four hours of school time every day must be devoted to English.

## **Beginnings of Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory**

The original Australian Constitution (1901) had contained discriminatory provisions explicitly excluding “Aboriginal people in any state” from the powers of the Australian Parliament to legislate for them, and explicitly excluding “the Aboriginal natives” from being counted among “the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth”. The removal of these exclusions from the Constitution was supported by 90.77 per cent of those voting in a 1967 referendum (National Archives of Australia 2015) and was formalised in the same year. Aboriginal people had been given the vote federally and in every state not long before—between 1962 and 1965 (National Archives of Australia 2015).

Perhaps significantly, it was after the 1967 recognition of Aboriginal people as people, and therefore worthy to be counted in the census and after Federal Parliament could “make special laws” for Aboriginal people, that the Australian

Government initiated bilingual education for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, which was, at that time, under Australian Government control. It was one of the first acts of the new Whitlam Labor government, elected in late 1972, after more than two decades of Liberal government. The Minister responsible for implementing this new bilingual program, Kim Beazley, later indicated that he himself had observed that classroom activities and interactions in Aboriginal schools were much more effective when Indigenous languages were used, but that the mission schools who used these languages in the classroom were jeopardising their government funding by doing so under state and federal government policies at that time (Beazley 1999, p. 5).

Policy in these programs has earlier been discussed by McKay (2007, 2011), showing the mismatch between policy and implementation and the strong emphasis on English. A national summary of policies related to Indigenous languages was provided in the *Social Justice Report 2009* (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2009, pp. 80–83). A chronology of bilingual education in the Northern Territory, drawn from earlier unpublished work by Harris and Devlin, was published by the Australian Broadcasting Commission's *Four Corners* program (ABC 2009) and summarised by Devlin (2011, pp. 263–264).

It was no accident that the first five schools targeted for the introduction of bilingual programs in Aboriginal languages in 1973 were schools associated with Christian missions which had developed the use of Indigenous languages in their work in the respective communities, thus giving the implementation of bilingual education a head start.

The early years of bilingual education were exciting times, with a sense amongst the staff involved that these programs represented an innovative and effective means of assisting the effective education of Aboriginal children who did not speak English and were largely not exposed to English at all before they started school. There was a high level of commitment from staff involved in the programs and from the Aboriginal communities in which the programs were based. Indeed the strengthening of the links between the school and the community and the Aboriginalisation of the education process, including the greater employment of Aboriginal people and the professional development of Aboriginal teachers, was one of the positive effects of the bilingual education programs in their early years (Collins and Lea 1999, pp. 123–124; Gale 1990, 54–59; McKay 1996, p. 115). Furthermore, the bilingual programs proved effective, with Collins and Lea (1999, p. 122) noting that outcomes in English in bilingual schools 'clearly show positive outcomes compared with benchmark non-bilingual schools', while Devlin (2009, p. 8) showed that 'students in bilingual programs were generally attaining better literacy and numeracy scores than their peers in non-bilingual schools' according to the available studies conducted in the Northern Territory.

I joined the Northern Territory bilingual program in its third year (1975) as a linguist charged with carrying out the basic linguistic research required to develop an orthography for the Ndjébbana language of Maningrida, in Arnhem Land, and then with assisting a Teacher Linguist and Ndjébbana-speaking Aboriginal Teaching Assistants and Literacy Workers to develop materials to establish the



program. The Ndjébbana bilingual program itself commenced in 1978 (Devlin 2009, p. 5) in the sense of establishing a separate Ndjébbana-speaking class. It was implemented fully in 1981, after approval of the orthography and the development of classroom materials in Ndjébbana. But one of the earliest effects was to improve the attendance rates of Ndjébbana-speaking children, who were no longer scattered amongst classes of speakers of up to six or seven other languages but could work and learn together with fellow-students and teaching assistants with whom they shared the language.

From the beginning, the aim of the Northern Territory bilingual education program had been to provide the earliest school experience to children in their first language—thus reducing the alienation of school—and to develop literacy in their first language, while teaching English as a second language in a gradually expanding pattern throughout the years of primary school.

The 1975 aims (under the Australian Government) included both the Indigenous languages and English, but placed the Indigenous languages first, suggesting that Indigenous language maintenance was a significant priority aim:

- (a) To help each child to believe in himself and be proud of his heritage by the regular use of his Aboriginal language in school and by learning about Aboriginal culture
- (b) To teach each student how to read and write in his own language (Australian Department of Education 1975, p. 1).

By 1980, now under the newly established Northern Territory Government, the aims were re-ordered. The following aim, which had been lower in the list before, was raised to the top, suggesting that transfer to English had now taken over as the priority aim:

- 1. To develop competency in reading and writing in English and in number to the level required on leaving school to function without disadvantage in the wider Australian community (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, p. 2).

Those of us who questioned the significance of this re-ordering at the time were assured that it made no difference, since the aims relating to English and to Indigenous languages were all still in the list. However, it was difficult to see why the re-ordering had been carried out unless it signalled a change in priorities. This change in priorities took some years to take full effect, but in the end, in line with national policy changes, the focus did shift strongly to literacy and numeracy in English.

The Collins Review of Bilingual Education, set up following the 1998 attempt to transfer funds from bilingual education programs to English, also noted the diverse strands of support for bilingual education from its early days (Collins and Lea 1999, p. 121). We should note, however, that in fact the programs were achieving both maintenance and transfer aims, thus satisfying different groups of stakeholders.

From the Northern Territory Government point of view, these programs appear to have been conceived of, and supported, as transfer-to-English programs. This eventually led, in 1998, to an attempt by the government to refocus the programs

primarily on English. Reasons given for this proposed move by the Northern Territory Government (Devlin 2009, p. 6) included the alleged concern of Aboriginal communities about bilingual education, the alleged lower performance by students in bilingual programs, and a desire to reduce the cost of education, allowing “schools to share in the savings and better resource English language programs”.

In the meantime, Indigenous people in communities where these programs were running, as well as most of the staff of these programs, saw them primarily as supporting Indigenous languages and communities and as more effective means of providing education to Aboriginal students who did not speak English upon entering school. In fact the outcry from Indigenous communities, bilingual staff and language experts against the 1998 prioritisation of English at the expense of Indigenous languages was on the basis of loss of support for Indigenous languages rather than a protest against English per se, and gave the lie to the first reason advanced against the programs. Indigenous people generally want their children to develop competence in English, but not at the expense of their Indigenous languages (Collins and Lea 1999, pp. 117, 120; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1992, pp. 3, 34). The parents generally choose both languages, rather than one or the other, if given the choice (cf. Ouane and Glanz 2010, p. 45).

The possibility of transfer programs assisting indigenous language maintenance was also noted by Chimbutane in discussing bilingual education in Mozambique,

Based on the positive impact that the program is having on cultural affirmation in both sites in this study, my argument is that in those contexts where pupils are surrounded by their native languages (instead of a second/foreign language), a transitional model may strengthen the vitality of low-status languages and associated cultures, instead of weakening them (Chimbutane 2011, p. 166).

Even the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* companion volume had noted that, “It is important to recognise that gaining skills in English need not be at the expense of gaining skills in Aboriginal languages” (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991b, 90). This was echoed, many years later, by the Australian Council for Educational Research’s review of Indigenous language programs in schools across Australia:

4. Learning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in the English language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive activities” (Purdie et al. 2008, p. 190).

## Pressures on Policy

In this final section I propose to outline a number of conflicting pressures affecting bilingual education policy and its implementation (or not) in the Northern Territory.

**Concern for rights, equity and addressing social injustice** can be a significant motivator for governments and lobbyists and, indeed, Moore (1996, pp. 475–476) suggests that such motivations lay behind the 15-year development process, from the initial work of the Whitlam Labor Government to the *National Policy on Languages* in 1987. However, subsequent developments suggest that other factors have frequently been given precedence by governments and policy makers.

**Resources** are a significant concern for governments, and rightly so. There is no doubt that in the case of the Northern Territory's bilingual education programs in Aboriginal languages the cost of developing and delivering programs in a number of different languages, each spoken in relatively small communities, was high compared with a one-size-fits-all English-based program. As noted above, one of the reasons advanced by the Northern Territory Government in 1998 to phase out bilingual education was to save money and to redirect the remaining resources into "further development of ESL programs" (as cited by Devlin 2009, p. 6). Research in Africa, however, shows that, while implementation costs of national/international language medium education are lower than for effective mother tongue education, this saving is more than outweighed by the higher cost of the resulting less effective educational achievement rates and the resulting higher student dropout and repeat rates (Heugh 2011b).

**Research** is, or should be, an important element informing all decision-making. What is of concern in the language policy debates in Australia more generally, and in relation to bilingual education in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory in particular, is how the research findings have often been either ignored, discounted, misquoted or denied in order to reach policy decisions deemed more appropriate on other grounds, even though the research shows that the resulting policies are less likely to lead to the claimed results.

The key findings of research related to bilingual education have shown that students' education is most effective when it is commenced in a language that the students know, and that strong development of the students' first language (including development of literacy in the first language) provides a strong basis for enhancing the development of a second language. Some of this research is listed or summarised by various scholars (e.g., Devlin 2011, pp. 270–271; Purdie et al. 2008, pp. 18–21).

International research studies also show the importance of strong development of the first language in order to be successful in learning and using a second language such as English. See, for instance, overviews or summaries related to different contexts by Alidou and Brock-Utne (2006), Qorro (2008, pp. 7–10), Ball (2011, esp. pp. 6, 23–25, 27, 28, 30, 35–36, 57), Ouane and Glanz (2011, pp. 23–24), Heugh (2011a, pp. 119–129), Hu (2005, pp. 18–19), Madiba (2012, pp. 16–17). Ethiopia presents an interesting case, as noted by Ouane and Glanz (2010, p. 27):

The Ethiopian education policy stipulates that the mother tongue should be used as the medium of instruction for the first eight years of schooling. In the decentralized Ethiopian education system, some regions apply this rule and others, such as the capital, Addis Ababa, introduce a foreign language, English, as the medium of instruction as early as year

six. A comparison of the learning achievements in year 8 showed that students with stronger mother-tongue education performed better in all subjects, including English (Heugh et al. 2007).

Research and experience show that students are much more active in classroom participation and more involved in active learning when the language of the classroom is a language they know and can understand; for example, Hornberger (2002, pp. 41, 42) with respect to South Africa's Zulu speakers and Quechua speakers in Latin America; Ouane and Glanz (2011, p. 35) for Africa and Qorro (2008, pp. 12–14) for findings in Tanzania.

In the early days of bilingual education in the Northern Territory, and in the lead-up to the National Language Policy, the research of language professionals appears to have been taken seriously. As time has gone on, however, it seems that results of research on bilingual education have had little or no influence on policy and decision-making.

**Political expediency**, as well as **public opinion** and/or **(mis-)understanding** can be significant counter-forces to educational and language research in policy formulation and decision-making in relation to bilingual education. Chimbutane notes that “language policy decisions in Africa are not guided by research findings but mainly by political pragmatism” in the view of some authors (Chimbutane 2011, p.21).

As outlined above, Aboriginal communities and parents in remote Northern Territory schools generally supported the use of Indigenous languages in their schools and for their children, and therefore objected to the government's shift to English-focused education. On the other hand politicians and policy makers seem to be more influenced by the Australian public majority's view that English is the paramount language and by the mistaken understanding that maximising teaching time devoted to English and the use of it as the medium of instruction are the best ways to improve English skills, despite repeated research results showing the opposite.

In some other contexts the strength of public opinion favouring the dominant ex-colonial language can persuade parents and communities to support a focus on that language, even when they realise that such an emphasis is not necessarily helpful. Qorro, for instance, notes that in Tanzania: “the majority of parents in the sample admitted they were aware their children learned very little when taught in English; however, they objected to the proposal to change the educational medium to Kiswahili [the national language]” (Qorro 2008, p. 15). Qorro attributes this to a misunderstanding amongst parents of the distinction between teaching a language and using a language as the medium of instruction (Qorro 2008, pp. 10–11; cf. Babaci-Wilhite 2010, pp. 297–299). As in Tanzania, public opinion, policy and practice in Australian schools show little regard for the results of the research done on medium of instruction in that country.

The example of schools using the Pitjantjatjara language in South Australia shows that Indigenous public opinion can also be misinformed, though experience may eventually lead to a different view:

These communities had bilingual education programs in Pitjantjatjara since 1937, and chose to give them up in the early 1990s, arguing that their children needed to learn English. But in 2006, Katrina Tjitayi, an Anangu teacher who was then Director of the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee, argued for a return to bilingual and bicultural education, claiming that the children had better literacy and numeracy under the earlier bilingual academic program (Simpson et al. 2009, p. 29).

## Conclusion

Building on the use of Indigenous languages in education by a few mission schools during much of Australia's history, bilingual education in Aboriginal languages in the Northern Territory was initiated in the Northern Territory by an innovative Australian Government that was concerned for social justice and equity during a period when justice and equity concerns for Aboriginal people were emerging after more than a century and a half of dispossession and oppression of these people. It came at the beginning of a short period of a decade and a half, during which such concerns were combined with respect for the results of language education research and a willingness to listen to communities of speakers of Indigenous languages about their priorities for the education of their children. These priorities were for development of skills in English combined with maintaining and developing skills in the local Indigenous language(s). The research then and now suggests that beginning education in the child's first language will render all of their education more effective, including their development of English (second language) skills.

Official moves to discontinue or redirect bilingual education can be explained in part by the costs of such programs, a nationalistic focus on English as the national language, a pandering to public opinion that was unwilling to recognise the results of bilingual education research, the public's fear of the unfamiliar, and a willingness to ride roughshod over the minority status and rights of remote Aboriginal people.

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# Chapter 9

## Consolidation, Power Through Leadership and Pedagogy, and the Rise of Accountability, 1980–1998

Samantha Disbray and Brian Devlin

### Introduction

The chapters in this section all touch on at least one of three overarching themes: consolidation, power through pedagogy and leadership, and accountability. Chapters in the previous section are set largely in the period from 1970 to the early 1980s, the establishment phase of the Bilingual Program. The first years of the program had been a phase of establishment, then of rapidly expanding programs. By 1984, programs in 21 schools had commenced. The level of resourcing was set (Ritchie, April 21, 1977, in NTDE file 93/483, f. 7). While a small number of programs commenced in the early 1980s, no new programs would be added after this. A period of consolidation followed for the Darwin-based Bilingual Unit and for programs in individual schools. Indeed already in 1979 the Bilingual Education Consultative Committee reflected that:

One thing we should have learned from our experience in Aboriginal bilingual education is that it is better to do a few things well than many programs poorly. Early in the bilingual program we recognised a need for four kinds of specialists: Linguist, Teacher/Linguist, Literature production supervisor (printer), and Aboriginal Literacy Workers (writers). We have a limited number of these people and spread them fairly thinly across our programs. As a result several schools only had one, or at most two, of these specialist support people and they had to attempt to do so many urgent tasks at once that none of them were done properly [...] We have learned our lesson in Aboriginal schools—we are now hastening slowly [...] Our approach can now take the form of consolidation with careful expansion

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where appropriate. One means by which to achieve this may be for the establishment of schools with bilingual programs to be filled with people competent in bilingual education techniques (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, p. 40).

It was critical to develop staff expertise, bilingual practice, local resources, pedagogies and curriculum in this phase (see Christie, Murray, this section). A small number of Aboriginal educators had graduated as teachers in the 1970s, but with greater resourcing for recruiting and training Aboriginal staff during the establishment phase, the number of qualified Aboriginal teachers increased in the 1980s and 1990s (Tamisari and Milmilany 2003, p. 13). The growth of committed and increasingly expert Aboriginal staff fueled aspirations of Aboriginal leadership, Aboriginal authority, and new priorities for the Program (Stockley, this section). This was the period of Land Rights in Australia (Morphy 1993) and the moves described here are part of a larger program of self-determination in Aboriginal affairs (Vaarzon-Morel and Wafer, and Kral, this volume), from which governments gradually retreated in the 1990s (Disbray and Devlin 2017). The consolidation phase was a vibrant and productive time, however support from the Education Department also waned in these years (Northern Territory Department of Education 1986a, b, p. 2) and new models of accountability emerged, challenging the Program's viability.

## **Consolidation and Developing Bilingual Education Expertise**

The urgent tasks during the establishment phase included formulating aims for the Program and clarifying bilingual models (Department of Education 1973). These included staffing the programs in schools, fostering adult vernacular literacy, creating literacy materials, producing teaching aids, adapting curriculum guidelines, and coordinating these activities across schools with bilingual programs. Throughout the consolidation phase of the mid-1980s to late 1990s, the Unit set policy to develop bilingual education practice and enacted this in various ways. One important means of dissemination was the *NT Bilingual Education Newsletter*, which appeared two or three times per year. It printed contributions from expert practitioners on all manner of topics to raise expertise and alert new staff to helpful ideas and resources. It also updated staff in remote schools on departmental policy and news. It advertised centralised professional learning workshops and meetings.

The Bilingual Unit foresaw the need to provide broader support to consolidate the Program and fostered partnerships to this end. Graham McGill, a Principal Education Advisor for the Bilingual Program worked to involve the Darwin Institute of Technology (formerly Darwin Community College, later the Northern Territory University), and a teacher-linguist training course was established. This was later credited towards a Graduate Diploma in TESL, an on-campus and external program that included a strand especially designed for specialist staff working in

bilingual programs. The School of Australian Linguistics (SAL), established in 1974 as part of the Darwin Community College, ran courses to train Aboriginal language workers (Department of Education 1974, p. 5). In 1982 SAL and Bilingual Unit staff, under the stewardship of SAL's David Zorc, organised an 8-week training course in applied linguistics, which would become part of the Graduate Diploma of Applied Linguistics at the Northern Territory University (Black and Breen 2001).

Negotiations with Batchelor College resulted in the annual Aboriginal Languages Fortnight, providing training in Aboriginal language story writing, history writing or Aboriginal vernacular literacy teaching (Christie 1994). These expanded learning opportunities for Aboriginal staff had more wide-ranging impacts than simply the skill development of individual educators. As more trained Aboriginal staff became involved in bilingual education programs, they began to query the purpose of the schooling they were helping to provide for their children, and to reflect their roles in this. This took expression in moves for power through pedagogy and leadership.

## Power Through Pedagogy and Leadership

Before the bilingual program started at Yirrkala, the Yolŋu way was irrelevant to the school. This helped the Balanda maintain power.

Bilingual education started in 1974. How did it help? It started people in the school and the community thinking about the two cultures. Some Yolŋu content was introduced such as crafts, hunting and dancing. Now the Yolŋu had some power **inside** the classroom. But outside the classroom, the curriculum, the staff meetings and all the school decisions were still under the control of Balanda...

Because they wanted more say in what was going on in the school Yolŋu formed the school council in 1984....The school council decided to adopt two policies for 'Aboriginalisation': Self-management and Self-determination.

Dr M. Yunupingu, Principal, Yirrkala School. Language and Power: The Yolŋu Rise to Power at Yirrkala School, presentation to the 1987 the 'Cross Cultural Issues in Educational Linguistics' Conference (Yunupingu 1990, p. 4).

In August 1987 the 'Cross Cultural Issues in Educational Linguistics' Conference took place in Batchelor in the Northern Territory, a lead-up event to the 8th World Congress of Applied Linguistics in Sydney the following week. Three hundred delegates attended. Two hundred were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and many were staff from the NT remote school bilingual programs. Dr M. Yunupingu opened the conference with the presentation referenced above, placing power squarely on the agenda, and Michael Christie presented 'Language and Power: How English keeps Balanda in power in schools' (Christie 1990). At Yirrkala Community School an Aboriginalisation program was underway (see Stockley, Christie, this volume). However, across schools with bilingual programs,

people shared similar concerns and aspirations. The editors of the conference proceedings, Christine Walton and William Eggington, noted that

many Aboriginal teachers and community members have found bilingual education not only a preferable model of education for their children, but also a means whereby they have been able to take their rightful place in the schooling of their children. They see it as a vehicle for self-determination and a means whereby they have been able to incorporate their languages and cultures into the school in order to make the school an instrument of language and culture maintenance, rather than destruction (1990, p. ix).

Three key issues framed the conference and guided its break-away workshops: Language and power, language maintenance and language in education. These issues reflected the ideological spaces (Hornberger 2002, 2005) that opened up on the ground in this consolidation phase.

The growing cohort of Aboriginal teachers, along with colleagues and community members had begun to see bilingual education as more than simply an educational reform focused on introducing vernacular languages for instructional purposes (see Devlin et al., Chap. 1, this volume). The establishment of bilingual programs at some sites involved local assertions of self-determination (Vaarzon-Morel and Wafer, Kral, this volume). However, as programs became established, people began to reflect further on their schools, and how these involved processes of power (Stockley, Christie, this section) and were inherently political at the core of critical approaches to language policy and planning (Tollefson 2013; Blommaert 1999; Shohamy 2006; Alim and Paris 2015). In his characterisation of the ‘evolution of bilingual theory’ in the NT Bilingual Program, Harris (1995, p. 10) observed:

any process is political when it involves decisions about who controls limited resources toward achieving different priorities. (Resources here include not only the obvious ones, but less obvious ones such as sources of identity maintenance and different ways of doing and administering.)

At the 1987 conference, one workshop group considered the topic ‘Aboriginalisation of the Aboriginal School’, under the language and power theme. In their discussion of control of limited resources and processes of priority setting, they posed this guiding question: “Is bilingual education enough? ...or... the ups and downs of non-Aboriginal control” (Group report 1990, pp. 48–49). Three arenas for redefinition and action were identified: the classroom and the role of the assistant teacher—from aide to teacher; the school and the Aboriginal staff—from worker to director; the community—from resource to responsibility. The proposed actions, questions and redefinitions included the following:

- School policies need to be developed by community-based school councils to establish guidelines by which the school functions.
- Once school councils or action groups are formed should non-Aboriginal Principals still have right of veto?
- How can unsuitable non-Aboriginal teachers and principals be got rid of?
- There should be induction for new Non-Aboriginal teachers locally by the community.

- Who decides what should be taught? How are these decisions made?
- Aboriginal people in communities also have the right to influence decisions in the schools.
- What can Aboriginal teacher education do to assist Aboriginalisation of control?
- Who do we work for—the community or the education department?
- School resources don't stretch to educating both children and Aboriginal teachers adequately.
- Schools and communities need to be planning future directions over years—so that change will occur (Group report 1990, pp. 48–49).

Some of these proposals or concerns came to be implemented in school policy and practice, while others failed to take hold. Christie (this volume) points out the ambiguity of the term 'Aboriginalisation'. In one sense, it meant "the process of training Aboriginal staff to take over the unreconstructed structures and practices of modern formal education (p. 35)", and this was ultimately not what prevailed in community schools. On the other hand, "there was an understanding of Aboriginalisation as assimilating in the other direction, whereby the curriculum, with its educational philosophy and pedagogy, would be radically restructured under Yolŋu authority (a common Yolŋu view) (p. 35)". To look more closely at these sites of struggle and innovation, each of the following issues is discussed in turn: school policy and practice, teachers and pedagogy, and curriculum.

## Power Through School Policy and Practice

The formation of school councils, their creation of school policy documents and induction programs were significant means for communities to take greater control of schools in this period of consolidation (Stockley, this section, on the Yirrkala Action Group). For example, Lajamanu, a Warlpiri school in the Northern Tanami, embarked on an extensive process to develop its 'School Languages Policy' to assert authority over the school's aims. In its 1984 'Statement of Policy' these were:

- That Yapa [Aboriginal] Way and Kardiya [non-Aboriginal] Way be strong.
- The community decide exactly what Yapa things and Kardiya things they want children to learn.
- Yapa teach the children proper strong Warlpiri and after that Kardiya make it strong and teach the children English properly so that the children can really understand and speak both.
- There is continued support for the Bilingual Program.

The document was expanded so that by 1986 it included extensive information about the locality, pedagogy and programming (Lajamanu School 1986). It

timetabled Yapa ('Warlpiri') staff meetings, which were important for Yapa leaders in the school and the school council. The on-going collaboration between the school council, local and non-local school staff required time and investment from all involved.

Documents such as the school languages policy and evidence for the practices they prescribed became part of the community-based appraisal program. This replaced the earlier bilingual education accreditation program in 1988 and represented an important aspect of accountability (Devlin 1995, pp. 31–32). However, no structural change was undertaken to shift power away from non-local principals to school councils to manage staffing. As a result, school councils and local teachers sometimes had to assert themselves in response to less collaborative principals and teachers, sometimes without success. Former Central Australia regional linguist Robert Hoogenraad writes of these challenges in the 1980s and 1990s:

If the principal was unwilling, then it was highly unlikely to happen and totally unlikely to succeed. A lack of sanctions and an absence of effective monitoring of what actually happens in classrooms in daily practice also meant that the classroom teacher could undermine the bilingual program with impunity, and the principal could simply not run the bilingual program in the school (Hoogenraad 2001, p. 131).

A persistent lack of mandate and resourcing for the Program would come to undermine the reassignment of power (Nicholls 2005).

### *Teachers and Pedagogy*

The articulation of a team teaching method (Graham, this volume), English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) teaching methodology (Murray, this section) and the development of training programs established for remote Aboriginal teachers were significant developments in bilingual education practice in this phase. Team-teaching practices in bilingual programs have been essential in ensuring effective classroom instruction and interaction, as few non-local teachers can communicate in their students' home languages. Team teaching has also been a source of formal and informal teacher training and professional development and a key means of power-sharing, as they formally recognised both the crucial linguistic, cultural and social knowledge of Aboriginal teachers and the curriculum knowledge, and planning skills of non-Aboriginal teachers. According to one appraisal (Harris 1995, pp. 16–17), Graham's 1986 book *Team-teaching in the Aboriginal Schools in the Northern Territory*

was the first clear documentation of how the Bilingual Program should (and had to in order to survive) contribute to the training and leadership growth of Aboriginal staff. At the time this book seemed to most to be simply good advice about how to organise cross-cultural team teaching, but in hindsight and in terms of the Aboriginal leadership it promoted, this was clearly a political book. Aboriginal teacher training is probably the most important achievement of the Bilingual Program.

The in-service training associated with developing the team teaching approach was an important support for accredited teacher training. The Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program at Batchelor College (now Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education) and the Deakin–Batchelor Teacher Education (D–BATE) teaching programs fostered professional reflection and triggered sophisticated discussions, which contributed to innovations in Aboriginal pedagogy and curriculum (Marika–Mununggiritj and Christie 1995; Marika 1998, 1999; Marika et al. 1992; McTaggart 1999). Yet resources to adequately train Aboriginal staff diminished over time as on-site training programs were cut (Bat 2013, Sects. 2.6.1 and 2.6.2).

In the early 1980s a range of English language teaching programs and materials were developed for use in both bilingual and English-only programs, to promote oral and literacy skill development. These included *Pronunciation Drills for Primary Classes*, *NT Oral English Units*, *NT Upper Primary T.E.S.L course* and the *Tracks* reader series (Walton 1984). Realising the need for contextually relevant and locally effective approaches, a number of programs or approaches were developing out of, or innovating in, the NT context. Literacy approaches for emergent language learners in NT bilingual programs were adapted from Don Holloway’s ‘shared book experience’ (1979) and this informed ‘language experience’ methods, which sought to link the content and topics in classrooms to what students have heard or experienced in and out of classrooms and allow them to draw on this in their own text production (See Murray, this section). On the ground, resources such as Beth Graham’s *Language Power: Towards Better Teaching Methods in Language and Literacy in Aboriginal Bilingual Schools* (Graham 1986a, b), along with resources targeting early childhood and Maths programs (1983, 1984a, b), supported teachers to use Do-Talk-Record methods for situational and scaffolded learning. Relatedly, programs such as *Concentrated Language Encounters* (NT Department of Education 1986b) and *Walkin’ Talkin’ Stories* (Murray and NT Department of Education 1986) supported structured and explicit English language teaching and learning programs, while also integrating content from across the curriculum (see Murray, Freeman, this volume). Before exploring this rich local curriculum development work, it is important to recognise the attention paid to English language teaching pedagogy.

Aboriginal teachers were trained to teach in English and their own language. However, Aboriginal teachers and assistant teachers tended to be more active in first language (L1) teaching and learning, and non-Aboriginal classroom teachers in English language teaching and learning. The teacher-linguist acted as a pivot, supporting both in learning about and planning instructional activities in L1 and English. Despite developing pedagogy and resources and delivering significant professional learning, the need for ESL-trained and aware teachers always exceeded supply. This was true also in English-only schools, which did not have the support of a teacher linguist or the Bilingual Unit. Perhaps more attention should have been paid to developing all teachers’ ability to teach both languages, but daily realities and demands never really allowed this. Later critique of the Program pointed to a lack of “competent pedagogy and sound teaching practices” (Collins 1999, p. 127) in some classrooms.

## *Power and Local Curriculum*

The creation of new, vernacular materials was an outcome of education programs that were not only biliterate and bicultural, but involved new conceptualisations of curriculum and pedagogy (Disbray 2014; Gale 1992; Marika-Mununggiritj and Christie 1995). An important aspect of both the teaching and literacy production programs was going out to places of significance on country with elders. On such trips, knowledge was shared, documented and incorporated into literature and curriculum. These new materials and curricula incorporated topics such as land tenure, ceremonial life, social practice and organisation, local history and dream-time stories, knowledge of the natural world, such as plants, animals, ecosystems, as well as hunting, tracking and resource use. Educators sought to skillfully weave locally significant concepts into the various local curricula, often incorporating science, maths and social science along with language and literacy outcomes (Disbray 2014). This work, in turn, influenced the *Northern Territory Curriculum Framework: Indigenous Language and Culture Outcomes* (2002). (See Carr et al., this section).

According to Teacher-Linguist Neil Murray at Walungurru (Kintore) in 1987,

The singular most encouraging thing is to witness the emerging concern (and ultimately responsibility for)—by the Yanangu teachers for curriculum development. That they are actively embracing and translating what is essentially a whitefella concept (a difficult one at that) is more to their credit. This has been particularly engendered by the RATE [Remote Area Teacher Education] program and more recently due to the visit by Kevin Keffe [a former teacher at Papunya school], who in conjunction with the Yanangu staff produced a booklet which defines their major concerns and interests [...] The booklet suggests a means of devising and identifying curriculum through an Yanangu frame of reference (Northern Territory Department of Education 1987, p. 45).

Indeed, Aboriginal educators and community members recognised that a curriculum can represent a knowledge system. It sets out what children should learn and know on their journey to becoming competent members of their community. By the 1980s they also recognised the fragility of the knowledge system and language practices that were crucial to their communities. From the perspective of Aboriginal educators and community members, there was a growing need for language and cultural maintenance (Walton and Eggington 1990). Indeed, the documentation and transmission of traditional language and cultural knowledge must be recognised as an invaluable contribution by the NT bilingual program (see Bow, Devlin and Christie, this volume). Documenting and maintaining traditional language and cultural knowledge was not a stated goal of the bilingual program (Department of Education 1973; Northern Territory Department of Education 1986a, b; Harris and Devlin 1997) and was therefore not altogether reconciled with policy responses from above (Disbray 2016). This tension would come to the fore in the light of the policy shifts and new accountability measures that lay ahead (below and Part 3, this volume).



## *Accountability and Shifting Policy*

A final theme, accountability, part of an international public policy shift driving education reform (Leithwood and Earl 2000), became increasingly important in this era. Key aspects of the new, technical-managerial approach are evident in the 1998 review of Indigenous education, the *Learning Lessons* report (Collins 1999). This report begins with a section ‘Costs, funding and accountability mechanisms’, which focus on action plans for school improvement, school annual reports, accountability of individual principals and system-wide reporting on standardised benchmarks as evaluation and accountability tools. These are clearly important to a modern education system. However, some theorists have characterised this shift as a social transformation in which economic relationships replace political relationships and the sphere of the political itself. According to Biesta (2004),

[t]he economic grounding of the current mode of accountability is evident in the fact that the government bases its own right to accountability on the financial investment it makes into public services such as education. Put simply, schools must be accountable to the government because the government provides them with the financial resources for doing their job. At first glance, there seem to be opportunities for a more democratic “face” of accountability, based as it is in the relationship between parents and students as “consumers” of education and schools as “providers.” I contend, however, that such opportunities are foreclosed by the fact that there is no direct relationship of accountability between these parties, but only an indirect one. The only role open to parents and students is that of consumers of the educational services provided. They have no opportunity to participate in a public, democratic discourse about education (pp. 239–240).

During the consolidation phase, Aboriginal people involved in bilingual programs were participating in a discourse about education in a political sphere. In 1980 the accreditation process for evaluating school programs was introduced (Devlin, Chaps. 17, 18, this volume), and in 1988 the appraisal process, and the additional funds needed to run bilingual programs were linked to accountability measures. Initially, these took seriously community involvement in schools programs and the development of local pedagogy and curriculum, along with attendance and academic progress data (Cataldi and Partington 1998; Devlin 1995). Indeed, the *Learning Lessons* report acknowledged that

the only schools ever systematically evaluated were bilingual schools which had to undertake reaccreditation every three years, resulting in a substantial report which was assessed by an appraisal panel. The review found there is no similar documentation or appraisal of non-bilingual schools, either urban or remote (Collins 1999, p. 47).

However, in the 1990s, with the rise of standards-based accountability, both nationally and internationally, measures narrowed to English literacy and numeracy. With the introduction of national standards more recently, standardised literacy and numeracy tests, undertaken by students at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, and in remote schools, and student attendance rates have become near exclusive accountability measures. These are critical measures of school success (Osborne and Guenther 2013), despite analysis that illustrates the poor correlation between scoring well on national benchmark tests and attendance in remote school settings (Guenther 2013).

National discourse and policy on language have intersected with education policy and practice in further ways. Standardisation of Vocational Education and Training has reduced access to training and employment (Kral, this volume). Further, a sequence of national policy turns took place from 1991 onwards, positively recognising languages of trade as resources, but positioning languages in other domains as less valued. Such moves were in part “motivated by concern that making diversity prominent in public policy would enshrine notions of language rights for minorities, or at least establish this principle as a basis on which public resourcing claims would be made” (Lo Bianco 2001, p. 18). In the narrowing policy remit, with prioritisation of the economy and national interest over the community in education policy discourse, Joseph Lo Bianco argues there that was a collapse of categories, from ‘languages’ to ‘language’ then to ‘literacy’, narrowly defined. Only English was appropriate in formal education or labour market settings (p. 42). With the values for language thus calibrated in discourse and policy, accountability frameworks foregrounding standardised English literacy testing, and excluding community education aspirations, almost inevitably followed.

## Conclusion

This chapter has set out a number of key themes and movements that are relevant to bilingual education in the 1980s and 1990s. The many innovations and achievements are explored in depth in the chapters that follow. Despite these changes, programs also faced challenges and many ceased within the first 10 years. In schools, rapid staff turnover among non-local staff, and low education levels among local staff squeezed the limited but essential resources for in-servicing professional learning and made maintaining good systems difficult. Outside of schools, new and or rising social problems, many related to health and substance abuse, deprioritised education for many. In top-down policy, moves incongruous with the community driven, local initiatives were at play. And yet, in this period, immense energy and commitment allowed great things to happen.

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# Chapter 10

## The Development of Successful Bilingual, Biliterate and Bicultural Pedagogy: Place for Tiwi Teachers and Tiwi Language in Learning

Frances Murray

### Introduction

I would like to point out that our children need to learn the knowledge and skills of our culture. I believe this strongly. This is very important in maintaining the language and our culture. I also believe that it is important to preserve it in written records of various texts or audio tape. The children do need to learn the knowledge and the skills of our culture such as where their country is - their sacred areas, the features of their country's environment, kinship, language groups, dance, family and relations, song, history, totems, ceremony and rituals. Our other language: English as a second language is also our major language because English is the language to communicate in the wider and broader world. (Gemma Nganbe, member of the Leadership Team, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Wadeye, NT).

From the beginning, Indigenous staff in bilingual schools understood the complexities and significance of using both languages in their children's education. This chapter describes how the *bilingual teaching context* and the intercultural nature of the *bicultural teaching teams* stimulated and influenced the evolution of a bilingual, biliterate and bicultural methodology in the early years of the Bilingual Education Program in the Northern Territory. This occurred at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic school (MCS), Wurrumiyanga (Bathurst Island), where a bilingual program began in 1974. Tiwi people are the traditional owners of Bathurst and Melville Islands. The school's enrolment was around 300 children, with attendance of 95–97 per cent. Here, a drive to invigorate the teaching of English as an Additional Language gradually resulted in changed pedagogies for learning through both languages. The chapter is built around the cornerstones of successful bilingual education in the NT: (1) Intercultural team teaching; (2) an active role for the home language (HL) in learning, and for Tiwi staff in teaching; and (3) Teaching empowering English for bilingual proficiency through academic learning. The evolution of a communica-

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tive, learner-focused and cognitive approach to language and literacy learning in two languages replaced the behaviourist literacy teaching methodologies in use at the time. The chapter has been written with the hope that it may inspire teachers and influence decision-makers given the positive outcomes of bilingual, biliterate and bicultural pedagogy as it was experienced through 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s.

## **The Bilingual Teaching Context**

The aims of the Bilingual Program (Department of Education 1973) made clear that the goal in the early years of school was to teach students initial literacy in their home language, alongside oral English, as a base for later ‘bridging’ to English literacy in Year 4.

The Bilingual Program used the staircase model of bilingual instruction. Young children spent the majority of their time learning in HL. They were taught oral English for a small proportion of the day, which increased until Year 4, when there was a 50–50 time allocation to each language. From this point on the fraction was reversed until the majority of learning time was through English in Year 7. The philosophy of the Program was a maintenance model of bilingual instruction; i.e., both languages were to be used in teaching at all year levels. However, as the assistant teacher (HL-speaking staff) allocation was reduced at Year 5, the program was a transfer model in practice. I taught 5-year-old children, who spent 90 per cent of their time learning in and through their home language, and 10 per cent of the day learning Oral English. At this time, two parallel language programs operated within the classroom.

## **Intercultural Team Teaching**

My allocated grade had an enrolment of 39 and I taught with two assistant teachers (ATs). Together we made up the teaching team. I spoke English, the Tiwi teachers spoke Tiwi and English as an Additional Language (EAL), and so there was a linguistic imperative to have a bilingual, bicultural teaching team. Locally, the ATs were known as Tiwi Teachers. The naming was empowering in itself. From the beginning we expected to team-teach with the Tiwi teachers as equals. As a young teacher, I was not as experienced as any of the Tiwi teachers. They had each been teaching in those classrooms for between 5 and 12 years longer than I had. The Tiwi teachers taught in and through Tiwi during formal literacy lessons, when giving instructions, and for explanatory purposes and lesson management throughout the day.

During those first few years I didn’t know what I didn’t know. More importantly, I didn’t know what the Tiwi teachers didn’t know. It was more obvious that I didn’t

know what they did know either! As the qualified English-speaking teacher in the teaching team, I was seen as the ‘holder’ of curriculum knowledge, by default. This was despite the fact that the Tiwi teachers held the HL curriculum knowledge. This would eventually be rectified.

In line with the Team Teaching model (Graham, this volume), the Tiwi teachers and I negotiated and developed our identified roles in the classroom. In the after-school *Planning Together* sessions, we prepared both the HL program and students’ learning of and through English. I did my best to explain the nature of the skills and knowledge—in western Maths, Science, Physical Education, Social Sciences, Arts—to be taught through Tiwi or English. We talked through the activities (in English), gathered the required resources, and collaboratively wrote notes in our daybooks (in English, as I didn’t understand Tiwi!). Practices for classroom routines, and planned intra-cultural and cross-cultural learning, became clearer as they were shared by each team member and thus became more reflective of bilingual teaching and learning. When cross-cultural *Learning Together* sessions were formalised within the school, we learnt how to exchange cultural information about learning and content, with each of us gaining more understanding of the other’s culture and knowledge. This wasn’t always easy, as these sessions could often become one-way knowledge transfer (of western learning by English speakers to Tiwi teachers). Maintenance of the two-way nature of learning and practice was crucial. The effort to maintain it needed to be continuous, especially given the high non-local teacher turn-over.

### ***My Role as Monolingual English-Speaking Teacher in the Bilingual, Bicultural Teaching Team***

My formal teaching time was initially 30 min/day of oral English. I acted as the class ‘conductor’ and support/mentor teacher in Tiwi instruction time. We grouped the children, Tiwi teachers each taught an aspect of the Tiwi literacy program, and I taught the day’s oral English lesson to each group. We then moved on to Maths and other learning areas delivered through Tiwi, in line with the bilingual staircase model. I depended on the Tiwi teachers as the children understood them, and I did not speak Tiwi. I had only a general idea of what was being taught in those lessons, thus the necessity for bilingual, bicultural team teaching.

Team teaching in the Early Childhood years at MCS was further developed in 1980, when a colleague and I designed ‘The Jirmani Approach’ (Murray and Gustin 1980). As a larger teaching team of 2 teachers and 3 Assistant Teachers, we re-conceptualised our roles, resulting in greater equity of responsibility through shared planning, teaching and assessing of students, as they learnt through two languages. Each adult took responsibility for the learning of 14–15 students of the 72 students in total. The teaching was distributed amongst us.

## **Empowering English for Bilingual Competency in Academic Learning and the Development of Walking Talking Texts**

To teach oral English, we were provided with a program made up of a series of scripted lessons, organised by strict grammatical structure; i.e., beginning with the verb ‘to be’ in present tense. The approach was ‘situational’ and we were tasked with creating contexts for oral English using the provided script. Trying to role-play real-life situations (such as formal introductions in English) in a Tiwi-speaking community, where such a specific cultural activity did not exist, was not effective. We could see these children thinking, “I know her name. She doesn’t have to tell me again”! This mode of teaching English may have suited older learners, who may have understood the purposes of these artificially created English-language ‘situations’ that were not part of their personal life experiences elsewhere. However, it failed to take account of the socio/psycho-linguistic and communicative needs of the language learners. The oral English lessons were decontextualised and isolated from the rest of the day’s activities. They had no pedagogical or conceptual link to the literacy skills being taught in Tiwi, or to other learning in the classroom. Repetition of words and phrases, with little comprehension of the utterances or their social purposes, predominated. It took a skilled teacher to create meaningful, motivational contexts for learning that linked to the child’s interests and reality. This couldn’t be guaranteed, given the high teacher turnover and the fact that most teachers were familiar only with teaching English-language-speaking students through English (still the case today). Thus, although the intention to establish oral English prior to bridging to English literacy had integrity, it wasn’t effective in delivering the planned outcomes for academic achievement in two languages; i.e., for students to become competent bilinguals.

Crucially, children were missing the frequent, early, rich, scaffolded engagement with literacy practices and knowledge that precedes independent literacy in literate cultures. The desire to innovate pedagogy was led by a number of disconnects—decontextualised oral English and its link to life outside, other learning within the classroom and literacy instruction; the graphophonics program for Tiwi language and literacy learning and its link to the socio-cultural purposes of literacy in an oral culture; and finally, there was no clear link between teaching and learning for oracy and literacy. Pedagogical innovations of the time triggered our reflections. In the 1980s I and other colleagues were increasingly influenced by emerging English as Additional Language (EAL) theories that supported engagement by learners with meaningful print in authentic interactive learning contexts. These provided ways to explore the textual content and its cultural purposes, along with the syntax, semantics and the structure of texts. Movements in languages policy and practice in Australia, and in teaching ESL, led by linguists and academics such as Angela Scarino and Penny McKay reached us also (Scarino et al. 1988; Scarino and McKay 1991a, b). The early work of Cummins (1977, 1980, 1981), with concepts such as ‘common underlying proficiency’, and the difference between ‘Basic Interpersonal Communication



Skills' (BICS) and 'Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency' (CALP) would guide my thinking and ongoing development of methodology, as we set the NT Bilingual Program in the broader international context (McMahon and Murray 1999). Functional Systemic Linguistics would raise our awareness of text types, genres and language structures and features (Halliday 1985; Martin 1990). The work of Joshua Fishman brought into relief critical matters such as socio-linguistic aspects of bilingualism, language learning and language maintenance (Fishman 1972). Finally, in developing approaches to learning we were influenced by the Vygotskian theory of scaffolding and the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1978). Thus we became aware that equipping children with conversational oral English and home language literacy was important, but not enough for educational success, as evidenced in the 'bridging to English literacy' process in Year 4. The socio-cultural context in which the students were learning English was a 'Foreign Language' one, whereas the language demands of school required 'English for Academic Purposes'. The Walking Talking Stories/Texts approach was a response to this and was driven by the need to innovate a method on site

Initially, there were reservations by Bilingual Program administrators to children being exposed to written English before Year 4. Permission was sought to integrate literacy experiences into the oral English program. Thus began the development of 'Walkin' Talkin' Stories'. This text-based approach used a rich piece of literature as the focus experience and incorporated frequent, language-rich exposure to and active engagement with written texts for the explicit teaching of oracy in this context. Informed by Vygotskian concepts of scaffolding, and Cummins BICS and CALP distinction (1980, 2000), a 'Petal Planner', with pedagogical descriptors was developed as the oral English program (Fig. 10.1). It comprised 18 communicative (listening and speaking) and practice activities, which developed interpersonal and academic oral language around a text/topic, in a scaffolded sequence. As such it broadened what had been a narrow and compartmentalised approach.

At this stage, the program was for young children learning Oral English. It did not teach independent literacy skills. The methodology was further developed into the Column Planner (Murray 1995) for students bridging to English literacy in Year 4, with a series of 42 teaching activities and exercises set out in a planned, scaffolded teaching sequence to teach interpersonal and academic language, including active literacy in English. Both planners integrated curriculum content using planned and explicit language teaching. The underlying philosophy of the methodology remains active teaching and learning (Murray 1995, Fig. 10.2).

The 'Column Planner' for Years 4 and up added the active and explicit teaching of reading and writing in English to an oral language base. Through the sequence of activities and exercises as applied to the written text, teachers introduced, taught and contextualised new language for academic learning purposes. Students were actively scaffolded through authentic and iterative language learning activities, allowing them to learn and use language for learning, in a range of interactive learning contexts (academic modes).

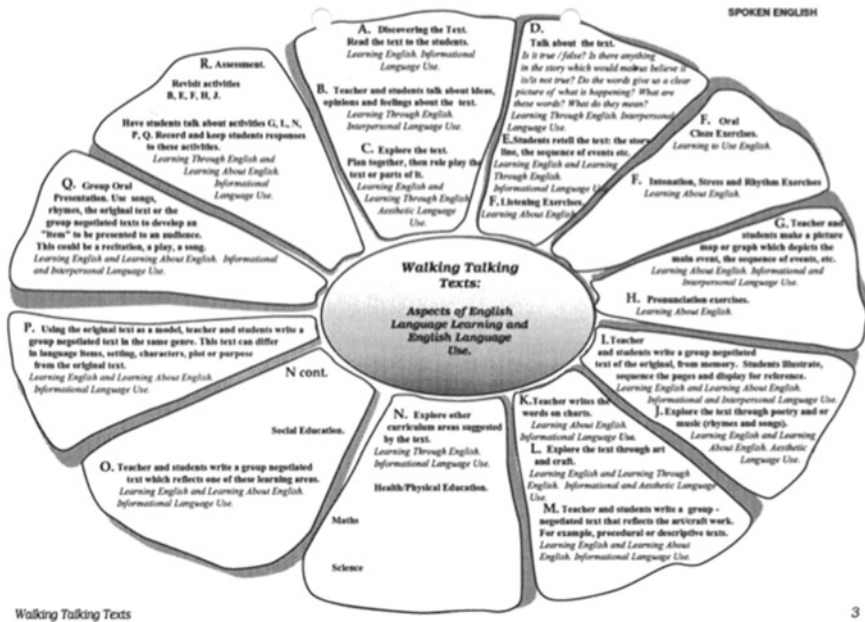


Fig. 10.1 Petal Planner (Murray 1981)



Fig. 10.2 Active teaching-learning triangle (Murray and Northern Territory Board of Studies 1995)

These hallmarks were further emphasised in the revised version, 'Walking Talking Texts' (reprinted, 1995 NT Dept. Ed). In addition, the work of Functional Systemic Linguistics (Halliday 1985) had drawn attention to the range of genres beyond narratives and the importance of explicit teaching of the full range of text types (recount, procedure, exposition, report) for a range of audiences and purposes. While language analysis had always been a feature of the planning, this school of applied linguistics emphasised the importance of knowledge about textual structure in the range of (English) text types, thus the change in name from 'Stories' to 'Texts'.

## **An Active Role for HL in Learning and for Tiwi Teachers in Teaching**

When I started teaching at Murrupurtiyanuwu School, Wurrumiyanga in 1978, the pedagogies used to teach initial literacy in Tiwi language and literacy learning did not reflect research on, and evidence of best practice in *language learning and literacy acquisition*. These advocated more interactive, integrated teaching/learning approaches for literacy as/for learning. Tiwi students come from oral (academic) home cultures. As such, purposes and contexts for 'print-based' skills/knowledge outside of the classroom did not exist, in contrast to the experiences of many bilingual students learning literacy in other education contexts.

When the program first started, the materials for teaching initial literacy consisted of five Tiwi reading 'Primers' based on the Gudschinsky Method (Gudschinsky 1973). This is a phonics-based, word-level approach, where students are taught to 'read' a word broken down to syllables. Words are constructed from syllables and known words became 'sight words'. These were combined for practice in reading phrases and sentences. The method was used to train speakers in third world countries to teach vernacular literacy to adults. While the content in the text (Tiwi creation stories) may have been familiar, the purpose of the phonics-only methodology for literacy learning did not seem clear to young learners, nor was it in fact effective (see Meehan, this volume). Children could read the words in the primers, but continued to struggle with unfamiliar text and additional content, as their exposure to print was limited to a few sentences learned through a grapho-phonetic method, and one primer for many weeks at a time.

This literacy learning method did not reflect the experience-based and culturally embedded approaches that foregrounded cognitive engagement with and social purposes for literacy. These aspects of literacy acquisition were promoted by educational thinkers who had become influential at this time (Clay 1975, 1982; Holdaway 1979; Freire 1985; Vygotsky 1978). We saw no similarities between the Gudschinsky method and these social, cognitive, academic and collaborative, 'learning by doing and being' theories and philosophies of these practitioners and academics. We now understand the role of enculturation in relation to the acquisition of initial literacy in literate societies, and thus the need to teach literacy as a cross-cultural activity to

students from oral cultures (Cummins 2000). The methodologies of the time saw literacy as a skills acquisition process only. Further, the context for learning bore no resemblance to speakers of Standard Australian English (SAE) acquiring literacy in mainstream contexts. The existing pedagogy did not empower Tiwi teachers as teachers or Tiwi children as learners. It was a scripted approach demanding correct immediate recall by students, with no immediately applicable contextual/purposeful use of the skills. We needed to rethink the pedagogy. The development of additional materials and approaches required interplay between research and theory perspectives from outside and much exploration, practice and negotiation on the ground between local and non-local teachers.

In the mid-1980s I was the school's teacher-linguist, working with the Tiwi and non-local staff to implement the curriculum through two languages, and the WTT methodology across the school for English language and literacy learning, in addition to supporting the integration of the Tiwi cultural program. Tiwi teachers observed the children engaging with the Walkin' Talkin' Stories methodology to learn English. They wanted to develop and teach a similar Tiwi program so that theirs would be more linguistically interactive and engaging. They wanted children to learn Tiwi knowledge and language in addition to literacy, from the texts they read. So I began to work with Tiwi staff to develop teaching programs, using rich written texts that engaged children in interactive, contextually relevant language and literacy learning experiences. As a result, the Tiwi teachers became actively engaged, especially as the group-negotiated Tiwi texts were constructed and displayed on the walls. Tiwi teachers and children revisited these regularly to engage in literacy practices and behaviours

## **From Two Parallel Teaching Programs to a Bilingual, Bicultural Teaching Program**

Developing the knowledge and skills needed by children demanded that appropriate pedagogies be developed for literacy and academic learning, including teaching both Tiwi and western concepts, as appropriate, through HL and English across the curriculum.

The 'Walking Talking Texts' (WTT) methodology evolved from classroom practice as a quest to improve oral English instruction. I developed the 'Walking Talking Texts' methodology from the 'ground up', from my classroom practice, to improve oral English teaching. The evolution of the methodology was informed by the research in language and literacy learning at the time. In the 1970s the bilingual program focused on home language solely for HL literacy learning. It became clear in the 1980s that the HL was also needed for content and skills instruction across the curriculum.

The WTT methodology had shifted pedagogy from teaching reading by rote, to teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing as modes of learning. Crucial to this was integration across curriculum learning areas and explicitly using language for academic purposes. The Do-Talk-Record strategy (Graham 1983) was included

within WTT for cross-curriculum learning in both languages. This simple but effective cycle ensures the centrality of planned language teaching within a learning experience. Curriculum integration occurs at a given point in the WTT sequence. After the language for learning has been introduced and taught, it is linked to learning contexts and curriculum content. In our *Learning Together* and *Planning Together* sessions, the bicultural teaching teams began to plan the teaching of curriculum content integral to the concepts in the English and Tiwi texts.

All curriculum learning began to be planned for and implemented through Tiwi in the early childhood grades in an integrated manner. This continued into the primary and secondary years for the time allocated in the staircase model. An example is the teaching of some initial western mathematical concepts in HL so that subsequent, symbol-based abstract mathematics concepts would have a conceptual base. This led to the development of a linguistically based mathematics scope and sequence at MCS to guide teaching teams in the choice of language of instruction for each Math's topic. In sessions and daily planning, concepts were discussed to decide whether there were helpful analogous concepts across languages and cultures, or whether a concept was better taught through English. For instance, concepts of time were well taught in Tiwi, through moon cycles and seasons. This conceptual knowledge did not have to be replicated but later, when Western concepts of time were taught in and through English, the teachers could presume that students had a sufficient grasp of basic temporal concepts to move on to western notions of time measurement assisted by effective EAL/D teaching strategies. Figure 10.3 shows a relevant metaphor. The bottom line is that learning is started with and through something that the learners already know; i.e., their first language, and unfamiliar things, such as the second language, are introduced gradually and learned after a solid foundation in the first language has already been accomplished (UNESCO 2006).

The inclusion of conceptual learning in Tiwi allowed focused language instruction and exploration of some sophisticated, Tiwi concepts and knowledge that would have been learned previously in more traditional living contexts, but to which the children were getting less exposure.

By the 1980s some language shift was evident at Wurrumiyanga. It was clear that children were developing a range of language styles and that Tiwi was under

**Fig. 10.3** Bridging from L1 to L2



great pressure from English. At school, a dynamic language setting, it was important to have good planning for language use; i.e., it was important to be clear about which language and what level of language should be spoken to whom, when and by whom in learning. To provide as effective learning input as possible, school policy discouraged individual teachers from mixing languages in instruction, given the language shift occurring. The content of lessons determined the choice of instructional language and areas of the classroom were defined for language floods in both languages. Surrounding children with rich written text that reflected the teaching and learning was essential to that methodology.

The uptake of Walking Talking methods by the Tiwi teachers impacted on their teaching practice. It moved them from a scripted, skills-based approach to an interactive, iterative approach based around a rich written text. The purpose of developing a more engaging and research-based methodology was to help children achieve age-for-grade reading abilities in Tiwi, to enable them to bridge to English literacy at the same level, given a sound oral English base. Later results in literacy in two languages would demonstrate this, and was recognised in the 2004 National Literacy Awards (Fig. 10.4).

The cross-cultural *Learning Together* sections helped staff to share broader pedagogical knowledge about different ways of knowing and doing, and to develop a both-ways or two-ways understanding. In these sessions we built on new methods for teaching spoken English and incorporated additional teaching strategies for developing independent literacy in HL. Other schools such as Bamyili followed suit in collaboration with us. In this way ‘the extended’ petal planner became the conduit for teaching HL literacy in other communities. As other schools learned of the pedagogical shift at MCS, they used different visual forms of the methodology to distinguish between themselves and the Tiwi bilingual program: the Petal Planner changed form to the Turtle planner, the Goanna Planner, or the Snake planner and became the method for language, literacy and content teaching in home language in other bilingual schools across the NT for Kriol, Arrernte, Warlpiri, Yolngu Matha languages.

At MCS, the school Literature Production Centre (LPC) became a busy place with staff writing, illustrating and printing Tiwi literature including narrative, recount and factual/expository texts, for classroom use. Previously the focus of the LPC had been to make word and syllable cards according to the Gudschinsky method. The demand for Tiwi reading material increased in volume and also complexity, as teachers sought a greater range of content and higher level materials, as the students’ knowledge and language skills developed through the grades. Indeed in many NT bilingual programs by the mid and late 1980s, Aboriginal people were beginning to use vernacular literacy to tell their own stories and knowledge, and there was an explosion of dreaming stories, information texts, procedural texts and many different visual texts representing cultural knowledge and practices (Gale 1994; also Bow, Christie and Devlin; Christie; Disbray and Devlin; Ross and Baarda, this volume).

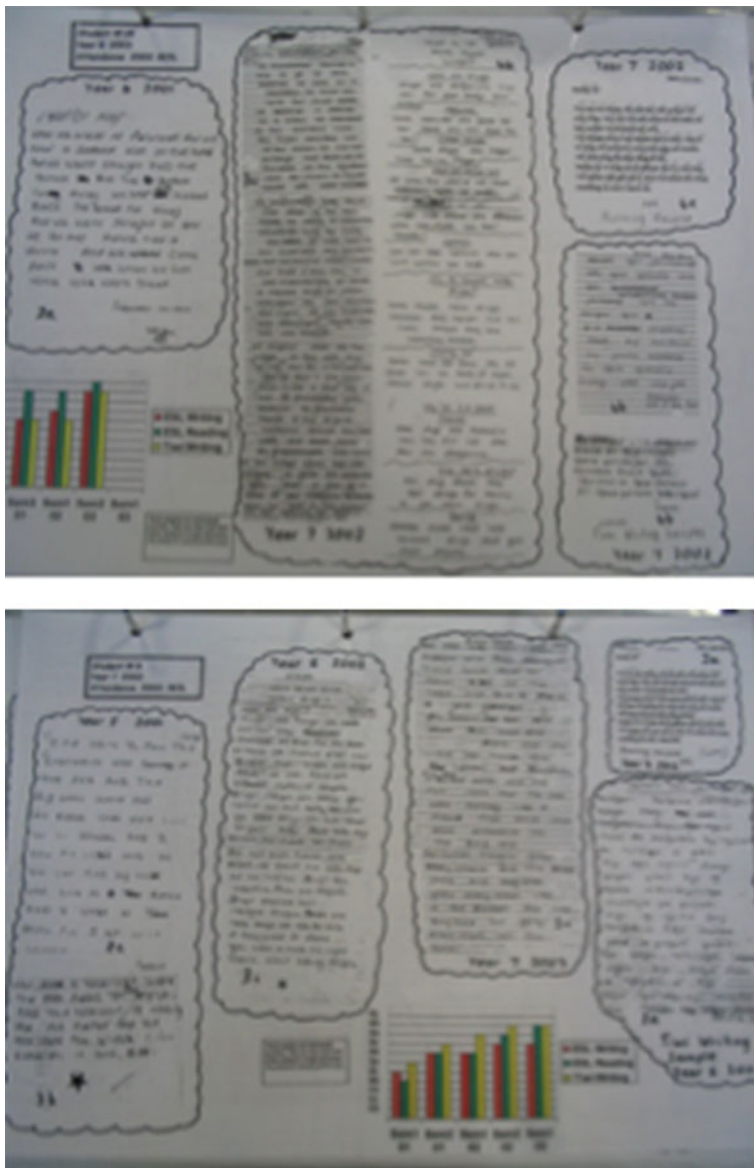


Fig. 10.4 Student work samples, Murrupurtianuwu Catholic School, National Literacy Award 2004

At MCS, the additional literature allowed for broader content teaching in Tiwi by Tiwi teachers, and also for Tiwi cultural knowledge to have a place in the teaching and learning program. Previously, Tiwi tended to be used for teaching and learning Western skills (literacy transfer, explanation of some curriculum concepts), with

some Aboriginal knowledge and skills. There had been some ‘cultural time’ when Tiwi teachers took the class for story-telling, dancing in family groups, and informing about the environment for a couple of hours per week. Until the development of the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework—Indigenous Language and Culture (NT Department of Education and Training 2002), this cultural knowledge was recognised as additional to and outside of the curriculum.

The development of the Walking Talking Texts methodology and the growth of Tiwi literature and developing pedagogy for teaching across the curriculum expanded the range, content and contexts for teaching in and through Tiwi. This gave students important exposure to increased depth and range of topics, and the use of both languages for learning. This was an important contribution to aspirations for language maintenance and development, and more importantly to a schooling experience that engaged children cognitively, and enabled intellectual growth by using the language that children understood, whilst they were learning an additional language. A detailed School Languages Policy ensured continuity of the processes and practices established, for many years to come, until central policy changes impacted negatively.

## Closing

This chapter has tracked aspects of the development of successful bilingual and bicultural pedagogy. It has focused on the development of Walking Talking Texts, as a method for teaching English-as-a-Second-Language, and, in parallel, for teaching HL literacy, resulting in new formulations of the role of HL literacy in learning, and in Tiwi language and culture. Through the same pedagogy, students further developed their spoken Tiwi by engaging with texts on familiar and new topics, while learning initial literacy. They were taught spoken English through active engagement with visually and conceptually inspiring texts, enabling familiarity with the Western culture of schooling, its academic purposes and literate practices. The children became familiar with similar purposes, processes and products of literacy and language learning practices across two languages.

The Walking Talking Texts methodology empowered teachers (Tiwi and English), through knowledge about planning for, teaching and assessing students, through effective ESL pedagogy and explicit teaching of and through HL as facilitated by bicultural teaching teams. It also became the ‘way in’ to ESL teaching by English-speaking teachers untrained in this field. The WTT Column Planner was adopted as the ESL methodology for English-only schools as well as Bilingual Schools. WTT methodology’s biggest impact was in the power shift from the English-speaking teacher to shared power and responsibility within the teaching teams, in which each teacher had the professional scope to deliver the unit of work in ways that met learners’ needs and reflected individual teachers’ strengths and abilities. For the first time, Tiwi teachers had control over their planning and the



delivery of unscripted lessons in which children were engaged, and Tiwi teachers felt respected as teachers.

Recent policy shifts have seen these phases of innovation, capacity building and languages' teaching thwarted, resulting in a narrowing of teaching and learning to test-driven literacy performance, and a recycling of original ineffective methodologies, and in the 'foreign language' only. The use of English-only for learning is a rejection of effective teaching, and of the language maintenance and bilingual aspirations still held by many remote Aboriginal people.

## *Final Word*

In contemporary society our children need to understand the significant things in our culture and in our traditional values and beliefs. It is important to keep our language strong and be able to use it effectively and influentially in our lives.

We believe that our Tiwi children need quality education in Tiwi language and in our own traditional value and beliefs.'(Leah Kerinaiaua ((RIP), Tiwi Principal, Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School, Bathurst Island, NT. 2007)

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# Chapter 11

## Developing Local Curriculum Materials— Learning Metaphors, Insightful Collaborations, Community Involvement

Michael Christie

### Introduction

When bilingual education began in remote schools of the Northern Territory we had only the most basic of printing technologies, and by the time it was revoked as a government policy 30 years later, we were well and truly in the digital age (see Bow et al., this volume). The remarkable evolution of the materialities of teaching and learning was paralleled and enabled by an equally remarkable transition of pedagogical theories, from those underpinned by colonialism and the enlightenment, to those reflecting and supporting distinctive local Aboriginal epistemologies and knowledge practices. In this paper, I outline, from my own point of view, the complex interactions between the theories and technologies of NT bilingual education, from the early 1970s till the mid 1990s.

### Milingimbi 1972

I arrived in Milingimbi fresh from a teacher education course and a single year's teaching in New Zealand, to find a thriving community of several hundred people and a vibrant school which had only recently been handed over by the Methodist mission to the Aboriginal Welfare Department. I was given a year three class of about 35 Yolŋu children, occasionally swelling to 45 depending on ceremonial activities, people arriving from other communities, or returning to the bush. As a Balanda ('non-Aboriginal') teacher, I worked alongside a 'teaching assistant', Baŋguli, also known as Wany'tjuŋ and today known as Master. He was indis-

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pensable. None of the children understood English, and when he was away, even for a moment, the class dissolved into riot.

I studiously undertook a study of the carefully prepared Gupapuyŋu Conversation Course and Grammar Lessons which continued to be compulsory for all missionaries, and at the same time I picked up the street argot which was more like Djambarrpuyŋu (and is now referred to by linguists as ‘Western Dhuwal’), a closely related language. I continue to mix both languages to this day. Only later, as I was introduced to Yolŋu family and ceremonial life, and as the curriculum was slowly transformed by Yolŋu agency, was I to learn the politics of language and identity at work in Yolŋu society. In those days the focus of schooling was upon English, and I failingly did my best to persuade my students to speak English to me and each other.

I had, looking back, been given an excellent teacher education at the new Waikato University in New Zealand, and had learnt to devise classroom activities which integrated literacy and numeracy into the various activities which emerged in community life. We had all studied the philosophy of education, including the works of Dewey (1916), which provided a good background to the ongoing questions of the purpose and role of education in a democracy and which still figures in our research today, long after attention to philosophy, whether western or Indigenous, has disappeared from most teacher education courses. My class was divided into four ‘ability’ groups which showed a remarkable range of capability from very bright indeed, to the otherwise engaged (commonly known as the ‘Bushboys’).

The basic readers were called ‘Bush Books’—and had been prepared for remote education students by the Western Australian Adult Native Education Branch. They featured generic Aboriginal children performing generic Aboriginal activities and growing up to be assimilated to good citizenship.

Much of the literacy education at work in the classroom was around writing—mostly illustrated news stories: ‘Today I saw a dog’, ‘Today big rain’—which we pasted onto butchers’ paper to make classroom newspapers. Supplementing the bush books, we soon had, in each class, a large box of graded colour-coded cards called the SRA reading laboratory for students who had managed to struggle through the bush books. SRA stood for Science Research Associates, and the reading laboratories developed in the US in the 1960s were to be found around the world, often in third world countries, where children with special needs (or teachers with special limitations) were in need of a special, fool-proof, scientifically graded program of literacy instruction. The students worked individually through the boxes, card by card, reading a text, and then undertaking a short written comprehension test (assessed and approved by the teacher), before moving on to the next card. (The alacrity with which children took to ritualised, programmatic classroom practices requiring little personal creativity was later to become a major focus of my Ph.D. research).



**Fig. 11.1** Michael out hunting with the Garrawurra Yothu-yindi at Milingimbi around 1976

## Bilingual Education at Milingimbi

When the Whitlam government in Canberra suddenly made a decision to introduce bilingual education in 1972, the policy was part of an international movement towards bilingual education, most particularly in southern California with its huge Spanish-speaking Chicano minority. It was also a time of the great expansion of field linguistics, particularly through the American non-denominational protestant missionary organisation the Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT), and their academic and training branch, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). A key mission of the WBT is to translate the bible into the thousands of unwritten languages around the world, and to teach their speakers how to read (and to a lesser extent) write in their own languages.

When the Whitlam government, with its new policies of Aboriginal self-determination, decided to develop programs of bilingual education in the NT, they were to be implemented within those communities where languages were strong, and where there was already significant linguistic work achieved. So at Milingimbi for example, Beulah Lowe had been working for 20 years, since the early 1950s. She was much loved and respected throughout all the Yolŋu communities, and by missionary linguists everywhere. She had a prodigious ability to learn and speak Yolŋu languages and had prepared the above-mentioned series of finely detailed and extensive pedagogical texts (alphabet and pronunciation, conversation, grammar) taught through a carefully graded program which was compulsory for all missionaries. They are still in use. Beulah's linguistic work involved developing an analysis of the particular sound system of a language (its 'phonology'), working from phonetics (all the sounds at work in everyday speech), to phonemics (the complicated task of determining the minimum number of sounds required to be represented for all the meaningful distinctions between words to be properly represented), and then finally to orthographics (devising a way to represent these sounds as well as some of the grammatical functions in writing).

The science of 'field linguistics' was rather new at that time, and organisations such as AIAS (now AIATSIS) and SAL, were actively involved. In my view SIL was leading the field. Fortunately for us and for the Yolŋu people, the phonological analysis was already well advanced in the Yolŋu languages. Beulah had produced a number of trial orthographies, and settled upon one which survives today.

Other communities were not so lucky. Forty years later there is still some controversy surrounding the phonemic analysis of some NT languages, such as Anindilyakwa. In such cases it has proved difficult to develop a functional and agreed orthography. The Yolŋu were fortunate to have a language with the common 'three-vowel system'. They were also lucky insofar as their grammar was relatively straight-forward. There are no noun class markers, so no prefixes which often complicate the stems they affix to. And Yolŋu languages have only a few verb classes, with only four forms of each verb and hardly any irregular verbs. Years later this almost mechanical simplicity of Yolŋu morphology and grammar allowed us to develop computer-supported language teaching software, starting with

Gupapuyŋu, which pulls stems and suffixes, pronouns and demonstratives out of tables and aggregates them into short sentences with sound files and testing systems—perfect for a language learner with a computer.

So we were doubly lucky—with a relatively straight-forward language, and a hardworking and good-humoured missionary linguist willing to turn her attentions towards developing materials for our bilingual program. The Gupapuyŋu language was chosen as the language of instruction because it had been chosen many years earlier for the language of the church. But there is no Gupapuyŋu land near Milingimbi, and Milingimbi's mosaic of territories belongs to half a dozen different groups of both Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties with languages very different from Gupapuyŋu, which had already gained ascendancy. Gupapuyŋu may have been selected because it was Gupapuyŋu people who were most supportive of the early missionaries, and there were a few very strong Gupapuyŋu men with very large families in the early mission days. So the majority of texts in Yolŋu languages at work in Yolŋu life were in the church, and in Gupapuyŋu.

Beulah set about developing Gupapuyŋu primers for the school to add to the small amount of secular literature already produced in the Adult Education Centre. At that time, in the early 1970s, the Summer Institute of Linguistics was developing the technology of reading instruction. Taking advantage of the fact that (unlike English), newly analysed languages were written 'phonemically' (i.e., spelt approximately as said), the SIL worked to develop readers which focussed upon building syllables and putting them together to make up words. (Yolŋu languages again were lucky to have very simple syllables—no consonant clusters at the beginning of a syllable, and no diphthongs). The international expert was Sarah Gudschinsky, at SIL, who came to Australia and worked with missionary linguists to develop a set of readers specifically for the new bilingual programs.

In those days, before the arrival of computers, all linguists (including neophytes like myself) depended quite literally upon shoe boxes which held cards in alphabetical order as incipient dictionaries. Beulah, ahead of the game, had her shoe-boxes full of envelopes, and each envelope was full of scraps of paper upon which were written example sentences which had come up in conversation or translation. She already had several thousand words, and her first two tasks in developing the pedagogical readers would be to work out which of these thousands of words were actually known to 6-year-old children, and then to work out which were the most common words in everyday children's speech. She achieved the first task by daily sending a list of words up to the school for testing with the children.

By this time, in the mid-1970s, I was working with Manydjarri (a Liya-Galawumirr man who, like Master, was a tireless champion of Yolŋu education). Manydjarri would read out the words, and the kids would shout out meanings and Manydjarri would sort them into 'everyone knows', 'some know' and 'none know'. Hundreds of words were selected for the initial primers and then painstakingly analysed as to phoneme and syllable frequency, as well as 'functional load'. Sorting out most common words—what were called 'functors' because they were key to forming sentences—was a difficult and tiresome exercise in counting words in recorded texts, which again is a task which today with computers is

relatively easy. The Gudschinsky system, while syllable-based, depended upon teaching a few functors as ‘sight words’, even if (and because) they depended upon combinations of sounds and syllables that would be taught much later in the process.

As the sequence for the introduction of phonemes (and syllable types) was worked out, there emerged a growing set of words which could be ‘decoded’ by the new learner. Manydjarri’s job now was to write stories using these new words. The words of course are quite disparate in their meaning, but this allowed for the sort of wry word-smithing for which Yolŋu are famous. It is upon surprising juxtapositions and repetitions of words and ideas that a particular popular sort of Yolŋu humour depends, and Manydjarri’s hundreds of stories still generate much mirth when they are read to a Yolŋu audience. Part of the work, many years later, of teaching the students of Yolŋu studies from around the world at the tertiary level, involves learning and translating these stories, and pointing to this good humour which inscribes the good humour of Yolŋu life, and pervades the literature from that time.

By the time the readers, and all their supplementary stories were ready for printing, our technology had progressed from the Gestetner machine (with its inks seeping through cut-paper masters from inside a circulating drum) to an off-set printer, which was set up in a converted toilet block and operated by a newly



**Fig. 11.2** Michael with Buyuminy (language worker) and Yambal2 (artist), Milingimbi Literature Production Centre around 1976



appointed Literature Production Supervisor. The Literature Production Centre (LPC), in addition to the work of the Literature Production Supervisor, also involved the work of the teacher-linguist (me at Milingimbi in the 70s), and local Yolŋu Literature Production workers, who set about producing ‘literature’ for the program, but also for the community. Over the years, almost 30 bilingual schools were producing literature in as many languages (Fig. 11.2).

Theories of community literacy were at work. We found ourselves working in two quite different directions in addition to the work of producing pedagogical primers and their supplementary readers. One was in producing books from stories told by community elders (most of whom had achieved adulthood before the missionaries had arrived) and the other was in producing a community newspaper. The aim was to ‘flood the community with literature’. If vernacular literacy was to become viable in the community, the community needed a wide range of literature to develop a literate population.

The literacy workers would go down to the camps and find elderly people who had stories to tell—creation stories, stories of the early missionary years, and everyday memories of ghosts, fights, the bombing of Milingimbi by the Japanese, ceremonies and heroic deeds—like walking the 400 miles to Darwin for this or that or no real reason. They would record their stories on cassette tapes, bring them back to the LPC, where we as a team would transcribe and edit the text, type it up (using either stencils or an adapted typewriter), illustrate the story, mock up the book and cover, and print it. (Today nearly all of these books and many other texts produced during that time, are available at [cdu.edu.au/laal](http://cdu.edu.au/laal).)

Then there was the community newspaper *Dilakkuŋu Dhäwu* (‘Stories from the elders’), which told stories of Milingimbi history with photos, news of the latest basketball or football games and results, news from the church or the clinic and the adult education centre, and the new phenomena of visits from art collectors, anthropologists, church officials and politicians. These papers were produced regularly, and distributed on foot from camp to camp.

Meanwhile, back in the classroom, alternative theories and practices of literacy were being devised, discovered and imported. These were related to a global movement of liberation of Indigenous peoples, which was entirely consistent with the Whitlam government agenda, and enlivened by regular bilingual conferences where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, linguists and literature production supervisors would come together and share their ideas, curricula and pedagogies.

I particularly remember the Language-Experience approach to literacy development, which built reading and writing practices around intensive group experiences. Teachers would provide some type of common experience like a trip to the beach or the mangroves, or cooking something, and the student either wrote a short story about the experience, or dictated the story to the teacher. This was a practice traced back to Sylvia Ashton Warner (a big figure in my teacher education in NZ in the 1960s, who worked on literacy with Maori children not far from where I grew up (Ashton-Warner 1967)) and also Paolo Friere (1970), whose theories of the ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ also informed our work. Later it would find its

Aboriginal form in the Garma curriculum at Yirrkala, without its Marxist liberatory imperatives. See further below.

Another pedagogical practice which we embraced with enthusiasm, was ‘Breakthrough to Literacy’ (Knowles 1973), a structured approach based on language experience, which engaged key ‘sight words’ in Yolŋu Matha—s/he, I, went, to (a suffix), home, beach, store. Each child had a folder with slots for small cardboard cards which contained all their personal words—some key sight words, and others that they were learning to read and write—plus the names of family members, places, and activities significant to their daily lives. The students built and illustrated their stories from the words in their personal folders, and as they did so, they would ask their teacher for more, and write and read to each other their stories on their own individual journey to literacy.

Both of these systems aligned well with the Gudschinsky primer work (Lee 2003) and all three had been specially designed and implemented by non-Indigenous people for Indigenous or disadvantaged students around the world.

All this pedagogy depended upon people fully conversant with the Yolŋu languages, their structures, spellings and meanings, which included a few Balanda, but mostly Yolŋu. The pedagogy demanded that Yolŋu teachers were central to classroom practice, and it paid off in academic results (Christie et al. 1981, 1982). So early bilingual education involved a strong commitment to the training of Aboriginal ‘teacher aides’ as professional teachers. This was where Batchelor College, (now Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education) began to play a prominent part in what was to be called the ‘Aboriginalisation’ movement.

Up and coming Aboriginal young leaders from dozens of communities came to Batchelor (a re-purposed uranium mining township an hour’s drive south of Darwin) to undertake a teacher education course, which took seriously the knowledge practices of both the Australian schooling system and the traditional knowledge authorities in their own many different communities. These students had well-funded and well-thought-out teacher education programs, which involved strong on-the-ground support, including arrangements whereby they could be enrolled as students at Batchelor, engage with community elders and their students, and continue growing their abilities as classroom practitioners.

As teacher-linguist, one of the many different Batchelor programs in which I became involved, was called Aboriginal Languages Fortnight (ALF), in which students worked in their own communities, with their Elders, and negotiated small but highly significant projects researching the local narratives and philosophies (of knowledge, of place, of history, the environment or whatever the Elders thought important), and wrote them up, with the help of linguists, in their own languages. Not only did ALF keep students in a thoroughly modernising system of education attuned to their own languages and epistemologies, but it built their confidence in arguing for the viability of a place for ancestral knowledge practices in the school room which still resonates today.

There is a gap here in my involvement where I went off to the University of Queensland to undertake a Ph.D., which was finally named *The classroom world of an Aboriginal child*, and which through a series of tests, interviews and

ethnographic observations, began to detail the strange world of classroom practice from the point of view of young students at Milingimbi. After completion, I was invited to take up the position of teacher-linguist at Yirrkala, in the far east of Yolŋu lands, and happily accepted.

## **Aboriginalisation at Yirrkala 1980s**

The policies and practices of the NT Department of Education in Darwin were changing. When I was at Milingimbi, Aboriginal education was administered first by the Aboriginal Welfare department, and then the Commonwealth Teaching Service. By the time I arrived at Yirrkala, the Northern Territory had taken over responsibility for primary, post-primary and secondary education in the NT (including urban centres). The Whitlam era was over, but bilingual education continued. Adult educators, who were once most important actors in community development, were no longer employed, and larger remote Aboriginal schools, many of which also had bilingual programs, were renamed Community Education Centres. This seemed to allow for a curriculum more engaged with community history and authority, especially as small schools were being set up in the homeland centres of the Laynha area (East Arnhem Land).

Arriving at Yirrkala I found that the new policy of Aboriginalisation was very much on the agenda. Aboriginalisation turned out to be a deeply ambiguous term. On the one hand, many (mostly Balanda) understood Aboriginalisation as the process of training Aboriginal staff to take over the unreconstructed structures and practices of modern formal education. On the other hand, there was an understanding of Aboriginalisation as assimilating in the other direction, whereby the curriculum, with its educational philosophy and pedagogy, would be radically restructured under Yolŋu authority (a common Yolŋu view). There was, as it happened, considerable contestation at work in the school (and other schools at the time) around issues of who would determine what sort of Aboriginalisation would play out: a political and ideological battle away from which I tended to hide in my Literature Production Centre at the back of the school.

The school had an ‘Action Group’ comprising all the Yolŋu staff at the school, and Batchelor College had engaged the services of Deakin University to ensure, through its credentialising mechanisms, the provision of a fourth year added to the training at Batchelor, to professionalise Aboriginal teachers to the same level as Balanda teachers, and, as it turned out, to develop a Yolŋu curriculum.

These young Yolŋu tertiary education students were experimenting with pedagogical practice which would involve both western and Yolŋu knowledge. And this is where my work as teacher-linguist took on a turn quite different from my Milingimbi work. I continued to make primers for early readers (now in Dhuwaya, the local street language) and community newspapers, but I was also invited to participate in and help document collective knowledge-making episodes under the authority of particular Elders, in on-country experiences.

The first book I helped to pull together involved a trip to Gulkula, (where the Garma festival was later held, and continues to take place). At Gulkula I stood with a bus load of secondary-aged young men on the edge of the escarpment, listening to the most senior Gumatj clan Elder telling the story of Ganbulapula (Yunupingu, n.d.) an ancestral being who had arrived at that place, having run all the way from the Gupapuyju land not far from my previous home of Milingimbi on the north coast. It was great to be listening to a story in a strange new place, in a strange new language, about a strange new incarnation of a figure with whom I had become quite familiar. He had changed as he ran from a Gupapuyju shark hunter called Murayana, into a Gumatj trickster, looking upwards for honey and swatting the flies from his face. The story was recorded and painstakingly transcribed, and became the subject of much classroom work over subsequent weeks—from finding and detailing old bark paintings of the figure, to mapping out the associated shark, dog, possum and night-jar dreaming tracks and relationships. This to me was the beginning of a new place-based curriculum under the authority of Elders, and a new form of literature.

From the other moiety of the Yolju world, I was also, because of the gift to the school of a sacred string by an old Rirratjinu man, invited to take part in producing a book about the local Yirrkala area, *Nayi Baljana Mawurrku* (Marika and Dhungala 1989). The book was based upon the transcribed text of an ancestral song and again, like Ganbulapula, threatened to expand out into uncontrollable directions as tiny threads were picked up and extended—from different spear types, to the thunder man, to fairy tern eggs and their clan affiliations, to the history of the sacred string.

This work, deriving from, and elaborating, ancestral knowledge and connections was of course vitally interesting to the students, and most exciting for me. And almost as exciting, the day I started at Yirrkala was the first time I had seen a personal computer—here a Mac Plus—with staggering capacity for ‘word processing’ (no more typewriters and correction fluid) and for formatting booklets and magazines with photos, columns, etc. (no more scissors and glue). Over the following few years, the software and hardware we came to use developed in unimaginable directions.

By now, Aboriginal teachers were fully engaged in their classrooms in their own ways, and it was often the non-Aboriginal teachers who were emptying the bins, and cleaning up the classroom. The Aboriginal teachers were nearly all involved in some ongoing, mostly on-site, teacher education program, and community Elders were being encouraged to take a greater role in conceptualising and institutionalising a Yolju curriculum. Based upon careful attention to and respect for the complexly different ancestral history of each individual student (and teacher) and their individual and particular relationship to the mosaic of people-places across the land, pedagogical practice was transformed under the Elders’ direction.

The Yolju curriculum was formally developed when the school principal Mandawuy Yunupinju was working on his 4 year of teacher education under the guidance of community Elders and Deakin University. The Elders introduced a number of significant metaphors, including Garma. Public ceremonies are conducted in recognised open spaces called Garma. The Garma allows people from different places and ancestral lines to come together safely and respectfully to work

together on producing a ceremonial celebration (the return of a sacred object, a funeral or an initiation for example). The notion of a Garma was given to the school authorities as a way of understanding how knowledge (and agreement) is made collaboratively, in place, under authority, by groups of quite different people working together in good faith. From the Yolŋu point of view, this radically challenged the most fundamental assumptions upon which the colonial education of the enlightenment was based (the universal and abstract nature of knowledge, the epistemic equality of children and of teachers, the notion of progress and achievement), and turned our attention to the need for young Yolŋu to learn through their extended networks of kin, addressing issues of common concern in the moment, rather than abstract learning goals. Much has been written about the philosophy and practice of Garma education (see for example Marika (1999), Marika et al. (1990), Marika-Mununggiritj (1991a, b), Ngurruwutthun (1991), Wunungmurra (1989), and Yunupingu (1991)). Here I detail some of the radical changes in the curriculum and its materials, as I reflect upon my last few years at Yirrkala.

The Elders who guided the curriculum development made it clear that working together to understand the history and identity of particular places (like homeland centres)—or issues like land rights—means that each person must perform their relationship to the place or issue, in their own way, comporting their own ancestral history and their position within the network of kin and place. This coming together of people, places and action for a particular purpose is termed, in ceremonial language, a *galtha*, and that became the name of the curriculum. This complex activity with singular purpose, could of course not happen in a classroom with a timetable dividing different skills into time slots. It would more likely happen over a few days of preparation, a day or two of intensive collaborative work on site, and a few days writing up the experience and reminiscing.

Suddenly, all the many different (but related) Yolŋu languages became quite central to the pedagogy. Young children were led to devise complex diagrams of their links to other places, other languages, other peoples and their shared totemic names. The Yolŋu teachers gradually taught each other to spell out the different languages and their various markers of identity for the many ancestral groups related in their various ways to the issues at hand. Older students wrote journals and summaries of their reflections in relation to the curriculum focus. The Balanda teachers, often mystified and feeling superfluous, would take photos, do some language learning, and write their own journals. It was a successful and engaging curriculum practice, and the books and magazines which came out of the process were rich and well read.

We had a lot of bureaucratic work to do of course, in convincing the Department of Education that curriculum documents come out of a learning experience, rather than feeding into it. But they were convinced, and we were reaccredited as a bilingual school in the ongoing review processes. Most significant to me, was the way in which literature in Yolŋu languages, produced from this radical new curriculum, really for the first time in my experience, was taken up and celebrated by the whole community. The books of ancestral narratives and the pedagogical

readers which had been produced over the previous years came to life only with the encouragement of teachers. But the Galtha curriculum documents and related newspapers, posters and magazines took on a life of their own, and found themselves circulating around the length and breadth of the Laynha area and beyond. And Yolŋu intellectual life was brought into the life of literature as the literature workers devised and produced a high-brow journal called *Yän*, dealing with adult matters of life and culture, which survived for several years (See Gale 1997).

After my years at Yirrkala, I was invited to take up a position at the Northern Territory University, setting up a program for teaching Yolŋu languages and culture under Yolŋu authority. That program, which is still running today, is based upon some of the key principles and protocols of Yolŋu knowledge, work which we learnt in our days at Milingimbi and Yirrkala (Christie 2008, 2009). And we continue to use the literature produced over the decades in the three Yolŋu bilingual schools.

Meanwhile, the schools at Milingimbi and Yirrkala no longer have the political and financial support they enjoyed when I was there, but the Elders (including some of my first students in the first bilingual class) continue to advocate for their languages and cultures. Charles Darwin University (including the Yolŋu Studies program and the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages) continues to support their work, and Master, my first teacher at Milingimbi over 40 years ago, continues to call me to discuss matters of language, culture and government policy.

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## Chapter 12

# The Quest for Community Control at Yirrkala School

**Trevor Stockley, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Dhungala Munungurr,  
Multhara Munungurr, Greg Wearne, W.W. Wunungmurra,  
Leon White and Yalmay Yunupiju**

Dedicated to the inspirational Both Ways education work of Dr Mandawuy Yunupiju (dec.), Dr Raymattja Marika (dec.), Mr Wāli Wulanybuma Wunungmurra (dec.), Ms Dayḡawa Nalwarri Njurruwutthun (dec.) and the many Yolḡu Ḥalapaḡmirri ('Elders') who shared their vision and knowledge with us.

In the 1960s two Ḥalapaḡmirri, now old men and respected Elders, had been young determined Yolḡu Land Rights fighters who signed the 1963 Yirrkala Bark Petition to the Commonwealth House of Representatives, asserting their Aboriginal rights to their Yolḡu land, their Yolḡu languages, culture and way of life. They had fought through the Australian legal system voicing their opposition to the improper leasing of their lands for mining and they had parried bureaucratic and administrative bluster, later sending a further Bark Petition in 1968 insisting that the new mining township being imposed on their lands be given its ancestral and proper Yolḡu name, Nhulunbuy (Wilkinson et al. 2009; Wuyal Galtha Workshop Report 1989).

Recently, as we talked together, those two Ḥalapaḡmirri pointed out that for decades Yolḡu had continued their established tradition of consultation and negotiation as a means of openly expressing their desire for self-determination and control of their lives, including the direction of education. Yolḡu have remained resolute about this, one of the old men asserted, despite changes in Government policy: "The political climate we are working under must be taken into account, it can cause problems ... we have seen this before" (Wunungmurra, personal communication 2014). The other old man, who was preparing to return to his Homeland Centre, added, "For years and years we have told you mob what we want our kids to learn at our schools; bilingual, both ways ... secondary education and more training at Homeland Centres. You just don't listen to us" (Munungurr, personal communication 2014).

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The Yolŋu story has changed little—their desire for the right to again control their lives resounds through the decades. Yolŋu have consistently reiterated their claim that they wanted recognition of their proud tradition of self-determination on their country and an understanding of the importance they placed on the maintenance of their culture and languages for their children and their grandchildren. Yolŋu did not want assimilation, instead wanting to face the future with respect and strength along with a return of their right to self-determination, self-management and self-sufficiency (Marika-Mununggiritj et al. 1990).

With the major change in the national political climate during the 1970s, the Yolŋu took the opportunity to make the crucial decision in 1973 to implement bilingual education at Yirrkala School in Gumatj and English. This decision was to have far-reaching consequences in providing their children, speakers of Yolŋu Matha as their mother tongue, with an effective and balanced bilingual education for their future (Graham, personal communication 2013). It was a positive step towards the maintenance of Yolŋu languages and culture and was to have major ramifications for the movement towards Yolŋu control.

A further opportunity to demonstrate the Yolŋu desire for control of the direction of education arose during consultation concerning education at Homeland Centres in 1974 by Maria Brandl, Daymbalipu Mununggurr and W. W. Wunungmurra. The Brandl Report (Brandl 1974) accurately reflected the strongly held belief that the Yolŋu community needed to be involved and consulted about Yolŋu education decisions and that bilingual schools should be established to teach their children at their Homeland Centres. The Yolŋu focus was on self-determination and their persistent request that community-appointed teachers have the opportunity to undertake teacher training using a community-based delivery model, resulted in the first on-site Teacher Education program being established at Yirrkala in 1976. Twelve years later, in 1988 at a UNESCO conference, second year Remote Area Teacher Education students said,

The Stage Two RATE program at Yirrkala is run in our community. This program was established at Yirrkala as a response to strong community request. The program is part of our community's plan for controlling the development of Education in our community (Yunupijju et al. 1988).

The 1980s saw a group of committed fighters emerge in the struggle for a return to community control of Yolŋu education in Yirrkala and Homeland Centres—these were the mature children of the 1960s Land Rights warriors. The relative stability of the self-determination and self-management policies gave the Yolŋu space to challenge the authority structure and curriculum delivered at the school. The feeling among the Yolŋu was for change. In his important record of these changing times Greg Wearne refers to “an increasing resolve by Aboriginal people to have a voice, to be listened to, and for their wishes to be translated into action” (Wearne 1986).

This decade saw the culmination of a number of significant and interrelated education measures which had been put into place at Yirrkala and Homeland Centre Schools over the past 20 years. The bilingual program was successfully operating at Yirrkala school and establishing an expanding library of Yolŋu Matha literature and

teaching resources; Homeland Centres were consolidating, developing essential infrastructure and establishing schools; Yolŋu teacher training utilising the community-based Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program was working well with trainee teachers at both Yirrkala and Homeland Centres undertaking Yolŋu education action-research projects (Burarrwaŋa-Ganambarr 1994); Deakin University and Batchelor College extended the qualifications of graduates through the Education Arts program (D-BATE); and the provision of secondary education for Yolŋu adolescent students at Yirrkala was underway.

The long held hope to see more Yolŋu knowledge and Yolŋu ways of learning and teaching incorporated into a balanced Both Ways education continued to drive the development of the workshop-based Yolŋu curriculum. Galtha Rom content negotiations were receiving vigorous and collaborative community endorsement (Wununmurra 1989) and the developing Garma Maths curriculum research was being trialled at the school and supported by Melbourne University (Yunupijū et al. 1986). Much of the learning, at primary, secondary and at a tertiary level during this time, was based around a workshop model involving close inter-generational collaboration between the Elders, teachers and learners (Marika 1990).

The next opportunity for the Yolŋu community to engage in consultation and negotiation with the school to plan future directions for Yolŋu education in the best interests of their children was the co-operative Yirrkala School Appraisal in 1983. The School Appraisal involved Regional and School staff, community members, parents, kin and community organisations forming working groups which completed surveys, conducted personal interviews and attended meetings. The comprehensive recommendations of the School Appraisal convey a strong sense of self-determination: with the Yolŋu re-stating their wish for bilingual education for their children and the need for Yolŋu languages to extend into the Post Primary/Secondary age students. Among other recommendations the School Appraisal endorsed increased support for Homeland Centre Schools and recognised the success of the community based RATE program in training local Yolŋu teachers. Positive school and community interest in the formation of a School Council was noted and included an accompanying recommendation to employ a Yolŋu community-school liaison person (Yirrkala School 1983).

During the 1980s the Yolŋu sought control of Yirrkala School, but importantly they sought more; they wanted to Aboriginalise their school. With the support and direction of their Nalapaŋmirri changes were being made in the school decision-making processes. These changes placed the School Council as the body setting the direction of Yolŋu education through designing and implementing Both Ways curriculum at Yirrkala and Homeland Centre Schools, while the Action (Djarma) Group enacted those directions through decisions made on a weekly and daily basis at school. Community control of the administration involved the selection and deployment of all staff and meant Yolŋu and Balanda working together towards the common goal of community control of Yolŋu education.

Formation of the initial Yirrkala School Council in 1983, as a governing body of the school, was a step towards fulfilling Yolŋu aspirations for self-determination and control of the direction of Yolŋu education. However, their vision was hindered

by the Balanda (non-Yolŋu) principal's lack of understanding and support for Yolŋu involvement in the operation of the school. He perceived the operation of the school, including staffing issues and curriculum matters, as being the function of the principal and Education Department alone. From his point of view the function of the School Council was to solve community problems, raise funds and meet visitors: in other words, to be a token Council. The Yolŋu School Council members definitely did not see themselves as token:

At first the school principal at the time supported the idea, he was happy to support some Yolŋu involvement in the school. But soon the Council was starting to make important decisions, and the principal got worried. He tried to stop the Yolŋu from having meetings without him. The Yolŋu had to fight to gain control (Yunupinju 1989).

A 1984 paper by Dr M. Yunupinju and John Henry proposed that a more Yolŋu way be introduced into the school, a Both Ways approach, to make it a more Yolŋu school. They suggested that changes to the administration and curriculum of the school could be achieved through changes to the communication structure of the school. This involved the formation of the Djarrma (Action) Group to guide the work of the school and staff, under the direction of the Yirrkala School Council and Community representatives.

We will be able to move forward on this issue of making our community school a 'both ways' place when we have a structure of communication linking the classrooms in our school with interested community people. We propose that the Yolŋu teachers in our community form an Action Group ...*(and that)*... the Yirrkala Community School Council become closely associated with the Action Group (Yunupinju and Henry 1984).

The Djarrma Group meetings, beginning in 1984 were meetings of a different kind to any previous regular planned school meetings. It is astonishing that in a Yolŋu school, these meetings were the first regular school meetings in which Yolŋu had the space and comfort to think, speak and reply in their first language. The weekly Djarrma Group meetings quickly became a place at school where Yolŋu felt empowered and were able to discuss and consider Yolŋu education and control issues within the security of their own cultural and linguistic environment (Ganambarr, personal communication 2014; Mununggurr, personal communication 2014; Yunupinju, personal communication 2014).

The Djarrma Group was comprised of every Yolŋu working at the school, including teachers at Yirrkala and Homeland Centres, RATE student teachers, literature production workers, clerical, administrative and ancillary staff. The Djarrma Group were the workers for the School Council and it was the Djarrma Group who would shoulder much of the hard work required to drive the change of control and curriculum at the school during the ensuing years.

As the work of the Action Group got going the hierarchical structure of the school had to start changing. The Action Group identified problem areas and looked for ways to start exerting control. As a sub-committee of the School Council the Action Group was the mechanism through which the School Council achieved control over everyday matters: the power, opportunities and ability to control our school because we are now able to make all

decisions, plan, evaluate, raise important issues and make recommendations for our school - the way we want it to be (Marika-Mununggiritj et al. 1990).

A demonstration of the Yolŋu resolve to translate their wishes into action came about at the end of 1984 in the issue of staff selection. Although the recent co-operative School Appraisal, involving both Yolŋu and Balanda, had encouraged self-determination in many of its recommendations, when it came to the point of Balanda relinquishing control of the hierarchical power structure, the Balanda decision-makers did not actually want change.

There had been no consultation in 1984 with the Djarrma Group or the School Council regarding decisions around the staffing of the senior teacher positions for the following year. This of course, was the usual situation. Despite that, the Djarrma Group discussed and presented their ideas for staffing of the senior teacher positions in 1985. The Balanda principal and senior teachers' response to this plan was fierce, refuting and opposing the staffing ideas (Mununggurr, personal communication 2014). And worse, in an attempt to discredit and disempower the Djarrma Group, the dissenting Balanda declared that the ideas must be the product of 'Balanda interference', not even the work of Yolŋu. The Djarrma Group responded:

As you know, the Action Group consists of the entire staff of Aboriginal teachers who teach here at Yirrkala School. We had talked about the teacher selection situation that was emphasised on the school appraisal document, giving the community more say in who they want to teach at their school.

We the Action Group feel that we are merely following up on recommendations put by this community and the Homeland Centre Communities and the hard work of the previous School Council (Wearne 1986).

The School Council Chairman, W. W. Wunungmurra, definitely saw that control of school staffing was a part of School Council and Community business, and he wrote concerning this issue in 1984,

During School Appraisal we were often told that Yirrkala had a Community school and that we 'would work together to make things better'. We agree that this is the way it should be but as parents and community members we must say that we are worried about the way the school is staffed. It is time for you to listen to our wishes, and to start 'working together to make things better'. We cannot agree to European teachers who are unsatisfactory or to senior teachers who do not understand our wishes (Wearne 1986).

The School Council and Djarrma Group were establishing their control as they turned their aspirations for self-determination and Aboriginalisation into action. Their future plans for the long term directions of Yolŋu education for Yirrkala and Homeland Centre schools were continuing to evolve, including community-based teacher training, Both Ways curriculum development and a strategy to regulate staff selection and placement.

Towards the end of 1985, the executive of the NT Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (FEPP) met at Yirrkala. The Djarrma Group explained its revolutionary work of changing the balance of power and instituting a Both Ways curriculum at the school and also discussed the difficult working relationship facing the School Council. It was decided that in an effort to meet community expectations

and to gain the support of the Department of Education, the School Council needed to be strengthened and re-constituted. The Secretary of Education also attended this meeting and said that,

He recognised the steps that the community were taking towards taking over control of the school. He, at that time, said that if we wanted to take control of the school we had to first establish and form a proper school council. He said that the Education Department would support our move in this and then give it real power ... (Yunupiju 1986).

The Yolŋu knew that teacher development and corresponding community involvement and development were the keystones in bringing about the changes they sought in attaining effective control of their school. For Aboriginalisation to become a reality it was essential that the community-based RATE program produce a high number of trained teachers and that qualifications for Yolŋu who already possessed teaching experience and training be upgraded. With 17 of the 19 Yolŋu staff undertaking training in 1987, the School Council estimated that by the early 1990s, Yolŋu should be able to fill all positions at Yirrkala and Homeland Centre schools. It was also essential that the development of Yolŋu Both Ways education, through Bilingual and Multilingual programs, workshops and Garma maths be appropriately and properly guided by the Yirrkala and Homeland Centre Naŋapaŋmirri and the Yolŋu teachers working as a team.

It was important to identify appropriate Balanda colleagues who could be assigned by the School Council to various roles as teachers in classrooms, lecturers, or tutors for Yolŋu teachers in training or to act as mentors for key Yolŋu who had been targeted to work in senior positions at the school. In this change of governance the Yolŋu needed to step up and assume their rights to self-determination and control, while Balanda needed to let go and step back. Aboriginalisation meant learning new skills and working together in new ways; Yolŋu and Balanda, Yirritja and Dhuwa, learners and teachers, school and community, School Council and Education Department in the understanding that the Yolŋu community, through the School Council was recognised as having over-arching control and guidance of the Yirrkala School.

Extensive consultation for the important Balaŋaŋa Project on the Educational Needs of Homeland Centres (Munungurr et al. 1987) was conducted during 1986. The Yolŋu researchers for the Project were notable. Mr Daymbalipu Munungurr and Mr W. W. Wunumurra, both Bark Petition signatories in the 1960s, were also members of the team that compiled the Brandl Report in 1974. Dr M. Yunupiju, the son of Mungurrawuy Yunupiju, another Bark Petition signatory, was completing his teaching qualifications through the D-BATE program and was recognised as a Yolŋu leader in educational change during the 1980s.

The research and consultation for the Balaŋaŋa Report were good preparation for the October 1986 Education Leadership Conference, attended by the Minister of Education, at which the interim Nambarra School Council was established and the staffing plan accepted by the Education Department. In his November 1986 letter, Education Minister, Darryl Manzie expressed his congratulations, support and acceptance of the School Council plan for control of education directions at Yirrkala and Homeland Centre Schools for 1987 and 1988 (Manzie 1986).

In a statement by W. W. Wunujmurra and Dr M. Yunupijū the role of the Namarra School Council was stated:

In the running of the School we would have the School Council as the highest authority. Through this body both the Yolju Community and the Education Department input into the school would be channelled. The Principal, the teachers and the advisors working in the school would be ultimately accountable to the School Council. .... We want this body to be such that it makes decisions in the same ways that decision making generally happens in our community. ... The functions of the Namarra School Council will be to make staffing appointments and determine the duties of the people appointed. Through the Council curriculum policy will be determined (Wunujmurra and Yunupijū 1986).

In the 1960s Yolju had clearly seen themselves at a frontier and that their languages, culture, land, and indeed their very lives were under attack. Those Yolju were standing up for their human rights for themselves, their children, and their grandchildren. Yolju in the 1980s were standing up for those same human rights, which included the right to determine and control what Yolju believed was the best education for the future of their children (Article 14, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2009).

This is a story of struggle, of courage and of the determination of First Australians to shape their future in the face of relentless and rapid change. The principles that guided Yolju and their Balanda colleagues are as relevant today as they were then. However, it seems that the more difficulties regarding attendance and achievement are evident, the less Yolju are consulted and involved, and the less the wisdom and educational practices which yielded Yolju-approved outcomes are considered.

It is important to understand that the Yirrkala Aboriginalisation program, with its imbedded Bilingual Education and Both Ways curriculum and philosophy worked. Graduates of these schools are now cultural, social and economic community leaders. The educational agenda of today needs to be mindful of today's issues and current Yolju aspirations but as Mr W. W. Wunujmurra expressed, he feels sorrow at the loss of the progress made and the erosion of those fundamental Both Ways principles, "We need to go back a little bit before we go forward."

In the publication *Always Together, Yaka Gäna*, Banbapuy Ganambarr a second year RATE student at the time, draws our attention to the future of Yolju self-determination and the control of Yolju education,

Our work is not just for ourselves but for all the people in this community and the Homeland Centres. Our work is based here at Yirrkala, so therefore we are opening new paths, marking the way for others to follow us and continue our journey (Marika et al. 1989). The Yolju struggle is ongoing.

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# Chapter 13

## Language Revitalisation in a Bilingual Program—The Case of Numbulwar School

Therese Carr, Melanie Wilkinson and Philippa Stansell

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the development and consolidation of the language revitalisation program at Numbulwar School. It covers the period from the early 1990s, when school and community members undertook steps that lead to their bilingual program being reinstated, until 2009 when an abrupt shift in policy resulted in a decline in support for bilingual programs (see Part 3, this volume). The growth of the program in this period can be attributed to both a vocal and pro-active community and its connection with Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DoE) Bilingual Program, and the resourcing and recognition this attracted.

Numbulwar is unique among the official bilingual programs as it is the only one which operates a language revitalisation program. *Language Maintenance* programs are designed for situations where all generations are full speakers of the language. *Language Revitalisation* programs, on the other hand, are for situations where a language is spoken by the older generations but needs special support in order to be transmitted to younger generations (Indigenous Languages and Culture (Northern Territory Curriculum Framework), 2009; Senior Secondary Assessment

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All of the authors have worked with the program at some time during the period described. We would like to express our deep gratitude to all of those we worked with. While the views expressed are our own we hope what we say attests to the remarkable developments during this time and reflects how much we learned from our collaboration.

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Board of South Australia 1996). With the pressures of language shift and uptake of Kriol, by the late 1980s a revitalisation program was required at Numbulwar School.

Developing a local school program is complex and requires attention to many intersecting areas. In the case of Numbulwar these included:

- community aspirations and departmental requirements
- local program goals, school priorities and the relative importance of the revitalisation program in the school curriculum
- understandings and communication between Wurruwurruj ('Indigenous') and Dhurrabada ('non-Indigenous') stakeholders
- the skills of key personnel in light of evolving teaching and learning practices, new curriculums and associated system wide reporting tools and resources.

In this chapter we start by describing the language context and some historical background, and then present nine elements fundamental to the consolidation of the program during this period. They are grouped together in four sections. The first focuses on the people involved: securing positions and strengthening skills and communication. The second looks at the school program: strengthening the teaching-learning cycle and working towards a local curriculum. We then discuss the importance of external recognition and accountability, through access to a language revitalisation curriculum, student assessment and the biannual review required of NT Bilingual Programs. The fourth section considers the importance of oracy in teaching and learning, through attention to particular teaching strategies. This is followed by a comment about Kriol in the school and some concluding remarks. We close with a postscript about more recent developments.

## Language Context

Numbulwar is a complex language setting. There are ancestral languages still spoken by older people. Wubuy has the greatest number of speakers (228 in the 2011 census) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Other ancestral languages that have had a place in the program are Anindilyakwa, Ngandi and Ritharrju/Waagilak. The most widely spoken language is the contact language Kriol (see Meehan, this volume). English is spoken as an 'additional' language (687 in the 2011 census) mainly by Indigenous community members and as a first language (59 in the 2011 census) mainly by non-Indigenous members of the community.

Wubuy, Ngandi and Anindilyakwa are morphologically complex prefixing languages (Heath 1978, 1984). Ritharrju/Waagilak designates a cluster of Yolŋu clanlects which typologically belong to the less morphologically complex Pama-Nyungan languages (Heath 1980; Wilkinson 2012).

## Historical Background

A bilingual program in Wubuy<sup>1</sup> and English was introduced at Numbulwar School in 1976. For a number of operational reasons it was formally suspended in 1979. The genesis of the current revitalisation program at Numbulwar School took place from the late 1980s. By this time Kriol had become widely used in the community. Nicholls (1994, pp. 230–232) describes the program as a “new model” for Aboriginal programs, emphasising the active moves by community elders to have their languages and culture included in their school program. She describes the persistent efforts of a group who were concerned about the loss of their language in the community and school. The group was known as the Numbulwar Linguists, and ‘Linguist’ or ‘Community Linguist’ remains the term reserved for senior Wubuy speaking Elders working in the program. The founding group of elders were Langayina Nunggumajbarr/Rami, a Wubuy speaker with some Ngandi, Anne Gawirra Manggurra/Rami (dec.), a Wubuy and Waagilak/Ritharrŋu speaker with some Ngandi, Elizabeth Wurragwagwa (dec.), an Anindilyakwa and Wubuy speaker, Galijliwa Nunggarrgalu, a Wubuy speaker and Ginyibuwa Murrungun (dec.), a Wubuy speaker. Alongside them was a group undertaking teacher training through Batchelor Institute Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) in the Northern Territory. In the early 1990s six of them joined the school as new teachers. Two of these, Edwin (Bundurr) Rami/Nunggumajbarr and Faye Manggurra are still with the school.

At a Numbulwar School Council meeting in 1990, support was given to the teaching of Wubuy, Anindilyakwa and Ritharrŋu within the school day. From 1991, the Numbulwar Linguists took on the task of developing resources and delivering lessons, initially with no payment. In 1993, the Numbulwar Linguists and members of the School Council sought to have the school’s bilingual status reinstated to access ongoing systemic support from the Department. These early moves were supported by the principals of the school at the time (Richard Jeeves and Jean Guernier). Consultations with Departmental representatives and community members were held in June 1993 and the school’s Bilingual status was reinstated in 1994. This officially confirmed community languages within the school curriculum and, while other languages were to be included in the school program, Wubuy was identified as having priority, by all clan groups, in the formal community consultations.

## People in the Program

There were many people involved in the program. Within the school there were two main teams: those who delivered lessons in classrooms and those developing the program and resources. In addition there were the Community Elders who were

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<sup>1</sup>Wubuy is the language name. It has also been referred as Nunggubuyu but this is the name for the people.

regularly available for consultation, the School Council who made directional decisions and the school leadership team who oversaw the running of the school. At times, Numbulwar-based teams were joined by people from outside the community e.g. Regional Linguists, the Manager of NT Bilingual Programs and others working on special projects. There was a continuous need for all members of each team to grow their own skills as well as to support each other.

### *Securing Positions and a Physical Space for the Program*

The school-based positions, provided by the Department when Numbulwar regained its bilingual program were a specialist senior teacher position (Teacher-Linguist/ET2 Two Way Learning) to oversee implementation and development of the program, a Literacy Worker position plus an extra classroom Assistant Teacher. The Literacy Worker position has always been a shared position. Additional funds were identified each year through the school budget to employ 'Community Linguists' on a part-time or casual basis.

In late 1995, the first specialist senior teacher, Ludo Kuipers, was appointed to the school. Together with the Literacy Workers Ginyibuwa and Galijliwa, two of the original Numbulwar Linguists, the new team was assembled. With Ludo's technical expertise, documentation and resource development for use in the classrooms flourished. Between 1995 and 2009 there were three further Teacher-Linguists, Jan Jardine, as well as the co-authors of this chapter Therese Carr and Philippa Stansell. Literacy Workers during this period were Anne Rami (dec.), Yambunija Nunggarraluj (dec.), Leonie Murrungun, Hilda Ngalmi, Yidangga Ngalmi and Lynette Nunggarraluj. The Literacy Worker position is the one most closely identified with the role of the original Elders and a keen interest was taken in identifying strong candidates for the position. Their role was to assist with the delivery of lessons, make resources and collaboratively oversee the program and the facilitation of training. Collectively they developed, maintained and upgraded a large collection of Wubuy theme boxes and bags, lesson plan formats and programming guides.

Department Regional Linguist, Melanie Wilkinson (as well as the co-author of this chapter) began supporting the program in 1991, first with occasional visits, and then for up to 2 weeks each term. She provided ongoing linguistic input to developments in the program and her knowledge of the program helped with continuity when school-based staff changed. The Manager of the Bilingual Programs, Paul Bubb, was also an important contributor. With his long experience, in bilingual programs in the Northern Territory he oversaw the formal processes that made the program accountable.

Along with secure positions came a secure space in the school, a room next to the Principal's office. It came to be known as the Linguists' Room. The original 'Linguists' had been repeatedly moved around the school, often with the loss of materials in the process, so this was an important advance. The Linguists' Room was comfortably accessed by both Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada. Interactions

were conducted as readily in Wubuy and other community languages as in English. Everyone in the room worked around one table. It became the hub for collaboration and open practice; a place for the Linguists' Room team to develop resources or discuss new directions for the program, for individual visitors to work on special projects, for teaching teams to plan or assess and for professional development sessions. Over time, the Linguists' Room became too small to house the Linguists' room team and all the program related documents and resources and, by the end of 2009, plans were approved for a new purpose built facility.<sup>2</sup>

### *Strengthening Skills*

The on-going professional development for the whole school community was a significant feature of this era. It had to serve students and Elders, Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada, teachers and non-teachers, the highly literate and the highly oral, as well as speakers of different languages. It took various forms, through collaborative planning and assessment, 'Learning Together' (Graham, this volume), targeted professional development and through enrolment in formal courses. 'Learning Together' were timetabled sessions for all staff, Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada, to exchange knowledge about culture and important aspects of the school's program, English as a Second language (ESL) and Maths, as well as Wubuy. They were important adult learning times and, alongside the scheduled planning and assessment sessions, were responsible for shifts in the staff's skills and understandings. Each small adjustment took some time to become embedded in practice, whether it was introducing a new theme or resource, devising a new assessment task or activity, or extending understanding of language learning in the school context. Targeted professional development in the Linguists' Room with the Wurruwurruj included introducing new classroom strategies, stages of language learning, Wubuy grammar, editing steps in the production of resources and attention to literacy skills in community languages. Partial speakers of Wubuy benefitted from both the focus of the session and from the Wubuy interactions that took place during the session.

Formal learning was undertaken by the Wurruwurruj staff in linguistic courses targeting Indigenous languages and teacher or educational support training. Some Dhurrabada teachers also undertook extra training in areas such as applied linguistics and Teaching English to Speakers for Other Languages (TESOL).

Groups of staff attended workshops and meetings, such as the regional Aboriginal Languages in East Arnhem Schools (ALEAS) forum (Northern Territory Department of Education 1994) and Language Revitalisation Workshops, networking with other Indigenous staff working in their own languages and specialists such as teacher-linguists and linguists. These forums were especially important for developing personal networks and allowing ongoing input and

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<sup>2</sup>The facility was completed and now houses the Wubuy resources and Linguists' Room team.

discussion with people from other places. Another important recurrent forum was the annual professional development meeting for specialist staff in all NT Bilingual/Two Way Learning programs.

### ***Strengthening Communication***

A multi-lingual and cross-cultural team needs time for all members to be able to think, and to both develop ideas and express them. Although the use of Wubuy noticeably increased when the school had a Wurruwurruj principal, the people in the school leadership teams were normally English-background speakers and communication through English in general school communications tended to dominate. Providing space to ensure understanding when a substantial number of school staff communicate through other languages was a challenge.

Most Wurruwurruj staff also operate within an oral tradition where knowledge is gained and held through talk. This also needs to be actively provided for. For those coming from a highly literate tradition it can be a real challenge to shift away from a reliance on print. Providing opportunities for rich ongoing talk, particularly in the Linguists' Room, was recognised and deliberately encouraged through:

- prioritising an issue and planning for ongoing attention to it over a period of time
- consulting with Wurruwurruj Wubuy program leaders prior to discussion so they could facilitate talks with others
- unpacking complex ideas within education e.g. 'learning pathway' or 'teaching-learning cycle' by using a graphic or a shared activity
- using Plain English
- inviting discussion in community languages after an idea has been introduced in English
- including time to reflect on what has been covered and to identify the next step
- putting up displays in the workplace to support ongoing work on a complex idea
- learning to listen if not a speaker of community languages
- involving external experts who have learnt a community language to monitor conversations and assess how these are progressing.

Documentation was also an important and complementary goal for communicating information about the program: Local handbooks, School Languages Policy and the biannual review reports were produced, in addition to the documentation related to the teaching-learning cycle. This aspect of communication contributes to sustainability over time.

Some of the Wurruwurruj developed skills in communicating in English about the program outside of the school context. In 1991 a seminal meeting was held at Batchelor NT. It inspired at least one member of the team to speak publicly in English for the first time and it was an opportunity to share views and struggles

regarding something that was so important to everyone there: keeping their language strong. Since then, Wurruwurruj and the senior specialist teacher have represented their program and participated in a number of regional, national and international forums, both in the NT and in other parts of Australia.

## **Developing the Program**

As well as impacting upon the people involved in the language revitalisation program at Numbulwar, regaining the bilingual status enabled a stronger delivery and documentation of the program. During this period, Wubuy became entrenched as part of the daily curriculum and all staff, Wurruwurruj and Dhurrabada, came to have a role within a regular cycle of planning, teaching and assessment.

## ***Strengthening the Teaching-Learning Cycle***

From 1993 to 1995, Wubuy lessons for primary students increased from once a week to four times a week (Monday–Thursday). The Friday lesson time was whole-school wungubal ‘traditional dancing’ instruction. The increase to daily lessons was a significant advance on the few lessons per term in the early 1990s. However, lesson times ran from just 30–40 min and concerns remained about this being long enough. Language revitalisation experts advise that one hour a day exposure to language is necessary in a school program if children are to develop fluency (Hinton and Hale 2001, pp. 7–8).

Provision in the secondary program was more uneven. The most successful strategy for older students was to work in blocks of time on project style work with elder speakers and musicians. In some years students were enrolled in Certificates in Aboriginal Language Work delivered by Batchelor Institute.

It is important to note that while Wubuy classes were delivered by Wubuy speakers, the other lessons at Numbulwar were taught by a qualified teacher, generally a Dhurrabada, teamed with a Wurruwurruj Assistant Teacher. During Wubuy classes little or no English, and very little Kriol, was used. The Dhurrabada classroom teachers had to switch to a supportive, but active role, in the Wubuy program; the Assistant Teacher’s role depended on their Wubuy skills.

In addition to the daily Wubuy lessons in the primary section, a Language and Culture week for the whole school took place each semester. It was planned for with community members, and students were grouped according to clan groups. A significant part of each day, during these weeks, was given over to Indigenous Language and Culture activities. They were an opportunity to bring other ancestral languages into the school program and teaching programs, and many resources were developed in Ngandi and Ritharrŋu/Waagilak for them. Unlike Wubuy, however, the learning was not assessed.

With more frequent lessons, it was considered essential to establish shared planning times. Timetabling for this was often a challenge and required some juggling on the part of the principal and school leadership. However, these sessions were crucial for including the classroom teaching teams and incorporating their ideas into the Wubuy program.

Weekly planning sessions brought the classroom teams and Linguists' Room teams together. The time was used to review lessons taught in the previous week and to fine tune lesson plans, including target language, for the coming week or fortnight. Weekly plans were written and displayed for reference in both the classroom and the Linguists' Room. This was a major advance from the beginning of the 90s, when planning and recording of lessons was ad hoc, if it happened at all.

### *Work Towards a Local Curriculum*

The objective of the Numbulwar language revitalisation program has always been for the learning of both culture and language. The identification of the outcomes for this learning was organised through cultural domains referred to locally as themes. They included:

- ngurrलगurmanyjina 'family kin relationships'
- ana-lhaal-yinyung 'homeland and country ties'
- awubani-yunggaj ... 'old days—new times' (including modes of travel)
- a-gugu-yinyung 'about water'
- ngujija 'fish' (freshwater and saltwater fish, parts of the fish)
- ngalaaligi 'turtle'
- ama-lhagayag 'the sea', shells and shell fish, seasons
- directions
- dhaagadaj marrya 'bush fruit'
- lhawumag 'yams' (teaching how to collect and cook)
- lagu 'wild honey' (teaching about the native Australian honey bees, parts of the hive, searching for, chopping, getting and eating it)
- wungubal 'songs and dance'
- old and new storytelling.

A key advantage of the theme approach was that it allowed the Elders to provide the culture content. Using the same cultural theme across the school made it easier to plan and develop graded activities and assessments for related language learning. Many of the 'Linguists' taught more than one class, so it helped them too. At home, siblings could support each other's learning and families were more likely to become aware of what their children were learning at school and assist them.

The culture knowledge and language learning recorded in the planning, resources and assessment, for the each level of learning, laid the foundation for a local curriculum. A local curriculum cycle evolved over the years to ensure

coverage across cultural domains and to manage the timing of when particular themes were taught. There were also opportunities to extend Wubuy culture and language learning into other key learning areas. Concepts such as number, technology (making things) and healthy living were introduced through Wubuy. Extensive work in these areas was aligned with the Remote School Curriculum and Assessment Material (Northern Territory Government of Australia 2014) utilised by the school in 2009. The range of local curriculum documentation that was available by the end of this period established an important guide for newcomers to the program.

## **System Level Recognition and Accountability**

The appearance of a new Territory-wide curriculum for Indigenous Languages and Culture (ILC) was a highly significant development which helped frame ongoing work on the local Wubuy culture and language and revitalisation curriculum.

Accountability of student learning through the introduction of student assessment was a major advance for the program. Accountability of the school program occurred through a biannual formal review required of all official bilingual programs.

### ***Access to a curriculum for language revitalisation***

During 2000–2002, the NT Department of Education developed an outcomes based curriculum framework (NTCF). It was organised around what students should progressively be achieving and included an Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) component with separate sections for Culture Content and Language Revitalisation.

This system level initiative had important repercussions for Numbulwar. It provided a formal learning pathway specific to their context—revitalisation of a language which still has some speakers. The Language Revitalisation section was informed by Numbulwar's Bilingual Program. It was fortuitous for Numbulwar that this system level initiative coincided with a Wurruwurruj Principal, Didamain Uibo, and a highly capable and experienced specialist senior teacher at the school, Jan Jardine.<sup>3</sup> It became the focus of much activity in the Linguists' Room for 2 years

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<sup>3</sup>The key Numbulwar contributors to the curriculum work at this time were the Numbulwar Linguists: Anne Rami, Yambunija Nunggarrgalu, Nganamugayi Murrungun, Assistant Teacher Faye Manggurra, Principal Didamain Uibo, and Teacher-Linguist, Jan Jardine. Working with the Numbulwar contributors were three linguists, two employed by the Education Department Melanie Wilkinson (East Arnhem) and Rebecca Green (West Arnhem) and Jen Munro from Ngukurr Language Centre as well as the curriculum writing team lead by Kathryn McMahon in Darwin.



and there was a lot of work done at Numbulwar to develop understandings around how learning was framed within the western education system. The working knowledge of the program helped raise questions about language development, and it became apparent that the contexts for language learning of the existing Wubuy speakers and the children they were teaching were quite different. Time was spent considering just what the children were learning and what their pathway as Wubuy learners could be. Another related topic to get attention was Wubuy grammar, to assist with targeting specific language at the different stages of schooling.

## *Assessment*

Formal assessments had not been part of the early phase of the program. This was introduced during the late 1990s and expanded in 2000, with folders containing evidence of learning that are passed on as students progressed through the school.

Following the introduction of Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) in 2000, students' Wubuy assessments were entered into the system wide recording and reporting tools aligned to the curriculum. There was a requirement to report to the system, and to parents, twice yearly using the NTCF band levels.

Learning how to assess, and how to make use of oral language assessment data, involved the 'Linguists' team making a significant step forward. They had to shift from informally observing familiar children's Wubuy language development in their own families to using the NTCF Band Levels (or targets) to assess all students in their classes. A number of strategies were introduced: audio or digital clips, rubrics, informal observations and individual student interviews as well as timetabled assessment meetings between classroom teams and the 'Linguists' team. The 'Linguists' also learnt to provide comments when reporting to families.

Examination of student results alerted the teams to areas of difficulty in student learning. Students were plateauing at about Band Level 2, and neither the classroom teams nor the Linguists were able to confirm, with confidence, whether students could use the language independently. Some responses to this were to:

- clarify expectations early in the unit of work
- scaffold towards the expected outcomes in ways to ensure student were successful or comfortable to take risks
- increase student understandings of what was required to demonstrate learning
- fine-tune the assessment practices to capture this learning
- identify learning strategies that extend the language learnt into different contexts.

## ***Biannual Program Reviews***

The Biannual Bilingual Program Review involved extensive reflection by the school on the program and led to a report that included setting clear objectives for the next two years. This included targets based on NTCF levels for years 1, 3, 5, and 7 in Wubuy ILC-Language Revitalisation, English as a Second Language and Maths. A panel, made up of the Manager of Bilingual Programs, senior Departmental personnel and community leaders, visited the school and produced an evaluation of the program based on this visit and the report. Their recommendations addressed areas such as the organisation of the program, time allocation, the way personnel in the program were being used, or tackled an area of perceived weakness in student performance. An example of the latter was a suggestion to make better use of home language, including Kriol, in the teaching of Maths.

### **The Importance of Oracy**

Wubuy is embedded in an oral tradition and the focus of language revitalisation at Numbulwar was naturally on oracy. It was especially important to the Wubuy-speaking generations and partial speaker young parents that the children learn to communicate in Wubuy and continue to follow associated cultural ways.

Targeting oral language teaching practices was a significant shift in the way Wubuy language was used in early classes. The older Wurruwurruj teachers had learnt Wubuy as their first language and were not initially conscious of the needs of second language learners and the consequent differences in the learning pathway.

Literacy in the programme had a secondary role, to scaffold teachers in the use of activities, in recording and documenting, and as a goal for students when they were ready. It was used by most members of the 'Linguists' team in their daily work in the Linguists' Room.

All the original Numbulwar Linguists had some literacy in their own languages, gained through experience in the earlier bilingual program that had introduced literacy in Wubuy working in Bible translation or study within language and linguistics courses.

Kriol, the home language for most of the students, was also part of the contemporary oral culture at Numbulwar and gained some attention as to its role as a language of instruction.

## ***Oral Language Teaching and Learning Strategies***

Initial ideas for oral language teaching strategies were informed by the Framework for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in Primary School (Ministry of Education, W.A. 1992). These included the use of games and chants for encouraging use and practice of language. Other activities were introduced over time and many were documented in local handbooks and lesson plans.

One important method adopted was the ‘4 times strategy’.<sup>4</sup> It is a strategy to assist with fluency that is helpful when learning new language structures and longer sentences, dialogues and/or narratives without needing to depend on the written word to aid memory. The idea was to spend a few minutes using this strategy in each lesson. It was particularly appropriate because it was designed to teach a language that, like Wubuy, has long words made up of different parts. Wubuy is an inflecting language with complex morphology. The teacher models a sentence, or part of a dialogue, four times, while students listen without responding. Only then do students say the sentence. They must repeat the sentence, or portion of dialogue, four times while the teacher listens for fluency. As confidence grows, smaller groups in the class can then take on the roles of repeating and listening to each other. This method was used to perfect dialogues, role-plays, chants and stories quite successfully.

Songs, chants and role-plays had always featured strongly in the Numbulwar program. These provided effective ways of learning pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary and language structures in fun and meaningful contexts through listening, singing, natural speech and rhythmical chanting of set pieces of language. In fact, the thoughtful incorporation of language in new songs and chants in class activities was a key strategy for encouraging students to produce extended chunks of language, rather than shy one-word responses.

From 2004 the place of songs and chants in the program and the quality of production was strengthened. Songs in particular were enthusiastically embraced by students and the wider community. Local musicians including members of Yilila band ([www.yilila.com](http://www.yilila.com)) worked with the ‘Linguist’ team to write and produce two collections of songs:

- Ngalaaligi: a 2007 CD of for children related to the cultural themes taught 2002–2004
- Waayin and Arrjambal: a 2008 CD and DVD set featuring new songs and children’s chants for bush foods, water, health and a ‘natural science’ bird theme taught that year.

As well as supporting learning in the classroom, the CDs and DVDs were distributed to households to further the benefits of using music to teach oral language, and the young children and teenagers, more attuned to Kriol, could listen to and learn the Wubuy songs whilst they played and socialised in their home context.

Community Linguist/Literacy Worker Leonie Murrungun was a key songwriter. Leonie cleverly captured language in the songs that could be targeted for student learning for particular cultural themes at different language levels.

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<sup>4</sup>The ‘4-times’ strategy is an adaptation of purposeful language drilling practices we learnt about from a web-site devoted to the teaching of Navajo language, hence we sometimes also referred to it as the Navajo strategy. The website is no longer available so we have been unable to locate a suitable reference. We think it most probably came from the American Indigenous Language Development Institute website. It may have been closely associated with a particular site or program.

Further collaboration with Tony Gray (music and IT consultant) resulted in good quality recordings of traditional clan songs for each of the family groups that could then be played in class. A similar strategy was adopted to make quality recordings for a Wubuy story-telling theme.

## ***Kriol***

Whilst we have focused on the developments around the Wubuy program, we should acknowledge the work that took place with the first language for many of the students: Kriol. The community Elders were resolute in their concern for Wubuy and all their energies were devoted to establishing a strong Wubuy program. This often included negative attitudes about Kriol. As the Wubuy program became more and more secure, the place of Kriol in student learning became something that could be talked about. This shift reflects a widely experienced phenomenon, the sensitivity needed when working with contact languages such as Kriol, which are stigmatised by speakers of other languages (Meakins 2010; Morrison and Disbray 2008; Ponsonnet 2010; Siegel 1999, 2006). During the 2000s, work on awareness about Kriol as a language distinct from English was undertaken with all school staff. Discussions also began with Wurruwurruj about more formal attention to its use in teaching and possible models for use of English, Kriol and Wubuy for instruction.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has outlined key elements that strengthened a school-based language revitalisation program over a period of 16 years. It has highlighted the complexities encountered and the immense learning that needed to take place during this time.

Undeniably Numbulwar would not have its program without the initial ‘walk-in’ by community members and their sustained advocacy and support, but some serious steps in formally incorporating the program within school curriculum were achieved through productive partnerships with Dhurrabada.

We hope the points identified from the experience at Numbulwar will inform, encourage or affirm implementation of other school-based language revitalisation programs.

## **Postscript 2009–2015**

Since 2009 the program has had to contend with the passing of many of the Wubuy Elders who had established the program. Unfortunately, just when community input to the school program needed some reframing, resources were also being weakened.

In 2010 the manager position for Bilingual Programs in the NT DoE was cut and with it regular accountability through annual reporting of student outcomes and the biannual program review process. The long-standing East Arnhem DoE linguist position was relocated to Darwin. While local ‘Bilingual/Two-Way program funded’ positions have been retained, their focus and accountability has shifted. System-wide reporting of student outcomes across the strands of the ILC curriculum stopped being required and gradually the electronic reporting tools to allow this locally became unavailable.

The depth with which the Wubuy program was embedded in school curriculum declined as DoE priorities shifted and the school became more reliant on itself to sustain the program. New staff were no longer able to draw on a team with the strength of knowledge and experience in the program which had characterised the period we discuss.

Things seemed to be edging in a better direction by 2015. In late 2013 an Arnhem regional ILC support position had been established for 18 months and was filled by one of the authors. With her extensive knowledge of the Numbulwar program she was able to facilitate some discussions with staff. Since 2013 Numbulwar has been a site for a project on early maths understandings around number. This looked at the use of Kriol, Wubuy and English by teaching teams, particularly Assistant Teachers, in scaffolding student learning (see Wilkinson and Bradbury 2013).

At the end of 2014 recording of ILC curriculum outcomes was re-established across Bilingual Programs at a regional level. In 2015 a manager position for the bilingual programs in the NT Department of Education was restored. It is hoped that this augurs well for re-invigorated attention to the bilingual program at Numbulwar.

### Endnote

All of the authors have worked in the program at some time during the period described. While the views expressed are our own, we hope what we say attests to the remarkable developments during this time and reflects how much we learned from our collaboration with all those involved.

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# Chapter 14

## Threatened Closure: Resistance and Compromise (1998–2000)

Brian Devlin

### Overview

The timeframe covered by this chapter, 1998–2000, spans the Northern Territory Government's attempt to redirect funds away from bilingual programs, the subsequent outcry, and the 'two-way learning' compromise that resulted. These events contributed to the shift in international perceptions of Australia, which had formerly been lauded for its progressive national language initiatives in the previous decade (Hamilton 1996 pp. 54–62) and for its international support for human rights since World War II (Robertson 2009).

Remote area education, like technology provision in isolated areas, is expensive, and so the use of public funds always needs to be monitored. At the same time, if educational services have been set up quite deliberately to advance the linguistic, cultural and educational rights of a group of Indigenous people, as Beazley argued (House of Representatives 1973), they should not be suddenly whipped away. Significant program changes need to be honestly and transparently negotiated before they are implemented.

### Introduction

Although this chapter is focused on the late 1990s, it is important to recall some of the language policy and program innovations that Australia had introduced in the preceding decade, ranging from the Australian Language Learning (ALL) project to the National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco 1987). Lo Bianco had pointed to the crucial role of truly bilingual teachers in successful bilingual programs, but one

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ongoing problem for the NT program was its inability to recruit and retain these teachers. Australia's language policy and program innovations can be seen, in part, as enlightened attempts to address the demands being placed on educational institutions by a swelling immigration program, and the problems associated with poor literacy attainment in remote Aboriginal schools, while balancing these against the requirements of national unity (DEETYA 1998; Lo Bianco 1987; Hamilton 1996). By way of contrast, the 1990s were marked by pragmatic attempts to rationalise expenditure in language education, and to increase accountability (Dawkins 1991).

## The Link Between Bilingual Education and Human Rights

Australia was an early supporter of international human rights, and so it is not surprising that when bilingual education programs were introduced by a reform-oriented federal government, this initiative was linked to the nation's responsibilities with respect to international covenants (Commonwealth 1974b; United Nations 1948; Whitlam 1972). It was only to be expected therefore that any sudden move to direct support away from remote Aboriginal bilingual programs should attract criticism from the Australian Human Rights Commission for breaching three rights guaranteed by international law:

- Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC), which provides for state parties to recognise the right of the child to education, with a view to achieving this right on the basis of equal opportunity
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (the ICERD), which states that education shall be available to all without discrimination on the basis of race [Articles 1(1) & 5(1)(e)(v)]
- Article 26 of the Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO 69), which requires states to take measures to ensure equality of opportunity to members of Indigenous peoples to acquire education (AHRC 2000).

December 10, 1998, Human Rights Day, should have been a time to celebrate in the Northern Territory, and in Australia more generally, for it marked the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which had been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. Australia had signed the UDHR in 1948, thereby agreeing to support the document as a member state of the United Nations; in fact, it had held the presidency of the UN at that time. It also agreed to extend to its own citizens the protections offered by the Declaration, including Article 26(3): "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" (United Nations 1948).

A human rights lawyer, Geoffrey Robertson QC, has since pointed out, citing Eleanor Roosevelt, that in the 1940s "Australia contributed more than any other



nation to the development of the principles enshrined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. What was particularly noteworthy, he said, is that “Doc Evatt and his delegates” had “ensured that rights to health, education and welfare—the very rights most needed, according to Brennan, by those on [the] margins of our modern society—were included in the Declaration, which calls upon all nations to protect human rights through domestic legislation” (Robertson 2009).

What linguistic human rights in education might mean for Indigenous and minority children had been spelled out by the Hague Recommendations (1996) and Terralingua, an international, non-governmental organisation (Skutnabb-Kangas 2008). Bilingualism was seen as a right, and a responsibility, for persons belonging to national minorities (Art. 1), and states were reminded not to interpret their obligations in a restrictive manner (Art. 3).

Nonetheless Australia’s celebration of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the UDHR in 1998 was marked by controversy, for the Prime Minister, John Howard, had refused to sign the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* the previous year (ABC 2007). It should be noted though that Australia did finally sign the UNDRIP in 2009. Ironically, and in a move that was just as telling, the Northern Territory Government chose to withdraw its support for bilingual education in December 1998. There were 20 schools with bilingual programs in the Territory at the time; some had been running for almost a quarter of a century.

## The Decision

In December 1998 the NT Government decided “to phase out specific purpose funding for bilingual education” (Collins and Lea 1999, p. 119). Accordingly, on Tuesday December 1, two government ministers, the Country Liberal Party (CLP) Treasurer (Mike Reid) and Minister for Education (Peter Adamson), announced in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly that bilingual education programs would be phased out in favour of the “further development of ESL programs” (Adamson 1998; Reid 1998). This decision was purportedly based on discussions with Aboriginal people around the Northern Territory the previous six months (Adamson 1998; Reid 1998).

In the second half of 1998 the NT Department of Education had set up an Education Review Task Group. Whether coincidental or not, this task group was convened at a time when bilingual education had come under fire overseas. In June 1998, for example, Spanish-English programs were outlawed in California following a referendum on Proposition 227. However, it is quite possible that there was no connection between that development and the review instituted in the NT.

The task group comprised Wal Czernezkyj (Chair), Gary Henry, Kath Phelan, and Don Zoellner, and was assisted by Sharon Smith. To carry out their review the group held discussions in Alice Springs, Alyangula, Darwin, Kalkaringi, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Palmerston, Papunya, Tennant Creek and Ti Tree. It is important to point out that only one of these sites (Papunya) had a school that operated a

bilingual program. However, Catholic Education Office spoke for its three bilingual schools at a specially convened session in its Berrimah office. Other contributions were made through school cluster consultations. For example, these bilingual community schools directly participated in regional consultations: Watiyawanu, Willowra, Lajamanu, Milingimbi, Galiwinku, Yirrkala, Numbulwar. Written submissions were received from Lajamanu and Walungurru made a written submission as well.

The task group prepared recommendations designed to save the government more than \$20 m. Following the task group's review, the Country Liberal Party decided to "...progressively withdraw the Bilingual Education program, allowing schools to share in the savings and better resource the English language programs" (*Schools our Focus* policy, cited in DEET 2005, p. 27). It is likely that many non-bilingual school principals and school councils felt that they were not being treated equitably in terms of resource allocations when compared to the bilingual schools and suggested ways to redress this issue.

## Justification for the Decision

Three reasons for the Government's decision to phase out support were given. The first was that Aboriginal people were said to be overwhelmingly concerned about the operation of the bilingual program. The Minister for Education, Peter Adamson, told Parliament on December 1, 1998 that "The review team was informed of this over and over by communities concerned about the operation of the bilingual education program" (Adamson 1998). He added, "The strong message was that the communities wanted good English as a Second Language programs, ESL, as the fundamental basis for education in Aboriginal communities" (Adamson 1998).

However, in a media release issued on February 19, 1999, the Board of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission condemned the government "for the absence of any meaningful consultation with the affected schools and communities in the making of the decision and for distorting the views expressed by Aboriginal people to an education review to justify the decision" (cited by Harris and Devlin 1999, p. 18). On behalf of the Board, Josie Crawshaw, ATSIC's Northern Territory Commissioner, called on Chief Minister Dennis Burke to reverse the decision. It should be noted though that ATSIC did not contribute to the review or attend consultation sessions.

A later review commissioned by government also noted "the total absence of prior consultation" (Collins and Lea 1999, p. 119). Collins and Lea also note (p. 119) that some organisations changed their mind over the issue when participating in *Learning Lessons* consultations. Further confirmation of this was provided by Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School Council on Bathurst Island, north of Darwin, which protested that the Tiwi Islanders had not been consulted at any stage about the decision (in an open letter to the Chief Minister and the Minister for Education, published by the *Northern Territory News* on 14 December 1998). In a

post to a website at [www.ozemail.com.au/~al4pozy/bilingual/](http://www.ozemail.com.au/~al4pozy/bilingual/) (no longer available online) one writer correctly pointed out that

Bilingual schools are required to complete an appraisal of the program every three years. It is rigorous and thorough and every aspect of teaching and learning in Language 1 (the child's own language) and Language 2 (English) are examined...Part of the Bilingual Appraisal requires the panel (Senior Departmental Officers and community members) and the school to consult with a wide cross-section of the community to determine whether they want a bilingual program in the school. Bilingual programs in community schools do not continue without proven community support. NOT ONCE in any Bilingual Appraisal has any community said they do not want bilingual education.

In response, Mr Adamson decried the “confusion, rumour-mongering and misconceptions”, claiming that some individuals and communities had changed their mind as a result of “threats and outright intimidation” (Adamson, 20 April 1999).

Second, it was claimed by the two politicians that students in bilingual programs were not performing as well as their peers. The Minister for Education explained to the *Alice Springs News* that “We looked at the statistics and bilingual communities, on average, are performing worse overall, and certainly in terms of numeracy and literacy specifically, compared to non-bilingual schools” (Chlanda 1999). The same point was made on Darwin radio (January 14, 1999) by Mike Reed, who was acting Minister of Education as well as NT Treasurer. Information sent out to NT Schools in December 1998 reiterated this claim, which was allegedly based on student assessment data obtained in 1996, 1997 and possibly 1995, when 11–16-year-old students sat for English and Mathematics tests administered as part of the Multilevel Assessment Program (Scott, pers. comm. 1999, cited in Harris and Devlin 1999).

When the Northern Territory Department of Education launched *Schools our focus: Shaping Territory education*, widely distributed information packs included 17 fact sheets summarising policy changes. *Fact Sheet 10: Phase out the bilingual program*, claimed that, “There is no evidence to show that children in these schools are performing better in English literacy than children in other schools, which do not have extra resources for bilingual education. In fact, on average, children in schools with funded bilingual programs are performing slightly worse in English literacy and in numeracy”.

However, this claim was disputed by Fran Murray, a prominent literacy educator, who asserted that “Quite a number of Bilingual schools, when examining their results from the Multi Assessment Programs (MAP) have noted that they are achieving above average results in literacy and numeracy compared to other schools in the non-urban cohort. Mr Reed must have a different set of statistics, or advice lacking in integrity, as the information he quoted would not seem to bear scrutiny” (Murray 1999). No MAP results, attendance rates, enrolment data, or comparative resourcing figures had been released to support the government's claims.

The third reason for the policy reversal in December 1998 was that the government wanted to trim the education budget as part of a ‘pruning for growth’ strategy across government. This was made clear in *Fact Sheet 10: Phase out the bilingual program*, which pointed out that progressively withdrawing the Bilingual Education Program would allow schools “to share in the savings and better resource

English language programs”. This fact Sheet went on to say that, “The Bilingual program dates back to the days of Commonwealth responsibility for education in the Northern Territory but has continued with funding exclusively provided by the NT Government. Of the 91 schools in remote Aboriginal communities, 20 schools in the Territory (including 4 non-government schools) have additional resources for bilingual education programs”. The additional resourcing required was clearly an issue, with the result that “The Government has decided to examine how these resources can be redirected more equitably to provide for improvements in literacy. Nonetheless, the government made it clear that “the positions of Indigenous teachers and non-Indigenous support staff employed with bilingual funds are protected. These teachers will be able to continue teaching in the schools where they are presently employed”.

The policy shift was announced as part of the Government’s “Planning for Growth” strategy. The Treasurer, Mike Reed, advised Parliament on December 1, 1998 that the Northern Territory public sector would be reduced by approximately 700 positions, including senior staff such as Chief Executive Officers. The Territory was also seeking expressions of interest from the private sector to provide health services at lower cost, he explained. “While precise figures are not possible at this stage, it is estimated that the budget bottom line is expected to improve by at least \$20 million as a result of this reform” (Reid 1998). Treasury estimated that the budget improvements, as a result of measures announced in October and December, would exceed \$100 million. Summing up, the Treasurer explained to Parliament that “Every function of government has been reviewed and a new direction determined. Not only will better government services be provided more efficiently but the leverage of the public sector has been used to enhance development prospects in the private sector”. Somewhat predictably, the Opposition Leader, Mrs Hickey, rose to her feet to condemn the Planning for Growth agenda as “one of the biggest frauds ever foisted on the people of the Northern Territory” and she called on the minister to “go into detail on the perceived difficulties with the bilingual program”. She asked, “Is this move being genuinely driven by proper motive or is it a cost-cutting exercise? The minister has to present cogent reasons for this radical departure from longstanding and, I have to say, very popular and well-accepted policy in bush schools” (Hickey 1998).

## **Reactions to the December 1998 Decision**

Peter Toyne (Member for Stuart) questioned the government’s decision to discontinue bilingual education programs on educational grounds.

The fact of the matter is that there is no research evidence out there that says the bilingual education produces inferior results, even in terms of the English literacy outcomes in a program to a non-bilingual school. And you certainly get particular schools that may be above or below the mean, whether they are non-bilingual or bilingual schools. The point is that, if there was overwhelming evidence that a bilingual program, or the existence of a

bilingual program, leads inevitably to a deterioration in the quality of the outcomes in English literacy, then maybe we should look at the sort of actions that have been proposed in the Planning for Growth statement. But the fact is that, if you look objectively at the research, there is absolutely no evidence for that. And in fact, it makes the decisions that are being proposed absolutely irrational. (Toyne 1998).

In his address to the NT Legislative Assembly on December 2, 2008 he urged the Minister for Education to revisit this decision, and pointed out two benefits of doing that:

One is that it would preserve very rich tradition and a very productive tradition, a unique tradition within the Territory education system. The second benefit is that it would avoid the inevitable outcry and protest and public action that is already starting to gather around that decision. Having worked in remote area and bilingual education for a very long period of time of my life, I quite frankly get sick of seeing so much energy required simply to preserve the status quo in terms of resources and in terms of policy support for programs that have, by the internal procedures of the department, been repeatedly and thoroughly evaluated and found to be productive and working effectively. Why we are back into yet another bunfight over this sort of decision is beyond me. (Toyne 1998).

However, the government's decision to phase out bilingual education provoked strong resistance from communities, teachers, linguists and educators on other grounds. For example, in December 1988, around 300 people joined a protest rally in Alice Springs where speakers said they were outraged that the decision had been made without consulting Aboriginal communities (*Land Rights News*, March 1999). The reaction of those who supported the decision is not known.

A number of prominent commentators accused the Northern Territory Government of breaching international law. Mick Dodson, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, pointed out from Geneva that the NT decision was a breach of UN Conventions. The same point was made by Sarah Pritchard, University of NSW international law lecturer, and Olga Havnen for the National Indigenous Working Group (Ceresa 1998). Former Minister for Education in the Whitlam era, the Hon. Kim E. Beazley Sr, noted that deny a people an education in their own language where that is possible is to treat them as a conquered people and to deny them respect" (Beazley 2009).

On April 20, 1999 a petition signed by 2443 people was presented to Parliament. It claimed that the progressive withdrawal of bilingual programs in Northern Territory schools would mean that Aboriginal languages, whether written or spoken, would now have no official place in NT schools (Hansard 1999). In 1999 members of the Indigenous Education Council signed a "Charter on Bilingual Language", which affirmed that "The Indigenous people of the Northern Territory have the right to choose bilingual education as the only acceptable defined educational process of maintaining cultural wellbeing". Signatories included prominent Aboriginal people in the region such as Lana Quoll, Jane Harrington, Isaac Brown, Beverley Angeles, Christine Birkinbirkin, Rae Mathews, Joyce Taylor, Richard Doolan, Pat Cummins, Annette Laing and Warren Williams.

Michael Christie, then in the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at the Northern Territory University, warned that "relationships between

communities and the Education Department, vital for retention and attendance rates, had been damaged. “It shows they don’t really have any notion that Australia’s first people have a place in our society, whether we like it or not”, he said (Ceresa 1998). Yolŋu educator R. Marika-Munungiritj called on Mr Adamson to reverse his ‘oppressive’ decision, which constituted “a direct attack on our rights to teach, and for our children to learn, both languages”. She pointed out that the bilingual program at Yirrkala School had improved English outcomes.

Information about the Government’s plan, and the mounting resistance to it, was made available online. Terralingua reproduced letters and e-mails from national and international academics Bob Boughton, Ken Hale, Mari Rhydwen, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. David Nathan provided online updates at [www.dnathan.com/VL/alert.htm](http://www.dnathan.com/VL/alert.htm), drawing on information provided by Peter Austin, Ysola Best, Bob Boughton, Jane Durie, Marilyn Macgregor, Jeff Siegel, Bruce Sommer, and Ann Stewart. Under the authority of Rosalind Djuwandayŋu, the Principal, a website documenting the changes was set up at Milingimbi School. Another message board set up at [www.topend.com.au/~dharuk](http://www.topend.com.au/~dharuk) attracted plenty of posts. A typical post was this one in English posted by a teacher, Marilyn McGregor, on December 5, 1998:

After teaching in a Bilingual school for nine years I am still convinced that the only way that students in remote areas will have any chance of success in the wider Australian society is to be given the support of the Department of Education – namely have the opportunity to become fluent in their first language before attempting to read and write in what is a “foreign” language: English.

I also feel that to cut Bilingual Education shows that the Government does not care about Aboriginal people maintaining their identity, language and culture.

R Marika-Munungiritj posted a message in her language on December 10, 1998 about the importance of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational pathways for children (*djamarrkuli’wu dhanal ŋarru marŋgiyi mǎrrma’wu rommgu balan-dawu ga yolŋuwu*).

The author of this chapter wrote to the Minister of Education on December 18, 1998 to ask whether any recent NT-based research had suggested that changing the language of instruction was likely to be a more effective way to achieve better educational outcomes than, say, improving attendance rates, alleviating poverty or tackling problems relating to health and nutrition. In conclusion he expressed disappointment that the Minister of Education had not received

better quality advice with respect to the advisability or otherwise of maintaining bilingual education programs. Had you been better informed, we would not be facing the situation we are in now where, after decades in which Ministers Stone and Finch and Harris at various times could claim that the NT was leading Australia with respect to its initiatives in indigenous education, you now face angry protests from a large number of Aboriginal communities, professional organisations, academics and human rights groups. This is a regrettable consequence of the changes that have been announced. I do hope the situation can be reversed, through negotiation and sensible adjustments to policy.

Kieran Finnane reported this Aboriginal perspective in *The Alice Springs News* on February 17, 1999:

Dennis Nelson had disputed the suggestion from the Minister and others that teaching children their Aboriginal languages was simply the responsibility of the parents, at home: “A long time before Captain Cook came, the tribes spoke our languages without interference. ‘Now there is too much TV, videos, CDs. That’s why we need the written language. It’s going to be really hard in the future for kids to speak our language unless it is in the written form’”.

On March 17, 1999 *The Australian* published a letter headed “Death of a Working Aboriginal Reform”, from two well-known scholars, Stephen Harris and Merridy Malin, who wrote:

In November 1998 the NT Government made a misguided and tragic decision, after 25 years of operation....Until this policy shift, about half the children enrolled in schools in isolated Aboriginal communities in the NT attended a bilingual school where for about half their time during primary school they were taught in their Aboriginal language and for about half their time they were taught in English.

In an article written for *Arena*, Nicholls (1999, p. 19) pointed out an ominous historical parallel:

Indeed, for many Aboriginal people in remote communities in the Territory, this decision is redolent of the bad old days, when schooling was used to deliberately drive a wedge between the generations. In 1994 Jeannie Herbert Nungarrayi, a fully-qualified Warlpiri teacher and Lajamanu community member wrote, “Community members at the Lajamanu community lobbied the Northern Territory Government for almost ten years before securing a bilingual program for our school. [in 1982] Prior to that, in the Welfare Days, we children were frequently beaten or caned by white authorities for speaking our own language, Warlpiri, in the school surrounds, or within the hearing of the Settlement Supervisor or the other Government Officers who administered the settlement. In some cases, the language was literally beaten out of us kids. Sometimes they really flogged us until we were sick. English-only was the unofficial policy but it had all the power of official written policy. The reason that the community lobbied so strongly for a bilingual education program was the fear of the old people...that the Warlpiri language would die out altogether.

The media reports discussed so far illustrate the opposition to the decision to close the bilingual program, however there was debate on both sides of this hotly contested decision.

On April 1, 1999 Carmel O’Shannessy, on behalf of Lajamanu CEC School Council, invited other school councils to join Lajamanu in making a complaint to the Human Rights Commission, which would be asked to investigate whether the NT had breached the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. Other schools expressing their disapproval as well included OLSH at Wadeye (Port Keats), Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School on Bathurst Island and Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land. The Minister for School Education, Peter Adamson, wrote to the Yuendumu Branch of the Australian Teachers Union NT on March 23, 1999, thanking them for their letter. Reiterating the Government’s reasons set out in Fact Sheet 10, he advised that

The phasing out of bilingual education in government schools in remote Aboriginal communities will enable those additional resources now devoted to bilingual education to be redirected more equitably to provide for improvements in English literacy and in numeracy. Non-government school systems will continue to allocate their program funding in accordance with their own priorities. Of the 87 government schools in remote communities, 16 are affected by the decision. There is no evidence to show that children in these schools are performing better in English literacy than children in other schools which do not have the additional resources.

Early in 1999 *Time* magazine published a short article on the issue: “Divided by language: The Northern Territory axes bilingual education for Aborigines, sparking charges of cultural neglect” (Horsburgh 1999). Many letters and faxes were sent to the Government from organisations as diverse as Edinburgh University’s Gaelic society, The Australian Linguistic Society, and the Max Planck Institute in Holland. Correspondents included Alasdair MacCaluim (Edinburgh University’s Gaelic society), Michèle de Courcy (Latrobe University), Lloyd Dawe (University of Sydney), Margot Ford (NTU), Warren Snowdon (Federal Labor Member for the NT), Galiwin’ku community, George Daynambu and Kenneth Hale, Ferrari P. Ward Professor of Modern Languages and Linguistics at M.I.T.

On December 10, 1998 Hale sent a fax to the Minister for Education, setting out all the reasons why the bilingual programs should be allowed to continue, after pointing out that he had been “one of the contributors to the 1975 report on bilingual education and one of the people involved in producing materials and in training Warlpiri-speaking teachers during the first months of the Yuendumu Bilingual Education Program”. Hale urged “in the strongest possible terms” that the Government’s decision “to withdraw bilingual education from the schools in the Northern Territory be reconsidered and revoked” (Hale 1998).

## The NT Government’s Response

Stung by the widespread accusations of unfairness, cultural neglect and lack of consultation, the Country Liberal Party government commissioned an independent review to determine the directions for Aboriginal education over the next five years. In 1999 the Government advised that a detailed consultation with all schools and communities affected by the decision would take place, over six months, to explore how the policy change could be implemented, and resources re-allocated to improve literacy outcomes. A former Labor Senator for the NT, Bob Collins, was asked to chair the review. Tess Lea was appointed Project Manager and Tina Lambert assisted as Project Officer. Their terms of reference were to provide an independent assessment of the main issues affecting educational outcomes for Aboriginal children, and to invite people to join them in developing strategic directions for Aboriginal education.

The community consultation phase began in May 1999. In their report, *Learning Lessons*, the authors noted that they had “conducted in-depth case studies of



forty-four schools across the Northern Territory...Of these forty-four case studies, thirteen were bilingual schools” (Collins and Lea 1999, p. 24).

The review was principally interested in parental concerns and issues to do with educational effectiveness. Key questions guiding the reviewers were: What do Indigenous parents, children and communities want from schools? What is going well? What is not going so well? What are the strategies for the future?

An initial problem was that staff in schools with bilingual programs felt that they had been over investigated. Indeed, one remote area school shared its Bilingual Appraisal Report with the reviewers, explaining in a covering letter that

We think that no-one in the Education Department has read our reports because now you are paying people to come and ask us what we want again. Every year you ask us and every year we tell you but you don't listen to what we say. Some community members say that you will keep asking until we tell you that we want to be Balanda, then you'll stop asking. We are not Balanda, our skin will always be black (Collins and Lea 1999, p. 25).

The Collins review noted strong community support for bilingual education and gave qualified support to continuing it. One reason was that bilingual programs had encouraged the development of “explicit and meaningful roles” for para-professional Aboriginal assistant teachers, “and that with such support, many went on to become fully trained teachers” (Collins and Lea 1999, p. 91). The reviewers noted that

The first and immediately obvious achievement of the bilingual program was to lift the community standing and self-esteem of Indigenous staff in schools. It provided the first real opportunity for Indigenous people to determine the type and style of education they wanted for their children. Local Indigenous staff became teachers in the real sense of the word. It is fair to say that bilingual schools have acted as the crucible for Indigenous teacher training and the increasing success of employing local Indigenous people to staff bush schools. This is an enduring legacy of bilingual education and arguably its greatest achievement.

(Collins and Lea 1999, p. 123)

However, *Learning Lessons* recommended a name change from bilingual to ‘two-way’ learning programs. This recommendation was later endorsed by Government, which interpreted ‘two-way learning’ to mean that local languages would be “used primarily as a means of teaching English literacy. A key difference is we will be tracking student attendance and their progress much more rigorously” (Lugg 2009).

At the same time as the Collins review was being undertaken, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) also conducted a National Inquiry into Rural and Remote education. The author of this chapter was appointed Co-commissioner for that inquiry in the NT. Although bilingual education was not on the agenda for that inquiry, issues related to the government’s decision to withdraw funding were voiced in every community visited by the HREOC team. This attested to the strong feelings that had been provoked in remote communities where bilingual programs had been operating.

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the Northern Territory government's move to close 20 bilingual programs in 1998, the ensuing resistance that was mounted by program staff, community members and academics, leading to an independent review of Aboriginal education and the 'two-way education' compromise that resulted. Four bilingual programs ceased to operate, leaving 16 two-way education programs at the end of the 1998–2000 period.

Michael Kirby, Justice of the High Court of Australia, has explained that democracy in Australia 'is far more complex than simple majoritarian rule. It is a sophisticated form of government which involves the general ability of the will of the majority to prevail but in a legal and social context in which the rights of vulnerable minorities are respected and defended—particularly where such minorities are unpopular' (Kirby 2000). Remote Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are a vulnerable minority. However, following the 1998 decision, many protested in order to ensure that their right to educate their children in their own languages was defended and respected.

### End Note

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# Chapter 15

## Defending Our Program at Wadeye

Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe

### Foreword

by Samantha Disbray

The body of this chapter is an adaptation of a paper presented by the author to an Indigenous Catholic Community Schools Leadership Meeting at Catholic Education Office, Darwin, on February 12, 2009. The meeting took place at the beginning of the first school year after the announcement of the *First Four Hours of Every School Day in English* policy. He and other colleagues, along with Sr. Tess Ward, sat and carefully planned the key messages and the evidence they wished to draw on to make the case for the bilingual program at Wadeye. The speech is reproduced below.

Though Nganbe and colleagues pitched their message academically for the education leader's forum, their thrust was maintained in the contribution by members of the Wadeye school and community (Nganbe 2011) to the 2011 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities (Commonwealth of Australia 2012). They were concerned at the emphasis on performance on standardised testing at year 3 and 5, so early in children's English language and literacy learning, and the way that this emphasis pushed out first language and culture learning. They drew on pedagogic arguments to make their case:

We learn best in a language we understand and this is very true for our children. They already know a lot before they come to Western school and if we use our language with them they learn more quickly. We can't learn to read a language we don't speak, so if we give our young children the chance to learn to read first in their language, then they can make a bridge when white people ask them to start to read in English. In the early years they can start to learn to speak some English but not be forced to learn to read in English from those early years when they don't know any English. Let them do one thing at a time. Let them learn to read and write in Murrinhpatha which they speak,

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then later maybe by year 4 or 5 move to reading and writing in English. We think we have a right for our children to learn to read and write in a language they speak. So all our children should be able to have time throughout their schooling for our language and culture to be part of what they are learning, not just the really young ones...

At the moment we are using Murrinhpatha for reading and writing but only to year 3. But a problem is because of NAPLAN they are forced at the beginning of year 3 to start to write English before they are strong in reading and writing Murrinhpatha. It is very confusing for them to have to learn another orthography before they have learnt all their own. They should not have to do NAPLAN in English in the early months of Year Three and they should only begin to write in English when they have become strong in writing in a language they speak well. In our culture lessons we are having lessons for the clans in their own languages to keep those other languages strong or help the ones who have started to forget their own, to learn before it is too late and no-one is left alive to teach them those clan languages (Nganbe, Submission 28, August 19, 2011).

Indeed Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe, Gemma Alanga Nganbe and other educators also emphasised a range of learning areas important for a good education for students at Wadeye (Nganbe 2011). They argued for the value of traditional language, culture, knowledge and intergenerational teaching and learning, along with the importance of this as a foundation for learning English:

We must give our children in Wadeye and the Thamarrurr region the opportunity to receive quality education. Our people are strong in culture and many languages are spoken in the community and back in the Homelands of the different clans. We dream, think and communicate in our daily lives through our language. At OLSH Thamarrurr Catholic School we now have a 'culture centre' called Da Ngimalmin Family Responsibility Centre. It's a place of significance in the centre of the school where our old people come to teach our children our way of life. Teaching the children about people and the relationship to each other, traditional dance and songs, stories, land, name of animals and plants, the universe, art and craft and the list goes on. The culture centre fits in well with what the teachers are doing in the Early Years. We know it will form a very strong foundation for our children's learning and hope that by strengthening education in the first language will make learning in the English language easier. Children will enjoy coming to school every day to learn (Nganbe, Submission 28, August 19, 2011)

The benefits that were identified—more efficient learning, enhanced self-identity and equity—are further elaborated in the submission by other contributors, who raised concern about the impact of the 2008 policy change, and what was at stake:

We have many people with many languages here: Marringarr, Magati Ke, Marri Amu, Marri Tjevin, Murrinh Nhuwanh and Murrinhpatha. We want to talk in the languages we speak, hold them strong and teach our children in them. We don't want to have to leave part of ourselves at home when we come to school. We don't want our languages and our culture wiped out. We see in communities near us, they speak only English and have lost their language. We don't want this to happen here.

We know who we are. We are not white people, we are black people and we know much about our land, stories, our clans, our foods that we want to teach our children. We have a lot of knowledge that you don't find in white English culture that is important to us. (Nganbe, Submission 28, August 19, 2011)

Despite the arguments put forward in 2011, English literacy continues to be introduced at Year 3, and English language literacy and numeracy performances remain the key measures of school success. However, in recent years the teachers have managed to continue to teach Murrinhpatha literacy in the years above, and are looking to the Australian Curriculum as an opening for further teaching and learning (Bunduck and Ward, this volume).

The presentation by Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe to Indigenous Catholic Community Schools Leadership Meeting at Catholic Education Office, Darwin, on February 12, 2009, is reproduced in full below.

### **Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe ‘A Positive Learning—A Step Forward in Community’**

This year our school has begun to put measures in place to ensure that our children are receiving the best chance of education. We are using Murrinhpatha as the first language for literacy for children in classes Pre-school to class 2. Murrinhpatha is the language of instruction for at least 50 per cent of the school day. Many members of the community have said that they are pleased that children will become literate in their own language first. We want to see our language valued and used by the children throughout their education, but at the moment we do not have the language used in a formal way as the medium of instruction in classes above class 2. A further positive learning step we hope to make next year is to see this developed above the present classes.

I would like to put before you some of the thinking and principles behind our renewed efforts at using *our* language as the language of instruction in our school.

Jim Cummins from the University of Toronto has done much research and is internationally acclaimed. He has written much and had wide experience. A paper that holds much enlightenment is “Bilingual children’s mother tongue: Why is it important for education”? This paper states a number of principles that underpin our use of our language in the school system and I would like to quote a number of points taken from this paper. Cummins (2001, p. 3) says:

Any credible educator will agree that schools should build on the experience and knowledge that children bring to the classroom, and instruction should also promote children’s abilities and talents. Whether we do it intentionally or inadvertently, when we destroy children’s language and rupture their relationship with parents and grandparents, we are contradicting the very essence of education.

Our children and our adults have much learning, but it is not always valued by the white culture—the culture of the Government and of the dominant wider white

society. We often have different values, different ways of doing things, different ways of seeing things, which are often at odds with the main culture of white Australia.

Cummins asks the question: “How can schools provide an appropriate education for culturally and linguistically diverse children?” He then proceeds to answer it by saying: “A first step is to learn what the research says about the role of language, and specifically children’s mother tongues, in their educational development”.

Briefly, I would like to touch on the points he makes.

### ***What We Know About Mother Tongue Development***

The research is very clear about the importance of bilingual children’s mother tongue for their overall personal and educational development. More detail on the research findings summarised below can be found in Baker (2000), Cummins (2000), and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000).

Bilingualism has positive effects on children’s linguistic and educational development. When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality. The research suggests that bilingual children may also develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages.

The level of development of children’s mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development. Both languages nurture each other when the educational environment permits children access to both languages. Mother tongue promotion in the school helps develop not only the mother tongue but also children’s abilities in the majority school language. This finding is not surprising in view of the previous findings that (a) bilingualism confers linguistic advantages on children and (b) abilities in the two languages are significantly related or interdependent. Bilingual children perform better in school when the school effectively teaches the mother tongue and develops literacy in that language. By contrast, when children are encouraged to reject their mother tongue and, consequently, its development stagnates, their personal and conceptual foundation for learning is undermined.

For this reason, we hope that in the future, Murrinhpatha will be extended above Year 2 and used as a language for ongoing learning, including literacy within the school system and that there will be an air of inclusivity, rather than a monolingual English learning environment. Strong support for this thinking is found in Cummins’ next point: Spending instructional time through a minority language in the school does not hurt children’s academic development in the majority school language. Some educators and parents are suspicious of bilingual education or mother tongue teaching programs because they worry that these programs take time



away from the majority school language. For example, in a bilingual program where 50 per cent of the time is spent teaching through children's home language and 50 per cent through the majority school language, surely children's learning of the majority school language must suffer?

One of the most strongly established findings of educational research, conducted in many countries around the world, is that well-implemented bilingual programs can promote literacy and subject matter knowledge in a minority language without any negative effects on children's development in the majority language. We can understand how this happens from the research findings summarised above. When children are learning through a minority language (e.g. their home language), they are not only learning this language in a narrow sense. They are learning concepts and intellectual skills that are equally relevant to their ability to function in the majority language (Cummins 2001, p. 18).

For many years the school has made lists of children with their English Christian names. When the bilingual program began in the school, children learnt to write first their Aboriginal name—the name they were called at home, the name they knew, and then as they became more literate as well as familiar with their English name, began to write that as well. But for many years this practice has ceased. They have learnt only their English name—a name that most children when they enter school are unfamiliar with. So another simple positive learning is that we have begun to teach children to write their Aboriginal name—or in the Pre-school their preferred name, which in most cases is their Aboriginal name, but in some cases is a nickname. Writing your own name, representing your own identity in school is important.

Cummins' next point brings us to reflect on whether we are living Christian values if we fail to offer children the opportunity to continue to learn in their own language. His point states:

To reject a child's language in the school is to reject the child. When the message, implicit or explicit, communicated to children in the school is "Leave your language and culture at the schoolhouse door", children also leave a central part of who they are—their identities—at the schoolhouse door. When they feel this rejection, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction. It is not enough for teachers to passively accept children's linguistic and cultural diversity in the school. They must be **proactive** and take the initiative to affirm children's linguistic identity by having posters in the various languages of the community around the school, encouraging children to write in their mother tongues in addition to the majority school language (Cummins 2001, p. 19).

In recent years there has been much debate over the importance of English and much effort, resources, including more non-Indigenous teachers have been poured into our school. This is very good, but at the same time, many Aboriginal teaching assistants and other staff have dropped off—perhaps because they feel left out or run over by the powerful white society. There has not been the same amount of resources poured into our people to enable more to be trained and skilled to teach in ways that the majority non-Aboriginal system accepts. We have fewer Aboriginal staff—because they don't have the qualifications demanded by the majority culture.

This year, we have another positive learning going on—a number of our people are doing ongoing training and some are beginning preservice training. In addition, some staff have returned to the school because they feel there is a return to giving a more prominent place to Murrinhpatha within the school curriculum.

In conclusion, I ask that those of you who are non-Indigenous and in leadership positions will think seriously about how you can support more strongly our language and culture within the school system, and bring to bear all your authority to enhance its place and give our people a sense that we—our language and culture—are valued, rather than you thinking that bilingual is not working, because our students do not achieve test results in English that are to your pleasing. If we can once again have a strong Murrinhpatha program, the research suggests our students will in time also achieve better academically in the majority language.

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# Chapter 16

## Sources of Evidence on Student Achievement in Northern Territory Bilingual Education Programs

Brian Devlin

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is make some observations about how academic achievement has been measured in the Northern Territory (NT), both in relation to schools with bilingual programs, and more generally. Four particular measures of progress have been taken into account: Research projects, critical reviews of the relevant literature, external test results and accreditation reports. The questions I have posed are: What information of value have these sources of information contributed? Do they tend to support or refute claims made about the effectiveness of programs, and the academic performance of students? To maintain focus I have drawn attention to two claims about comparative student outcomes. I have avoided reference to the international research on bilingual education as summarised in Grimes (2009) and elsewhere, or the 1200 or more international case studies mentioned by Lo Bianco (2010). As valuable as that body of research on bilingual education might be it, is not the focus of this paper. Only selected research findings concerning Northern Territory (NT) programs are considered here. The reason for this is that such results have, from time to time, been ignored, denied or misinterpreted by decision makers in the NT.

#### **Brief background—The external testing program in the NT (1983–2007)**

The shift to standardised testing was slow to permeate practice in the NT. For example Collins and Lea (1999) report a lack of monitoring, reporting and record keeping in the education system. When I was a school principal in the mid 1980s, I remember flying quite regularly into Darwin from Elcho Island to attend meetings of the Primary Assessment Program (PAP) Committee, which was coordinating the development of tests that could be used across the Northern Territory. The aim of

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these teacher-developed assessment instruments was to provide confidential, moderated, systemic feedback to the Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DOE) and equally confidential feedback to particular schools to inform staff and parents. PAP test results were not to be revealed publicly. That was our clear understanding at the time. Cataldi and Partington (1998) observed that in Lajamanu the PAT reading tests were administered along with Marie Clay's Stones reading readiness and the Gap reading test.

These tests were replaced by Multilevel Assessment Program (MAP) test battery, which was a more sophisticated set of measures based on item banks and modern mathematical understandings. These tests were administered in August each year to students in Years 3, 5 and 7. The aim was to compare student achievement levels against nationally agreed benchmarks. Each year the NT Board of Studies would then prepare a report to the Education Minister on the results obtained. At different times politicians would also discuss these results in the Legislative Assembly; for example, on August 24, 2005 the Education Minister reported that

the number of indigenous students achieving the Year 3 national reading benchmark improved 31% since 2001, the Year 5 benchmark improving by 43%, and the Year 7 figures improving by 46%. The Year 3 numeracy benchmark has improved by 10%, Year 5 by 38% and Year 7 by 43%.

So, in the years leading up to 2008 there was a sense in the NT that progress was being made. Students in bilingual programs had been compared to those in English-only programs at different times and the comparative findings.

From 2008 onwards much of the discussion about student achievement has been framed with reference to the *National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy*, generally referred to as NAPLAN or NAPLaN (this volume). For example, in a report commissioned by the NT Government in 2013, the performance in students at five schools—Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Milingimbi, Maningrida and Yirrkala—was tracked from 2008 to 2013 using those national test results (Wilson, 2014, Appendix 7, p. 281).

### **Rationale**

The argument put forward in this chapter is this: Although there is some evidence available to help us determine whether bilingual programs in remote Aboriginal schools have ever been successful, effective, or of value to local people, these findings have often been ignored, or drowned out by ideological disagreements, especially for a few years after December 1, 1998, when the Northern Territory Government announced that it would be redirecting funding away from bilingual programs and then again after October 2008, when a later NT government ceased its support for the step-model of bilingual education in seven remote schools. The 'noise' associated with the resulting polarised debates has made it difficult to hear what the researchers have had to say.

It is always reasonable to ask whether a government-funded program has been worthwhile, especially if it has continued in one form or another for more than four decades, as bilingual programs have in locations such as Areyonga, Galiwin'ku and

Yirrkala. How we might establish a program's worth is a task requiring careful evaluation and, of course, there are a number of ways that might be done. For example, we could ascertain whether the educational program has been giving local people the skills and knowledge they need to help them realise their hopes for a better life (Kral, this volume). As part of that, we might want to know whether a particular bilingual education program has assisted with the introduction of modern scientific and technical knowledge in a remote Aboriginal community, and whether it has contributed to young people finding meaningful work in the modern sector as skilled entrepreneurs or employees. Questions such as these relate to program *impact*, and are necessarily complex, for their answers depend on some sensitive, longitudinal, socioeconomic research and an ability to make sound, on-balance judgements and connections. Alternatively, we could settle on an easier method, one that simply measures a few selected aspects of student performance on some (hopefully) valid and reliable tests. This is the *output*-focussed approach, which governments have generally adopted. When we seek to assess program impact, we are asking a question about effectiveness: "How has this program contributed to society more generally?" When we gauge program outputs, we are focussed on finding out what a program has achieved for a particular institution or agency. When our aim is to compare outputs across institutions the results invariably have political, funding-related ramifications.

My focus in this paper is not on the broader, economic and social impact of bilingual education, although that might be an important and interesting topic to explore (Disbray and Devlin 2017). Nor is it concerned with other outputs that have been compared and measured, such as student attendance. What I have set out to do is to single out one aim of bilingual education and to ask: Are there any available data that would tell us whether, at different times, in different locations, that particular aim has been achieved? My rationale is that it is more useful to consider the research findings concerning one of Program X's aims at Time Y than to join in the never-ending debate about whether Abstraction A, freely defined, is a better approach than Abstraction B, which only encourages disagreements about untestable generalisations or myths (Nicholls 1999).

Which aim to choose though? Since its inception in 1973, the NT Bilingual Program has had eight aims. As McKay (this volume) has shown, these eight aims were changed and reprioritised in 1980, when a formal evaluation program commenced. In 1975 the first two aims were to help children to believe in themselves and to feel proud of their heritage through "the regular use" of L1 in school and "learning about Aboriginal culture" and, secondly, to teach "each student how to read and write in his own language" (Australian Department of Education 1975, p. 1). These aims mirrored Whitlam's idealistic vision—where bilingual education would encourage "greater respect for aboriginal languages and culture" through programs that "when fully implemented ... will affect most aboriginal children in the Northern Territory and will be extended to tribal areas of northern Queensland, the Kimberleys in Western Australia and northern South Australia" (Whitlam 1972). Five years later the eight aims had been rewritten and reordered to ensure a sharper focus on proficiency on English literacy and numeracy. Now in first place

was the aim “to develop competency in reading and writing in English and in number to the level required on leaving school to function without disadvantage in the wider Australian community” (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, p. 2; McKay, this volume).

The reason for that change in wording was that program evaluators wanted some more precise, testable objectives to measure when appraising the performance of students in remote Aboriginal schools with bilingual programs as part of the accreditation exercise that had been planned since 1979 (Devlin 1995). The focus of this paper is on identifying sources of evidence on achievement of the first (revised) aim (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, p. 2). That task is taken up in a later section of this paper, “Two claims regarding bilingually educated students’ achievement in literacy and numeracy”. The following section deals with a few preliminary ideas that will help make sense of what follows.

## Which Perspective Counts When We Measure a Program’s Success?

What criteria should we use when making judgements about a program’s ‘effectiveness’ or its ‘value to parents and students’? Whose perspective counts as important? Some assume that it is the government’s viewpoint that should prevail. After all, the Australian government had made a considerable investment in setting up ambitious bilingual programs during the 1973–78 period, and the Northern Territory Government inherited the expense of keeping them going after July 1, 1978 when the *Northern Territory (Self Government) Act* came into operation. So, for elected parliamentary representatives, paid government officials, and for the voting public more generally, it was entirely appropriate at that time to take stock and ask: Are these programs that were initiated and paid for from Canberra worth maintaining? How do students in these schools with bilingual programs compare with others? Are they achieving better results in English and Mathematics? Such questions all relate to *program accountability*, the *interests of stakeholders*, and *measuring academic outcomes*. To ask them is entirely justified. At the same time it is useful to remind ourselves that such questions are *limited*; that is, from the perspective of a program evaluator, they focus on output (that is, what a school or program achieves for itself in the short term) rather than impact (what a school or program achieves for others in the long term). Secondly, it is too *narrow* to gather data just on student outcomes for English and Mathematics, for doing so not only ignores achievements in other subject areas, not to mention vernacular literacy (reading or writing in L1), but it completely excludes a second perspective, which concerns the *value* of such programs (Devlin 2009), as perceived by local people (such as the Aboriginal authors whose views are expressed in this volume: Banbapuy Ganambarr, Deminhimpuk Francella Bunduck, Dhungala Munungurr, Dorothy Gapany, Multhara Munungurr, Tess Ross, Tobias Ngande, W.W.

Wunuṁmurra, Yalmay Yunupiṁu, and others.) The authors of *Learning Lessons* contrast these two perspectives as follows:

The bilingual program was begun in schools in the Northern Territory in 1973.

Government and bureaucratic proponents of the program at the time cited improved school attendance and better outcomes in English literacy and numeracy among the primary aims and anticipated benefits. Indigenous support always centred on what was seen as the first real recognition by Government of the value of Indigenous language, culture and law. In other words, while there was common support for the program, it came from different perspectives. In many quarters these different perspectives have not changed in more than twenty-five years.

(Collins and Lea 1999, p. 121)

## **Two Claims Regarding Bilingually Educated Students' Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy**

In this section of the paper I introduce two claims that have been made about the achievement of students in relation to Aim 1 (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, p. 2) and briefly assess the evidence that might support or refute them.

### **Claim 1**

Some NT bilingual education programs have been comparatively effective in improving student academic results (Silburn et al. 2011, p. 26).

#### ***Explanation***

This claim, which was made in another review commissioned by the NT Government, appears to be supported by the available evidence. To start with, some useful official findings are available. These are the result of a series of school-based evaluations conducted for accreditation purposes soon after the NT government took over responsibility for education from the Commonwealth. As Devlin (1995, p. 25) has explained:

Telegrams dispatched to regional offices in 1980 announced the NT Department's decision to introduce accreditation procedures as a way of evaluating bilingual education. The purpose of accreditation, which would set out to evaluate the performance of each bilingual school program using the official aims of bilingual education as a yardstick, was to make sure that programs were being effectively conducted. Participating schools were told of the benefits that accreditation would confer, namely official recognition and a permanent allocation of additional resources.

There was problem with evaluating Aim #1 though. Even though it had been reworded to make it as specific and measurable as possible, thereby assisting bilingual program evaluators, the task of coming up with conclusive findings proved to be quite elusive for the researchers concerned. That is, it was difficult for them to say with certainty that the students they tested had developed "competency in reading and writing in English and in number to the level required on leaving school

to function without disadvantage in the wider Australian community” (Northern Territory Department of Education 1980, p. 2). At the time there were no national standards or tests available to allow evaluators to determine what that level might be.

The second-best alternative was to use some proxy measures, and these were developed as part of a ‘sophisticated’ model of program evaluation (Harris and Jones 1991, p. 45; Northern Territory Department of Education 1991), one that included interviews, document analysis, comparisons between designated bilingual programs and about six ‘non-bilingual control schools’. In attempting to gather what useful data they could, however, evaluators came up with comparative findings that reflected quite well on bilingual programs (Harris and Jones 1991).

### *Evidence*

After examining all the accreditation reports two researchers concluded that the Bilingual Program had

produced on the whole statistically significant academic growth in English and Maths...but this growth has not been as great as predicted from the theoretical advantages of the bilingual approach....A statement true of all schools except Oenpelli would be that, in general, significant gains in academic terms had been demonstrated in comparison to the pooled results of a group of non-bilingual control schools. The independent measures recorded by Murtagh (1979) and Gale et al. (1981) corroborate this statement in relation to Barunga (Bamyili) and Milingimbi.

(Harris and Jones 1991, p. 45)

The independent measures referred to above are analysed later in this paper.

Devlin (1995) explained that accreditation had aimed at a comprehensive examination of the *variables* affecting the operation of bilingual programs in individual Aboriginal schools, especially those designated as operational, social/psychological and academic ones. Students in Years 5, 6 and 7 were assessed on criterion-referenced English and Maths tests which had been jointly devised by NT Department of Education curriculum advisers, staff from the Evaluation and Research section of the same department, and teachers from six Aboriginal schools. Before being administered, the tests were piloted then subjected to item analysis. A control group of at least six non-bilingual schools was chosen for comparative testing purposes. Devlin (1995) then analysed results obtained by three schools which were eventually accredited: Yirrkala, St Therese’s and Shepherdson College. He explained that what the accreditation teams found when they analysed the test results for these schools was that bilingually educated pupils had performed as well on the English and Maths tests as pupils in the reference group of non-bilingual schools and in some cases they had performed better. For example, tests administered Shepherdson College in 1981–2 and 1984 indicated that students in the reference group did not perform significantly better than Shepherdson students on any test at any year level (Markwick-Smith 1985, p. 47). Those at Shepherdson College “performed significantly better in enough areas, particularly in Years 5 and 7, to suggest that overall they have greater proficiency in school work than pupils in the [English-only] Reference Group schools” (Markwick-Smith 1985, p. 49) (Table 16.1).



**Table 16.1** Accreditation reports: three examples to illustrate their scope

Name	Years conducted	Type	Details	Findings
Richards and Thornton (1981)	1981	Matched group comparison between one school with a bilingual program (Yirrkala) and a reference group of six schools without bilingual programs	Students in years 5-7 were assessed using criterion-referenced English and Maths tests developed by curriculum advisers, staff from the evaluation and research section, and teachers from six Aboriginal schools. The tests were trialled and then subjected to item analysis before being administered	No statistically significant difference in performance was noted except for the subtraction sub-test in which year 5 Yirrkala students attained significantly better results
Stuckey and Richards (1982)	1981	Matched group comparison between one school with a bilingual program (St Therese's) and a reference group of schools without bilingual programs	As above	Year 7 St Therese's students attained significantly better results on all English tests bar one and the multiplication test. Year 6 significantly outperformed the reference group in tests on addition, time, written production and oral production. Year 5 did significantly worse on addition and maths problems
Richards (1984)	1982 and 1983	As above	As above	In 1982 St Therese's students performed better than the reference group on all tests—significantly better for years 5-7 subtraction, cloze, written production, year 7 oral reading, year 6 multiplication and year 5 reading comprehension. In no year (1982 or 1983) did reference group students significantly outperform those at St Therese's

**Claim #2**

Academic results for students in ‘step’ model bilingual programs were worse than those for English-only programs at similar, remote Aboriginal schools (NT DET 2008).

**Comment**

This was a significant claim for it was made by the Education Minister in the NT Legislative Assembly on November 25, 2008. Also, it was on this basis that the NT Government decided to cease its support for the ‘step’ model of bilingual, biliteracy education.

**Alleged evidence**

On the 20 national tests conducted in 2008, bilingual schools were said to have done comparatively worse than a group of similar non-bilingual schools, on all but one test: Year 9 numeracy (Devlin 2011; NT DET 2008). A document, *Data for bilingual schools in the Northern Territory*, was tabled in the Legislative Assembly the next day as evidence to support the NT Government’s decision to phase out ‘step’ model bilingual programs the previous month (NT DET 2008). It claimed that, compared to ‘non-bilingual’ schools, ‘bilingual’ schools achieved better academic outcomes on only three of the 20 items in the 2008 NAPLAN literacy and numeracy tests; namely, Year 3 Grammar, Year 3 Reading and Year 5 Grammar.

**Evidence**

Claim #2 is not supported by the available evidence. Using MySchool data, Devlin (2010b) checked the accuracy of that claim and found that the authors had neglected to mention a few other cases where the bilingual group did as well or better (Table 16.2).

The analysis in Devlin (2010a, b), using official NAPLAN data on the MySchool website, showed that Year 3 students in the Government’s ‘bilingual school’ sample had actually performed better than the comparison group on four out of five tests; namely, (1) Reading, (2) Spelling, (3) Grammar and Punctuation, and (4) Numeracy; only in Writing did they lag behind (cf. Wigglesworth et al. 2011).

Simpson et al. (2009) drew attention to the weakness of the NT Government case against the ‘Step’ model of bilingual education. It was important that these scholars took this stand, for people connected with bilingual programs had been transferred, staff at Literature Production Centres had been directed to work in classrooms, resources had been diverted and Indigenous teachers had been marginalised—all on the basis of dubious claims, the questionable interpretation of national test scores (NAPLAN 2008), incorrect basic arithmetic, and the selection of an invalid school sample for comparative purposes (Devlin 2011). The sample was invalid because it included a school that did not have primary grades (Xavier EC) in the control group of primary schools, and one was running a Language Revival (LR) program. This was a heritage language learning program, rather than one in which student were taught in their first language and English, which was true of the other bilingual programs (Table 16.3).

**Table 16.2** NAPLAN results for year 3 spelling, year 3 numeracy, year 7 numeracy and across 16 comparison schools selected by NT department of education and training

#1 year 3 spelling			
Non-bilingual	School means	Bilingual	School means
Alekarenge CEC	212	Lajamanu CEC	
Angurugu CEC	186	Maningrida CEC	202
Boroloola	203	Milingimbi CEC	223
Gapuwiyak CEC	186	OLSH Thamarrur CEC	198
Kalkaringi CEC	197	Shepherdson coll CEC	195
Ngukurr CEC	229	Yirkala CEC	
Raminging CEC	220	Yuendumu CEC	
*Xavier		*Numbulwar	297
Group School Mean	204.7	Group School Mean	223
#2 year 3 spelling			
Non-bilingual	School means	Bilingual	School means
Alekarenge CEC		Lajamanu CEC	
Angurugu CEC	245	Maningrida CEC	201
Boroloola	251	Milingimbi CEC	303
Gapuwiyak CEC	236	OLSH Thamarrur CEC	219
Kalkaringi CEC	271	Shepherdson coll CEC	224
Ngukurr CEC	251	Yirkala CEC	282
Raminging CEC	206	Yuendumu CEC	
*Xavier		*Numbulwar	331
Group School Mean	243.3	Group School Mean	260.0
#3 year73 spelling			
Non-bilingual	School means	Bilingual	School means
Alekarenge CEC	239	Lajamanu CEC	363
Angurugu CEC		Maningrida CEC	399
Boroloola	394	Milingimbi CEC	362
Gapuwiyak CEC	380	OLSH Thamarrur CEC	344
Kalkaringi CEC	386	Shepherdson coll CEC	417
Ngukurr CEC	366	Yirkala CEC	323
Raminging CEC	386	Yuendumu CEC	311
*Xavier	368	*Numbulwar	361
Group School Mean	359.9	Group School Mean	360

\*The invalid entries have been asterisked

## Levels of Evidence

So far in this paper I have considered two claims in the light of some available evidence. Such an approach is fine as far as it goes, but it does not take account of the *quality* of the evidence that is put forward to support or refute a particular claim. One way to do this might be to adapt and apply National Health and Medical

**Table 16.3** Schools in NT DET's comparative sample by grade range and program type (*Source* NT DET 2008)

Non-bilingual	Grades (program)	'Bilingual schools'	Grades (program)
Alekarenge CEC	P-9 (xBL)	Laja manu	P-9 (Billing)
Angurugu CEC	P-9 (xBL)	Maningrida CEC	P-12 (Billing)
Boroloola	P-9 (xBL)	Milingimbi CEC	P-9 (Billing)
Gapuwiyak CEC	P-9 (xBL)	Numbulwar	P-9 (Revitalisation)
Kalkaringi CEC	P-9 (xBL)	OLSH Thamarrur CEC	P-12 (Billing)
Ngukurr CEC	P-12 (xBL)	Shepherdson coll CEC	P-12 (Billing)
Raminging CEC	P-12 (xBL)	Yirkala CEC	P-12 1 (Billing)
*Xavier	7-11 (xBL)	Yuendumu CEC	P-9 (Billing)

Research Council guidelines, which have been prepared to help researchers rate the key components of any 'body of evidence'.

These components are:

1. The evidence base, in terms of the number of studies, level of evidence and quality of studies (risk of bias).
2. The consistency of the study results.
3. The potential clinical impact of the proposed recommendation.
4. The generalisability of the body of evidence to the target population for the guideline.
5. The applicability of the body of evidence to the Australian healthcare context.

(National Health and Medical Research Council, n.d., p. 4)

Using this levels-of-evidence approach one might imagine that the place to start looking for gold-standard evidence might be randomised, controlled trials. However, no such trials have been conducted in the Northern Territory to gauge the efficacy of any small, remote, bilingual programs, although there have been some non-randomised, experimental cohort studies. These have taken the form of a matched-group comparison between two schools (Murtagh 1979, 1982), a matched-group comparison within one school (Gale, McClay et al. 1981), and case-control studies involving one school and a control group of six or seven reference schools (e.g., Markwick-Smith 1985; Richards 1984; Richards and Thornton 1981; and Stuckey and Richards 1982). Some of this work has previously been reviewed (Devlin 1995; Silburn et al. 2011), but student attainment in English literacy and numeracy is worthy of reconsideration here, because of its relevance to political and policy-related decision-making.

### **The evidence is "limited, but consistent"**

A team of researchers from the Menzies School of Health was commissioned in 2011 to review the literature related to bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) approaches (Silburn et al. 2011). In undertaking this project the researchers used National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines (NHMRC, n.d., p.4) to help them distinguish high-strength evidence from research studies with a medium or low standard of evidence rating.

### The Menzies School of Health reviewers concluded that

In considering the effectiveness of different language acquisition approaches in the Australian Indigenous context of English as a foreign or additional language, no definitive conclusions are able to be drawn given the limited sample sizes of the available studies and/or their lack of internal or external reliability. Most of the available reports have evaluation design limitations which render comparisons of the outcomes of Northern Territory bilingual and non-bilingual programs inconclusive. These include poorly selected comparison groups and/or a lack of rigorous statistical analysis resulting in studies reporting weakly supported findings (Devlin 1995). Nevertheless studies by the NT Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET 2004) and academic researchers (Batten et al. 1998; Devlin 1995; Lee 1993; McKay 1997; Gale et al. 1981; Murtagh 1982) offer limited but consistent evidence that some NT bilingual education programs have been comparatively effective in improving student academic results.

(Silburn et al. 2011, p. 26)

In reviewing 243 studies by evidence type and rating, the researchers found that

in the Australian Indigenous context, the bulk of the reported evidence comes from descriptive or quasi-experimental studies, case studies and reviews. There are 24 studies involving particular methodologies or specific approaches for SAuE language acquisition within the Australian Indigenous context. Of these only 15 included direct outcome measures of the efficacy for identified instructional approaches, including three studies reporting to DET system-level data in the Northern Territory context. However, in only three of these (Devlin 1995; Gale et al. 1981; Murtagh 1982) was the description of the study methodology considered sufficient for it to be rated for evidence of efficacy by the SPR Standards for Evidence (SPR 2009).

Of the three studies mentioned above, Devlin (1995) was a review of the research including official accreditation reports which until then had been buried in the grey literature. The others (Gale et al. 1981; Murtagh 1982) were empirical studies.

### High-strength evidence

Silburn et al. (2011) considered that several independent research studies were based on high-strength evidence, including those relevant to the NT (Gale et al. 1981; Murtagh 1979, 1982). The relevant studies are summarised in Table 16.2 and elaborated a little in the text that follows.

### Murtagh (1979, 1982)

Edward J. Murtagh, a linguist from Stanford University, assessed the results obtained by 58 Year 1–3 students in two schools, one with a bilingual program, and one without. (The two schools were Bamyili and Beswick, located east of Katherine and about 450 km southeast of Darwin). This cross-sectional study was conducted over 10 weeks. Although Murtagh refers to the ‘experimental group’ and the ‘control group’, his was not an experimental study, in fact, since the students were not randomly selected (1982, p. 16). His study is best classified as an example of a post-test only, nonequivalent control group design. Murtagh reported that, “the results of this study indicate very definite trends towards the superiority of bilingual schooling over monolingual schooling for Creole-speaking [Kriol-speaking] students with regard to oral language proficiency in both the mother tongue, Creole and

the second language, English". This was because the bilingually schooled students attained better results on measures of oral language proficiency in their first language (L1) and L2, and were found to be better able to separate the two languages.

**Gale et al. (1981)**

Gale et al. (1981) undertook a longitudinal comparison of Year 5–7 students over 4 years using tests in oral English, English reading, English writing and mathematics. As such, their research could be classified as a multiple-group time series design. Data-gathering instruments used by the researchers included the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and story-retelling for assessing oral English Proficiency; Dolch sight words, a cloze test and the Schonell Reading Test were used to gauge reading progress.

In regard to the bilingually schooled students the researchers reported results that were both consistently better and statistically significant at the Year 7 level. It was their considered opinion that

since the introduction of bilingual education the [Milingimbi] children are not only learning to read and write in their own language and furthering their knowledge and respect for their own culture, but they are also achieving better academic results in oral English, reading, English composition, and mathematics than they were under the former English monolingual education system

(Gale et al. 1981, p. 309)

When the research conducted by Gale et al. (1981) was reviewed 30 years later, as part of a systematic investigation into English language acquisition and instructional approaches for Aboriginal students with home languages other than English, it was praised for its "high strength of evidence" (Silburn et al. 2011, p. 88). These reviewers noted though that there had been several possible intervening variables

such as a possible Hawthorne effect, curriculum changes and progressive exposure to English and Western culture outside of the school. Possible confounders acting in the opposite direction are that the Indigenous teachers supporting the bilingual classes had little or no teaching experience at the start of the program and that the L1 curriculum and teaching resources were very limited in the early years of the program

(Silburn et al. 2011, p. 87)

The reviewers from Menzies reported that the study had been "well conducted" and although the cohort size of around 20 at each year level was small, it was "sufficient to achieve statistically significant results in several cases" (Silburn et al. 2011, p. 88). In addition they noted (pp. 87–88) that

Both groups performed equally on English vocabulary tests. Bilingual students had better results on story retelling which increased with year level, but this was not statistically significant at 5 % level. The three reading tests, particularly comprehension, showed a similar very significant pattern. At year 5 level the bilingually educated children were significantly behind the English educated children but by year 7 this was reversed. In most cases these results were statistically significant at 5 % level. The authors cite this as evidence of L1–L2 skills transfer.

The year 7 bilingually educated children also scored significantly higher than the English only group in written English composition and several arithmetic tests.

Overall on the ten tests at year 7 level, the English only students performed better on two tests (neither significant) while the bilingually educated students had better scores on eight, five of these at 5 % significance level and two at 10 %.

### Research with a medium standard of evidence rating

Two studies are listed in Table 16.4. These provided the evidence for refuting Claim #2, as discussed in the previous section.

It has been pointed out by Georgie Nutton, who coauthored the *Early years English language acquisition* literature review (Silburn et al. 2011) that

potentially one of the key and critical issues for readers may be understanding that comparison studies and quasi experimental studies can often be rated lower on standards such as the NHMRC ratings only because the qualities and specifications of the ‘bilingual’ and ‘non-bilingual’ programs are not well articulated or monitored—i.e. what children actually experience as each of these programs is not described.

(Georgie Nutton, personal communication, September 2015)

Since Devlin (2010a) is not relevant to the present chapter, as it concerns attendance, not achievement, it is not discussed further here. Devlin (2010b) pointed out that standard deviations and the possibility of standard errors in the measurement were ignored when NAPLaN test scores were presented in the *Data in Bilingual Schools* document (November, 2010). This was not in accordance with NAPLaN reporting protocols (Table 16.5).

### Research with a low standard of evidence rating

A departmental statistician undertook a comparative and longitudinal Logit analysis of Multilevel Assessment Program (MAP) test scores for the 2001–2004 period in

**Table 16.4** Research studies with a high strength of evidence rating (Silburn et al. 2011)

Name	Years conducted	Type	Details	Findings
Murtagh (1979, 1982)	1979	Matched group comparison between two schools (Bamyili and Beswick)	Cross sectional comparison of 58 year 1–3 students in two schools, one with a bilingual program, and one without	Bilingually schooled students attained better results on measures of oral language proficiency in L1 and L2, and were better able to separate the two languages
Gale et al. (1981)	1976–1979	Matched group comparison within one school (Milingimbi)	Longitudinal comparison of year 5–7 students using tests in oral English, English reading, English writing and mathematics	Bilingually schooled students obtained consistently better results, statistically significant at the year 7 level

**Table 16.5** Research studies with medium standard of evidence rating (Silburn et al. 2011)

Devlin (2010a)	2010	Matched comparison of attendance at 16 schools	The comparison schools were chosen by the NT Government	Average attendance was poor across all the schools, but it was better in those with bilingual programs
Devlin (2010b)	2010	Matched comparison of results at 16 schools	The comparison schools were chosen by the NT Government	Results were below standard across all the schools, but those in bilingual programs performed comparatively better on most NAPLAN tests

the Northern Territory (Begg 2004). The findings, which were published in *Indigenous languages and culture in Northern Territory schools Report 2004–2005* (NT DEET 2005, p. 35), were thought to provide an “indication of positive results” (NT DEET 2006, p. 25).

Silburn et al. (2011, p.79) considered this comparative data analysis to be “very interesting”, but rated it low on their standard of evidence rating. They summarised it in this way:

The sample is students from 10 2-Way schools and 10 “like” schools. They combined MAP results over 4 years; a total of about 3000 tests in all. About half the data is for 2-Way students.

Across all years the 2-Way students had better enrolment and participation. Their MAP reading scores were lower than the control group in year 3 but improved more rapidly scoring higher in years 5 and 7 when their English was better established. Results for both cohorts were markedly below the national benchmark across all domains and at every year level.

The report notes that the 2-Way schools are better resourced (by 20–30 %) and the matching is on similar student populations.

There are some indications that 2-Way learning improved outcomes and retention.

The report is very broad based making a number of important points about the need for an evidence base and need for improved consistency and quality in the delivery of 2-Way learning.

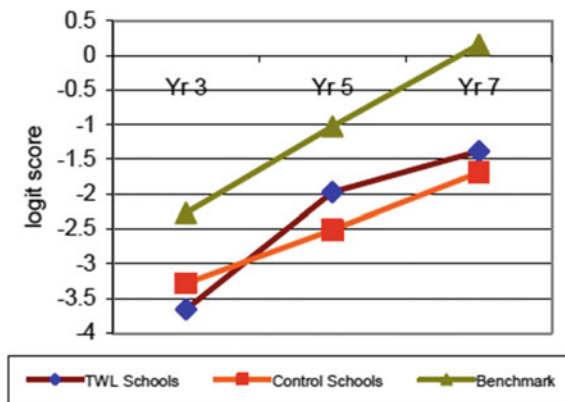
As Devlin (2011, pp. 270–271) has explained, Begg’s analysis had been done as part of a departmental review of bilingual education. A representative graph (NT DEET 2005, p. 35, chart 6) is included here to illustrate one of his findings (see Fig. 16.1). Students in schools with bilingual programs [‘2-way schools’] scored comparatively lower on MAP tests at the Year 3 level, but had moved ahead of the comparison group by Year 5 and maintained a slight lead by Year 7. The following conclusion was reached:

while the combined comparison of Two Way Learning and like school MAP reading scores supports the theory that students’ English literacy acquisition is accelerated through bilingual instruction, due to the smallness of the numbers of students with scores that are analysed relative to the whole school cohort, this data can only be taken as indicative rather than conclusive (DEET 2004, p. 35)

It should be noted though that both groups performed well below expected Benchmarks. Also “large numbers of students from both groups of schools...did



**Fig 16.1** A comparison of combined mean reading scores on MAP Tests, 2001–4, attained by Two Way learning and ‘Like’ school students (Source NT DEET 2004, p. 35)



not record any achievement in testing” which could lead one to ask “what educational benefit these students are gaining from school” (DEET 2004, p. 35).

The label “TWL schools” in Fig. 16.1 refers to Two-Way Learning schools; i.e., schools with bilingual programs. Each point in this chart combines MAP test result data from 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004.

Another study assigned a low standard of evidence rating by Silburn et al. (2011, p. 79) was Devlin (1995). Silburn et al. (2011) noted with interest “the move from quantitative appraisal to qualitative community based assessment” that had been analysed this study, adding that “This may explain why little data is available from the later Years” (Silburn et al. 2011, p. 81). They concede that “some qualitative data from 1984 on literacy/numeracy skills is included and discussed in detail”, but consider that “some of the conclusions are weakly supported by the data” (p. 81). They conclude though with the observation that “there is a pattern in the data of broadly equal achievement when comparing students in bilingual schools with an equivalent cohort in English immersion” .

## Conclusion

This chapter has considered a very specific question: What research evidence is available that would help tell us whether bilingual education in the Northern Territory has ever been effective in promoting better student attainment in English and Mathematics? One reason for choosing such a limited focus on Western-style academic performance in this chapter, rather than taking account of vernacular literacy, school-community relations, or some other wider indicator of achievement, is that it is important to draw a line in the sand. Some politicians and senior bureaucrats have specifically denied in recent years that *any* evidence in favour of NT bilingual programs exists (AAP 2008; Doyle 2009; Devlin 2011, p. 270;

Freeman and Bell, this volume). For that reason it became the task of this chapter to show that some supporting evidence is available, though it is fairly sparse, and not all of it warrants a high strength rating (Silburn et al. 2011).

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# Chapter 17

## Policy Change in 2008: Evidence-Based or a Knee-Jerk Response?

Brian Devlin

### Introduction

School attendance and student performance data have been used in two quite different ways to determine the status and future of bilingual education programs in remote NT schools since the 1970s. Quite appropriately, bilingual programs have been evaluated in one form or other for educational planning purposes since their inception, (Cataldi and Partington 1998; Devlin 1995; Disbray 2014; Eggington and Baldauf 1990, Richards 1984; Richards and Thornton 1981; Markwick-Smith 1985; Nicholls 2005). However, a second, more regrettable trend is that evidence has also been selectively compiled by Government officials at different times, as in 2008 (NT DEET 2008), to serve a particular political purpose.

In the 1970s the program evaluations included reviews by interstate experts such as Betty Watts, and internationally recognised linguists such as Geoff O’Grady and Ken Hale (O’Grady and Hale 1974). After self-government was achieved in 1978, NT Education authorities began to compare the performance of schools with bilingual programs against similar ‘non-bilingual’ ones. In 1980 the first attempt to do this, known as the accreditation exercise, produced useful comparative information (Devlin 1995, 2009, this volume; Eggington and Baldauf 1990, p. 96; NT DEET 2005).

In 1988 community-based appraisal was introduced to replace accreditation procedures, which had proved to be too costly and slow (Devlin 1995). There were shifts in the way that individual programs, and the Bilingual Program more generally, were evaluated for planning purposes—and this was reflected in the changing nomenclature, from ‘review’ by outside experts to departmental ‘accreditation’ procedures to a community-based ‘appraisal’ process that was designed to be constructive, consultative, open and fair.

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However, when evidence is quietly compiled and then used in a totally different and unpredictable way by politicians, data manipulation becomes possible—even acceptable, unless challenged. This was the case, for example, in November 2008 (Devlin 2009, this volume; NT DEET 2008; Simpson et al. 2009, p. 32).

This chapter comprises six sections: the first explains the rationale for this chapter; the second reviews the status of bilingual programs as they were at the beginning of 2008; the third section briefly deals with some responses to the national assessment results (NAPLAN) that were released in September, 2008; the fourth outlines the NT Government’s decision, announced in October, to dismantle step-model bilingual programs; the fifth critiques the data used to justify that decision; and the final section draws some conclusions.

## Rationale for This Chapter

This chapter extends the analysis in Devlin (2009, 2010a, b, 2011a, b, this volume) by exploring further dimensions of the changes introduced in October 2008 by the Hon. Marion Scrymgour, Minister for Education in the Northern Territory Labor Government. In 2008 the Education Minister had visited remote schools throughout the Territory, including those where step-model bilingual programs were operating. Later she acknowledged “a degree of irritation with the purist ‘step method’ educationalists who have succeeded in promoting their model of early years monolingual education as ‘bilingual’ (Scrymgour 2011). This chapter takes issue with that claim since schools with bilingual programs in the NT did not have the monolingual aim of teaching vernacular languages only and deliberately excluding English.

Oral English had always been used for at least part of the school day, including preschools (NTDE 1986), since the benefits of early structured second language teaching and learning have long been acknowledged (see Murray, this volume). While many children in remote Aboriginal settings pick up more than one language through interactions in their home environment, Standard Australian English is rarely one of the languages they acquire in this way. And so the development of English language skills takes place sequentially (rather than simultaneously) through formal instruction in an education setting. The Bilingual Program recognised from its inception the need for, and so it planned for, structured instruction in English as an additional language from the start of school.

Ken Hale, former Professor of Linguistics at MIT and a key figure in the development of the NT Bilingual Program, was always very clear about this:

In relation to English, we recommended that all Aboriginal children be given instruction in oral English from the very beginning of their school experience, with the view that, at an appropriate time later, they would be able to transfer to instruction in English literacy with three important kinds of underpinning: (1) they would have experienced the feeling of

success in attaining full literacy in the vernacular in a relatively short time; (2) they would have a firm understanding of and feeling for, the alphabetical principle; and (3) their relatively firm control of spoken English would provide the necessary basis for literacy work in English (Hale 1999).

## **Bilingual Programs as They Were at the Beginning of 2008**

The *Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006–2009* committed the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to “strengthen the bilingual program and improve its effectiveness and sustainability to deliver outcomes” (NT DEET 2008). As part of “Priority 1: Literacy and Numeracy Programs” the bilingual education approach was explained as follows:

a formal model of dual language use where students’ first language is used as a language for learning across the curriculum, while at the same time they are learning to use English as a second language for learning across the curriculum (NT DEET 2008).

According to that definition, only eight NT schools notionally had bilingual programs in early 2008: Areyonga, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Milingimbi, Shepherdson College, Willowra, Yirrkala, and Yuendumu (NT DEET 2008). These were referred to as ‘language maintenance’ (LM) programs, but had been known as Model I programs in the 1970s; later, they would often be referred to as examples of ‘step’ or ‘staircase’ model bilingual education. Since their establishment in 1973, bilingual programs could involve sequential literacy (Model I), simultaneous literacy (50:50), or no Indigenous literacy (Model II). However, regardless of the form they took, they were expected to be well organised. Simply allowing ad hoc code-switching, unplanned language teaching and use, including interpreting by local teachers and a bit of Indigenous culture in the afternoon, did not constitute a bilingual program. That had long been a Department of Education understanding.

A ninth school, Numbulwar, offered a Language Revival program in Wubuy (Nunggubuyu). ‘Language Revitalisation’ was the term used for that program, as children were learning Wubuy rather than learning through it (Carr et al., this volume). Because of language shift to Kriol, Wubuy is spoken fully only by older generations of speakers.

Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) programs had been in operation since the late 1980s as subjects in their own right, or as LOTE programs (Languages other than English). They were formalised in the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework document (NTDET 2002). However, no policy framework for ILC has ever been developed. Such programs run for generally an hour or so per week, usually in the afternoons, in some or all classes, depending on the priorities of individual school principals at a given time (Disbray 2015). In most schools that ran an ILC program model, teaching took place overwhelmingly in English, with time dedicated to learning local knowledge and possibly some literacy in home language. In 2015 some consideration was being given to a firm proposal to develop

and implement specific policy for ILC programs (Northern Territory Department of Education 2015).

With the introduction of the NTCF ILC (2001), the terminology of the Australian Indigenous Languages Framework (1993) was adopted and the term ‘language maintenance’ was applied to the first language aspect of the bilingual program. This denoted the language situation of the language and the learner profile, rather than the intention of the program. Of course, language maintenance was clearly an important goal for many Aboriginal people (Disbray and Devlin, this volume).

By early 2008, however, a number of factors were constraining the successful operation of all remote schools. Unsatisfactory student attendance rates were a persistent concern, but another important factor affecting schools with bilingual programs in particular was the diminishing supply of trained Aboriginal teacher graduates from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). In 2006, for example, five Aboriginal teachers graduated; only four did so from BIITE in 2007 and by 2008 the number graduating from that institution had decreased to two. Concerns about this worrying trend were conveyed at the time by the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity to the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard:

BIITE has trained most of the Indigenous teachers working in remote communities in the NT. It is a tragedy that over the last few years the pressure for BIITE to be financially viable has led to a decrease in numbers of young Indigenous people from remote communities undertaking teacher training at BIITE. This has had, and is having, calamitous effects on the education of children in remote communities (RNLD 2010)

A Ministerial statement called “Transforming Indigenous Education” was tabled in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on November 26, 2008. This document envisaged a broad program of change, which was not implemented, because a new Education Minister was appointed after a cabinet reshuffle in early 2009.

## **The First Release of National Student Assessment Results in September, 2008**

In May 2008 Northern Territory schools participated in the first round of national testing known as the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). A summary of the NAPLAN national literacy and numeracy test results for Australian students was published for the first time on September 12, 2008. What this set of scores indicated was that Northern Territory students, especially those in remote area schools, were not doing as well as their counterparts in other State or Territory jurisdictions.

This was the trigger for several events that followed. The first of these was that, in the first week of October 2008, the Chief Executive of NT DEET was sacked (Toohey 2008). Then on October 14, as a direct consequence of the NAPLAN



results that had been released, and “the intense media glare” that followed (Waller 2011), the NT Minister for Education, announced a new requirement, that henceforth “... the first four hours of education in all Northern Territory schools [would] be conducted in English.”

As the former Chief Executive observed, some time after her dismissal:

the media was actually the trigger behind all that policy change, to go from bilingual to a four-hour, full-on English experience. It was the national publication of results, the Northern Territory’s need to respond, to look like they were handling it. ...There was no well-constructed policy response as far as I could see, and nor has there been. It’s just sort of, almost, a knee-jerk response

(Margaret Banks, quoted in Waller 2011).

## **The Government’s Decision to Dismantle the Step-Model Bilingual Programs**

Indeed, intense media attention focused on the poor NT NAPLAN results, which were relatively uniform across more than 150 very remote schools. The former Minister (personal communication, October 2015) argues that her *Transforming Indigenous Education* blueprint might have provided a more coherent direction for remote schools and their students, in response to the poor NAPLAN results. However, the policy that appeared instead was the *Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of Each School Day* policy’, which affected just nine schools.

As a result, those remote Indigenous Schools which had been offering bilingual (LM) programs were required to abandon what they had been doing, regardless of whether their programs had been running fairly successfully and had strong community support. Targeted by this directive were some of the first bilingual programs initiated by the Federal Government in the early 1970s in what had been judged to be “one of the most exciting educational events in the modern world” (Hale 1999, p. 43). The specific aim of the Minister’s new measure was “to improve attendance rates and lift the literacy and numeracy results in those schools” (NTG 2008).

NT Cabinet adopted the position that English had to be used in the mornings while Indigenous languages were reserved for use in the afternoons. This view was supported by influential figures such as Bess Price (Chair of the Northern Territory Indigenous Policy Committee in 2008), Marion Scrymgour, Chris Burns (Minister of Education and Training) and Paul Henderson (Chief Minister).

Department of Education and Training staff loyally implemented Cabinet’s directive, while at the same time allowing for some local exceptions and providing, at times, more relaxed interpretations of what the policy actually meant. Their flexibility was pragmatic and sensible, but it sometimes confused people on the ground when they discerned an apparent split between official words and actions, between hard-line government policy and its more liberal interpretations (Devlin 2011a, b).

When she addressed the Legislative Assembly on November 27, 2008, the Education Minister made it clear that, in the afternoons, “Aboriginal language class work should be structured and rigorous, and it should be focused on reading and writing in the child’s principal Aboriginal language”. If we accept her assurance that the October 14 decision had not been aimed at “disrupting or undermining the nine so-called bilingual or two-way learning school[s]”, then it has to be said that her intentions might have been misunderstood by some of her parliamentary colleagues and those middle-ranking departmental bureaucrats who were charged with revising and implementing her policy.

## Data Used to Justify the Government’s Decision

On November 26, 2008 the Minister for Education tabled a document called *Data on bilingual schools* (NT DEET 2008). This evidence was presented to parliament to justify the abrupt policy shift announced the month before. The following day the Minister summarised the data presented. It was explained to the Legislative Assembly that on the 20 national tests conducted in 2008, bilingual schools had done comparatively worse than a group of similar non-bilingual schools on all but one test: Year 9 numeracy. That was said to be the only result that did not fit into the general pattern of comparative failure.

However, Devlin (2009, 2010a, b, Chap. 16 this volume) demonstrated that the evidence tabled by the Minister was incomplete and invalid (see also Simpson et al. 2009, p. 32; Wigglesworth et al. 2011). Using official NAPLAN data which the Federal Government had made available through the MySchool website, it was shown that Year 3 students in the Government’s ‘bilingual school’ sample had actually performed better than the comparison group on four out of five tests; namely, (1) Reading, (2) Spelling, (3) Grammar and Punctuation, and (4) Numeracy; only in Writing did they lag behind.

The Northern Territory Government, despite requests for copies of the document *Data on bilingual Schools in the Northern Territory*, which had been used by the Minister to justify the closure of bilingual programs, refused to make this data available. For example, on April 24, 2009 the Moderator and General Secretary of the Uniting Church Synod met with the then Chief Minister and Minister for Education, Paul Henderson, and asked for the data to be released. In that face-to-face meeting Minister Henderson clearly stated that the document would be made available by his Department of Education. However, it was never released, despite several follow-up e-mails to his office (Peter Jones, personal communication, October 22, 2015). The document was eventually made available to this researcher by a sympathetic politician.

## **Response by the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training**

On November 3, 2008 NT DEET prepared a draft policy statement, *Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day*, which exempted some pre-schoolers from the four hours of English requirement. However, when the final *Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day* policy (NT DEET 2008) was introduced in 2009, no exemptions were allowed, not even for the pre-school students who understood little or no English.

Since the *Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day* policy (NT DEET 2008) only had a two-year shelf life, it was reviewed, as required, before January 2011. On December 29, 2010 it was temporarily replaced by a new policy, *Literacy for Both Worlds*, which reintroduced some options for schools, including vernacular-English, bilingual-biliteracy programs to the end of Year 2, at which point children are aged approximately seven in the Australian system. This was an appropriate concession, for it formally recognised a private government agreement that had already been reached after one school (Areyonga) had lodged a human rights complaint (see Freeman, Bell, this volume).

For two weeks or so from December 29, 2010 the new policy (*Literacy for both worlds*), and its accompanying guidelines document, were freely available on the Departmental website, but on January 14 2011 a senior departmental adviser e-mailed the author to say that the *Literacy for both worlds* policy had actually not been finalised, and should not have been put up on the Web in the first place. Accordingly, this replacement policy was removed. The old *Compulsory four hours of English* policy was returned to the Web and remained there until August 31, 2011. What this vacillation suggested was that departmental staff and elected politicians had found it difficult to agree on whether, and if so how, the compulsory four hours of English policy should be broadened to include first-language or vernacular literacy as a part of a school program. That had been the sticking point since October 14, 2008, when the former Minister of Education directed a complete change of modus operandi for ‘step-model’ (LM) bilingual programs, which had taught children to read and write in their own language first before bridging them to English literacy by mid primary.

Understandably, school staff had many questions about how the four hours of English policy would operate after October 2008. Gary Barnes, the newly appointed Chief Executive of the Education Department, assisted by presenting an interpretation of policy that was more flexible than the wording of the four hours policy might have suggested. However, in his dealings with schools, he made it clear that the ‘step-model’ of bilingual education was no longer supported. In his view the demarcation of instructional time—English in the mornings, vernacular languages in the afternoons—could be loosely interpreted. For example, when interviewed by Debbie Whitmont in 2009, Barnes told Four Corners that

...teaching in the first four hours of English categorically does not mean that the home language of the community won't also be used in that first four hours because good teaching is making sure you build from where the kids are at. Kids have got language and they've got culture. That needs to be a feature of how we go about delivering in those first four hours (Doyle, 2009)

even though the compulsory four hours of English policy was actually much more strictly worded:

Teaching and learning programs in Northern Territory (NT) schools are to be conducted in English for the first four hours of each school day .... The teaching and learning of Indigenous languages and culture may be scheduled during afternoon sessions (NT DEET 2008).

In effect, the Government mandated English-only teaching in the morning; the Department pragmatically reinterpreted this to mean that oral use of the vernacular to assist teaching in English was possible. Departmental officials were willing to allow first language and culture programs (strong L1 oracy and early L1 print literacy) to operate in the mornings, in other words, rather than simply English-only ones.

Nevertheless, despite the Chief Executive's generous assurance that the Department wanted to see teachers building from "where the kids are at", some staff in positions that had been established to support the bilingual program were swiftly relocated, careers were put at risk, and there was an abiding fear of speaking out (Waller 2011), even though teachers then and now had a right, and a responsibility, to engage in discussions about the educational reconstruction of schooling. The Minister's disparagement of the LM program (the staircase or step model of bilingual education) in October 2008 had opened the gate, however nuanced the actual intentions might have been, and this allowed others to pursue a strongly assimilationist agenda that precluded vernacular literacy, and even undermined bilingual education altogether.

## Northern Territory Government Policy in 2010

Chris Burns, who was appointed Education Minister in 2009, expressed his impatience with the continuing debate on bilingual education. Presenting himself as a dogged, vocal opponent, he helped defeat a motion (by 38 votes to 31) to improve the *Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day* policy at Labor NT's annual conference in November 2010. Two months earlier, on September 15, 2010, the Minister had said that there was nothing superior about bilingual education and the debate over its merits was purely academic. "There's no startling superiority in terms of bilingual," he said. "I know some people have got a long-term attachment to it but really what I'm interested in is really engaging with communities to get kids at the end of the day to be able to participate to get jobs, to be able to contribute back to their community in many different ways" (ABC 2010).

Given the widespread agreement on the importance of more jobs, better housing, better health and better education for Aboriginal people, this ideological line of attack was regrettable and unproductive. Meanwhile, student attendance across the Northern Territory schools reached new lows, and despite a number of proactive and punitive methods, this trend was not arrested (Purdie and Buckley 2010), despite evidence of more community driven approaches to improve attendance (Guenther 2013).

## Reactions to the NT Government's Decision (October, 2008)

The *four hours of English* issue proved to be divisive for the Labor Party, for Federal Senators Snowden and Crossin, unlike some of their colleagues, were unwilling to accept either the change introduced by the Henderson's Government in the NT or the unsatisfactory rationale that had been provided (ABC 2008; Crossin 2009; Nancarrow 2010). In her address to the Australian Senate on October 28, 2009, Labor Senator Trish Crossin underlined the importance of initial vernacular literacy as a building block for learning how to read and write in English (Crossin 2009). Then in July 2010, in a speech to about 1,000 delegates attending a national Indigenous childcare conference in Alice Springs, she criticised "the Territory Government's policy of forcing schools to teach English for the first four hours a day" (Nancarrow 2010).

The government's sudden policy about-turn in October 2008 had ignored at least one publicly signed contractual agreement; namely, the one between Yambirra Schools Council and Northern Territory of Australia (Northern Territory Government 2007). Another human rights complaint was triggered when Areyonga, a school with 90 per cent plus attendance, was forced to discontinue its step-model bilingual program. In response, assisted by a national law firm, Lander and Rogers, it appealed to the Department of Education and Training in June 2010 to be allowed to continue with the step bilingual model (Freeman and Bell, this volume).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Calma (2009) bluntly pointed out, in response to the 2008 decision, that Australia was "in breach of its international obligations". There were indeed human rights issues at stake, given that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a set of non-negotiable standards and obligations ratified by Australia in 1990, protects a child's right "to use his or her own language" (Article 30). Article 14.3 of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is even more explicit:

States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Simpson et al. (2009, p. 37) deplored the way in which the Minister could "destroy the bilingual education programs on so little evidence". Devlin (2009)

explored some of the continuing tensions between the value of dual language education, advocated by many local people, and the primacy accorded to English by the authorities, reflecting their monolingual bias and the new accountability measures they endorsed, which had led government to discount heartfelt pleas from remote Indigenous people. That analysis will not be revisited here, but it is relevant to note, in passing, that Rowse (2010) has analysed some of the ways in which the government's new assimilationist ideology is underpinned by evidential frameworks. "Our greater capacity for measuring has resulted in an impressive statistical apparatus, but not one that measures effective engagement with remote Aboriginal people, the less tangible things that are valued or the way an imposed language of instruction challenges very young children from a marginalised group".

Several key political figures disparaged the biliteracy programs in English and Indigenous languages, claiming that they were 'ineffective'. On November 17, 2008, for example, *The Age* newspaper quoted the Chief Minister's observation that "There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that bilingual education in those first four hours of the school day has been of any benefit to those indigenous students" (AAP 2008a, b). Echoing a similar view some time later, the Chief Executive of NT DEET told the media that, "Certainly, there's no evidence to suggest that the two-way/bilingual step program delivers any better results" (Barnes, as cited in Doyle 2009).

These publicly stated opinions failed to take account of the Department's own reports (Collins and Lea 1999), the body of local evaluation and research findings (Devlin 1999) and NT DEET's own 2006–9 strategic plan (NT DEET 2006), as well as the many favourable international findings concerning the comparative effectiveness of bilingual programs (e.g., Apthorp et al. 2003; Collier and Thomas 2002; McCarty 2008; Tong et al. 2008; and Willig 1985). Those overseas results were complemented by independent research conducted in the NT (e.g., Gale et al. 1981; Hill 2008; Murtagh 1979, 1982), official NT evaluation reports (e.g., Markwick-Smith 1985; Richards 1984; Richards and Thornton 1981; Stuckey and Richards 1982; see also Devlin 1995, this volume), and an official statistical analysis of NT test results conducted over a four-year period (2001–2004) as part of a departmental review of bilingual education (NT DEET 2005). The NT Indigenous Education Strategic Plan for the 2006–2009 period drew on that analysis and noted that "The bilingual programs are effective overseas and give an indication of positive results in the Territory. DEET will strengthen the bilingual program and improve its effectiveness and sustainability to deliver outcomes" (NT DEET 2006, pp. 24–25).

## Conclusions

As Eggington and Baldauf (1990, p. 89) have pointed out, formal language planning procedures may be set aside at times and quick decisions made "on a narrow set of educational criteria, rather than on the broader scale appropriate for a

language plan”. These quick decisions allow little time for reflection, even though it is undoubtedly true to assert that “recognition of human rights requires governments to reflect on the potential effects of their decisions before forming policies. That is, they must adopt evidence-based, as opposed to reactionary policy” (Simpson, et al. 2009, p. 38).

What had been a clearly articulated preference for a particular educational method in the 1970s and 1980s—namely, introducing literacy in the student’s first language before bridging to literacy in English and the use of home language for conceptual learning—had morphed by late 2008 into official support for English literacy alone (see Disbray, this volume). Bilingual education had been the rationale for the most common NT Bilingual program, officially referred to as ‘Model I’ from the mid 1970s, or more colloquially as the ‘staircase’ or ‘step’ program, and as LM programs by 2009. The sequential bilingual method was valued by local communities and it could be justified with reference to the findings of relevant evaluation and research studies.

In October 2008, however, school-based vernacular literacy for remote NT students became an option that was only available in the afternoon, provided community support was forthcoming. The shift from the step-model to the *English First Policy* on October 14, 2008 was masked by rhetoric that purported to value students’ vernacular languages and culture. In November 2008 it was supposedly justified by some claims that have since turned out to be false (Devlin 2010a, b). Nonetheless, the NT Government wanted to foster the belief that (1) bilingually educated students were not attending as often or performing as well as their counterparts in comparable schools, and that (2) bilingual education, which was only available to one in five remote NT students in 2008, was somehow the cause of the systemic failure of all remote NT students to do as well as their peers in other jurisdictions.

The announcement on October 14, 2008 was an ad hoc response to the national test data that had been released the month before. It was neither supported by sound evidence nor informed by appropriate consultation. After national literacy and numeracy test results had been released (on September 12, 2008), English was mandated as the language of instruction in all Northern Territory schools during the first four hours of each school day (on October 14, 2008). This decision was followed by a bewildering sequence of policy shifts. Even observers used to policy changes found these vacillations confusing. For remote school staff, however, particularly Indigenous staff, this instability just generated a sense of powerlessness and despair.

The counter-assault against bilingual education in the NT could be interpreted as an example of “backlash” ideology (Faludi 1991; Gutiérrez et al. 2002), which puts forward banal and untrue simplifications as “a kind of pop-culture version of the Big Lie”. Just as US President Reagan demonised liberalism, so have some political leaders in the NT decried bilingual education, preferring to blame parents and children for underachievement, rather than maintaining adequate support for educational programs, not to mention facing up to chronic, systemic problems linked to poverty and grossly overcrowded housing, and dealing with them. After all, it has been established in the literature that “strong operational support is a key factor in

determining the success of a bilingual program” (Eggington and Baldauf 1990, p. 89).

In this way underachievement is maintained and inequalities are preserved through a kind of assimilationist approach coupled with the withdrawal of support. The sudden tilt against bilingual education in late 2008 disallowed heterogeneous and hybrid methods that suited local circumstances, restricted opportunities to build on local linguistic and cultural resources through first-language literacy and served as a disincentive to Indigenous staff wishing to draw on their own valued knowledge by arranging appropriate teaching and learning activities in the vernacular for young students during prime teaching time. The backlash ideology was deceptive for it was cloaked in the language of increased opportunities while it sought to limit the use of the students’ own languages in instructional contexts.

The unresolved status and future of the discontinued bilingual education programs for remote Indigenous students in Australia became an issue of national and international concern in 2008. Had NT Government ministers and officials openly explained that an inadequate supply of teachers was forcing a rethink of their approach to bilingual education and causing them to favour another type of program, they would have been given a more sympathetic hearing. Fewer Aboriginal graduates had obviously made it all that much harder to achieve one of the original aims, “that the Aboriginal base of Bilingual Education staff be constantly broadened” (Hale 1999, p. 48). Instead, in a textbook example of how not to manage change, the Government had acted dramatically. It sacked the chief executive of NT DEET (Toohey 2008), denied it had done so (Langford 2008a, b), suddenly curtailed LM bilingual programs by means of a press release, then sought to justify this precipitous action by making incorrect claims in parliament and elsewhere about how the academic performance and attendance of students in those LM programs had compared unfavourably with supposedly ‘like’ schools on 19 tests (NT DEET 2008; Devlin 2009, 2010a, b). This combination of deceit and naivety, coupled with “this hasty and ill-considered decision” (Simpson et al. 2009, p. 37), and no follow through with robust policy implementation regrettably served to hamper progress in improving remote school education across the board in the Northern Territory.

Devlin (2011b) explained why bilingual education has been so contested since its inception in the NT. If this educational approach had been better understood, there would have been a strong impetus to refine and effectively implement a model of schooling that is appropriate for students in remote areas. Instead, in 2008 and 2009, politicians debunked bilingual-biliteracy education, which they poorly understood, thereby robbing schools and literacy plans of any momentum and distracting attention away from the work that needed to be done. Following the 2008 decision, attendance rates fell away to worryingly low levels (Dickson 2010).

Additional historical details about the events analysed in this chapter can be gleaned from Simpson et al. (2009), Devlin (2009, 2010a, b, 2011a, b, this volume), and a television program about Yuendumu on the Four Corners website (Doyle 2009).



## End note

Ms Scrymgour's willingness to make comments on this chapter was much appreciated.

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# Chapter 18

## The Areyonga Case: *Utulu Kutju Nintiringanyi* ‘Learning Together’

Leonard Freeman, Neil Bell, Tarna Andrews and Peggy Gallagher

Part 1: Differing Perspectives (by Leonard Freeman)

### Introduction

In contemporary Australia, issues to do with Indigenous disadvantage, particularly Indigenous students’ educational outcomes, inclusion and participation rates, elicit considerable concern from governments and this reflects a broad concern in Australian society with the rights and wellbeing of Indigenous people. At the heart of the issues and controversies surrounding the history of bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory is a tension between the great principles of equity and reconciliation.

For policy makers and educators who view equality as equal treatment and equal outcomes, reconciliation and equality are perceived as incompatible with one another, because their conception of equality is contrary to initiatives such as bilingual education, which offer special treatment to some. Yunupingu (1995) suggests that many Australians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are now reaching beyond the binary (either/or) conception of the issues of equality and reconciliation, towards a view where equity and reconciliation are seen as parts of a bigger whole.

To develop an education system that embraces the aspirations of Indigenous Australians, Yunupingu (1995) believes that we must recognise that a ‘mainstream’ education system is not adequate for Indigenous students. Instead, we need to create an education system where ‘local distinctiveness’ can thrive; only then can access be equitable, and reconciliation achieved. Yunupingu (1995) states, “when

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education systems recognise and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures and support their continuing maintenance and development, the kind of equality of regard from which reconciliation is possible can be created” (p. 21).

*The Areyonga case: Utulu Kutju Nintiringanyi ‘Learning Together’* presents the story of a small Pitjantjatjara school community which passionately believes in their ‘locally distinctive’, rich and engaging bilingual education program. The community was shocked by the Northern Territory Government’s sudden announcement that, in order to ‘close the gap’ and improve remote students’ results on the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the first four hours of the school day must be conducted only in English. The community could not understand how relegating the teaching of their language and culture until the last hour of the school day could be an improvement. Particularly when Areyonga bilingual school’s attendance and literacy results were higher than that of other similar remote, English-only schools. This chapter provides an insight into the workings of Areyonga School’s bilingual program, and the lengths the parents, community and elders went to, to protect their children’s right to learn in and through their mother tongue.

Areyonga Community (also known as Utju) is a small Pitjantjatjara-speaking community that is home to approximately 250 Anangu residents located in Central Australia about 220 km West of Alice Springs. The small community school was one of five government schools to first commence teaching a vernacular language and English bilingual education program in the Northern Territory (NT) in 1973 (Devlin 2009).

The community is very proud of their little school that provides a welcoming, engaging rich bilingual learning environment for the children of Areyonga. The school has a proud history of strong community involvement, Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff working closely together as ‘teaching teams’ to support students achieve good progress with their learning in maths, Pitjantjatjara, English and other curriculum areas.

Utulu Kutju Nintiringanyi (‘Learning together’) is the motto of the school and it represents the vision of the school as a learning community where parents, community members, teachers and students work and learn together. The elders of the Areyonga community set the example by delivering the fortnightly Utulu Kutju Nintiringanyi (UKN) program. The elders lead the students on rich cultural excursions and then the knowledge is brought back to the classroom where the elders, teachers and students discuss and record the traditional knowledge, language and culture in Pitjantjatjara using a variety of genres and technology. The elders’ leadership in the classroom not only provides rich first language literacy experiences it is essential to mentor and pass on the knowledge to the staff and students so they can become the leaders of tomorrow.

## The Aims of Bilingual Education

The vision of Areyonga School’s bilingual program, to promote academic achievement in English and maths as well as the transfer and maintenance of the vernacular language (Pitjantjatjara), is in line with the eight revised aims of Bilingual education presented in the Northern Territory Department of Education’s *Handbook for Aboriginal Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory* (NTDE 1986). The bilingual teaching framework (known as Model I or the step model) presented in the handbook recommends that the vernacular language be used half the time, with the amount decreasing in a step-like fashion as the students progress from Pre-school to Year 7 (Devlin, Chap. 2, this volume). The overall goal is that students will develop the level of competency in English and mathematics they will require to function in society when they leave school by first achieving literacy in the local vernacular and then subsequently developing literacy in English (NTDE 1986).

Developing initial literacy in the vernacular language is therefore a fundamental principle of the NT’s bilingual programs and this was influenced by the 1953 UNESCO declaration (Harris and Devlin 1999), which championed the importance of developing initial vernacular literacy skills. The design of the ‘step-model’ that promoted initial literacy in the vernacular language was congruent with the expectation that students would develop the English literacy and numeracy proficiency skills required to become successful members of society before completing school.

## Closing the Gap

In 2007 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed *The National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, which commits all State and Territory governments to ‘Closing the Gap’ by improving the outcomes for Indigenous Australians in the areas of life expectancy, health, education and employment (COAG 2008). The baseline measurement of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous results in reading, writing and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 was determined using the national results from the 2008 National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLaN) (COAG Reform Council 2012). At this time the Northern Territory Government outlined its commitments in the *Closing the gap of Indigenous disadvantage: A generational plan of action*. The plan sets the ambitious milestone that within five years “at least 75 percent of Indigenous children will be achieving literacy and numeracy standards in Year 3” (NTG 2007, p. 15). The plan anticipates closing the Year 5 and 7 gaps in literacy and numeracy achievement in 10 years.

## The Influence of National Testing

In 2008 NAPLaN commenced in Australian schools, replacing the previous Multi-level assessment program (MAP). NAPLaN tests provide a common assessment measure of all students' numeracy and English literacy skills in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across all schools in Australia.

Osborne (2013) asserts that policies such as 'Closing the Gap' and the rhetoric associated with addressing Indigenous disadvantage, by setting NAPLaN targets such as (NTG 2007), directs attention "to improving outcomes for what is a very narrow perspective on what constitutes a good education" (p. 5). The current focus of using NAPLaN 'benchmarks' as the official measure of student achievement and schools' educational success overlooks the complexity and the time required to achieve linguistic competence in a second language, particularly when the learner is required to demonstrate the syntactically and lexically complex language skills of a first language English speaker for abstract academic learning purposes (Hakuta et al. 2000), as NAPLaN tests require.

Despite the linguistic and cultural diversity of modern Australian society, the understanding of literacy described in the Australian curriculum, and assessed using NAPLaN tests, continues to be one firmly grounded in a monolingual assumption of what it means to be a literacy learner (Cross 2011). NAPLaN tests assume that all students speak SAE as their first language (Wigglesworth et al. 2011) and had continuous uninterrupted schooling for the prerequisite number of years in English in an Australian school (Creagh 2014).

The use of such systemic, norm-referenced tests is widely recognised as being problematic for assessing children from a minority language background (Thomas and Collier 1997; Wigglesworth et al. 2011) because such tests have generally been normed on populations that do not include children from minority language backgrounds. It is therefore clear that Anangu students from 'step model' bilingual programs are not part of the norm-referenced population, because they do not have the assumed years of prior instruction in SAE, as students in a step model program develop initial literacy concepts in their Indigenous language and don't undertake formal reading and writing activities in English until Year 4 (NTDE 1986).

The government's short-term goal of preparing remote Indigenous language speaking students to achieve English literacy 'benchmarks' in Year 3 is therefore fundamentally at odds with the design of vernacular bilingual programs that are focused on teaching students' 'first languages, first'. The application of common English-speaking benchmarks for all students led to the perception that Indigenous EAL/D learners are 'failures' for not meeting native English speaking 'benchmarks' and calls grew for an end to bilingual education programs because as the then local member of parliament claimed. "Indigenous schools should have the same learning requirements as those in capital cities" (Hind 2012).

Such statements demonstrate a lack of awareness of second language acquisition research where it is widely accepted that EAL/D students require significantly more time to learn a new language for learning (for example, see Hakuta et al. 2000;



### The Phases

Year	Standard	Year	Standard
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum standard is within ESL Level 2</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Writing is within ESL Level 3</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Reading is within ESL Level 4</li> </ul>	Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum standard is within ESL Level 4</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Writing is within ESL Level 5</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Reading is within ESL Level 6</li> </ul>
Year 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum standard is within ESL Level 5</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Writing is within ESL Level 6</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Reading is within ESL Level 7</li> </ul>	Year 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum standard is within ESL Level 6</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Writing is within ESL Level 7</li> <li>• Proficiency standard for Reading is within ESL Level 7</li> </ul>

Fig. 18.1 Official expectations of EAL/D learners (Source NTDET 2009b, p. 5)

Thomas and Collier 1997). Informed by Cummins’ (2000) research, that the development of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), the language skills for ‘classroom talk’ (Gibbons 2002), takes 7–10 years, NT DOE (2015) has developed performance expectations for EAL/D students against the English second language (ESL) pathways in the NT Curriculum Framework (NTCF), henceforth the *NT ESL*.

NT DOE (2015) states “it would be expected that students who begin learning SAE in the foundation year of schooling would be working in *NT ESL* Level 3–4 in all areas of SAE by the end of year 6” (p. 8). By year 9 NT DOE (Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DOE) 2015) then expects these students would be working “within *NT ESL* level 4, with some evidence of *NT EAL(sic)* Level 5” (p. 9). Teachers are reminded that students may not reach these achievement milestones within this timeframe, and at all stages throughout their schooling these students require EAL/D pedagogy in order to access age level curriculum (NT DOE 2015).

When NT DOE’s ‘expected’ learning progression through the *NT ESL* levels as outlined above are aligned to NAPLaN minimum standard ‘benchmarks’ as presented in *The Phases* chart (see Fig. 18.1), it is clear there is no expectation that EAL/D learners who begin learning Standard Australian English (SAE) when they commence school will reach national minimum literacy standards ‘benchmarks’ in years 5, 7 or 9.

### Achievement Timelines for Indigenous EAL/D Students

As presented here, peer-level performance on academic English tests are not expected by NT DOE (Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DOE) 2015) until the students have had the required time to develop the age-for-grade academic language proficiency standards in SAE, and from NT DOE’s timelines this is not expected within the Primary or Middle Years. Therefore it is

inappropriate to characterise Indigenous EAL/D students as failures by evaluating their progress against NAPLaN's monolingual English-speaking-background 'benchmarks'.

Cross (2009) agrees that the characterisation of EAL/D students' underperformance as failure is:

problematic not only because it relies on a test designed for native-speakers to assess non-native speakers, but because the test is testing two different constructs: in the case of the native speaker, it identifies what a student has 'failed' to acquire in his first language, whereas in the case of non-native speakers, it reveals the progress the student has achieved in his second language (p. 516).

Hudson et al. (2014) assert that the research literature regarding the timing of English learning is generally based on the learning experiences of migrants who are speakers of 'obvious' languages other than English and live in contexts where they are immersed in SAE. Turnbull (2002) cautions that, in the absence of long-term research studies on Indigenous language and Aboriginal English speakers' acquisition of SAE, discussion about the length of time required for successful acquisition of SAE language and literacy, must be purely 'speculative'.

Sarra (2011) explains that while NAPLaN test results tell us 'something' about students' performance at school they are far from the full picture and should be seen as only one measure of teaching and learning effectiveness. Policy makers' dependence on NAPLaN data means that current educational policy is unable to recognise and respond to the complex determinants of educational performance or incorporate local educational aspirations (Fogarty et al. 2015).

Disbray (2014) agrees that relying on NAPLaN data alone provides a poor method of appraising remote Indigenous bilingual schools and argues that broader measures of school effectiveness are needed, including measures of what the Indigenous communities regards as success. Therefore, while academic achievement in literacy and numeracy are fundamentally important, it is also clear that NAPLaN results alone do not provide policy makers with an accurate picture of the performance of Anangu students, or the effectiveness of bilingual education programs and they should seek to gain a broader understanding of 'success' when evaluating indigenous education programs.

However, following the release of the national test results on September 12th 2008, the NT Government responded swiftly. The NT Chief Minister, Paul Henderson, stated that he deplored the results for the NT and explained that "the worst cases came from remote schools" (SMH 2008, p. 1).

On 14 October 2008, the Minister for Education and Training directed that with the commencement of the new school year, in 2009, "all students are to undertake their teaching and learning programs in English for the first 4 hours of every school day" (NTDET 2009a, p. 1).

The reason for mandating the teaching of English for the first four hours of the school day was said to be poor comparative performance of remote NT students on the 2008 national literacy and numeracy tests. The Chief Minister stated his belief that "there is absolutely no evidence to show that bilingual education in those first 4 hours

of the school day has been of any benefit to those indigenous students" (SMH 2008, p. 1). Unfortunately, political controversy has become common place for bilingual education programs in the NT with government support swinging back and forth during the 40 years of the program due to the changing winds of political, ideological and economic forces.

## **Areyonga Community's Reaction**

Areyonga's Indigenous principal reported that the community were 'distracted' and deeply hurt by the news that the Minister of Education proposed to dismantle the school's bilingual education program (SMH 2008). "The community gathered at the school to express their anger that such a significant decision is being made without anyone speaking to them first" (de Silva 2008, p. 1). The Anangu assistant teachers and qualified Anangu teachers at the school were upset to learn they will be required to speak only in English for the first 4 hours of school and could not see how this would benefit the students.

The community sent a letter signed by elders, parents and community members expressing their wishes for the bilingual program to continue. The letter emphasised the importance of Pitjantjatjara language and culture having equal status as English and that it was not appropriate for the Minister to make an important decision like this without speaking to the community first (de Silva 2008). The letter requested that Minister Scrymgeour come to Areyonga to meet face-to-face with the community to discuss the policy changes with elders, parents and community members.

## **Meeting with the Minister**

On 3rd December 2008 a meeting was held between Minister for Education and Training and the Areyonga community and school staff.

At the community meeting held on the basketball court, community members expressed their wish for the children to become literate in Pitjantjatjara. They wanted schooling to be conducted in equal parts English and Pitjantjatjara. They did not want the Pitjantjatjara teaching day to be taught for only an hour a day or for the lessons to take place out of school hours.

During the meeting teachers and community expressed their objection to the Minister's assertion that the children at Areyonga 'can't read' (based on the school's NAPLAN literacy results) and that the school needs to teach more English for the students to learn the very important skill of reading. The school staff suggested gathering the students from the classroom so they could attend the meeting and demonstrate their reading skills in Pitjantjatjara and English. The offer was declined and instead the Minister and her advisor agreed to have a meeting back at

**Table 18.1** A comparison of students achieving national benchmarks, 2005–7

Areyonga school students achieving national benchmarks—multi-level assessment program					2005 average for all NT very remote schools' average (NTDEET 2006) (percent)
		2005 (percent)	2006 (percent)	2007 (percent)	
Year 5	Reading	100	33	50	19
Year 5	Numeracy	0	50	0	16
Year 3	Numeracy	50	67	25	52

school with the school staff, so that they could explain the school's program, present samples of the students' school based assessment as well as the MAP results from previous years.

The school made the following presentations to the Minister:

### **(1) Areyonga School's MAP Results**

The MAP results for Areyonga School from 2005, 2006 and 2007 demonstrate that the program can be effective. When the program is running as it should, and the school is fully staffed, the results have been good in comparison to other remote schools.

Given the small population at Areyonga, with only four or five students in each year level, the results can vary dramatically (e.g., if two students are away on the day of testing, then that will have a major impact on test results). For this reason, it is important to look at results over a long period and not just focus on one year (Table 18.1).

### **(2) The School's teaching and learning program**

#### ***Teaching language and literacy skills***

The school uses the *Walking, Talking Texts* Petal Planner for Transition (Kindergarten) to Year 3. The Petal Planner provides the framework for the active teaching/learning of spoken English and the learning about (exposure to) written English (Murray, this volume).

The rationale for this approach is that children must first acquire English speaking and listening skills before they can read and write, because children must learn to first make meaning through English. It is crucial to recognise that the vast majority of Areyonga children do not understand English when they begin school, and they do not use SAE outside the classroom. This is why remote Indigenous language speakers are often referred to as learning English in a foreign language context (McKay and Scarino 1991).

#### ***Importance of a shared context***

Engaging English storybooks and informational texts are the focus of the school's English as a second language program, *Walking, Talking Texts*. The books provide a shared context for learning new language. Unlike mainstream students, children from remote communities such as Areyonga have limited opportunities to

re-visit/reinforce their English language learning through purposeful English interactions outside of school. As a result, it is more difficult to bring real life purposes to the learning of English.

For example, a group of Year 2 mainstream, English-speaking children can write about what they did on the weekend. They think in English and will be able to articulate in English what they did. The material they write will reflect the language that they can use. However, a group of Year 2 Areyonga children will not be able to independently articulate in English what they did on the weekend. Their entire experience of the weekend would have taken place in Pitjantjatjara. They must first be able to articulate their thoughts in English before they can write them (or understand what they are reading).

### ***Learning literacy skills through a scaffolded oral language approach***

As they participate in the *Walking, Talking Texts* program, the children as a class are read to in English. They explore the text together and exploit it for meaning through a sequence of set activities. This is very well suited to the needs of Indigenous ESL learners. It is non-threatening and engaging. Areyonga School's excellent attendance rates, consistently between 85–95 percent demonstrate that children at Areyonga are happy to come to school.

It is important to understand that, although the Junior class (K-3) is taught English through an oral program, this does not mean that the children are not taught the skills required for reading and writing. For example, during the Teacher-linguist's daily English teaching session with Year 2/3 students, the *Do-Talk-Record* model is used. Working through a shared activity reduces the communication breakdowns that occur frequently when teaching ESL students. The Teacher Linguist and the students first carry out an activity together. Then they talk about it and write up what they did as a group. Although the Teacher-linguist is doing the writing, the children actively participate in talking about what should be written. The children's responses are scaffolded to demonstrate to the student how to correctly construct meaningful sentences in English. This back and forth process of discussion and negotiating the meaning gives the children immediate feedback on their use of English. The stories they create are bound into books and displayed in the classroom, so the children and the class can revisit them. They are able to understand the content, because they took part in the activity and learned the language needed to express the ideas discussed during that activity.

If students in the early years are asked to write in English before they have acquired a sufficient command of English, all they will be able to do is copy letters and insert words with little or no understanding of the meaning. Children can be taught what sound each letter (or combination of letters) makes. Then each time they see these letters they can make the appropriate sound. But this does not mean that they comprehend what they are reading. This is why in phonics-based English-only programs, the students often only reach Year 3 reading benchmarks and their results deteriorate as they progress through the years. The NT averages for Very Remote Schools in 2005 were: 20 percent in Year 3, 19 percent in Year 5 and 15 percent in Year 7.

With regard to the results in properly run bilingual schools, such as Areyonga, while the students do not reach the Year 3 benchmark, they have caught up and outperform the English-only students in Year 5. This is evident from the Year 5 reading results (100 percent in 2005, 33 percent in 2006 and 50 percent in 2007) and consistent with the findings of the *Indigenous Languages and Culture in Northern Territory Schools Report 2004–2005* (NTDEET 2005).

### **Numeracy**

Areyonga School would like to continue teaching numeracy concepts in the Junior class through Pitjantjatjara and English. The Year 3 numeracy results have been comparable to ‘like schools’, which demonstrates that this is an appropriate method for teaching maths concepts to children who do not yet have a sufficient command of English.

### **Compromise Proposal**

Following the school’s presentation of their teaching and learning program, comprehensive student assessment portfolios and comparatively good MAP results, the school staff suggested a compromise proposal. The school leadership explained that they believed the school day could be structured to accommodate the Minister’s request to increase the time allocated to English instruction and provide sufficient time for students to develop their Pitjantjatjara literacy.

The school proposed: For the Senior class (Years 4–7) the school is willing to teach the first 4 hours in English. However, Pitjantjatjara will be used to translate concepts or to check for understanding. We want to undertake a review of the maths program to establish which outcomes can most effectively be taught through which language

The Junior class (Transition-Year 3) needs to develop literacy in their first language before they can acquire literacy in a second language. As the students’ speak/think in Pitjantjatjara and are unfamiliar with English when they begin school, it is more effective to teach them reading, writing, mathematical concepts and other learning areas in the language they understand. English is introduced through an oral program.

One hour and 20 minutes is not sufficient for students to develop literacy in Pitjantjatjara and reach the key milestones in other learning areas through Pitjantjatjara.

If the literacy and numeracy foundation in the first language is not developed in the Early Years, it will hamper students’ acquisition of literacy in the second language and understanding of mathematical and other concepts.

However, the school is prepared to allow more time for English in the Junior class as per the Minister’s wish that there be a greater focus on English in all grades. The Junior Class teaching team agrees to teach English for a maximum period of two hours, which will still leave enough time for the children to develop first language literacy skills. The school is willing for the English component to be in the morning, as per the Minister’s wishes.

The meeting concluded with the Minister acknowledging that the school was performing well, had high attendance rates, thorough assessment practices and comparatively good results on the MAP test compared to other very remote schools. The Minister asked the school leadership to put forward a proposal based on the

discussions that took place during the meeting and send it to her advisor. The advisor's business card was provided to the staff and they were assured that the proposal would be considered by the Minister and then taken to the Department.

## **Different Perspectives of Educational Goals and Aspirations**

Bilingual education occurs when the school and the community work in partnership to bring the knowledge of the local language, culture and community together with the wider western community inside the school gates and give both knowledge systems and languages equal importance and status. To have a successful bilingual education program in remote indigenous communities requires a strong partnership based on mutual respect. When all these essential ingredients are in place, it is a truly special environment to learn, work and live, and the Areyonga community value the program highly.

The argument presented by the school to defend the bilingual education rested on the premise that the bilingual program provides the most effective way for Areyonga's students to acquire English and the students' MAP performance was presented as evidence that the students perform better on standardised tests compared to 'like', very remote, 'English-only' schools. Since the establishment of bilingual programs in the NT, it is fair to say that the majority of non-Aboriginal educators have primarily argued their support for the program primarily in pedagogical terms (Walton and Eggington 1990). The government's argument for the policy change in 2008 was there is little or no benefit to the students' English results, therefore the additional investment in staffing that bilingual programs receive is not warranted. However, many elders, parents and Aboriginal educators see bilingual education as vital for language and cultural maintenance.

Bilingual education programs in the NT have also enabled Aboriginal teachers, parents and community members to take their rightful place in the schooling of their children by playing an active role in the design, delivery and control of education in ways English-only immersion programs have not (Walton and Eggington 1990). Therefore it is important to question what a successful bilingual program is. Should the effectiveness of a dual-language program be measured solely by the students' achievement on English tests? Or should the language, cultural, and other social impacts of the program, such as increased employment opportunities for community members be considered? How do the key stakeholders, the parents, students and community judge the effectiveness of their school?

## The Importance of Perspective

Storytelling and metaphors are often used in Indigenous cultures as a way of explaining a concept or moral. The metaphor of a tree was often used at Areyonga to explain the interconnected relationship between the school, community and the role of the two languages in the students' learning journey. The Indigenous staff are represented as the trunk of the tree as they are the backbone of the school, because they are the long serving staff that remain at the school. The community are the roots that hold, nourish and support the tree and the non-indigenous staff, the foliage and flowers that if all the other factors are in place and everyone worked in partnership could make the tree bloom. The community believed that the students are the *maku* ('witchetty grubs') that live in the roots of the tree and if they are nourished in a supportive environment by English and Pitjantjatjara rain clouds (dual instruction) they will grow up big, healthy and strong.

The arguments presented by the school during the meeting and in the proposal submitted to the Minister's advisor on 4th December 2008 are informed by Cummins' (1980) Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model of bilingualism. The CUP model is often pictorially presented in the form of two icebergs (see below). The languages bilingual students speak appear to operate separately when they are used in conversation. However, underneath the surface (within the learner) the two icebergs are entwined, thus the two languages do not function separately (Fig. 18.2).

While it may seem logical to presume that languages operate separately without transfer, what appears logical is not always psychologically valid (Baker 1993). The portrayal of languages as two separate entities within a bilingual learner's head, while plausible, doesn't fit the evidence. It is widely established in second language acquisition research that first language literacy skills directly improve bilingual students' second language reading and writing performance (Silburn et al. 2011).

Unfortunately, the international research and the school's MAP data failed to convince the Minister. The staff did not hear back from the Minister, but the school's leaders were summoned to a meeting with the Executive Director for Central Australia, who informed the school leadership team that the policy stood.

**Fig. 18.2** The iceberg metaphor (Source Baker 1993, p. 134)





They were provided with a copy of the government employee's 'code of conduct' and reminded of Sect. 10.3 regarding implementing government policy that states:

A Public Sector Officer is also responsible for carrying out decisions and implementing programs promptly, conscientiously and with full regard to Government policy. In implementing programs, a Public Sector Officer's own values should not supplant those explicit or implicit in Government policy (OCPE 2008)

The metaphor of the tree and the importance of a bilingual program being grounded in community support became clear in 2008 when the political winds shifted dramatically and the government withdrew their support and silenced school staff from expressing their concerns about the changes. The Areyonga community believed so strongly that their children need bilingual education and were left with no other option to voice their concerns about their children's education and the importance of learning in and through Pitjantjatjara at school. United, they decided to take on the daunting task of lodging a claim of racial discrimination against the Department of Education with the Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma.

Part 2: A Lawyer's Reflection (by Neil Bell)

## **'The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Complaint' by Neil Bell**

I became involved in the battle over bilingual education at Areyonga when Peggy Gallagher (or Yilpi, as she was to most of us), whom I had known at that stage for about 35 years, said to me "You learned to speak Pitjantjatjara; they want to stop bilingual education and you've got to help us".

At that time I was in legal practice and had several matters that took me to central Australia for a few days a month. Because I speak Pitjantjatjara, some of those matters involved Pitjantjatjara-speaking communities at Docker River and Uluru as well as at Areyonga.

As a result of my conversation with Yilpi, I wrote to the NT Minister for Education on 22 December 2008, closing the letter by saying that "most of the schools outside the main service centres of the Territory, are bilingual and will be bilingual for the foreseeable future' and that "the only question is whether policy makers see this as an opportunity or as a deficit".

The Minister's response, dated 3 February 2009, mirrored the call from *The Australian* newspaper's editorial writer who declared that "The NT Government must not waver on classroom English" (*Australian*, December 23, 2008).

Faced with mounting pressure to reduce the scope of bilingual education and vernacular literacy, in November of that year Sarah Gallagher, Yilpi's daughter, laid a complaint with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), assisted by the local co-ordinator of the Finke River Mission, which makes much use of vernacular worship and therefore has an interest in vernacular literacy. In her complaint Sarah said, in response to the question about how she was affected, "I was



**Fig. 18.3** Emma Purdue and Sarah Gallacher preparing affidavits at the time of the HREOC proceedings

taught in my language when I went to school. I want my childrens [sic] to learn my language before English. It could help them to understand English much better". In reference to the outcome she was seeking she said "Teachers at school have freedom to use both languages to teach my childrens [sic]"

In a comprehensive letter to an investigation/conciliation officer dated 24 March 2010, Emma Purdue and Melanie Schleiger of national firm Landers & Rogers set out "the reasons why the *Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of Each School Day Policy* is substantially discriminatory, and therefore unlawful." The letter referred specifically to sub-Sections 9(1) and 9(1A) of the Commonwealth's *Racial Discrimination Act*.

The letter concluded by saying "We look forward to exploring an appropriate remedy to the Complaint with the Commission and the Department of Education and Training". To that end mediation sessions, discussed below, were convened (Fig. 18.3).

In organising the mediation sessions, Leonard Freeman, the teacher-linguist, and Tarna Andrews, the principal of the school, were supportive of, as well as Yilpi, the complainant and the mediation sessions. Without their support, bilingual education at Areyonga would have terminated.

Emma and Melanie had prepared a comprehensive Brief to Counsel and on 7 May 2010 there was a meeting with senior counsel, Ron Merkel Queens Council, at which options for a conciliated outcome were canvassed. There followed from this two mediation sessions in Alice Springs, the first later in May and a second session at Areyonga in October.

The first meeting involved travel to Areyonga on 12 May 2010, followed by meetings with relevant people there, advising them of the issues and the arrangements for the following day in Alice Springs.

Neil Napper, a senior partner in the national firm Landers & Rogers, joined Melanie Schleiger and Emma Purdue and obtained instructions from Yilpi, Sarah

and others. It is indicative of Emma's, Melanie's and their firm's, commitment to human rights that neither they nor their firm earned any fees for the considerable time and effort that they put into this cause.

HREOC had arranged the mediation session between the plaintiff parties, Sarah Gallagher and others, and representatives of the Department of Education at the casino conference centre in Alice Springs.

For reasons that I still do not understand Department of Education officials refused to travel to Areyonga for this session, but instead insisted that the 15–20 people making the complaint travel on dusty roads some 230 km to Alice Springs and return on the same day.

For Emma, Melanie and myself, it involved travelling to and from Areyonga twice in a 48-hour period, about 1000 km, much of it over dusty, corrugated roads. I still have a vision of the senior partner at Landers & Rogers, sitting in this very dusty bus, still complete with his pin-striped suit and tie. Windows open, dust everywhere.

There followed an intensive three and a half hour mediation session and, amongst other things, I was impressed by Sarah Gallagher's clear and persuasive use of English in this context. She was a very good advertisement for bilingual education.

The outcome of this session was that, prior to a further mediation session, the complaints would draft a letter with a series of questions to which the Department of Education would respond.

We returned to Areyonga at the end of that day in the bus. It was a long and tiring day, physically, intellectually and emotionally for all concerned.

After that meeting in a letter dated 18 June 2010, Emma Purdue, wrote to the director of the Legal Services Unit at the Department of Education setting out, *inter alia*, a series of questions regarding the bilingual education programme at Areyonga, its times, class levels etc.

The director of the Legal Services Unit provided a response to these questions in a letter dated 25 August 2010 and in a letter dated 30 September 2010 Lander & Rogers made a without prejudice offer to settle the complaint.

A second mediation session, held this time at Areyonga, lasted for two hours. The position put forward in the 30 September Letter of Offer was endorsed, so that the settlement arrangements included an undertaking by the DET to fund the position of Executive Teacher of Bilingual Education and a Literacy Worker.

Part 3: A Resolution and a Way Forward (by Leonard Freeman)

## **A Resolution**

At the second mediation session all the parents, interested people from the community, the legal representatives and staff were invited to meet at Areyonga School with the Department of Education's representatives. At the meeting the Department's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) stated that the Department of

Education and the community both wanted the same thing: For the children of Areyonga to receive a high quality education. The settlement position put forward by the Department regarding the language of instruction, the curriculum and staffing aligned with the compromise model that the school leadership had proposed to the Education Minister. This compromise position provided an increased focus on English, while allowing sufficient instruction time in Pitjantjatjara for the students to become literate in both Pitjantjatjara and English.

Important lessons regarding educational equality and the need for consultation should be learnt from the Areyonga story. Essentially, the Areyonga community were asking for equity, for their children to be taught in and through their language at school, something English-speaking families take for granted in Australia. However, the national push to improve Indigenous students' English literacy rates represented a move by governments to use Indigenous economic disempowerment and educational disadvantage to legitimise the dismantling of special bilingual programs. The Areyonga communities appeal for a 'fair go' for their children fundamentally challenged the Government's revised notion of 'equality' that sought to treat everyone equally and expect the same results.

Areyonga's experience therefore demonstrates the importance of governments actively consulting with Indigenous communities as genuine partners in the decision-making process. This is particularly important in regard to remote Aboriginal children's learning and maintenance of Aboriginal culture, because "many of these decisions can only properly be made by Aboriginal parents, and Aboriginal teachers representing them, as they see situations develop" (Harris 1990, p. 113).

The CEO announced that Areyonga School had demonstrated that it had the five essential requirements in place to run an effective bilingual program. These were:

- (1) Strong community support and engagement in the school
- (2) Qualified Indigenous teachers and committed assistant teachers to teach the Indigenous language and culture program
- (3) Indigenous language teaching materials and resources in place and the capability/skills/resources to produce new resources
- (4) A qualified teacher Linguist to co-ordinate and manage the 'two way' Indigenous language and ESL program
- (5) Student engagement and high student attendance rates.

Perhaps a significant development to emerge from the mediation process is the Education Department's realisation that bilingual education programs can enable the community and school to work together in an effective partnership to deliver a quality education, which prepares students to be successful in 'two worlds'. By demonstrating that bilingual education programs lead to improved English results, the Areyonga case could provide a framework for a more inclusive Indigenous education strategy that values Indigenous languages as a resource within the current era of English literacy accountability.

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# Chapter 19

## Policy and Practice Now

Samantha Disbray

### Introduction

The history of bilingual education in the Northern Territory (NT) is well characterised as the interplay between people, places and policy, the sub-title of this volume. Many of the chapters in this final section are personal and professional reflections over time, firmly grounded in particular locales, involving particular people. The chapters trace local histories and responses to the openings and closings which language and education policy have provided and which, on the ground, educators, community members, leaders and others have resisted and co-opted to create (García and Menken 2010). Most bring us to the present and lay out challenges that come to bear on bilingual education and learning in the future, and matters of language maintenance and use more broadly. Some chapters direct us to new practices and players outside of schools and their policy remit, or new school structures, which provide openings for first language and bilingual teaching and learning. This chapter explores current policy and practice for languages and education, and provides an anchor for the chapters that follow.

### Languages and Education Policy Now

The dominant policy discourse in Indigenous education is one of deficit, failure and intractable problems, with a definition of educational success measured by comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scores on standardised literacy and

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numeracy tests (Fogarty et al. 2015; Guenther et al. 2013; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2011; Wilson 2014, See also Freeman and Bell, this volume). In response, schooling for remote communities is positioned ever more narrowly, with a narrowed curriculum, an intensive focus on English literacy and a proliferation of prescriptive pedagogies promising to raise literacy levels (McIntosh et al. 2012; Fogarty and Schwab 2012). This discourse leaves little room for community expectations or aspiration, or languages teaching and learning (Fogarty et al. 2015). Similar policy discourses, responses and consequences for education of minority-group students can be observed elsewhere, particularly in the US (McCarty 2015; McCarty and Zentella 2015; Romero-Little et al. 2007).

Within the NT Department of Education some recent developments offer potential openings. In late 2014, recruitment for a manager for the remaining eight bilingual programs took place, reinstating the position after its removal in 2009. In 2015, with the pending introduction of the ‘Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages’ as part of the National Curriculum, a manager for Indigenous Language and Culture programs was appointed. However, these moves must be understood within the broader current policy scene, which is taking shape in light of the 2014 Indigenous Education Review and the resulting Indigenous Education Strategy.

### ***The Indigenous Education Review and Languages in Education***

The 2014 review (Wilson 2014) dedicates a number of pages to a discussion of bilingual education, a consideration of some international literature, local submissions in the consultation phase and NT data on standardised national testing between 2008 and 2013 (Wilson 2014, pp. 113–121). On balance, it acknowledges international research that shows educational advantage derived from bilingual education, though few studies are cited and caveats are applied. The review characterises the NT Bilingual Program as having a “chequered history”, beginning with pilot programs in 1973, and beset with problems throughout its 40 year history. Building on this, it posits that “controversy about bilingual education is not confined to the NT. There is a continuing international argument about its merits, complicated by the wide variety of approaches gathered under the category”, effectively casting a broad shadow (p. 118). Overall, the review proposes “that there is little research evidence to demonstrate the relative effectiveness and sustainability of specific instructional approaches [including bilingual approaches]:

when they are delivered on a longer-term basis, on a wider scale and under real-world conditions, particularly in very geographically remote and disadvantaged settings” [citing Silburn et al. 2011, p. 48] (Wilson 2014, p. 120).

Such positioning compounds the discourse of Indigenous education characterised as an intractable problem, where ‘nothing has worked’. The appraisal of the



bilingual program makes no mention of its goals beyond English literacy, which are explored in many chapters in this volume, and elsewhere (Disbray 2014).

A shorter section in the review is dedicated to English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) approaches, which is positioned as similarly circumspect. It notes a surprising decline in the use of EAL/D practice, given the high proportion of English language learners, and points to concerns such as a lack of consistency in EAL/D practice, a lack of unqualified or under-qualified teachers and a lack of professional support for classroom teachers. This established, a shadow is then cast over EAL/D pedagogy, due to concern that in the NT practitioners have

strayed some distance from its origins, and is now associated with cultural and first language maintenance as much as with the explicit teaching of English to children who arrive at school not speaking English. It is clear that good EAL/D teaching could make a material contribution to better literacy outcomes, but it is difficult to be confident that the NT is now able to deliver such teaching (Wilson 2014, p. 122).

While the author contests the veracity of this claim, it is more important to note at this point that such framing undermines the potential effectiveness of, and denies access to EAL/D pedagogy, due to the risk of attention to first language and culture.

Earlier in the document, on first page of the Overview languages teaching and learning, the importance of first language(s) is positioned equivocally:

The review acknowledges and supports the role of students' first languages in education and supports their teaching. They contribute to identity formation, are important elements in student engagement, help children to feel at home in the school environment and have educational value including instrumental benefits in learning English. First language and culture should be part of a child's education where qualified teachers are available and communities agree.

Following from the discussion above, the review thus makes recommendations which are "pragmatic, based on what is repeatable across multiple sites and hundreds of classrooms, on what an actual workforce can realistically deliver in the NT" (p. 14) and focuses on

English language skills and knowledge that underpin success in the western education system and proposes that these are gained through rigorous and relentless attention to the foundations of language and the skills that support participation in a modern democracy and economy. This report recommends that explicit teaching and assessment of foundations elements of English literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary.

The rejection of Aboriginal languages and aspirations for education could not be more stark (Ross and Nganbe, this volume; Guenther et al. 2015; Minutjukur et al. 2014; and Fogarty et al. 2015).

However, this NT framing resonates with national discourse on language and education, which presents a consensus on the importance of recognising, celebrating and maintaining Australia's Indigenous languages, acknowledging a place for them in education delivery (Australian Government 2009, 2012, 2013; Commonwealth of Australia 2012). Links between language and well-being are articulated in the

current Federal policy platform to ‘Close the Gap’ (Australian Government 2013, p. 2). However, in the formulation of education policy, Indigenous and non-Indigenous parity on national literacy (in English) and numeracy tests dominate as the sole focus (Disbray 2016; Fogarty et al. 2015; Truscott and Malcolm 2010).

An Indigenous Education Strategy has now been developed to implement the findings of the review, with elements and targets that set the parameters for policy and practice in the remote NT schools. There is no mention of EAL/D, Aboriginal languages, bi- or multilingualism or bilingual education in the long term strategy set out in ‘A Share in the Future—Indigenous Education Strategy 2015–2024’ (Northern Territory Government 2015c). It is possible that the strategy will be further developed and fine-tuned, as an evaluation process has been established to guide and monitor the program. The directions are yet to be seen.

A set of short term implementation plans identifying five ‘Elements’ were also released (Northern Territory Government 2015a). In ‘Element 2—Essentials’, Aboriginal languages are included, among the following actions:

- Implement a mandated curriculum and assessment framework in identified schools, providing a consistent approach in very remote schools to the teaching of literacy and numeracy that is inclusive of phonological and phonemic awareness.
- Introduce Direct Instruction into selected remote and very remote schools for Indigenous primary students, to address the low level of literacy and numeracy achievement.
- Establish NT wide age benchmarks testing twice per year for numeracy, writing, reading, phonemic awareness and sight words.
- Revise principal performance plans and school plans to reflect the mandated approaches and identify school based strategies for success.
- Develop and implement policy to guide the delivery of Aboriginal Languages and Culture programs in NT schools following national and NT policy direction (Northern Territory Government 2015b)

The openings available for bilingual education in official policy are clearly limited. This is true of bilingual learning conceptualised more broadly, such as structured second language teaching programs, which recognise learners as speakers of a language or dialect other than English, developing English language proficiency. Like the English-only programs which operate a local Language and Culture program, the bilingual programs that continue tend to operate as ‘Two-solitudes’ models (Cummins 2008), under the pressure and privilege of literacy in English, though some continue to strive for genuine bilingual programs. Overall, the space left for Aboriginal languages is most commonly a weekly class in an Indigenous Language and Culture program (Disbray 2016). However, on the ground there are instances of agency and innovation that respond to this pressure and dis-investment look for alternative ways to continue teaching Aboriginal languages and cultural knowledge.

## Teaching and Learning in and Out of Schools

In a number of novel ways, partnerships between schools and outside organisations allow educators and community members to develop the multilingual resources of young people. In particular, the burgeoning domains of cultural and resource management and digital technology provide opportunities for multilingual, and indeed multi-modal practice and learning (Bow et al., this volume). In addition, community projects outside of formal departmental schooling offer openings for bilingual teaching and learning. These projects are not a substitute for structured education programs, and may not serve to restore local Aboriginal authority in schools. However, they also have what Heath and Street identify as the strengths of community-based learning programs, the “freedoms of time, space, activity and authority that schools as institutions rarely provide” (2008).

### *Partnerships with Schools*

Schools in some locations in the NT have partnered with Caring for Country projects, providing an important opportunity for place-based learning, intergenerational learning and language use (Fogarty 2013; Fogarty and Schwab 2012). At Maningrida in the NT, for instance, in the collaboration between the Maningrida Community Education Centre and the local Djelk rangers, educators have developed science programs delivered largely outside of the classroom, where students and adults use and develop multilingual resources and local and western knowledge. More recently, the Australian Venom Research Unit at the University of Melbourne has entered the partnership at Maningrida and students are taking part in developing health and ecological knowledge resources (Webb et al. 2013).

In the Pintupi-Luritja region in Central Australia, Tangentyere Council operates a ‘Land and Learning Program’ (see Mooney, this volume; Mooney 2010). This program has flourished with supportive and proactive Aboriginal teachers and school Principals (Disbray 2016).

At Lajamanu in the Warlpiri region, the local ranger group is instrumental in supporting country visits for secondary students. With the severe reduction of its bilingual program, in recent years junior classes have been taught for in a one-hour language and culture lesson per week, and the school has struggled to provide a regular senior school program. The local CLC ranger program supports the school by organising country visits, particularly for secondary students. Local rangers, themselves community members, along with elders, community and staff members take part in trips on country a couple of times each year, to teach students about sites, land tenure and local ecology. The country visits represent an important opportunity for intergenerational learning for both students and adults. However, the country visits are not part of a larger program embedded in school (Warlpiri Education Training Trust, May 2015, personal communication).

A further learning opportunity in Lajamanu is the bi-annual Milpirri Festival. The Darwin-based Tracks Dance Company and local community members collaborate with the school to stage a performance by students and elders based on Warlpiri traditional song cycles. The Warlpiri program in the school has also made good use of the community art centre, and has developed exhibitions and enterprises with senior girls' classes through this partnership. Arts-based projects are important for youth engagement in learning (Kral and Schwab 2012). A further example of arts-based projects on Warlpiri country is through Pintubi Anmatjere Warlpiri media at Yuendumu. This local association produces multimedia products including animations, in Warlpiri and other Central Australian languages, for use in and out of schools. In addition, students from a number of the schools have been involved with production of the animations and other film projects.

Indeed new technologies are being harnessed to develop interactive learning resources for use in and out of schools. The Central Australian sign languages project 'Iltyem-Iltyem' involves partnerships between community members, schools, the University of Melbourne and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (Green et al. 2011). The project documents sign languages in Central Australia, and creates a web-based video dictionary for learning in and out of schools. This project is one of many such collaborations lead by Batchelor Institute's Language Centre Support Program, which generally have innovative multi-media elements and target multi-modal communication, including song. And finally, the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages, which involves a partnership between Charles Darwin University and NT Department of Education, is detailed in this volume (see Bow et al.).

### *Out of School Learning Spaces*

A number of innovative remote community learning spaces have emerged, in particular in the areas of early-childhood, youth and adult learning, providing openings for language learning and practice. Other community-driven openings include the establishment of independent schools, such as Mäpuru and, historically Yipirinya (see Greatorax and Kral, this volume). Community-governed early childhood programs have the scope to operate more independently than schools. One such example is the playgroup in the Warlpiri community of Willowra, 300 km north-west of Alice Springs. It is one of four early childhood programs in each of the Warlpiri communities developed through a partnership between the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust, a local board responsible for the allocation of earnings through mining royalties, and World Vision Australia (Central Land Council, undated). Each local project is guided by a reference group, and community governance and control are central to its operation. At Willowra, local staff and family members attend the centre with children and run a program of play-based learning, with the support of a non-Indigenous mentor. The program includes bush trips with elders. It is a Warlpiri-speaking environment, with some

English input from the non-Indigenous mentor and some semi-structured English language learning, through songs and games.

A further community driven project, ‘Children’s Ground’ is a whole-of-community development and well-being project underway in the West Arnhem region of the NT (Children’s Ground 2015). An important element of this integrated program is early learning, which like the Warlpiri project above, involves a locally staffed intergenerational program, aimed to develop a range of skills, including home language, English language and cultural knowledge.

In remote Indigenous communities youth programs and learning centres provide further rich sites for multilingual opportunities. Kral and Schwab (2012) have observed a myriad of ways that young people expand their language, literacy and culture skills in their engagement with learning in ‘learning spaces’, including local community learning centres, arts programs, youth and youth media programs. These spaces attract young people in remote settings and allow productive activities that build on Aboriginal language and culture, and frequently, digital technologies (Disbray and Bauer 2016).

## Conclusion

This chapter has painted a somewhat bleak picture of the policy settings for bi- and multilingual learners in remote schools, and the committed educators who have worked and advocated for the programs in the places they know and value. The appointment of senior officers responsible for language policy and programs is heartening, but the degree of power, resourcing and time in classrooms is not yet clear. In many places, the effort to teach and learn first language and culture is irrepressible and so new openings are found. These place-based projects allow local control and direction. There are, nevertheless, various potential limitations. Projects in partnerships with schools may be seen as an ‘add-on’ with no formal role in education settings, and lack longevity and security. Further, when projects are not integrated into a broader learning program, they are often unmonitored and unassessed. Where learning programs are infrequent or do not have sufficient planning time with language specialists, they may achieve little, especially in language revitalisation settings.

As stated above, out-of-school projects are not a substitute for formal schooling, with its attention to individual development and progress, or for bilingual education. Within schools, especially those with at times vibrant, multifaceted and bilingual programs, much is lost and not replaced. Warlpiri educator Barbara Martin observed this in 2009, voicing concern at the First Four Hours of English policy at the time (Northern Territory Department of Education 2009). The policy is no longer in force, however other pressures have narrowed the space for bilingual teaching, pedagogy and ethos in schools:

We used to support each other and work together. But now, this four hours English, it's separate. We don't really know what we are doing, we don't know how to fit Warlpiri. Warlpiri is important too, for our kids, because they understand Warlpiri. They can start learning a lot of new things, school things in Warlpiri. And before it was working really well, when we had team planning, with support from a teacher linguist, learning together sessions, team teaching, all of that.

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# Chapter 20

## Starting Out at Yuendumu School— Teaching in Our Own Language

Tess Ross and Wendy Baarda

### Part 1

My name is Tess Napaljarri Ross. 1975 was the time that I came back from Batchelor College. I studied for two years, one year in Kormilda College (secondary boarding school in Darwin), one year in Batchelor (close to Darwin). When I came back, I was a teaching assistant for Pam Harris in the junior class at Yuendumu school. At that time we had about 200 children. First I used to teach just 30 or 40 minutes each day in Warlpiri. Back then, every morning a literacy worker came to every class. He used to go around every class room and teach with us. He was doing just 30 minutes. But after we learned Warlpiri literacy, we decided to take the whole class, each of us, every classroom in our language.

I was taught how to write my language by Ken Hale from America. I only studied for two weeks. A whole group of us went to learn from that old man, Ken Hale—Rex Granites, Connie Kennedy Nungarrayi, June Napangardi Granites, Valerie Napaljarri Martin, Georgie Jampijinpa Robertson, others. I also learned to record stories for old people, to write them down. We can't forget Ken Hale. He was walking around all the camps, learning hard Warlpiri. We all got shocked when we heard him speak, he learned deep Warlpiri from Micky Jupurrurla Connell, Kenny Jungarrayi Wayne, and Sammy Johnston Japangardi, Frances Japaljarri, one of the Granites and the White family. Ken Hale came and spoke to me and Jeannie Egan and my first husband. We went to learn about sounds and spelling. After that workshop, we started teaching Warlpiri bilingual program, in 1975. I also did a three weeks course in Sydney at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, learning more to write down my language and its grammar in 1976.

At school first we had oral English in the morning, but when our bilingual program started it was changed from English to Warlpiri. Instead of just doing Warlpiri for just

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30 minutes, we did English for 30 minutes. We had elders come to the classroom and tell stories for the children. Once the children learned some literacy, they could listen and write down the stories in their own words. Every morning they wrote their diary in Warlpiri. We started to teach our own children in our language, in Warlpiri.

We started to teach everything, and everything was in Warlpiri: Counting, maths, science. All that was in Warlpiri. It was really good. Then all the students in the classroom, they were just brainy, catching up quickly two ways, learning English and their own language. They just started reading and singing two ways, which was really good for us and really good for those kids to understand. Before in the classroom there was always a Kardiya ('non-Aboriginal') teacher, and sometimes they couldn't understand the language of the teacher, but when they had two languages, two teachers in the classroom, an English teacher and Warlpiri teacher, they were just getting it in their mind quickly. They could learn quickly and they were proud. And some of these students, who were with us learning in the bilingual program we had, some of them could learn and were ready to work and go to college, they went to (Yirara and Kormilda) college (secondary school) after they were learning in the classroom and at home. Everything was in the bilingual program, the Warlpiri bilingual program.

We had 250 kids enrolled with a little group of Kardiya kids (Juttners, McKells, Baardas) and they also did Warlpiri time. Then when we were doing oral English, they were all together and that really helped the Warlpiri kids. Back then parents sent their kids to school every day. We had all our meals back then in the community kitchen, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Warlpiri people worked in the kitchen, everyone had to work for their own dole (government payments) then. The missionaries sold a little bit of food at the mission store. Only later (in the late 1970s), when the government took over, we were paid by the government. The school was started by the missionaries and then the government took over.

But when we started bilingual education, the kids were just getting it quickly, and understanding why they wanted to learn two ways, to learn two cultures, Kardiya and Yapa (Aboriginal) way. And they could see the teachers, Warlpiri teachers, speaking and reading English and Warlpiri. And all those students know how to write in two languages, sing and write and type and do facebook in their language today.

Now we have the radio, PAW from 9–4 and now Warlpiri on the ABC local news. Through the radio, other people can understand too—we all hear other languages, Anmatyerre, Pintupi, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara, whatever languages are spoken in NT, in other communities, out in the desert. For desert people can understand each other. Some of those southern and northern people, eastern people they do the same kind of ceremony and sorry business (mourning ritual). And we can teach our students to understand that. We want to have our own language and our own culture in schools, then young ones can understand and learn lots of languages: Luritja or English, Anmatyerre, Arrernte. They can understand one another and all the languages can be stronger.

A long time ago my sister used to work here (at Yuendumu school). She knew three languages, and more. She could speak Anmatyerre, our grandmother's

language and she could understand Luritja and Pitjantjajara. And our first language is Warlpiri. I don't speak Anmatyerre, but I can understand it. All these language and culture skills come in together. English is a second language for everybody. I see that with my eyes and hear it with my ears. When Aboriginal people are together, and playing AFL (Australian football), they understand each other. Each of those people from different communities, they can understand. Yes, when people come together, children too, for sports weekends or church or sorry (mourning and mortuary rites), they are learning, learning other languages.

In the beginning when the missionaries came and in government times, no-one was allowed to speak in their own language in the classroom. Then we had the bilingual (or Two-way) program and everyone could speak their own language and learn in their own language. But now we really have to fight for Two-way education. It's the language and culture, the language that we speak in the camp or out in the community. Warlpiri is our main language. We don't want to lose that. We want our children in the future to speak the language we were born with. It's got spirit, language and culture together. When we are born, we have our skin name, already in our mother's womb, and our *Jukurra*, and we have child spirits for where we are born.

*Jukurra* is a Central Australian Aboriginal term called 'Dreaming' in Aboriginal English. *Jukurra* is the stories of the ancestral beings, where they travelled and how they shaped and changed the world. The *Jukurra* links us up with all the other tribes around and even far away, as the Dreaming travels on into other language areas. We have always been bilingual.

*Jukurra* describes people's relationship to place, to each other, to plants and to animals, and the proper ways of interacting with relationship and kinship groups. *Jukurra* gives us connection to whatever is our dreaming: for example it might be goanna, kangaroo, fire, water, stars or any other natural thing. If we are *Janganpa Jukurra* we are possum dreaming, we are the place of that Dreaming, Yuendumu hills, we are the *Kirda*, that means we are the owners and we own the designs, *kuruwarri*, the ceremony, we dance for this dreaming and we own the songs and the country. We get our dreaming from our fathers and our father's fathers. We are born with it. Everything is *Jukurra*, but we don't always know what it is. Sometimes people learn it from dreams. Everything has always been here, but *Jukurra* is always making it change.

Our children are learning a lot of Warlpiri things, like out in the bush, when they have man's business, they learn really strong culture. And even women's business, they are still doing that. We want them to learn all of that, to understand their *Jukurra*. We want to keep on doing the Two-way program, so that kids can learn really strong knowledge. We call that *Jaru Pirrjirdi*. There are a lot of young people working in Yuendumu, like at the office or the hospital and they can do interpreting. They are already there, with those skills for interpreting. And there are young people, our families are really brainy (in both languages and cultures). And at the courts, here or at other places, there is always someone there interpreting for the lawyers or judges, for people who haven't been to school very much or don't know legal English. It is really hard, but another Warlpiri can come and explain in

their own language and in English. Our language is really strong. It's like any other people around the world have their own language.

Someone who is talking in the city, they don't know our culture and how we live, how we walk. We walked in the night, in the old days. They were really good days for our people. When people wanted to walk to where the water was, they walked in the night, burning a fire and then getting close to where the water was. In the day it was too hot for them to travel with the family. But the night was the best time to travel. This is when our people were travelling to water holes. In those days, there was really strong language. The parents used to teach us the names of the countries, how far it was to another country. They took time, and they were really strong, healthy people, travelling around with nothing. And they had really good food, which they could find and make themselves strong, through every time of year, when weather was cold, or wet or when it was really hot. In those days people were really strong.

Now we are living in a remote community at Yuendumu and we still have our language and no-one will tell us what to do. We have new things, new ways, some of them are hard. People have to get used to new things, some things. But no one can rub out our language. It's in our heart. We don't want people to come who don't understand. We know our children learn best when they learn in their own language at school, when they learn their culture, their history and their language. We know that, because we did it with the bilingual education program at Yuendumu.

## Part 2 by Wendy Baarda

We came to Yuendumu in January 1973. My husband, Frank, was working for a mineral exploration company west of Yuendumu. We had three little children, the eldest had just turned five and Yuendumu was the closest place with a school. Frank organised a teaching job for me and as I was secondary trained I was employed as the academic teacher for the post-primary girls class. There was also a domestic science teacher and one, sometimes two Warlpiri teaching assistants. In those days staffing was only limited by recruitment difficulties, not staff ceilings.

It was the tail end of the Welfare era. All whitefella households were allocated a house girl and a gardener. There was constant shuffling of house girls and gardeners, so I had a series of Warlpiri instructors. I was determined to learn the language. It seemed no White people then knew any Warlpiri beyond *yuwayi* and *lawa*, yes and no.

I made lists of words with invented spelling, but how they fitted together was a mystery. I wrote down phrases, but I had no idea where words began and ended, or how they related to the meaning given. House girls had showers when they came in. I wrote, Ngapa guran you-come-me, 'I'm going to have a shower'. Now I know it is properly written, "Ngapa-kurra-rna yukami" and means 'I'm going into the water'.

Our first young house girl was greatly entertained by my attempts at Warlpiri. She also liked to trick me and invited her family to enjoy my renditions of her favourite sentences while using our washing machine. Our next two house girls were older women who were very keen for me to learn proper Warlpiri. They quickly realised I had a very poor memory so demanded I write everything down and made me repeat words over and over for days. I couldn't hear what I was saying differently from them.

Then an amazing little notice appeared on the staffroom notice board. "Warlpiri class for teachers, Tuesdays 7:30 pm, signed Pam Harris". She worked in early childhood classes at the other end of the school and must have avoided the boong jokes (racist jokes) in the staffroom, because I had never spoken to her. Pam had a series of Warlpiri lessons from an American Linguist, Ken Hale, who I then began to hear a lot about—a wonderful man, much loved by many Warlpiri people.

The lessons were wonderfully simple.

*Wati ka yani* ('The man is going')

*Wati-jarra kapala yani* ('Two men are going')

*Wati-patu kalu yani* ('Some men are going').

We had to write the sentences substituting words for 'woman', 'child', 'dog' and so on, and using other verbs; pages and pages of writing after which we certainly knew that sentence pattern. Pam helped with pronunciation with pictures of the mouth and tongue.

Every lesson was like this, so many useful examples of Warlpiri sentence construction. The code was cracked. I could generate sentences which were understood and not always a source of mirth. I put a huge effort into learning Warlpiri, but it was about four years before I could understand what people were saying beyond just picking up a few words.

In 1974 the government (I worked for Native Welfare South Australia and then Canberra in quick succession) decreed that Aboriginal schools could run bilingual programs where the language had been documented and given an orthography for writing. Warlpiri had been extremely well documented by Ken Hale from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and S.I.L. linguist Lothar Jagst had developed the orthography with men at Lajamanu. Warlpiri people have always been happy with this way of writing Warlpiri.

Our principal at the time, Dave Stoddard was quite open to the idea of bilingual education. We had several staff meetings and school council meetings to decide if the school would take it on. The Warlpiri staff were most enthusiastic, as were some of us regular attenders of Pam's Warlpiri class. A few teachers were not at all keen and Pam said we were not well enough prepared. We had virtually no materials, but we felt this window of opportunity might never come again. Objections were crushed by our enthusiasm. We had a great Warlpiri staff of mature, long-standing women and one man. They were not at all daunted by the prospect of running their own classes. They had worked with a stream of good and bad teachers.

It was decided to run a full bilingual program right through the school immediately. Ken Hale was invited to come and help us get started. Our social club, which

operated the community shop, paid his fare from America. He was delighted to hear of this and amazed at what seemed a sudden great advance in white Australian attitudes. He came straight away and the school was organised around his classes: Warlpiri literacy for Warlpiri staff and other interested Warlpiri people, and Warlpiri language classes for white staff. Some Warlpiri who could read and write English learned to read and write Warlpiri very quickly. George Robertson was right on top of it and immediately began teaching Warlpiri literacy in every class for half an hour every day. They wrote lists of words with drawings carefully copied into exercise books, about hunting, animals, bush tucker, artifacts. The classes were totally engaged, and soon the not-so-keen white teachers were won over.

We had compulsory Warlpiri language lessons for non-Warlpiri staff every morning in school time. The Warlpiri Teaching Assistants became the main class teacher in their classes. A few Warlpiri men were employed to write Warlpiri books and materials. Pam Harris did planning with all the Warlpiri teachers, not just for Warlpiri literacy as now every subject was taught in Warlpiri. They had planning every day, the last half hour of school time and they usually worked till about 6 p. m. Pam was very good at negotiating ways of teaching the English syllabus in Warlpiri. Warlpiri literacy was made up of phonics, based on Hale's syllable charts, and the children's own experience stories. This was the reading material, and many children did better then than now with all our books. Students from these first bilingual classes still read and write Warlpiri.

I took oral English. It was not my main interest, but it was the essential other half of the bilingual program. We followed a step program: half an hour English in Preschool and Year 1, an hour in 2/3/4. Students in Years 5/6 and Post Primary continued with mostly English, but George Robertson took them for Warlpiri for half an hour or more every day. He extended the content to include kinship diagrams and maps of country and Dreamings. We also had a lot of input from elders who came to tell stories, demonstrate traditional skills, organise painting up and dancing and came on excursions.

### ***The First Warlpiri Books***

The literacy production men were very productive writing and illustrating story and sentence books, transcribing dreaming stories and making a picture dictionary. We sent books to Darwin to a government printer. They were very slow but the quality was good and they sent us many copies which are still in use today. Unfortunately the largest parcel we sent disappeared in the cyclone, which hit Darwin on Christmas Eve 1974. We had poor quality copies of most of them but they had to be illustrated again. We had no copy of that picture dictionary and it was never redone. We now have a new picture dictionary (Hoogenraad, Laughren with Warlpiri people from Yurntumu, Lajamanu, Wirliyajarrayi and Nyirрпи 2012). It is on sale and lots of Warlpiri people buy it.

We were very lucky with the appointment of Mary Laughren as linguist. She very quickly ran off many books and work sheets on our temperamental roneo machine. She befriended and inspired the Warlpiri teachers, helped them with their own Warlpiri literacy and encouraged more Warlpiri cultural content in classes. This suited Warlpiri staff, as they were confident and proud of their own knowledge. Their dedication to bilingual education lay less in literacy and more in passing on Warlpiri knowledge, though they still see literacy as a tool for this.

### *Some Set Backs*

Most Warlpiri teachers were still struggling with Warlpiri literacy in the early years. Some could write quite well but were very slow at reading even their own writing. Gavin Breen came quite often and ran courses working through School of Australian Languages (SAL) (see Disbray and Devlin, Consolidation chapter) and later Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics (CALL), the Indigenous language component of Batchelor College. These were one-week courses and they were very effective. Everyone became able to write children's stories and read them back.

The bilingual program at Yuendumu was going well for a few years. Herman Nijhuis became the principal. He was Dutch and had no doubt that children could learn two languages. However, not all Education Department staff believed this. I remember an argument at a bilingual conference between several bilingual education advisors and only one, Cos Russo, of Italian descent, argued that two languages could be spoken equally well. The others maintained that the second language would never be mastered or that study in one language would have to be at the expense of the other. This misconception has always hindered support for the bilingual education and continues to do so.

A little later a group of Education Department bosses from Alice Springs arrived. They sat at the back of classes. We had four untrained but experienced Assistant Teachers taking their own classes. The visitors saw well behaved students, all listening and answering and all engaged in their reading and writing. But they told us classes could not be taken by untrained teachers. We had one trained Warlpiri teacher, Jeannie Egan. She was two-year trained under the old system and had to upgrade her qualifications. She remained in charge of the Year 1 class. White teachers were put back in charge of the other classes. Some measure of Warlpiri control was achieved by knocking out walls between classrooms, so that one white teacher could supervise the two classrooms while Warlpiri staff did most of the teaching. The English teacher took English for half the morning in each class.

## *Jeannie Egan*

Jeannie was a driving force behind Warlpiri bilingual education. She kept other Warlpiri staff on track and on time, continually reminding everyone of the importance of what we were doing, which can be forgotten in the hectic school routine. She continually advised the principals and staff. She had a vision of Warlpiri-owned and managed communities with full employment of Warlpiri adults, strong in Warlpiri language and culture. She knew exactly what she wanted children to learn. One time when I asked her if she would like any help with planning she said, “We don’t need you for that. We just need you for Warlpiri singing”. I still do singing. There are a few traditional children’s chants and the other Warlpiri songs we write at Warlpiri Triangle workshops. In fact over 50 have been composed and are an important part of the Warlpiri program in Warlpiri schools. Songs have survived through all the ups and downs of the program. Parents love to hear their children singing the same Warlpiri songs they learnt at school.

Every time Bilingual Education came under threat, which happened many times, through cutbacks and attempts to phase it out, Jeannie would organise us all to write letters, organise meetings, go to town to face education bosses, get politicians to come to Yuendumu and face the school council. We had a strong school council. The important men, heads of families were on the school council. Some were well educated and strong speakers. Up until the ‘First Four Hours English’ rule, the new policy in 2008, they always managed to reverse those bad decisions (see Devlin, Chap. 16, this volume). There was no chance with the Four Hours of English policy. It came in overnight without warning.

Jeannie worked with Beth Graham on Warlpiri Early Childhood education, giving it a more Warlpiri focus. She experimented with running preschool in the camps but other teachers didn’t like doing this. Jeannie was always writing letters to bosses and politicians and got herself on advisory committees and went to Canberra and Darwin many times. Because she found it hard to get a word in at the meetings, she visited the people on the committee at their homes before the meetings. She was very concerned about teenagers and young people. She knew all the ideas of those faraway people were out of touch with the reality of this community. I remember Jeannie trying to explain to some government people, “You think we are up here in school education.” She held her hand level with her eyes. “But we are still down here. She held her hand below her knees. “We can never get up to here because you are not letting us start from where we are.” At Jeannie’s funeral, Andrew Mirtschin, one of our best principals, said “All I know about Aboriginal Education is what she taught me”.

One other Warlpiri teacher came back from Batchelor College in 1974. This was Tess Ross. Tess and I are the last ones left in the school of the teachers who were working in the bilingual program from the beginning. Tess is a truly great teacher. She has such a depth of knowledge. She brings stories, even words, to life with her colourful anecdotes. She is totally committed to Warlpiri language and literacy. Now she is a literacy worker. She writes stories and information books about



themes and still reads stories to classes at Yuendumu and Nyirripi. They really laugh and laugh at the funny parts. Tess worked closely with Pam Harris and Mary Laughren. We have always continued teaching syllables and doing weekend stories (journal writing) despite all the educational fashions thrust on Aboriginal schools in the endless attempt to make them exactly like mainstream schools.

### *The Present*

Now I'm retired as a teacher but I'm working as a casual literacy worker and I also go around classes for Warlpiri singing. I go to Nyirripi, a small Warlpiri community to the west of Yuendumu most Wednesdays and help them along with planning and materials and singing. In between I work in the printery making Warlpiri books with our great, knowledgeable literacy workers, Tess Napaljarri and Ormay Nangala and our Literacy Production Supervisor (Rachel O'Connell, now Lisa Brereton) and Emma Browne, then Gretel MacDonald, our linguist. There couldn't be a nicer place to work. We still run Warlpiri classes for non-Warlpiri people. We all agree this is very important because without white people in the school and in the community who appreciate and stand up for Warlpiri language, a negative and dismissive attitude can quickly spread. I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to learn Warlpiri and to have had such clever, patient, generous Warlpiri teachers through the years. I feel so lucky to be doing what I love, working with my friends, such great, wonderful people and living in this special country where Nature still wears her original clothing.

From my experience at Yuendumu I have five recommendations:

- It's important to have a pool of Warlpiri relief teachers. With no Warlpiri adult in the classroom, children can become frustrated, bored and rude. Teasing and fights break out. The non-indigenous teacher can become very stressed.
- A separate diploma for Indigenous teacher training with lower entry standards in English literacy is needed, to enable local language speakers to teach in their own language area, and permanent funding for teacher training in the communities.
- Screening of non-indigenous teachers and principals, to prevent appointment of those with negative attitudes to Aboriginal culture, language or bilingual programs.
- A department directive that, in bilingual schools, initial literacy should be taught in the children's first language and English later.
- A permanent position for a qualified linguist for each Aboriginal language used in bilingual schools.

## Conclusion

Yuendumu has gone through a lot of changes since 1973. Some are good. The children's health has improved. They don't have chronic colds, running ears and sores any more. They look great, dressed and combed with love, lively and funny. Education might seem not to have improved as literacy in English seems about the same. Some Warlpiri adults can easily read and use work related documents. However, understanding of spoken English has improved a lot. And quite a few write in Warlpiri on Facebook. Unfortunately Warlpiri Literacy has not become currency as have Arrernte, Luritja and Pitjantjatjara, which are used much more by some people in their communities. I think those language speakers get regular reading practice in church, where they have hymn books and prayer books in their languages. The Baptist church has no prayer book and much fewer Warlpiri church songs. Only a few people read the Warlpiri bible.

The worst changes came in with the Northern Territory Intervention (Altman 2007) by the federal government, the closure of local community councils and the replacement with regional shires and, of course, the Four Hours English policy (see Devlin Chap. 16, Freeman, this volume). Even though there have been some attempts to modify these, the main assimilationist thrust is still continuing. Almost all of public life is under government control and ownership. This means that Warlpiri have no real say in their future. It is up to white people how much of their culture and way of life can be maintained. Many Warlpiri try to avoid contact with the white people but now house inspectors, truant officers, child protection officers, Centrelink, and other well-meaning officials chase them up in their camps. Police enter any Aboriginal house without warning, without a warrant. More people are in jail, more children are taken and put in white families. It is very hard to get them back. The claims of a high level of child abuse have never been proven but the media, the government and education department carry on as if it is true. Racism has increased, most noticeably in Alice Springs.

Over the years the Warlpiri communities have managed to gradually push back the changes they feel most threatened by. They don't do it straight away. Time means little to them. They managed to keep bilingual education going through the government closure policies in 1993 and 1998 when other schools lost their bilingual programs. They went to Canberra, Darwin, and the Education Department in Alice Springs. They wrote many letters and submissions to Government Enquiries. They invited politicians to come to Yuendumu to talk with the school council. After the Four Hours of English decree in 2008, a group of Warlpiri school councilors went to talk to Marion Scrymgour. She told them there had to be a balance between the local language and English. Warlpiri educator Barbara Martin told me she had said, "Four hours English and only one hour Warlpiri in the afternoon, that's not a balance!" They invited Chris Burns (the next Education Minister) and Gary Barnes to a school council meeting where they spoke strongly and lovingly of their bilingual program which had been taken from them. At the end

of that meeting Gary Barnes said they could have bilingual education to the end of Year Two. But it didn't really happen then as the principal didn't have enough faith in Warlpiri staff. However, it did allow the one hour of Warlpiri to be taught in the morning.

It's nothing like it was when we had Warlpiri class teachers but everyone is more optimistic now (in 2015-16), more keen, feeling like they are useful again, teaching their children something they think is important. They have no power but they do have respect. Back in 1993 or maybe 1999 there was a little headline in protest to that closure of the bilingual education program. It was a direct quote from a young Warlpiri teacher, Madelaine Dixon, "They learn because they understand." I find it amazing that so many politicians, public servants and educators are unable to grasp this simple fact.

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# Chapter 21

## Stories from Central Australian Indigenous Community Schools in the Pintupi-Luritja Region

Meg Mooney

### Foreword

by Samantha Disbray

Bilingual education began in the Pintupi and Pintupi-Luritja region in Central Australia at the outstation school Yayayi. Its program started in 1974, and ran until 1978. At Haasts Bluff school there was a bilingual program from 1976 to 1980. Watiyawanu (Mt. Liebig) and M'Bunghara began in 1981 and Walungurru (Kintore) in 1983, but these programs ceased in the early 1990s. The longest running program was at the largest school in the region, Papunya. The program began in 1979 and closed in 2005. Papunya school also housed the Literature Production Centre (LPC), where hundreds of books, newsletters and other resources were drafted and printed over the years. Photographs that document school and community events were developed in the darkroom of the LPC. In 2008 the majority of the Pintupi-Luritja teaching materials were packed up and stored in the old darkroom at the LPC (converted into a store room), as described in the story below. And now many of the Pintupi-Luritja resources created there will be archived in the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages (see Bow et al. this volume).

In recent years Haasts Bluff and Watiyawanu have run vibrant Indigenous Language and Culture programs thanks to very committed local Aboriginal staff and supportive school principals, with the program at Watiyawanu involving a successful bi-literacy program (Disbray 2015). The staff from Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Watiyawanu and Walungurru sometimes come together for Language and Culture program planning workshops, organised by the Northern Territory Department of Education Indigenous Language and Culture resource staff and described in one of the stories below.

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Meg Mooney worked as the Literature Production Supervisor at Papunya School from the 1987 to 1990, and has remained involved with Papunya community. Over the last 14 years, she has worked with schools in the region through Tangentyere Council's Land and Learning Program (Mooney 2010, 2015). Meg is an ecologist and author of a number of volumes of poetry. The events described in the stories below took place between 2009 and 2014.

## Stories

The whitefella teacher is reading a story about a boy, in an abalone-diving family in the tropics, whose father was killed by a shark. The story is punctuated by the teacher's reprimands about students talking, not listening, getting up and walking around.

The cheeky ones are in and out of the door, running up the wooden verandah, making faces through the window, but most of the students are lying or sitting on the floor, wriggling around a bit, giggling, whispering. A few are definitely listening. A typical desert community classroom with a teacher who isn't particularly strict, or nasty, and is doing something the students have some interest in. Later that same day, an Indigenous teacher is reading a book in the local language to the same class. I'd come across the booklet by accident. A typical, stapled-together product of the bilingual era. The students all sit around the teacher and listen intently to the story. They move around so they can see the black and white photographs of women hunting for goanna, decades ago.

One woman, thankfully only glimpsed in the photographs, is the assistant teacher's mother, who passed away a few days ago. Everyone soon knows this, and it seems right that this old woman has come into the classroom like this now. The assistant teacher is pleased, although she can only look quickly at the photos. Twenty years ago they would already have been blacked out with a pen.

Now the children each get one of the photo pages that I've brought out, about our trip goanna-hunting a few weeks ago. The children fight over the pages, but soon settle down with one or two each. They ask the Indigenous teachers, the assistant teachers and me how to spell words in their language. The boy who was running in and out before is sitting with three pages at a desk, carefully copying the words I've written for him.

The students call out, keen to dictate what they want to write. They haven't had much first language literacy. This school is relatively big and has had a lot of changes in staff in the last few years. The Luritja teacher conducting this lesson is the only fully-qualified teacher who speaks this language, still used by maybe 2000 people.

This teacher does all the Indigenous language and culture classes at the school but is not confident enough to do much lesson-planning or get many resources together on her own. I work on a program called Land and Learning, run by Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs, that helps teach two-way science about the bush and provides regular on-ground support for a few schools each year.

Everyone writes about at least one photograph. The teacher comments with surprise that one boy—another of the ‘ratty’ ones—was writing and reading his language with only a little help.

Earlier today in this class, the whitefella teacher had asked the students to imagine and write a continuation of part of the abalone-diving story. Only the girl who has English as her first language did this, although one of the top students had managed a sentence. Most of the others had stared blankly at their pages, struggling to think of and write any English words.

The whitefella teacher told me that he did an English literacy session with the class after the goanna-hunting trip and the students did some of the best writing he’s ever seen from them. I don’t mean to suggest that students only learn and do good work in relation to Indigenous cultural activities, but that these activities do clearly support other parts of the curriculum.

For twenty or more years from the late 1970s, bilingual programs were taught at around a dozen remote Indigenous community schools in central Australia, including the one above. Children learnt to read and write in their own language in lower primary and the focus changed to English in upper primary.

I saw one of these programs in action when I worked as a literature production supervisor for the Pintupi-Luritja bilingual program in four schools—the position was axed when I left in 1990, the beginning of the end of bilingual education in the Centre.

I have a background in natural science, not education, and for the last 14 years have worked on Tangentyere’s Land and Learning program. This program usually supports Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) programs in schools. ILC programs have for some years now run as a kind of elective, depending, in particular, on the interest of the head teacher or principal.

From my experience in both these positions, it is clear to me that local language literacy supports the development of English literacy and vice versa. Also, students’ understanding is far greater in their own language, so they learn much more about, for example, the local bush when they are taught in their own language, especially by the elders, who they respect.

In my work with Land and Learning, I have seen very effective teaching of Indigenous language and culture without the extensive support needed for a bilingual program. Larry Kenny, principal at Watiyawanu (Mt Liebig) School, has supported a strong ILC program at this school, particularly with assistant teachers Roderick Kantamara and Rita Turner, since 2010. The one or two central Australian Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) resource staff at the Department of Education have supported this work with ILC planning workshops with this and neighbouring Luritja schools at least twice a year.

The Watiyawanu ILC program, run by the assistant teachers, operates for half an hour or so four or five afternoons a week and runs a school camp a couple of times a year. At the beginning of this program, senior students quickly transferred their English literacy skills to Luritja literacy, and wrote enthusiastically in their own language.

In the last two years, this program has been extended, with great effect, to include twice-yearly workshops with a linguist. With the support of the linguist, assistant teachers and others, the students eagerly learn to transcribe and translate stories recorded with community elders about, for example, the history of the community, local plants and animals.

While some Indigenous people down south and over east struggle to recover their languages from explorers' notebooks, here languages that are very much alive are often given little care and attention. It's not just up to schools, of course, but an Indigenous researcher told me once that you can tell the morale of the Indigenous teacher aides in a community school, and of the whole school community, by how well the local language and culture program is going.

Of course acknowledgement and inclusion of your language and culture at a school is going to make you feel better about going there; and getting to show and use at school the knowledge you have from your culture is going to make you feel better about yourself.

I wake up early in my little cell in the GBM accommodation, so-called because the new Government Business Manager for the community lives in a tiny flat there. Most communities now have these 'GBMs', consisting of two large demountables, for visitors to stay. They're one of the more noticeable, for whitefellas, legacies of the Intervention.

I load the troop carrier and head over to the old ladies' sorry camp, on a quiet edge of the community. People move to a sorry camp like this for weeks or months after a relative has died. The ladies are still lying or sitting among piles of colourful blankets on their beds, which consist of foam mattresses on old bed frames next to well-made humpies: these shelters made from 'sheet-of-iron' and canvas with leafy branches for verandahs provide protection from sun and rain. If you didn't know, you might think this camp was primitive.

These five old women all grew up walking around the bush with their families, when whitefellas were few and far between out this way. There were no communities, maybe one or two ration stations. The women lived mainly off the country until at least their teenage years and know as much about it as any professor of botany.

I give the women cheques for the bush trips we took the school students on, to teach them about plants of the rocky and sand country. (The plants of the river country have mostly been smothered by the weeds couch and buffel grass.) Old women in communities are generally keen to support the teaching of local language and culture in schools, because they know that many children these days don't learn so much about the bush from their families. Grog, unemployment and poor health are big pressures in communities, and some families don't have much access to cars.

Back at the sorry camp, one of the old ladies wants a lift to another community with me. She's quiet but easy company, points out her country, beautiful ranges, the outstation where she used to live and the camels I didn't see. Eighty kilometres pass quickly.

I drop off more cheques to old ladies at the community, a smaller one with a few dozen houses, store, council office, clinic, aged care centre, GBM—locked up since the last manager left a few weeks ago (she lasted a couple of months)

The Indigenous assistant teachers at the school here have been teaching local language and culture lessons most afternoons, with the support of the head teacher. Up until a few years ago, Indigenous language and culture had not been taught at this school for a long time, because the head teacher of many years had not approved of doing this (Fig. 21.1).

I watch a lesson where one of the Indigenous aides uses plant photo-cards, with local language names on the front and information on the back, to teach the junior primary class. The children love these cards we made, she tells me. I think this is partly because they look like proper resources, like English ones, not just line drawings on coloured paper. The students know the names and uses of a lot more plants now.

The other assistant teacher goes through the syllable chart (See Fig. 21.1) he's made for the older class. Then the little ones stick the plant specimens we collected on a bush trip on to paper and write their names. They draw pictures of the plants and what they are known for: fruits, grubs that live in roots, small coconut-like galls



**Fig. 21.1** Assistant teacher Roderick Kantamara teaches Watiyawanu (Mt Liebig) students using a Luritja syllable chart he developed with a class teacher. Watiyawanu School, 2010. Photo Meg Mooney, Tangentyere Council



made by another grub, flowers with honey, medicinal leaves or bark. Almost every tree and bush has some use, and many of the grasses and herbs as well.

The next time I work with this school the Indigenous aides decide to teach the children about birds, because of all the budgies and cockatiels, crimson chats and honeyeaters that have flocked here after big rains. The following term they do plant medicines. I print up pages of photographs from the bush trip when the children learnt about collecting and preparing three different medicines. I ask the aides to help the children write in their own language about the photographs, rather than me writing an account in English. I type up the children's writing and make an A3 spiral-bound booklet with this and the photographs. When one of the aides reads the booklet to the class the children, who usually find it hard to remain still, sit in silent awe, occasionally whispering things like 'Henry wrote that page'.

Indigenous languages were not written down until whitefellas appeared, but now books and other writing in these languages are key to their continuing life. Written and digital materials are vital for recording languages and are important for teaching them. Here's another story.

I'll set the scene. Cream metal louvers stained with the red dust they don't keep out. Dirty lino tiles, slobbered each afternoon from a muddy bucket. There's the clatter and whirr of folding, binding and stapling machines; and fragments of gospel songs from a dying tape player continually rewound by literacy workers, young artists and transcribers, talking in long runs of words I can't understand. I spent years in this room.

The only texts in this language, apart from a dictionary and picture dictionary, the bible, a hymn book or two, are the booklets made in this room. Stories about a young man running from a plane, thinking it was a devil in the sky; revenge parties tracking down men who'd stolen young women, or couples who married wrong way, or whole families in feuds that went on for generations; 'all the Tjampitjinpa men' chained together and taken off for killing cattle.

There are readers with sentences like, *Wati ananyi ngurrakutu, The man is going home*, with a drawing of a man walking toward a corrugated iron humpy; and legends, like the one about warriors spearing a giant, man-eating goanna, and a man full of spears turning into a centipede. Then there are Western desert versions of Grimm's tales: dingoes devour a lost boy after weeing on the log he's hiding in, so it falls apart; *mamu litutjarra*—louse-y monsters—and devil-men steal babies and roast them on fires. All the hunting stories, looking, looking, looking, and often finding goanna, emu, kangaroo, bush turkey. Tales of country full of food, grubs, honey ants, berries, yams.

Twenty years later, the preschool has taken over the old printery. No-one knows where the books are. I imagine piles of them: the stories the old people carried; the pictures the young artists drew, sitting for hours at an old wooden table etched with their names; photographs of an echidna cooking in the coals, an old woman grinding grass seed on a stone to make damper. All these thrown next to old washing machines, mattress skeletons and dead cars at the rubbish dump.

The acting principal hasn't seen the books. She thinks they got packed up at the beginning of the year. The bilingual program at this school had stopped the previous year, when the Education Department had organised a community vote about continuing the program and it was voted out by a narrow, and uncertain, margin. All the white teachers are new since then. Later we find out that some of the Indigenous aides knew where the books were.

There's only one room we haven't investigated, in a corner of the old printery. None of the teachers has a key for the padlock but the janitor does. The little room is piled high with boxes, filing cabinets and crates. All the stories are locked away, in the darkroom.

The story becomes more positive. The Northern Territory Education Department linguist gets some funding for someone to get all the books out of the darkroom, sort and digitise them. There are a couple of hundred different booklets produced since the late 1970s. As well as multiple copies of the booklets there are lots of photographs, posters, song and syllable charts, audio tapes and other resources.

A local Indigenous woman, who worked as a literacy worker here, helps with the sorting of all this. She is keen to continue looking after the revamped Indigenous language resource centre. She'd like to help teachers use the booklets, some of which she wrote or transcribed, and read them herself to classes at the school.

Then the story flounders again. There is no money to pay the local woman to work more than a few hours a week, and no-one to support her. A year or so later, the resource room has been partly packed up again, so the school can use the space for other purposes. Each of the four schools in this language group does get a hard drive with all the digitised resources, roughly sorted. However, the Indigenous aides need support to go through these digitised resources, and only one of the schools has a colour photocopier to print booklets. As in all schools, the teachers have very little spare time. Even if they are interested, teachers struggle to provide the support the aides need for teaching language and culture, let alone investigating resources.

It's like a meeting of a secret club. There's an elderly linguist, an education department Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) consultant, seven Indigenous assistant teachers and one Indigenous teacher from a total of three communities, and me, helping teach about the bush. The assistant teachers from the fourth community had to go back because a young couple killed themselves last night.

You won't read about our meeting anywhere. It's not about the health or education issues that grab national headlines, at least it doesn't appear to be. It is an ILC planning workshop for Indigenous assistant teachers at the Luritja schools organised by the education department ILC consultant.

First we share what we've been doing: teaching about the food plants that have come up in the burnt country, and the tracks of animals, so easy to see on blackened ground. Flames trickling through scrub have been a common sight this winter and autumn after last year's rain.

Then we talk about the usual things at schools: syllables, word lists, flash cards.



**Fig. 21.2** Assistant teacher Roderick Kantamara asks Watiyawanu (Mt Liebig) students to guess, from hints about the bird, the Luritja name of the bird on a Tangentyere photo-card he has turned around. The students are standing up and running forward in their eagerness to guess the bird. Assistant teacher Rita Turner looks on. Watiyawanu School, 2010. *Photo* Meg Mooney, Tangentyere Council

No-one speaks English much. The education department woman and I strain to understand, but we're used to this, enjoy the flow of language and ideas around us. We know it's the others who struggle to understand most of the time.

We talk about how the children don't know near as many plant and animal names as they did a generation or two ago. People say to me, "Those students just say *watiya* ('plant') or *tjulpu* ('bird'), they don't know what it is called". If the name is disappearing, it's certain that other knowledge about the plant or animal is too.

Two assistant teachers talk about going through bird photo-cards with their students every afternoon. The bloke turns the cards around and gives the children clues until they work out what the plant or animal is. The children stand up and rush towards him in their eagerness, shouting, for example, *kakalyalya!* ('pink cockatoo'), *kulyirritji!* ('budgie'), *irranti!* ('black cockatoo') See (Fig. 21.2).

Now we plan a practice lesson about the plant people use to 'smoke' new mothers and babies, holding them in the medicinal fumes from leafy branches heaped over a small fire. The male assistant teacher finds a guitar in the school

storeroom and everyone makes up a song about medicine plants, to teach the children in the lesson tomorrow (Fig. 21.2).

This language is lucky. Two of the four schools have head teachers who wholeheartedly support it, a third school is heading in that direction and the fourth is interested.

In this room, a group of young to middle-aged Indigenous women and one man, two middle-aged white women and one old white man hold this language and the deep knowing of the old people high, and something happens that is more than the sum of us. The culture shines around us, grows in our hands and eyes, so no-one can doubt its worth, or how it will hold us together.

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## Chapter 22

# Yipirinya School: That Generation, This Generation

Inge Kral

Under the reforming agenda of the 1970s, the Whitlam Labor Government acted within the framework of self-determination to introduce bilingual education programs. While most programs were mandated within the existing government or Catholic education system in the Northern Territory (NT), the era of self-determination seeded an independent, community-controlled model of bilingual education in Alice Springs. Like an *intelyape-lyape* butterfly emerging out of a chrysalis, Yipirinya School came into being in 1978 with the formation of the Yipirinya School Council. The school is named after the ‘*ayepe-arenye*’ caterpillar one of the major Dreamings of the Alice Springs town area (Cook and Buzzacott 1994, p. 78). Although it would not be registered as a non-government school for a further five years, the butterfly had taken flight. After a long struggle, the determination of Arrernte and Luritja elders to overcome a legacy of discrimination and marginalisation paid off with the emergence of a model of ‘two-way schooling’ that continues to this day. I worked at Yipirinya School as a teacher and teacher linguist between 1987 and 1991—a period that saw the realisation of the many dreams and hopes held by the Yipirinya elders who established the school. Over the intervening years I have maintained contact with a number of Yipirinya families and I have watched the children in these families grow up, face life’s rewards and adversities and become parents themselves. This longitudinal perspective has allowed me to reflect on the vicissitudes of their lives and their capacity to assert agency in determining their life directions.

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## The Early Aims and Aspirations of Yipirinya School

In 1983 Yipirinya School was finally registered as an independent non-government school. Having started in 1979 in the town camps of Alice Springs, the school moved into demountables in the yard of Tangentyere Council in the light industrial area of Alice Springs in 1985. Further accounts of the early days at Yipirinya can be found in Cook and Buzzacott (1994) and Rubuntja and Green (2002). In 1988 Nanette Sharpe, one of the founding members of the Yipirinya School Council, described the school as follows:

...we are teaching in three languages: Luritja, Arrernte, Eastern Arrernte, and English. The kids are coming to school every day and we take them out bush while the Aboriginal teachers prepare their lesson for the next morning. We also take them out camping so they can learn about their fathers' mothers' and fathers' fathers' country. We will be shifting to the new school soon, and when we move we will have everything at the new school (Yeperenye Yeye, Newsletter of the Yipirinya School Council, July 1988, p. 22).

Later that year Yipirinya school transitioned from its temporary site to a permanent architect-designed location nestled into a hillside on Lovegrove Drive. The bilingual program was expanded to include teaching and literature production in four languages: Central Arrernte, Western Arrernte, Luritja and Warlpiri. Based on a 'two way schooling' model, initial literacy was introduced in the children's first language and maintained alongside English up to post-primary (see Harkins 1994; Kral 2000). A literature production centre employed a linguist as well as language speakers to produce curriculum materials in four languages. School attendance was high and a post-primary program was commenced. In addition, a Culture Day, organised by the Aboriginal staff, was held every Wednesday, typically entailing a bush excursion (Cook and Buzzacott 1994; Harkins 1994; Taylor 2013; Wilkins 1992).

In this chapter, using an intergenerational approach based on interviews and long-term ethnographic observations, I explore three of the early aims of Yipirinya School. As noted by Cook and Buzzacott (1994, p. 81), the early aims of the school included:

- teaching the children English and other non-Aboriginal knowledge as well as maintaining and reinforcing Arrernte, Luritja and Warlpiri knowledge;
- developing children's oral language and literacy skills as well as reinforce their Aboriginal identity, cultural knowledge, values and spirituality; and
- producing people who could move freely with knowledge and confidence in both Aboriginal and European society.

Accordingly, I address the language maintenance aims of the Yipirinya bilingual education model. I then consider how generational cohorts associated with Yipirinya have grown up, learned and developed (LeVine 2011). I reflect on the changing social, cultural and historical circumstances and the impact of altered conditions on their life trajectories. In doing so, I focus on the effect of schooling on

young adults who were among the first cohort of school children, and consider whether their experiences at Yipirinya School enabled them to move confidently between two worlds.

To understand the perseverance and motivation of the elders in forging a new way for future generations requires tracing the sociohistorical experiences that led to the formation of this particular model of bilingual education. In this analysis I focus on two groups: Eastern/Central Arrernte speakers affiliated with the Catholic church and mission at Santa Teresa, and Western Arrernte/Luritja speakers affiliated with the Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg. Both these groups have had a long association with Alice Springs.

## Generational Change

### *The Mission Generation*

The genesis of the Yipirinya School initiative is seeded in the complex, sometimes fraught, history of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations in frontier Central Australia. The colonisation of Arrernte country commenced when the explorer John McDouall Stuart passed through Central Australia in 1860. Alice Springs township was established soon after, and from the 1870s pastoralists moved into the central desert region precipitating a period of conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Duncan 1967; Kimber 1991; Rowse 1998). After its establishment in 1877, the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission, some 131 km south-west of Alice Springs, provided a refuge from frontier violence for Western ‘Aranda’ (Arrernte), and later Luritja, speakers. Schooling soon commenced and Lutheran missionaries displayed a keen interest in learning Aranda, primarily for proselytising purposes, translating scripture and training evangelists (Kral 2000). Aboriginal people learned to read and sometimes write in Aranda, either at school or through church activities.

The Raggett, Sharpe, Inkamala and Rubuntja families were associated with Hermannsburg Mission. Eli Rubuntja was born at Hermannsburg in 1922 and learned to read and write in Western Aranda in the old mission school and later became a Lutheran pastor. Louise Raggett and Nanette Sharpe went to school at the mission. Families associated with Hermannsburg Mission were imbued with a model of education that aimed to produce adults who were literate and armed with vocational skills and an industrious work ethic (Leske 1977). This setting also modelled an ideology where Aboriginal language, and literacy in the vernacular, was valued. This ethos informed the foundation philosophy of Yipirinya School.

By contrast, Eastern and Central (‘Mparntwe’) Arrernte people, the traditional owners of country in and around Alice Springs, were adversely affected by pastoralists who moved into the central desert region (Duncan 1967) and the growth of the new township. Various directives determined where Aboriginal people could

camp and what areas around the town were prohibited (Rowse 1998). Under the 1918 *Aboriginals Ordinance* and the subsequent *Welfare Ordinance*, full-blood Aboriginal people were required to hold passes or exemptions to enter Alice Springs up until 1964 (Donovan 1988, p. 271). The Catholic Little Flower Mission was established in 1935. In 1937 permission was given for a church and school to be built at Charles Creek, where it was insisted that “all children learn and speak English, and completely refrain from using their mother tongue” in school (Harmsen 1993, p. 64). By 1940 some 200 people were living at the Little Flower Mission (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 56), including members of the Ryan, Stevens, Dixon, Ferber and Heffernan families, who later became core members of the Yipirinya community.

Arrernte people also moved between Alice Springs and local pastoral stations, ration depots and mining centres, chasing work and rations, and living on country (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 44). Such movement enabled people to maintain their links to traditional country and their ceremonial obligations across a wide area, including the town (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 47).

Wenten Rubuntja, an early member of the Yipirinya School Council, recalls working on stations and living in Alice Springs during this era (Rubuntja and Green 2002). In 1942 Central and Eastern Arrernte families from the Little Flower Mission were shifted to Arltunga, 110 km north-east of Alice Springs (Donovan 1988). Santa Teresa Mission, some 85 km south-east of Alice Springs, opened in 1953 to replace the mission at Arltunga, and schooling continued in English (Dobson 1986; Harmsen 1993).

Throughout the 1950s most Arrernte people were under the supervision of either mission or government agencies, or else they worked for pastoralists. “If not on a pastoral station they lived at either Hermannsburg or Santa Teresa Mission...or at the Bungalow reserve—the government settlement at the telegraph station from 1946 to 1960 (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 95). Basil Stevens, born in 1941, lived at Bond Springs Station north of Alice Springs with his grandparents until 1950, when he was put into the school at the old Bungalow (Stevens 1986, *Yeperenye Yeye*, Newsletter of the Yipirinya School Council, July 1988, p. 34). May Ryan was born at Bond Springs Station north of Alice Springs and by World War II she and her family were at the Little Flower Mission (*Yeperenye Yeye* Newsletter of the Yipirinya School Council July 1988, p. 21). The family was then shifted to Arltunga where May worked as a house cleaner, and thereafter onto Santa Teresa.

## The Assimilation Generation

Discrimination, racism and institutional control were a pervasive backdrop to settler relations in and around Alice Springs until the ‘assimilation era’, when a more congenial approach to Indigenous relations emerged, from the 1950s. Up to this time, other than at a few mission schools, education was unavailable for most remote groups. Subsequently, education and training were used to instill in people



the qualities and attributes required of a worker, parent and householder on the pathway to assimilation and ultimately citizenship (Rowse 1998). In 1960 all the Aboriginal residents of the Bungalow, as well as people camping around town, were forcibly removed to Amoonguna (Coughlan 1991, p. 63), the new government settlement established some 14 km south-east of Alice Springs. Amoonguna represented a new approach to Aboriginal affairs and residents were encouraged to embrace “the general concept of ‘work’ as a worthwhile aim in life” (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 96). At Amoonguna different language groups were mixed up and schooling was conducted in English. It was not, however, an entirely satisfactory place for people to live and so many people drifted back to the fringe camps around Alice Springs (Heppell and Wigley 1981, p. 25). Concurrently, cash had become more accessible for Aboriginal people with the commencement of social security (Sanders 1986) in tandem with the onset of alcohol consumption. During this period a number of Eastern and Central Arrernte families moved between Amoonguna, Santa Teresa and Alice Springs.

May Ryan’s daughter Carmel was born in 1963 at Santa Teresa. Although her parents had never learned to read or write, Carmel attended primary and secondary school at the mission. This set her on an aspirational pathway, where she took advantage of the vocational training on offer and worked in the office and clinic at Santa Teresa. These formative experiences would underscore her life trajectory as an educator and teacher of Arrernte language and culture.

## **The Emergence of a New Kind of Community**

The early 1970s was a period of increased politicisation across Aboriginal Australia as assimilationist policies were rejected and replaced by aspirations for self-determination. The election of a Labor government in 1972 led to profound Indigenous policy reforms. Freed from the disempowering policies of former years, Aboriginal people began asserting their Indigenous identity, evident in the growth of ‘Aboriginal organisations’ including community-controlled health services, legal services and media organisations. The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* was passed in 1976 and Central Land Council (CLC) was formed soon after. Although claims for land rights in Alice Springs were not successful, the NT Government started to grant ‘Special Purpose Leases’ (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 113). At the time people from different language groups were typically camping in the dry riverbed or in camps without sanitation, running water or electricity. In late 1977 Tangentyere Council was formed to secure the leases for camps existing on the fringes of Alice Springs (Coughlan 1991). By 1989 a total of 16 leases for ‘town camps’ had been granted and 167 residences were built under the guidance of Tangentyere Council (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 131). As well as meeting the need for housing, the Council facilitated meetings of town campers, who were beginning to advocate for education for their children.

By 1978 a language rights approach to education was well underway in the NT. A bilingual program had been started within the Catholic education system at Santa Teresa, whereas in Alice Springs, families living in the town camps sought to send their children to town schools. However, without secure housing, electricity and sewerage, families struggled to meet the standards required. As Eli Rubuntja recalled,

When I first came to Alice Springs I was a Sunday school teacher. The Aboriginal kids went to the government school at Traeger Park. Their parents and relations came and told me, “The white kids fight and swear and grab our kids’ lunch money” (*Yeperenye Yeye*, Newsletter of the Yipirinya School Council, July 1988, p. 21).

In 1978 only seven out of 106 town camp children were attending school, and then only intermittently (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 133). In June that year Aboriginal people, including Eli Rubuntja who lived at Anthepe town camp, and Louise Raggett and Nanette Sharpe, who lived at Trucking Yards town camp, began to campaign to establish a school for town camp children (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 133). These adults were from the mission generation and they wanted a safe place for their grandchildren to be educated in the western system, as well as a place where their language and culture could be maintained. In 1979 volunteers began classes in decentralised sites in the town camps. Louise Raggett and Nanette Sharpe were teaching at Trucking Yards town camp and May Ryan volunteered at Hidden Valley camp.

### ***Anwernekenhe Itirrentye Kaltiyelenthetyeke—Teach Our Culture, Teach Our Way, the Yipirinya Way***

Yipirinya School aimed to provide a form of ‘two-way’ education that would ensure that the children would develop into bilingual, bicultural adults. The ethos of the school was predicated upon language and culture maintenance. Eli Rubuntja, the School Council President, asserted that “The children must learn to read and write Aboriginal way, white man’s way. We tell the teachers they must teach two ways” (Kral 2000, p. 43). Significantly, despite the impact of English and the earlier marginalisation of Aboriginal language and culture in Alice Springs, Arrernte and Luritja had been maintained and transmitted to the next generation of town dwellers.

By this time it was evident that resources were required for the new bilingual education programs across the NT. The School of Australian Linguistics (SAL) was established in Darwin in 1974 (Black and Breen 2001) with the aim of “training well-motivated native speakers of Australian languages” so that they could analyse their own language, develop orthographies, write grammars and devise suitable teaching materials (Dixon 1980, p. 93). Courses began in Central Australia in 1981.

Those who undertook the SAL literacy courses acquired the skills to work in bilingual education programs, including at Yipirinya. As one teacher noted,

I did that training and I started working at Yipirinya then, and that's when IAD were setting up adult education, like setting up interpreting training and literacy courses in languages. That's when I really started to read and write my language. (Kral 2000, p. 44)

In the 1980s, Louise Raggett, Nanette Sharpe and Sylvester Renkeraka studied at SAL in Alice Springs with linguist Gavan Breen and learned to read and write in Western Arrernte and/or Luritja. They were then able to teach vernacular literacy classes at Yipirinya and later worked in the Literature Production Centre. Louise's daughter, Dulcie, also taught in the bilingual program, and other family members were employed at the school. Central and Eastern Arrernte speakers including Margaret Heffernan, Rosie Ferber and Basil Stevens also attended SAL, as did Carmel Ryan, and all worked in the two-way program at Yipirinya.

By the 1980s, a proud and strong linguistic identity was emerging in Alice Springs. Concurrently, the emblematic use of Arandic text and cultural motifs emerged in the linguistic landscape, giving Aboriginal people a renewed sense of place and belonging. The Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD), established in 1969, provided not only 'bridging' courses, homemaker courses, and literacy courses in English, it also became the umbrella organisation for many Indigenous language initiatives. IAD managed the Aboriginal Translating and Interpreting Service. Dictionaries, learners' guides and language curricula in Central Australian languages were published through IAD Press. At IAD, non-Aboriginal employees from Aboriginal organisations were participating in Aboriginal language courses and cultural awareness inductions in order to relate to, and better understand, the Aboriginal constituency. In turn, these activities provided employment for speakers of Aboriginal languages. IAD and Yipirinya provided a focal point for Aboriginal language research that aimed to forge research collaborations with language speakers (Wilkins 1989, 1992). During this period, adults were acquiring skills in many new arenas. Importantly, the circumstances of the time enabled them to put this expertise into practice and to shape it to suit the requirements of the indigenisation aims of rapidly forming community-controlled Aboriginal organisations, including Yipirinya School.

At Yipirinya, Aboriginal teachers were mentored into their roles, often taking full classroom responsibility even though, according to mainstream criteria, they were not 'qualified' teachers. A number also participated in training through the Anangu Teacher Education Program (AnTEP). The two-way program meant that elders could play an important role in transmitting cultural traditions and teaching pride in language and culture. Through elders like Margaret Heffernan, Rosie Ferber, Basil Stevens and Thomas Stevens, children learned the significance of the totemic landscape of *Mparntwe*—Alice Springs (Brooks 1991). The school curriculum taught the children about the sacred sites (Stevens 1985) at the same time as their elders were continuing the fight for legislation to protect them (Rubuntja and Green 2002, p. 144). Vernacular literacy texts across a range of genres were written, and the 'Yeperenye Yeye School Newsletter' was produced, in the literature production

centre. Most importantly, families felt they had agency in the education process and were exerting control over determining the pathway of future generations.

But what of the linguistic aims of the bilingual program? Without longitudinal data it is not possible to determine whether the bilingual program at Yipirinya School has assisted language preservation. According to the 2005 National Indigenous Languages Survey, everyday spoken Arrernte remains strong and is used by all age groups including children (AIATSIS/FATSIL 2005), guaranteeing its transmission to the next generation. What is at risk, however, is the full spectrum of communicative modalities in this endangered language setting. At Yipirinya the pedagogical emphasis was on vernacular literacy rather than communicative competence. Adults who acquired basic vernacular literacy competence through SAL were able to find employment, but for the children who went through bilingual education at Yipirinya, as I state elsewhere (Kral 2000, p. 79), the acquisition of vernacular literacy has had limited uses.

It can be claimed nonetheless that the bilingual program played an important role in socialising children into the practice of schooling. Children and grandchildren observed older family members in responsible positions in classrooms and the literature production centre, and they accompanied them to school every day, assisted by the school bus that brought them to and from the town camps. This cohort also saw their elders taking on advisory roles as board members steering the direction of the new Aboriginal organisations. Leaders like Wenton Rubuntja had a public face and a significant leadership role at local Aboriginal governance organisations such as Central Land Council and Tangentyere Council, and in land rights negotiations with the government (Rubuntja and Green 2002). These elders were setting the template for the kind of adult roles that they hoped successive generations would later assume. During this era there was optimism about the future, the bad old days of discrimination and paternalistic control were behind them, and the younger generation saw their elders as competent operators able to engage with the wider community on their own terms.

### **‘Moving Freely with Knowledge and Confidence in Both Aboriginal and European Society’**

At this point I refer back to another of the original aims of Yipirinya School and explore whether the school produced people who could move freely with knowledge and confidence in both Aboriginal and wider Australian society.

The Yipirinya community moved into the 1990s with faith in schooling and the promising future that it would deliver for their offspring. Yipirinya youngsters attended school regularly and spent their formative years with adults who had acquired mainstream skills and taken on leadership roles. It was assumed that this foundation would enable them to shape their life directions and secure successful futures in two worlds. But was too much expected of the children who would come

of age in a period of profound sociocultural change, when family life would become more unsettled—with greater mobility, overcrowding in houses and an increase in alcohol-related violence in town camps? Moreover, were the early aims sufficiently robust to withstand the vicissitudes of a rapidly changing socioeconomic reality where a different kind of labour market was unfolding?

In the late 1980s, in response to broader global changes, Australia introduced the National Training Reform Agenda (1987–1996). In the remote context this meant that Indigenous workers would now have to meet nationally accredited Vocational Education and Training (VET) requirements. The National Training Reform Agenda was the Australian Government's effort to reform the vocational education and training system and its linkages to the workplace. A number of its initiatives implemented since 1990, such as the development of a Standards Framework, have led to a more formalised approach to school to work transitions, and entry level qualifications were now required for vocational employment. These changes collided with the goal of Aboriginalisation, where many Indigenous people were employed without formal qualifications, English literacy or employment experience. Simultaneously, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) had protected people in remote communities from engagement in the mainstream labour market. Paralleling these changes, by the 1990s a national shift from multilingualism and multiculturalism to a focus on the economy was underway, which saw the linking of English literacy provision to Vocational Education and Training outcomes (Lo Bianco and Wickert 2001, p. 28). The focus in Indigenous education shifted to English literacy and the competencies required to function in mainstream society without disadvantage. The earlier language rights approach to education was largely replaced by a discourse of crisis around the literacy 'problem', and the unemployment and welfare dependency due to poor education and lack of English. The *National Literacy and Numeracy Plan* (DEETYA 1998) ushered in the era of external benchmarking testing and a back-to-basics approach to literacy pedagogy, as well as the subsuming of English as a Second Language under literacy. The commencement of the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in 2008 led to Indigenous students being assessed in accordance with the same developmental pathway for literacy achievement set by English first language students (McKay 2001). In remote Australia, low school attendance and poor retention rates—especially in the secondary years—has become a chronic issue. Successive education models for remote youth have not succeeded in improving retention rates (Guenther 2013), making the expectations of participation in mainstream employment unrealistic (Fig. 22.1).

Since the 1990s Indigenous policy has witnessed a shift away from diversity and choice as a means for self-determination, and instead a focus on instilling a sense of responsibility and reciprocity has emerged (see Pearson 2000). What has followed has been a raft of interventions focused on realising individual responsibility through welfare reform strategies, such as the use of conditionalities on welfare payments and strategies to move Indigenous people into training and productive employment. Simultaneously, there has been an incremental expansion of



**Fig. 22.1** AnTEP Graduation, Yipirinya School, 1989 L to R Pamela Ryan, Sylvester Renkeraka, Dulcie Raggett, Eli Rubuntja, Jennifer Inkamala, Nannette Sharpe, Louise Raggett. *Photo Inge Kral*

non-Aboriginal intervention in everyday life, most notably exemplified by the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) intervention (see Altman and Hinkson 2007). At the same time the bureaucratic and employment requirements of the mainstream have also become exponentially more complex over recent decades, partly because of constant policy change. Such socio-economic changes have been augmented by a growing sense of anomie caused by poverty and substance abuse. Loss of control in the public space is mirrored in the domestic space where inconsistency in parenting styles and few domestic time-and-space rules make a stark contrast between home and school expectations. Many families now struggle to hold onto fundamental values and are often left unable to shape directions for their children's futures, as they have little access to the economic, and social and cultural, capital they need to make choices.

### **Learning for *What* Future?**

The generational cohorts I have focused on in this chapter have experienced 'exceptional situations of upheaval' (LeVine 2011, p. 427), each in their own way. There are, however, fundamental differences. For the older generation who moved into the era of self-determination the acquisition of new forms of expertise could easily be put into practice. The circumstances of the 1980s were such that even



**Fig. 22.2** Preparing for NAIDOC Day, 1987. Yipirinya School. *Photo Inge Kral*

those with little or no education were able to find pathways to employment and governance. It was, I would suggest, not schooling and training that enabled the older generation to take their place as leaders, but their cultural authority and capacity to keep learning (Fig. 22.2).

The first cohort of Yipirinya students who transitioned from adolescence to adulthood in the 1990s saw their elders developing as experts in the Aboriginal world and in the mainstream. Their expertise pivoted around locally defined sociocultural roles, whereas today children see that the expertise, place, and power of their elders has been marginalised in public, social and political space. This cohort has encountered an altered training and employment environment with fewer positions for unskilled workers, in tandem with a heightened focus on social ‘problems’ in Indigenous communities.

I turn now to the trajectories of some of those whom I taught at Yipirinya School in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I focus primarily on two young women, both of whom experienced a similar socialising environment as children, yet their adult pathways have taken different directions. One has chosen to live in a bush community where she has agency and some control over her immediate environment and access to enabling resources. By contrast, despite all her best intentions and individual capacity, the other young woman continually faces adversity. By living in Alice Springs she remains marginalised, unable to harness the resources and energy required to draw on the local environment and make positive choices.

## ***Bush Life***

Some in the Yipirinya cohort have shifted from Alice Springs and married partners who live in bush communities. In particular, a Western Arrernte/Luritja group has chosen to live in the Utopia Homelands communities (350 km north-east of Alice Springs). One young woman in this family group was born in 1980. Her grandmothers and aunts all worked at Yipirinya and were Council members. After primary schooling at Yipirinya she went to the Catholic High School in Alice Springs. After leaving school at 15 she did an Office Skills course at IAD, but never had any mainstream employment. She moved to Utopia more than 10 years ago, married into a local family and started a family. Other cousins and an aunt have also chosen to live on the Utopia outstations providing additional family support. This young woman has maintained her literacy in English and Luritja (Kral and Falk 2004). She now attends the local Study Centre, where she can access computers and the internet, and has completed *Certificate I in Childcare* and is studying *Certificate II* with aspirations to complete *Certificate III*. In this way she is drawing on the culture of learning modelled by her family and is providing a template for learning for the next generation. In a recent interview she told me that her son now says to her: “Oh when I grow up I’ll be doing study like you, mum” (Kral and Schwab, in preparation).

## ***Town Life***

Earlier I introduced Carmel Ryan, who was the Central Arrernte teacher at Yipirinya School for at least a decade. When accredited training was mandated, Carmel became the first qualified Arrernte teacher in Alice Springs through La Trobe University. She later worked at the Alice Springs Language Centre and taught Arrernte in primary and high school programs. At the time she said, “Being a teacher is very important to me because I want to be a positive role model and to show everyone that it is not impossible to make your dreams come true”. Carmel has since returned to Santa Teresa where she is the senior Arrernte teacher in the school.] “I love it”, she says: “teaching language is my passion.”

A younger relative of Carmel’s was born in 1985. Bright and vivacious, this girl was a regular attender at Yipirinya School and continued her schooling at the Catholic High School in Alice Springs and St John’s College in Darwin. As a young adult, unlike other friends, siblings and cousins, she has held her life together, despite adversity. Like Carmel, she carries aspirational values. She is more bilingual and literate than many of her peers, and has taken computer and hospitality courses at IAD and Batchelor Institute. Despite her best intentions, however, these initiatives have not led to employment. This young woman was reared to have expectations of a positive future. Yet she has not been able to achieve the same level of engagement and interaction with mainstream as Carmel. Despite all the



training she has done, and her oral and written English language competence, she is held back by the difficulty of town life. As she has told me in the past, there are few places in town where she can access resources to write a job application or even update a curriculum vitae. Additionally, as a young mother she is unable to access the childcare that would enable her to take up employment. The harsh reality is that there is minimal employment available for someone like her outside of Aboriginal organisations. She has tried to establish an independent home for herself and her children in a housing commission flat. This has not been successful, however, as relatives come to stay, start drinking and consume all her resources, leaving her shouldering the burden.

For others in the Eastern/Central Arrernte group life has been equally hard. Many are highly mobile, moving between Alice Springs, Santa Teresa and Amoonguna. Very few have completed high school. In fact, most have disappeared off the institutional radar. Occasionally, I encountered them around town, full of potential, but appearing directionless. Sometimes I met them in the Alice Springs Public Library, enjoying the relief of the air-conditioning, accessing computers and the internet, or finding a quiet place to read by themselves or with their young children. As these young ones grew older it was evident that many were not going to school and the library had become their learning space (Kral and Schwab 2012).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the early ethos of Yipirinya School emerged out of the ‘historically produced’ norms and practices (Holland and Lave 2009) of the mission and assimilation generations. The older generation brought with them a specific template for learning and an imbibed work ethic. Simultaneously, they had also experienced dislocation and discrimination in their encounters with the wider Anglo-Australian world. These factors drove their desire to effect change and to create a better future for successive generations enabled by the sweeping policy reforms of the self-determination era. It was hoped that the bilingual program would deliver youngsters the skills to ‘move freely with knowledge and confidence in both Aboriginal and European society’.

As I have shown, this aim has not been realised. Despite all the modelling of successful adult roles, most Yipirinya children have not been able to move freely in both Aboriginal and European society. Over recent years, national policy debate has encouraged the shift to urban centres in an attempt to have Aboriginal youth skilled and able to ‘orbit’ between two worlds (Pearson 2009), where individuals from regional locations are encouraged to move to urban centres to ‘better themselves’. What this chapter has indicated is that, for the Yipirinya cohort discussed here, schooling alone was not sufficiently robust to deliver mainstream outcomes. What the Yipirinya experience has given them is knowledge of their own culture and a strong Indigenous identity. Additionally, this cohort has an awareness of Indigenous agency and what their forebears achieved under different circumstances.

Lastly, this generation knows that education need not be oriented solely around English literacy, but language and culture are also integral to learning in the remote Indigenous context.

For the next generation, more than ever before, heritage languages such as Arrernte and Luritja are under pressure in response to the effect of globalised media on language and cultural practice. Developing strategies to ensure that endangered languages are kept alive in everyday social and cultural practice must be prioritised. Whether or not bilingual education can ‘save’ (Hornberger 2008) minority Indigenous languages is unclear. What is clear is that the infrastructure and policy support for bilingual education evident in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be replicated in the current socioeconomic or political milieu. While a return to bilingual education is not necessarily a solution, the implementation of appropriate language policy and planning to ensure the maintenance of fragile languages such as Arrernte and Luritja must be considered.

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## Chapter 23

# The Program at Wadeye, Past and Present

Deminhimpuk Francella Bunduck and Teresa Ward

The aim of this chapter is to give you our reflections on some aspects of the bilingual education program at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School at Wadeye, Port Keats, about 400 km south-west of Darwin. We are writing for a wider audience, of course, hence our decision to contribute a chapter to this book. However, we are also addressing a local audience, which is why the next part begins in Murrinhpatha, one of the language varieties spoken in our community.

### Part 1 by Deminhimpuk Francella Bunduck

Murrinh ngay-ka Deminhimpuk-wa i ngay-ka kardu Yek Neninh, kardu Murrinh Ke i kardu lalingkin. Nhini-wa yile ngay ngankungintha-yu. Ngay-ka ngamkathan Murrinhpatha ngarra Kale ngay nukun.

Ngay-ka murrinh kurl ngardirdurididha da ngarra putek kale ngay nukun. Bere ngarra murrinh kurl kanhi ngardidha-ka murrinh patha da matha wurdininngan-thethiththa wurrini ngala da matha.

Bere da numi pirridha kardu kale i yile nganki pirrimardawith ngarra murrinh kurl nanhthi wurlk ngarra nganki ngumedha ngardi pubenganmangkardudha warda pardi. Bere ngay-ka nganirilidha ngini ngarra yile ngay Palibu da mana pirret ngurru ngarra ngay-re, bamngingkardu murrinh patha nganirilidha ngini. Nukunu-ka marda le ngamnamut i murrinh mamnge ngarra Thitha Tess, “Ngay-ka le da matha ngenge wakal ngay murrinh darntilil dim mange nigunu-yu.”

Ngay-ka murrinh kurl-ka mere thangu ngatha mengkartmuttha ngarni wurda da matha. Ngay-ka le da matha kardidha murrinh kurl-yu. Bere ngarra ngungawuy mana-ka ngay-ka nganardi wurlk warda nganam ngarra murrinh kurl.

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D.F. Bunduck · T. Ward (✉)

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Da marra kanhi warda ngurran-ka kardu mamay wurnangat kanhi-nu bempir-rakarnirn ngurran ngala da matha mangini pumayitnu purru nanhthi pana ngarra panampurrkpurk nanhthi pigunu, ku ngakumar! i da ngarra pigunu nhini weyida ngay marda manganart ngurran mamay marra kanhi-nu panardurdu tithe thipmam nekingime lurruth ngala parramutnu nanhthi wurlk.

Ngay ngatha marda manganart da karrim kathu kardu mamay, kardu kigay, kardu mardinhpuy kanhi kanam-ka murrinh warda parrililnu purru mange pigunu i ngarra punguwurru murrinh kurl kathu-ka wurlk warda ngatha pubadurtnu.

My name is Deminhimpuk and I belong to the Yek Neninh clan. I speak Magati Ke and am a salt water person. That is what I am, because I received that from my father. My mother shares the Murrinhpatha language with me.

When I went to school, it was on the land of my mother. At school, we used the language of my mother, Murrinhpatha, and we were taught everything in that language. We learnt so much.

At school we would have open days when parents came to the school to see the work of their children. So one day I was writing and my father, Palibu, came into the classroom and stopped beside my desk, looking at me as I wrote in Murrinhpatha. He was so happy, I gave him so much joy, and he said to my teacher, the second author of this paper, Sister Tess, "I am so happy to see my child writing all by herself in Murrinhpatha."

I never missed school. I loved going to school, because I could understand what was going on.

When I finished my studies, having gone right through, I then found work at the school. I worked first as an assistant teacher but then went to Batchelor College and later to Charles Darwin University, and became a teacher.

Nowadays, when our children come to school, there is so much to think about, and many things we want them to hold onto. We want them to know their clan dances, to know all about their totems and their country. As an Indigenous teacher, I really want them to learn all that and become really strong.

I really want our children, our young men and girls in the future, to be able to continue to write in our language, receiving an education in our way, to help them get a job.

## **Part 2 by Teresa Ward**

### *The Past*

When I went to Wadeye in January 1978, I was asked to be the teacher-linguist, as I was told that the community wanted a bilingual program. I was also told that Murrinhpatha had been chosen because all the children spoke it, even if it was not

their first language. A bilingual program had been started, unofficially, the previous year by Pinpirrith Majella Chula and Christine Steer.

Rather than go straight into that position, I asked if I could teach for a year before taking on the teacher-linguist's responsibilities. So I became the Grade 2 teacher. In the afternoons, after school, I spent time with people like Darrnanthi Theodora Narndu, as well as Pinpirrith Majella Chula and Wulili Concepta Narjic, to prepare stories and/or worksheets, other than the ones in the primers which the SIL linguists Chester and Lyn Street had already prepared.

The Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms were in a galvanised tin building that was quite some distance from the rest of the school. Our two main resources were a well-planned primer and a writing-activity book. The blackboard was our main tool for teaching. At that time, the only duplicating instrument I had was a jelly pad on which to run off worksheets one at a time, until we were fortunate enough to be given a spirit duplicating machine. The children in Grades 1 and 2 began a vernacular literacy program that year, 1978.

In 1979 I took up the role of full-time teacher-linguist. We set up the literature production centre (LPC) in a demountable comprising three small rooms, and much of my time went into preparing resources to assist the teachers, such as hand-made flash cards, jigsaw puzzles and other resources including, of course, more books. We began making big books, which were one-off, hand-drawn and hand-printed.

There were a number of literacy workers, mostly part-time, as that is how the money was allocated. At that time we had no Literature Production Supervisor, but I worked mostly with men to begin to produce books on site. The most regular staff were Wuma Bert Munar (a writer), Dittin Aloysius Kungul (a writer and artist) and Mayirri Damien Tunmuck (an artist and also printer, when we obtained an off-set printer). There were others who were employed when we had money for extra part-time writers and artists. They included Thaddeus Apath Dartinga, Bonaventure Nininem Ngarrri, Wuminhkem Angelo Kungul, Mempi Bede Lantjin, Bararartak Bryan Murielle and Lurrinhin Francis Kolumboort. In the following years some of these staff began working on a more full-time basis as the positions became available.

A number of assistant teachers also wrote stories for use in the classroom. These writers included Ngardinithi Tobias Nganbe, who had written many of the stories for the early primers while working with Chester and Lyn Street at a Writers' Workshop, Kalwaying Cletus Dumoo, Nganpalangku Dominic Kolumboort, Mirrkun Miriam Bunduck, Nganani Tess Narndu, Walbinthith Dominica Lantjin and Kibinkirri Marie Therese Thardim. Also assisted us as part-time writers were Pinpirrith Majella Chula and Darrnanthi Theodora Narndu.

When Chester Street was at Wadeye, working for the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), he told me the following about the beginnings of the program at Port Keats (later known as Wadeye). The whole idea of Bilingual Education in the NT was new to the Education Department, he said, so a lot of information on how to run this sort of program was obtained from other countries. He recalled seeing a lot of information coming from North America, in particular, with information on bilingual education programs being used among the North American Indians and

the Eskimos. A Bilingual Education Section was set up in the N.T. Education Department and all Indigenous communities were encouraged to work towards bilingual education in their schools.

Murrinhpatha was no doubt chosen as the language for bilingual education, he said, because it was the one SIL was researching. An orthography for it had already been developed, and it was also the language spoken by all the children in the community, even those whose parents were speakers of one of the other languages. So it was probably the obvious choice, although all of us were keen to see something done for the other languages as well.

Gerry McCormack was the Principal of the OLSH School at Port Keats at the time, and he was keen to get a bilingual program started there. It was a new learning experience for all of us involved. Bill McGrath from the Education Department came to Wadeye to talk to members of the community about the idea of bilingual education. From memory there were at least 20 at that particular meeting, and the reaction of those who attended was positive.

Tobias helped the school a lot in those early days as we endeavoured to put together suitable pre-readers, primers and other reading material. He also attended a literacy course with us in Sydney for about 6 weeks, because we sought extra help in this work, and so he illustrated some early reading materials. With his help, and with the assistance of others, we put together a set of four primers, which included pre-reading material as well as supplementary readers. We were also involved in helping the Aboriginal teacher aides develop their literacy skills in Murrinhpatha, so that they in turn felt confident to teach the children.

When I arrived in January 1978, it was the first of the primers and the supplementary reader accompanying it that I used in the vernacular literacy program. I was working with Pinpirrith Majella Chula for most of that year, except for a short time when Majella was off work to have a baby; during that time I worked with Wulili Concepta Narjic. We collaborated using a team-teaching approach and, although it was not meant to be, I was actually involved with teaching literacy in Murrinhpatha. We worked in groups that rotated and did different activities: reading from the primer and using it to teach children the syllables for each unit of work, building words with the syllables they learnt, and helping the children learn to read 'sight words'. Spelling and dictation was done regularly, and children were encouraged to write and illustrate their own stories. This was a weekly activity and formed the basis of a set of small books which we later printed.

During the School's Open Day that year, parents were encouraged to visit the classrooms while lessons continued. For Deminhimpuk Francella, a student in my class at that time, it was a proud moment when her father stood behind her chair as she wrote a sentence in Murrinhpatha that I had dictated to her, and read it back to her father. He was so happy and proud. I remember him saying something like, "I am so happy to see my daughter writing in a language we can understand."

The Year 1 and 2 children were the first to be taught literacy in the vernacular language (Murrinhpatha) by assistant teachers, whereas students in all classes above them were taught in English and learned to read and write in that language too. The



non-Indigenous teacher worked with Year 1 and 2 classes in the afternoon to make worksheets and to prepare work on the blackboard.

Every Tuesday afternoon these two classes combined to have culture time. Usually the children were broken into their ceremonial groups. Elders and songmen came to sing and the children danced, with the adults instructing them or allowing the children to mimic their dance moves. On different occasions, the classes would go out on excursions for the day to explore different environments, including the mangroves, woodlands, beaches, plains, rivers and billabongs. Afterwards the class would write up and draw their experiences.

As I was not in a classroom full time, I worked with non-Indigenous teachers, helping them to understand the principles behind bilingual education and to work effectively with the teaching assistants, who were the actual teachers of Murrinhpatha literacy in the classroom. The non-Indigenous teachers were a wonderful support to the Indigenous assistant teachers, sharing good teaching strategies with them, as well as helping them to make resources for use in the teaching of the Murrinhpatha literacy.

We followed the Step Model. Children in the very early years were taught oral English every day, and an English story was read to them as part of this, but they were not expected to write any English. They wrote their own indigenous name, so that what they learnt first was the Murrinhpatha orthography. They were not introduced to writing in English until mid way through Year 4. By this time most were very fluent in reading and writing Murrinhpatha, although some more complex symbols for sounds may not yet have been mastered. As they bridged to English literacy, their Murrinhpatha continued to be developed and extended, as we had many more books printed, and they continued learning the more complex symbols in the orthography.

During these years we had wonderful support from the elders in the community. I spent time gathering information from them and this formed the basis of the Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) curriculum as well as material for other books. They also provided cultural learning to the students in the form of story telling (usually done in clan groups when creation dreaming stories were related) and bush trips to gather materials to make implements, spears, musical instruments and the like, as well as to gather and process bush foods.

I left Wadeye in 1984 but returned at the beginning of 2009 at the request of the Indigenous leaders of the school. On my return I found a different set of circumstances compared to when I had left: some negative, others positive.

One of the negatives was that Murrinhpatha literacy teaching had been pushed aside and English literacy introduced into much earlier classes, namely Year 2. The principal at the time explained to me that they were concerned, because the level of English reading in the secondary classes was extremely low—about a Year 1 or 2 level. I responded that I was not at all surprised at that, because that is what the research shows, that if the majority language is taught strongly before the child has become really literate in their own language, then the level at which this occurs is the level at which the student will function academically. So I asked that Murrinhpatha only be used for literacy until mid way through Year 4. A plan was

agreed to, whereby Year 2 children learned to read and write Murrinhpatha only and English was taught orally. The principal agreed to that, but then a change of principal at the end of that year meant that the decision was reversed yet again.

One of the positives was that despite very little or no support, the Indigenous staff had kept the language program going. Another pleasing feature was that a number of them had become trained teachers, and had asked that I return to help them make the program more vibrant and to assist them in producing more and better resources. Since then they have been working tirelessly and so there is a stronger program running now with numerous resources. During the years that I was away, some people had begun work on orthographies for the Marri languages and for Magati Ke. For example, Maree Klesch at Batchelor Institute has worked in the Wadeye community with speakers of these languages, produced some clan stories in Marri Tjevin, Marri Ngarr, Marri Amu and Magati Ke, and shared the orthography with me.

### *The Present*

Our bilingual program in the school is based on a number of principles. The first is an ethical one, based on a people's inalienable human right to use and maintain the language, heritage and culture into which they were born (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948). The second is a sociological principle: Language is a primary symbol in cultural transmission. In order for a people to transmit their culture to their children and to be able to maintain their identity, the use of their language must be allowed its rightful place. The third principle is an educational one, supported by considerable research, which states that the best medium for initially educating a child is in his or her own first language. Learning first in the vernacular allows the learner to move 'from the known to the unknown'. Most school learning is achieved through verbal means—either spoken or written—and unless children understand what they hear and read, they will learn relatively little. With regard specifically to reading, one of the fundamental assumptions in the teaching of reading is that children learn to read in the language that they speak best, so they can concentrate on decoding the written symbols associated with meanings they can readily understand. The final principle is a sociopolitical one: school and community should be indissolubly linked. A bilingual program helps a school to value a local community's knowledge and history.

The Murrinhpatha literacy program is culture rich. It builds on the children's oral proficiency in their first language, and aims to develop their skills in reading and writing, so that they can express themselves and be proud of their heritage. In using language familiar to the children, and allowing them to become literate first in the language they speak, we endeavour to ensure that their education is firmly grounded in their own language and culture, giving them a much better chance of building a bridge to English, and to Western understandings, thereby strengthening their

ability to cope with the complexities of life. It is designed to be a way of achieving the academic goals of education without destroying their right to be a people with their own unique language and way of living.

While we want our children to experience school as a place where they can build on what they already know and feel good about themselves as Indigenous children, we also aim to develop proficiency in oral English as a second language. This prepares them for the English literacy program which follows. Ideally, children would bridge to English literacy mid way through Year 4 and continue their Murrinhpatha literacy as well. This would assist them to become, eventually, bilingual, bicultural and biliterate graduates. However, because of external pressures, English literacy is now beginning in Year 3, but at least Murrinhpatha literacy instruction is continuing until Year 6. The indigenous staff want it to continue on into secondary school and this was mooted to begin in 2015, but it will be taught in the academy classes in Years 7, 8 and 9 in 2016.

### *The Future*

Now that the Australian National curriculum has endorsed Indigenous languages in the new curriculum, there is hope that our students will be able to continue to learn in and through Murrinhpatha in secondary school and to be able to take it as a subject while gaining their Year 12 qualification.

Some Indigenous teachers at our school participated in a consultation with representatives from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in Darwin. Spurred on by a sense of hope after this, they have planned what they think are appropriate learnings in culture and language for the various age groups. However, as the framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages is currently being revised, following public consultation, and it is expected to be considered by the Catholic Education Council, no definitive plan for such a language program has been put in place as yet. However, as soon as we have the framework, we hope to have materials ready.

What we are planning and making are more culture-rich resources, as well as multi-modal texts that will enhance our children's learning; for example, iBooks and other resources that make use of the newer technologies, such as smartboards, Apple TVs and iPads. As well as these newer ways to engage children, we will continue to make efforts to include the elders and relations when taking children to their country for hands-on learning about how to catch crabs, what shells to collect, where to find the various foods (some of which are season specific), how to prepare those plant foods which require preparation, and where to find the numerous scrubs, trees, etc. required for making different cultural items. We hope to continue the gatherings in ceremonial groups for weekly dancing with songmen and working in clan groups to learn and write their stories and songs.

Another development is that I have begun to make resources in some of the other languages, while working with the people in the clans that speak those language

varieties. These materials are being used as soon as I finish them, as part of the culture component, especially in the early years and primary classes at this stage, but in the future they will be part of the secondary school's offerings.

Some printed books have been produced in the Magati Ke language and a few digital books have also been prepared in that language as well, specifically dealing with totems for the two clans, namely Yek Neninh and Yek Yederr. With speakers of Marri Ngarr I have begun to work with people of three different clans to make iBooks for their clans, namely Rak Wambu, Rak Dirrangara and Ma Rak Thawurr. Other languages I am working on are Marri Amu (with speakers of that language), Marri Tjevin and Ngeng'wumirri.

The most important thing is that, whatever we do, our focus must be on the children. It is our task to provide the best opportunities for them to maintain and use their languages for learning.

# Chapter 24

## We Did It! A Case Study of Bilingual/Bicultural Education at Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School

Ailsa Purdon and Imelda Palmer

### Introduction

This chapter brings together two different experiences with bilingual and bi-cultural education over a period of more than 30 years at Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School in Santa Teresa some 80 km south east of Alice Springs. Imelda Palmer is an Arrernte woman who has worked at the school since 1970 and is currently the Assistant Principal. Ailsa Purdon is a non-Indigenous woman who arrived at Santa Teresa in 1979 as an early career teacher. While she left the school staff in 1981, she has continued to maintain a connection with Imelda and the school through her work at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary education and is an advisor in Language and Literacy with the Catholic Education Office in the Northern Territory.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the school and community at Ltyentye Apurte and the involvement of the authors in the school, followed by an outline of three major phases in the development and implementation of bilingual education at the community school. These sections, which are based on recollections of the authors and some other key staff as well as school documents, are followed by a brief discussion of some of the changes over the years, the factors that have contributed to these changes and how they relate to some of the research and literature on bilingual education.

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## ***A Brief Background to the School and Community***

The history of the people whose children attend Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School is connected closely to the Catholic Mission that was established in 1936 at Charles Creek in Alice Springs, then moved to Arltunga west of Alice Springs in 1942, and finally relocated to its current site in 1952 as the Santa Teresa Mission. The mission brought together people who spoke Central and Eastern Arrernte, many of whom had been displaced by the growth of the pastoral industry north and east of Alice Springs.

While some families have a three or four-generation history of schooling that includes attendance at the Catholic school in Alice Springs, for many, school started at Arltunga and then at Santa Teresa in mission classrooms taught by the sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH). Mrs Kathleen Kemarre Wallace describes coming into the mission as a young girl and being left there by her parents ‘to learn’ (Wallace and Lovell 2009). Many of the parents and grandparents of the children now at school went to school at Santa Teresa Mission.

Imelda herself completed all her schooling at the Santa Teresa Mission School where the only language of instruction was English. Education policy for Aboriginal students in the Territory at that time assumed a cultural deficit and the need for compensatory education, which was seen as a program “of rapid change from one culture to another” (Gallacher 1969, p. 100).

Ailsa Purdon arrived at Santa Teresa as a young teacher in 1979. She had previously worked in a remote community state school in Cape York but was still quite inexperienced as a teacher and with no experience and knowledge of Arrernte language and culture. Imelda Palmer, on the other hand, was an experienced Assistant Teacher (AT) who had completed a short course run by the NT Department of Education at Kormilda College in 1972 and was undertaking a leadership role in the school.

## **Changes to Curriculum Policy for Indigenous Students— The Introduction of Bilingual Education**

The community leaders at Ltyentye Apurte, did not immediately take up the option of applying to set up a bilingual school, when that avenue became possible in the early 1970s. During an initial meeting with the Department of Education representatives, community leaders declined the invitation to begin a bilingual program, apparently because of concerns that it was not the role of white people to organise an Arrernte language course in the school. Language was community business and the job of the school and its teachers was to teach Maths and English and the knowledge identified as ‘western’ knowledge (Reynolds, personal communication, June 5, 2014).

A number of people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were disappointed by this decision, because there was interest in using the Arrernte language for instructional purposes in the school. What was perhaps most significant about the comments made by the community leaders was that the school was seen as the domain of white people, of English language and of Western knowledge. As it happened though, Imelda and the Assistant Teachers were already using Arrernte as a medium of instructional support for the students' learning across all areas 'to get the meaning across' at strategic points in the teaching-learning cycle.

The situation changed fairly rapidly, however, and by the time Ailsa arrived in 1979 the school had an official bilingual program in preparation. A non-Arrernte linguist was working with a number of Arrernte literacy workers to collect, transcribe and write stories in Arrernte as well as to translate scriptures (Reynolds 1994). This language work was supported by the Institute of Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs, a government-funded, independent organisation that undertook research in Arrernte language and culture as well as a number of other languages in Central Australia.

Decisions about the orthography for Eastern Arrernte were still being finalised as the literacy workers began to develop and produce written materials for teaching literacy in Eastern Arrernte. Unlike the step model used in government schools, literacy was taught in the secondary years after students had learnt to read and write in English. For that purpose one period of about 90 minutes was set aside each week for the teaching of Arrernte and taught by Imelda.

Ailsa taught two full classes of Years 1 and 2 as a member of a teaching team together with two Arrernte Assistant Teachers. As the qualified teacher in the team, it was Ailsa's role to plan for all subjects and to teach English. She was an early career teacher and really knew very little, whereas the Arrernte teachers were untrained, but knew a lot about the students, their understandings about the world, their experience of learning and the language they spoke. One of the most fundamental requirements when facilitating learning is that students understand what the teacher is saying. This understanding also includes recognising and building on underpinning conceptual understandings and prior knowledge (Cummins 2000; Hattie and Yates 2014).

Although a Catholic School, Ltyentye Apurte received professional and curriculum advice from the NT Education Department, including from their bilingual program advisors. It was suggested to Ailsa by one government advisor that she plan to teach a lesson in one language and then to repeat it in the other. The choice of language used in the first lesson would depend on the topic, knowledge and the skills of the teachers. So some topics would be introduced in English and then developed further in Arrernte, while others would be introduced in Arrernte and later developed in English. There were some topics and lessons in Arrernte that were never repeated in English; for example, those dealing with traditional ideas and artefacts, which might involve more obscure vocabulary, which the children no longer learned as a part of everyday life.

Teaching and learning activities for each topic were defined into lessons that were planned in terms of a specific teaching focus, the choice of language and how it would be used to develop further understandings, skills and knowledge. The aim was to ensure that learning in one language was supported by learning in the other; for example, by drawing on the children's experience and understandings developed in their first language and applying them to a second.

As the children's knowledge and ability in English improved, there was no reason why a topic could not be introduced in English and the ideas transferred across to the first language and in this way developing conceptual knowledge, as well as metacognitive and metalinguistic knowledge in both languages. Diagrammatically, the model looked like this (Purdon 1986, 2010) Fig. 24.1.

This model was actually an additive, rather than a transitional one for using both languages, and it supported learning across all areas of the curriculum as well. Researchers have shown that an additive bilingual model which is maintained throughout the whole of a student's school life is more likely to produce better educational outcomes than a transitional model (Ramirez 1991). This model moves beyond monolingual instructional conventions and recognises what Cummins (2008) has described as the 'reality' of interdependence across languages. Children learn ideas in one language and, as they engage with the world and seek to communicate in a second language, they activate their knowledge by asking how to express these ideas in a second language. Studies of children growing up in multilingual contexts (Baker 2011; Francis 2012) also demonstrate that children compare and contrast the way ideas are articulated in different languages and they use this as a strategy for identifying and separating languages.

Planning to teach in this way included the need to plan for the human resources required for delivery. As Ailsa was not bilingual, and her Arrernte colleagues at that stage were not trained teachers, a truly bilingual approach such as the one described above was dependent upon the development of effective team teaching.

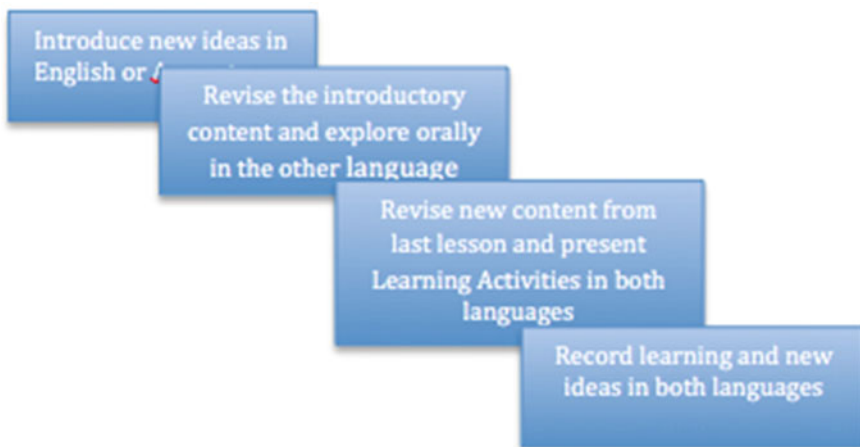


Fig. 24.1 Developing children's knowledge using two languages at Ltyentye Apurte



## Developing a Bilingual Teaching Team

Ailsa saw her role as bringing specialist knowledge, which was valued by the parents and needed by the children as they made their way in a changing world, and teaching it in the school context. It included knowledge of the English language, an understanding of texts, and how the discourses underpinning them worked in a wider social and political context.

However, she still had a lot to learn, not just inside the classroom but outside it as well. She realised that there were existing intellectual traditions, curricula and pedagogies and that to establish a pedagogic relationship with the children, she would need to be accepted, not just as a friend who provided fun experiences, but as Vygotsky's 'knowing other' (Vygotsky 1979). Weekends were spent going out hunting, always with numbers of children. It was a reciprocal relationship—while Ailsa often provided the vehicle and a driver, the assistant teacher and her family provided the entry into a whole other world. They put up with this young thing constantly asking questions outside the classroom—'Jinglers, Ailsa. Do you have to know everything?' (Purdon 2010, p. 39)

Inside the classroom, in the home corner, the assistant teacher would ask if Ailsa wanted to know what the children were talking about, and she would describe how the children were talking about their relationships to each other. In this way, Ailsa came to know the full scope of the learning that was occurring in the classroom. For example, on one occasion, the children were exchanging clothes as they were playing dress-ups and explaining why there should give each other clothes: "because I'm your sister". As a class, we went on short bush walks at least once a week, and the assistant teacher would call out in Arrernte, "Children, where are we? We are lost!" The children would look up, and orient themselves, saying, "No, it's that way." Techniques such as these brought the traditional pedagogies of the home into the classroom (Etherington 2006) and allowed the children to practise and rehearse skills needed to live as Arrernte. Ailsa was also learning about their world, an essential requirement for her as a teacher if she was to be able to recognise and activate the existing and prior knowledge of students, and in particular their schemata, so important for effective teaching and learning (Hattie and Yates 2014).

As we explored ways to support children's learning in the classroom, moving from the known to the unknown, we had to explore other possibilities, especially new ways of doing things and using knowledge. It was recognised that we were introducing new ways of organising and working with knowledge that might then be applied to existing and continuing activities. On one occasion, for example, when Ailsa proposed that the class would go collecting *yelke* ("bush onions") to use for counting, the assistant teacher was sceptical. She thought the children would find this strange as *yelke* were for eating, not for counting. To her amazement, the children started counting their *yelke* as soon as they started to gather them, transferring new conceptual knowledge and processes to familiar actions and events. We also ate the *yelke*.

Not only were the children beginning to extend their ways of thinking about and engaging with the world, but Ailsa was developing what Etherington (2006)

defined as a ‘pedagogic relationship’, not just with her students, but also with her Arrernte colleagues, as someone recognised as having some knowledge and standing within the adult community. Together with another younger assistant teacher, the children in these classes were introduced to new ideas in both English and Arrernte. These explorations formed the basis of the development of written English texts taught primarily by Ailsa. These group-constructed texts, which recorded shared experiences, supplemented, but did not replace, an English language reading program, *Tracks*, that had been developed and recommended for use in other NT Aboriginal schools using English immersion models of education. This program included materials that supported the learning basic English vocabulary, grammar and the sound system of English, using sentence readers and a series of structured story readers based on the vocabulary and sentences previously introduced. We also enjoyed sharing English language picture books, songs, rhymes and simple English caption books. At this stage there was not a significant body of Arrernte written texts available, nor were the Arrernte assistant teachers able to read and write the language.

By using Arrernte to support the development of key skills in English it could be argued that we were supporting a subtractive approach to bilingualism in Arrernte and English. However, if this approach was continued throughout their schooling along with the Arrernte literacy program, it would have allowed the learners to transfer their English literacy skills across to Arrernte in the later years. This was a structured approach to using both languages and was not just the translation of English instructions into Arrernte, but an attempt to develop children’s learning in their first language. One teacher, who remained after Ailsa left (Br. Kevin Hore, personal communication, June 2014), suggested that much of this work was not continued, in part because a new principal “came and threw it out because this was not how it was done when she was there before”. While there may have been justifiable reasons for returning to previous, more monolingual teaching models, this may have had more to do with the capacity of the non-Arrernte teachers to take on a different instructional method and curriculum, than an inherent weakness in the bilingual model that had been operating at the school.

Also, the relationships within the school, and between the school and community, were to become more complex and dynamic as a group of Arrernte people, mainly women, began to train and develop as qualified teachers.

## **Arrernte Teacher Training and the Intelyape-Lyape Curriculum**

In 1979 the first year of an Associate Diploma in Teaching (Aboriginal Schools), accredited by Batchelor College, was offered on-site at the school. This could be completed by a group of assistant teachers over two years. Any further training had to be completed on campus in Batchelor. Both of the assistant teachers who worked

with Ailsa went on to enrol in Batchelor College. However, only one was able to continue, while Imelda and a number of other Arrernte staff went on to complete the equivalent of three years training through Batchelor's Remote Area Teacher Education Program. Many of this group continue to work in the school as either assistant teacher or teachers.

The Remote Area Teacher Education program, which expanded in the 1980s and 1990s, provided formally accredited teaching qualifications through a transformational, both-ways approach, which challenged the student teachers to see themselves as Arrernte teachers for Arrernte children, rather than as Arrernte who were taking the place of non-Arrernte teachers. They began to work towards the notion that it was important that their children be "taught our way, the proper way through a balanced bilingual and bicultural curriculum" (*Teaching our Way* 1991).

There was a great deal of social, cultural and material change in the community in a single decade, the 1980s. Community members were becoming concerned that videos, TV, cassettes, and the dance hall had taken over family contact (Lena Cavenagh, n.d in *Nganaapa Anwerekenhe*) and that children had a tendency to use English words even when there were Arrernte words available. These issues had also been identified in a community research project undertaken by one of the Arrernte Teacher Education students, Jane Davis, as part of her Batchelor studies.

One response to this was that Imelda and her Arrernte colleagues—teachers in training and early career teachers from Ltyentye Apurte and Alice Springs with support from Batchelor College, IAD and funding from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation—began to develop what they described as a more 'balanced' curriculum (*Intelyape-lyape Akaltye*, n.d, p. 2). The *Intelyape-lyape* Project drew on the traditional texts and metaphors of the country around Alice Springs. According to these texts, the *yipirinyi* caterpillars fought together and came to Emily Gap, a site along what English speakers called the McDonnell Ranges. The caterpillars still come; generation after generation, and turn into butterflies, the *intelyapeteleyape-lyape* (Rosalie Riley, *Intelyape-lyape Akaltye*, n.d p. 2). Drawing on this metaphor the teachers felt that if the next generation learnt through the Arrernte curriculum, "they will come out of their cocoons, strong and beautiful and able to read their full potential in the Arrernte way and the whiteman's way. There would be no more Terra Nullius" (Rosalie Riley, *Intelyape-lyape Akaltye*, n.d p. 2).

Their project Aimed to:

- Investigate with Arrernte communities and schools, the social and education needs and difficulties of young Arrernte children.
- Develop with Arrernte communities and schools, a socially and culturally appropriate curriculum for young Arrernte children.
- Develop with Arrernte communities and schools, appropriate materials for young Arrernte children
- Provide a model for developing Aboriginal curriculum that can be used by other schools and communities (*Intelyape-lyape Akaltye*, n.d, p. 3).

To do this they were aware that the school had to be part of the community. And in keeping with the thinking of the elders of Santa Teresa that Arrernte language should be their responsibility, not that of white people, the Project Management committee was all Arrernte. It was, however, a big job and there were non-Aboriginal people who provided key support to the project. Imelda recalls that non-Arrernte staff provided the administrative and managerial support in handling the project funds to meet audit requirements as well as invaluable support with the interpretation of formal school curriculum frameworks and how these might link to the Arrernte context.

The curriculum was based in Arrernte knowledge and pedagogy, and comprised two strands: *Anwerne-kenhe areye akerte* ('family') and *Tyerrtye mwerre akerte* ('health'). Central to both strands was *Apmere* ('country'), as country visits with elders were identified as essential to the Arrernte way of teaching. This curriculum was supplementary to much of the content of the NT Education Department curriculum documents and was designed to be taught in conjunction with it.

As such, *Intelyape-lyape Akaltye* was more than what Ailsa had been doing in her classroom, using Arrernte as a medium of instruction for teaching the Department of Education curriculum, and went beyond what Imelda had been doing when she was teaching Arrernte literacy to the older students. It was in effect an attempt to develop an Arrernte school which recognised that "western education is the key to the outside world", but also acted in an integrated way to bridge "cultural gaps" (Blitner, Dobson, Gibson, Martin, Oldfield, Oliver, Palmer, & Riley 2000, p. 16).

Anna Cavenagh, who studied with this group, graduated as a teacher, and now works as an assistant teacher, recalls this period as the "best time....a lot of work went into it but all the RATE students were working together and with the old people" (personal communication, July 30, 2014).

## **Introduction of a Model 1 Bilingual Program at Ltyentye Apurte School**

According to Reynolds (1994), Davis' community research report had also acted as an impetus for the school to apply to become a formally accredited Model 1 Bilingual school in 1989, a status which was achieved at the end of 1990. In this model, the one adopted by most NT government schools, the majority of the curriculum until Year 3, including initial literacy, was taught in the student's first language, in decreasing proportions, until Year 4, when the majority of instruction was in English. By this time most classroom teachers at the school were Arrernte. The early years classes were taught through the medium of Arrernte, with English lessons taught by a specialist English teacher. Arrernte language instruction was continued into the primary and early secondary years. The primary classes at Year 4 and beyond had four Arrernte sessions: two focussed on Arrernte language, one on social and cultural education, and one on religious education.

Writing about the program in 1994, Reynolds reports that the Arrernte teachers were concerned about their ability to teach in English, so that the idea of a bilingual teacher was not yet a reality. According to Reynolds, the Arrernte literacy skills of all but a few of the Arrernte teachers were limited, so that the teaching of Arrernte, especially in the primary years, was mainly oral, and based around engagement with prepared Arrernte texts until the literacy skills of the Arrernte teachers could be improved (Reynolds 1994).

The English language program was based around *Walking Talking Texts*, an oral language and literacy teaching approach, with the Arrernte teachers supported by an ESL teacher. This program had been developed by Fran Murray after teaching English in similar bilingual contexts (see Chap. 10, this volume).

Imelda recalls the English and the Arrernte teachers working as teaching teams, planning together and continuing their own education in the knowledge and understandings of curriculum from different perspectives, teaching and learning from both the Arrernte and the government perspectives. Arrernte assistant teachers also continued to support the English teacher by interpreting and translating in Arrernte to ensure that the children understood key ideas and concepts as a basis for deep learning. A much more complex model of curriculum, and of teaching and learning, evolved—one that went beyond just the use of the first language to support the teaching of the received government curriculum that Ailsa had been engaged in. However, there were still some continuities.

In the Model I program at Ltyentye Apurte, the same topics were taught in both English and in Arrernte. Ideas were brainstormed by both the Arrernte and English teachers to see what could be introduced in each language, and how ideas could be transferred between the two. Imelda feels that this approach worked well because of team work and team planning. Arrernte teachers met once a week to plan the Arrernte lessons for the week and teaching teams also met with the Curriculum Coordinator to discuss what had been taught and to set goals and foci for the next week based on embedded assessment (Lyentye Apurte Languages Policy 2003).

At some planning meetings and ‘learning together’ sessions the Arrernte staff were the teachers and at others the non-Arrernte staff took charge. These learning together sessions provided some of the learning that has now been identified in the professional standards for Australian teachers for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students ([www.aitsl.gov.au](http://www.aitsl.gov.au)). Arrernte staff were given the opportunity to continue to develop their Arrernte literacy skills within these learning together sessions.

The development of the NT Indigenous Language and Culture curriculum provided a framework in which the *Intelyape-lyape* curriculum could be implemented. However, it is the teaching and learning programs that form the actual curriculum experienced by students in any school. By adopting a model in which the same learning outcomes were addressed in both languages, the school provided opportunities for using both languages to support learning in line with the interdependence hypothesis (Cummins 2008).

However, there were a number of cracks forming, not so much in the model itself, but in its resourcing and implementation. Some of these related to the

capacity of the Arrernte teachers to sustain the program. They had initially graduated with a restricted qualification to teach in Aboriginal schools in the NT only. Reynolds' comments in 1994 about the capacity of the Arrernte teachers in English language and literacy suggest that a sustainable approach to implementing the NT curriculum still required bilingual teaching teams. Her description of the Arrernte language programs, the materials available and the literacy capacities of many of the Arrernte teachers, suggest that using Arrernte as the primary medium of literacy acquisition may also have been problematic.

As requirements for teacher registration and upgraded qualifications were legislated across the NT, many of the Arrernte teachers found that they could not sustain the demands of maintaining their teacher registration. As higher standards of teacher qualification were set, from associate diploma to diploma and then to degree, the support that had previously been available for community-based training also declined.

A critical threat to the development and maintenance of a team approach was, and is, the arrival of non-Arrernte staff who are not trained to teach a bilingual/bicultural curriculum and who often introduce new ideas that Imelda has described as 'sweeping away' the existing ideas and practices. Gradually, the planning process broke down, and learning together sessions stopped, as Arrernte staff ceased to attending them. The reasons for this are not really known, but they could relate to the comments made by both Imelda and Anna Cavenagh, that the support was no longer there from the community.

Imelda and some of the Arrernte teachers began to feel that Language (Arrernte) and English were clashing and they sought to separate out Arrernte Language and Culture, and Spirituality, as distinct learning areas under the management and leadership of Imelda as the Deputy Principal.

## **Another Model**

So in 2004 another model of language and culture education had been introduced at Lyentye Apurte. In this model the national/English curriculum was still taught as it was when Ailsa first came to the school, mostly by non-Arrernte class teachers with the support of Arrernte assistant teachers. The remaining trained Arrernte teachers taught language, culture and spirituality in the pre-school, through the medium of Arrernte. There were separate classrooms for each of these learning areas and Imelda saw this approach as providing a strong Arrernte environment where children could come to understand what they have to do and learn to be strong Arrernte people in the 21st century.

## The Current Situation

At the time of writing, this Arrernte curriculum ran parallel to the main classroom one. There was one lesson a week in Arrernte Culture in the home classroom taught by the class teacher and assistant teacher. This was planned so that the non-Arrernte teacher might also be a learner of Arrernte culture. Although each element of the program was connected to the formal government curriculum through the Indigenous Languages and Culture component of the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework, the intent of the Arrernte program, in both its curriculum content and pedagogy, was to support Arrernte identity.

This latest model seems to be an attempt to articulate what Bourdieu (1977) might have called an Arrernte habitus in the school, as a basis for on-going reflection and activation of the continuing knowledge and schemata which act to shape the way that children engage with the knowledge, narratives and ways of talking and doing and relating to people, things and ideas beyond their families and communities. One of the roles of the school in Ltyentye Apurte, and in other contexts with similar histories, is to ensure that students have access to the full range of tools for accessing the resources available to them to live their lives in the current conditions. The Arrernte teachers are aware that this means accessing and using new technologies, knowledges and skills to create cultural artifacts with this new generation of children. While western education might be the key to the outside world, Imelda and other Arrernte educators see themselves as bridging cultural gaps in the creation of an integrated education system for their children.

Ltyentye Apurte no longer identifies itself as a bilingual school within the framework of Catholic Education NT policies (Catholic Education NT, 2012). While Imelda still believes that teaching the same topics in both languages is the most effective model and has continued to support non-Arrernte teachers who request this kind of support, the actual delivery of the Arrernte language curriculum currently reflects a monolingual teaching model.

There is little available data measuring academic achievement from any of these periods. Data from the national standardised NAPLAN tests that measure the achievement of students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in English language and literacy and numeracy show that children at Year 3 at Ltyentye Apurte, while not at national benchmarks, achieve towards the top of the range of results for similar schools. Using NAPLAN data to actually measure or evaluate results of a program over time is inherently dangerous, as the data is a snapshot of performance on one set of tasks on one day. While the data over the last decade shows growth from year to year, this growth is not consistent across cohorts. Without any clear control of variables we cannot draw any conclusions about cause and effect.

There is almost no longitudinal data to indicate how successful education generally, or bilingual education specifically, has been in terms of enriching the lives of the people of Ltyentye Apurte. While the vocational importance of Arrernte for working within the community in various roles—in the school, in the Centrelink office, with the police—has been identified (Arrernte Curriculum Document, 2013),

these seem to be restricted to the points of engagement between the Arrernte people of Ltyentye Apurte and western structures and services within the community, not in terms of how Arrernte people might integrate into an Australian community beyond Ltyentye Apurte. The general indicators of disadvantage of Indigenous Australians, measured against Australian norms, suggest that while there has been some improvement in educational attainment in urban and regional centres, this is not the case in remote areas such as Ltyentye Apurte, and that any such achievements may take many years to show results in terms of changing fundamental measures such as life expectancy. In the meantime chronic health issues, mental health problems and increasing levels of incarceration suggest that the Indigenous population remains disadvantaged in relation to the Australian population generally, a situation that is not yet being ameliorated by education, especially in remote sites in the NT (*Closing the Gap*, 2013; *Close the Gap*, 2014, 2015).

However, early data collection in research in child language acquisition in Arrernte at Ltyentye Apurte indicates that the children are maintaining Arrernte as their primary language with little evidence of the changes or shifts seen in other communities (Poetsch, personal communication, January 6, 2015). Imelda recalls a time when school children were using baby language, whereas now they are able to ‘talk like adults’, telling quite long and complex stories. These results also seem to address the concerns that were identified by the community in the early 1990s.

Although considerable research has identified the importance of oral story telling as a foundation of literacy and for school learning in English (Heath 1983; Wells 1986), Harper and Purdon (2013) remind us that there has been little research into the key linguistic features associated with written story genres in Aboriginal languages, how these link to the linguistic features of the rich oral texts and interactions in Aboriginal communities, and how both might support children’s language development in a school context.

Given Reynolds’ comments about the resources available to teach literacy in Arrernte, including the capacity of the teachers, the Model I bilingual program, delivered when there was a high proportion of qualified Arrernte staff was, in fact, the most problematic of the three models used at Ltyentye Apurte (Reynolds, 1994). This is not to suggest that bilingual education per se has not been successful, but that there have been a number of models at different times that have been used more or less effectively. What seems to be the issue is the need for bilingual, bicultural teaching teams to ensure the maintenance of teaching models that engage with their Arrernte pupils and the knowledge they bring to the learning process.

There was initially a tension around the cultural nature and ownership of the school and the school curriculum, and the school as a domain for non-Arrernte, more mainstream, ‘white-fella’ knowledge only. For Imelda and her Arrernte colleagues, however, the school is a site for a more integrated model of education, embedded in an Arrernte habitus. The teaching model that Ailsa and her colleagues had used effectively still has a place within a more integrated model of Arrernte education. However, given the importance of the contribution of the elders identified by Imelda and others, the issues seem to be much broader than the debate



around bilingual or non-bilingual education and the use of first languages to teach standard curriculum in schools or teaching methodologies. While the Arrernte teachers have ideas and some opportunities for upgrading their teaching, without group support from other staff and the old people, it appears to be difficult to act. Imelda agrees with Anna Cavenagh, that the ‘early years’ were best for Arrernte leadership, with more family support: “family encouraging and supporting you”.

## Conclusion

For those of us who have been part of this journey for many years, and who ‘did it’, it is difficult to understand how bilingual/bicultural education has come to be seen as so controversial and so difficult. It is congruent with the fundamental understandings of how children learn and how teachers should teach, by engaging with prior knowledge and ways of organising the world (Hattie and Yates 2014). What the Ltyentye Apurte experience suggests is that working together in teaching teams is one way of bridging this gap, however these teams are difficult to sustain due to the high turnover of non-Arrernte staff and the need to almost continuously construct and reconstruct new sets of relationships within the school and between the school and community, so that people can ‘work together’. The history of bilingual education at Ltyentye Apurte also reminds us how important it is that collaborative relationships with organisations outside the school and community, including those that deliver teacher education and do research in Aboriginal languages as well as other schools, are maintained.

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## Chapter 25

# Forty Years on: Seeking a Way for the Future—*Dhawal'yurr Yuwalkku Dhukarr*. Reflections on Bilingual Education at Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku

Noela Hall

### Introduction

This is a personal perspective on the exciting beginnings of bilingual education at Shepherdson College compared to the situation today, 40 years on, where under the current NT Department of Education regime one only occasionally sees glimpses of the vision and potential that were the strong motivating inspiration of those early years. I taught at Shepherdson College for 11 years between 1972 and 1985, and I remember the 1970s and early 1980s as a time of excitement and enthusiasm. As a school staff, both Yolŋu ('Aboriginal') and Balanda ('non-Indigenous') teachers were committed to working together for something that was not only educationally sensible and sound, but also just and right—that every child should have the opportunity to learn in their own language. This meant not only the development of a new curriculum for the students, but a complete change of dynamics in the way Yolŋu and Balanda school staff learned to work together to deliver the school program the community desired.

Throughout the last 40 years Yolŋu have said consistently that they want their children to learn *both ways*, Yolŋu and Balanda. Today the idea of Yolŋu and Balanda staff sharing knowledge about their languages and cultures, learning with and from one another, and working together to deliver a curriculum that enables both ways learning seems to have slipped off the agenda. Though current government and departmental policy is allegedly supportive of bilingual education, at

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the school level the implementation of these policies is very weak and short-sighted, and Shepherdson College, one of the few remaining NT ‘bilingual’ schools, has since 2009 been left very much to its own devices with little support and guidance from the NT Department of Education.

### *Historical Context*

Shepherdson College is located in the community of Galiwin’ku on Elcho Island, 550 km north east of Darwin. The community was established in 1942 during World War II by a Methodist Overseas Missions (MOM) missionary, Rev Harold Shepherdson, and his wife Ella. The school’s origins go back to 1943 when Ella Shepherdson, with the assistance of the late Mr David Burrumarra MBE, conducted the first classes for about 20 children under a *narrapi* (‘bush apple’) tree near where the Marthakal workshop is now. Class was held for only a couple of hours each day and the children sat on a log and had a plank for a desk.

In 1953 a qualified teacher, Dorothy Yates, was recruited and by 1956 she was teaching 100 children in the old sawmill, which had been converted into a school with two classrooms and a store room in the middle (later the Adult Education Centre, but currently the Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre office block).

In 1970 new school buildings (all of which are still in use today) were completed, and the school was officially named Shepherdson College in honour of Rev



**Fig. 25.1** Elcho Island School staff about 1963, including our first Yolju teachers: back L-R Don Williams, Leku, Baḏaltja, Helen Western, front L-R Guywaḋa, Dhaykamalu, Bev Tilse, Nḏandama, Guyumul

and Mrs Shepherdson, fondly remembered as *Bäpa* ('Father') and *Nändi* ('Mother') Sheppie. During these early years the school was staffed by mostly Australian-qualified missionary teachers and 'untrained' Yolŋu teaching assistants including Burrumarra, Djumangay, Leku, Guywaŋa, Dhaykamalu, Nändama, Guyumul and Marrŋanyin'. In 1968 Guywaŋa, Dhaykamalu and Marrŋanyin' completed the government's 12-month teaching assistant training program in Darwin (Fig. 25.1).

Though the principal language of instruction was English, students' home languages were highly valued and so Yolŋu students and staff freely and profitably used their own languages as long as English was not required.

In the early 1960s Beulah Lowe, the mission linguist at Milingimbi, developed the orthography for Gupapuyŋu and this is now the standard writing system for all Yolŋu languages throughout north east Arnhem Land. Beulah also developed courses in Gupapuyŋu Conversation and Grammar, and all mission teachers throughout the district were required to spend time on language learning. The first challenge for new Balanda teachers was pronunciation, as they needed to be able to pronounce the names of their students as they called the roll.

## *Starting Out*

The 1970s brought lots of changes to the remote mission settlement on Elcho Island. The 1972 Labor Government of Gough Whitlam adopted self-determination as the official government policy in Indigenous affairs and pledged to address the issue of Aboriginal Land Rights. Among many other changes it dropped the Training Allowance Scheme and on December 1 1973 it introduced award wages for Aborigines on settlements and missions. These days are now seen by Yolŋu as the time of the government takeover.

Shepherdson College, as an integral part of the Elcho Island mission settlement, had been governed by the mission superintendent and the Village Council consisting of mostly *mala* ('clan') leaders—the respected elders of the various Yolŋu clans living on Elcho Island. Hearing news in late 1972 that every child in Australia would have the opportunity to learn in their own language was very exciting, but also intriguing—Did we have the resources to make this wonderful thing happen? Then once they heard that the Federal Government was preparing to introduce bilingual education programs at Milingimbi and Yirrkala schools in 1973, the Elcho Island school and community became very vocal about their desire to not be forgotten and to have Yolŋu Matha taught at Shepherdson College as well.

As the mission had always encouraged the use of Yolŋu Matha in the school and had employed Yolŋu Teaching Assistants, the preschool was considered to already be running a bilingual program and this program continued without dramatic changes. The Yolŋu teaching assistants were Rranu, Garmburr and Garrutju and

Pam Stephenson had responsibility for coordinating the whole program and teaching Oral English.

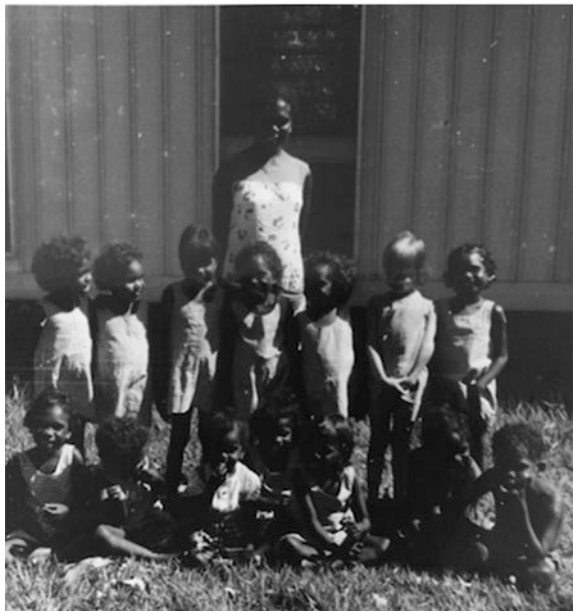
The goal of the new bilingual program introduced into the two First Year Infants classes in 1974 was the teaching of reading and writing in Yolŋu Matha and instruction in Oral English for the first two years of schooling so that, after a short bridging period, children would be reading and writing fluently in English. Guywaŋa and Guthadjaka were the teachers in charge of the two First Year Infants classes and I had responsibility for oversight of the daily preparation and planning and the teaching of Oral English. Guywaŋa at this time was a two-year-trained Commonwealth Teaching Service (CTS) officer and Gutha had completed the government's Assistant Teacher training (Fig. 25.2).

Mission adult education staff taught Yolŋu Matha literacy to each of the nine post-primary classes for one hour each week. The boys' classes were taught by John Rudder, Djumaŋgay and Badikupa while the girls were taught by Dianne Buchanan, Wanyuli, and Banbinawuy. Though Gupapuyŋu was the basic language of instruction, other language varieties such as Djambarrpuyŋu and Gälpu were also used and students were actively encouraged to write in their 'very own' languages. The Yolŋu staff, supported by the Balanda staff, handled most of the instruction. The learning materials used in the First Year infants classes, and also for the older students, were Gudschinsky method primers produced for Milingimbi's Gupapuyŋu program.

Despite the immense task of developing learning materials and a literacy program for a language about which most Balanda teachers knew very little, this was a time of vision and possibility. Though Shepherdson College was still a mission school, the NT Department of Education was very supportive. Expertise was shared through Departmental officers visiting and organising workshops and the Department paid for mission staff to gain qualifications in language and linguistics through attending Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) courses. At the same time mission staff were very involved in supporting the fledgling bilingual programs. From 1974 on until the early 1990s Beulah Lowe and other mission linguists and adult educators were involved in supporting school staff in the development of the programs at Milingimbi and Yirrkala, as well as at Galiwinku, using Gupapuyŋu, Gumatj and Djambarrpuyŋu respectively (Fig. 25.3).

By the early 1970s, some Yolŋu adults at Galiwin'ku who had become literate in English were reading Yolŋu Matha, either Gupapuyŋu or Gumatj, through their involvement in bible translation and church activities. In 1974 when adult education and linguistic work started at Galiwin'ku in Djambarrpuyŋu, adults who had had little schooling speedily learned to read in their first language. From then on, skills in reading and writing Djambarrpuyŋu became very important, as Yolŋu were needed to develop the school's bilingual program. Yolŋu literate in both English and Yolŋu Matha were needed in the classroom, and there was also a need for people who could assist in developing teaching materials and writing stories for the children to read.

**Fig. 25.2** Two 1974 classes photographed outside their classroom



Marrjanyin' was one of these skilled Yolju teachers who worked so faithfully in the beginning years of the bilingual program and then went on to be a mentor for younger Yolju teachers. As well as being able to write engaging stories, she had an eye for detail and was always very particular that words should be spelled correctly.



**Fig. 25.3** Badaltja working with Djunundjunuṅ in the Adult Education Centre (formerly the old school and now the Marthakal general offices)

In the later years of her life when she had to live in Darwin (because she was having daily dialysis) she was a major contributor to the development and teaching of the Charles Darwin University Graduate Certificate in Yolngu Studies course. In 2005, that course won the Prime Minister's prize for the best tertiary teaching program in Australia.

In 1975 David Hassall, a former CMS missionary principal, was seconded from Maningrida school to take over the position of principal at Shepherdson College. His task was to prepare the school to be handed over to the government, as the mission had decided that it was no longer able to staff the school. At the beginning of the 1976 school year the school was officially taken over by the Northern Territory Education Department, no longer mission staffed or controlled.

The following year Terry Parry was appointed as Principal. Terry had been a Departmental Education Advisor and a resource person for the original Bilingual Education Consultative Committee. He had a very good understanding of the aims of bilingual education and what the ongoing implementation of the program would involve. He saw how important it was for the school to follow the mission's lead in working firstly with the adults in the community so as to not undermine their traditional authority. Under his direction, staff developed a new bilingual curriculum for the children, and a strong emphasis was placed on the development of team teaching, and professional development for Yolngu staff and adult education.



## Language of Instruction

As Gupapuyŋu curriculum materials were already being prepared for the Milingimbi bilingual program, Gupapuyŋu was also chosen for the one at Galiwin'ku. Though Djambarrpuyŋu was the language most widely spoken by the children there, little linguistic work had been done in it at that time. Gupapuyŋu is closely related to Djambarrpuyŋu and was already being learned by mission staff. The community decided that Gupapuyŋu was their best option if they were to start their bilingual program immediately. This was not a comfortable decision for many staff, both Yolŋu and Balanda, who saw the immense potential of children being able to learn to read in a language that was their 'very own'.

The situation was somewhat resolved in 1977. After considerable input from Yolŋu staff, a survey of the children's language, and considerable community consultation, Djambarrpuyŋu was officially introduced and gradually replaced Gupapuyŋu as the language of beginning literacy instruction. Those students who had commenced in Gupapuyŋu were allowed to continue with it, and by 1981 the bilingual program encompassed the whole of the primary section of the school.

Gälpu, another Yolŋu clan language, had been studied and described by Ray Wood, an SIL linguist, in the early seventies. The Gälpu clan tended to be more independent, and had a strong clan consciousness. Children from this clan sometimes found it difficult to mix comfortably with other students, so school staff and clan elders arranged a special class for Gälpu-speaking children. A literate clan member was chosen to be the teaching assistant and for several years from 1977 on, a separate multigrade Year 1–7 class catered for these students. As there was no Gälpu literature available, an informal bilingual program using the 'breakthrough to literacy' approach was developed. The class varied in size from 15 to 20 over the years, but the positive benefits of increased school attendance and engagement, and the ability of the students to transfer easily to the post-primary school when they were old enough demonstrated its worth.

Interestingly, as of 2015, Gälpu children are the only ones who still speak their own clan language, whereas the children of all other clans use Djambarrpuyŋu as their primary language.

## Teaching English as a Second Language

Right from the beginning of our bilingual program, teaching in teams was a necessity. Initially, teams of one Balanda and two Yolŋu planned and prepared together. The Yolŋu teachers were responsible for the delivery of Yolŋu Matha lessons, while the Balanda teachers were responsible for the delivery of English. In 1979 the teams became larger. Balanda teachers working together in twos or threes to plan, prepare and deliver Oral English activities gave students opportunity to see natural, lively English language interaction modelled by two native speakers.

After struggling on one's own to plan meaningful situations which gave students opportunity to practise English, Balanda teachers found this approach very refreshing and became very enthusiastic about it. Units, based on a traditional story or children's interest in a particular theme, were developed to focus on the prescribed English structures. Time for Oral English preparation was programmed into the school day and teachers went to a lot of trouble to find the right materials or props to go with the variety of activities planned—activities that gave the students opportunity to use the focus language in a fun and meaningful way. For one of our units, built on the structure “I'm putting on...”, the theme was ‘the circus’ and the children had fun showing off the clown hats, collars and shoes they'd made.

## Curriculum Development

Though our young students were certainly more engaged and more successful at learning to read in Yolŋu Matha than they were when learning to read in English, the Gudschinsky method primers required analytical ability that was beyond most of them (see Murray this volume). Much team preparation time went into planning supplementary activities, which reinforced the learning of ‘key words’ and made the simple primer stories more meaningful. The word *rākay* (‘edible rush corm’), a key word in an early primer, was more easily remembered after an excursion to the billabong. Through bilingual workshops and Education Department advisers our team learned more about the language experience, ‘breakthrough to literacy’ approach and using this, our students were able to write more personal texts, which were then duplicated and made into small booklets for younger children to read.

At the beginning of the 1978 school year our first teacher-linguist, Pam Stephenson, was appointed and she, along with Dhaykamalu, Nāndama and Marrŋanyin’ began the development of the Djambarrpuyŋu Structured Language Arts Programme (SLAP), an integrated literacy teaching program which included listening, speaking, reading and writing. Pam and her co-workers worked on the program, trialling it and refining it until she left Shepherdson College at the end of 1983.

## Professional Development and Training

Guywaŋa gained her Associate Diploma in Education in 1978 and started teaching as a Band 1 teacher after having been an assistant teacher since the early 1960s. In June that year our first onsite teacher education program, Aboriginal Teacher Education Centre (ATEC), began. Baŋdaka 2, Banyawarra, Dhathu, Mānurr, Natuyil, Nāndama, Rraminba, Warinyara and Wulumu were the first students. Yolngu staff were very excited about this program, as it meant they could still be teaching in the school while completing their first year of teacher training part-time,

without having to go away to Batchelor. This training was only able to happen because under the new Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) the school was able to employ additional Yolŋu to teach in the classrooms while their colleagues were studying.

Networking with the other Yolŋu bilingual schools, Milingimbi and Yirrkala, was particularly important as a source of encouragement and support. Yolŋu teachers especially enjoyed the visits between schools. Seeing how other Yolŋu teachers were managing their classrooms inspired our teachers to achieve even more when it was their turn to be on the receiving end of a visit. As well as visitors from nearby, there seemed to be a constant stream of visitors from other parts of Australia, including north Queensland and South Australia, all excited to see the innovative program we were attempting to implement. There were regular bilingual workshops for reporting and sharing progress. In stark contrast to today, we felt supported by the Education Department.

### *The Between Years*

In the 1980s government Aboriginalisation policies encouraged Yolŋu staff to gain recognised qualifications as teachers and literacy workers. Self-management was encouraged, and some Yolŋu staff also became partners in higher duties, such as the Assistant Principal position held by Rurrumbu Dhurrkay from 1981 through 1983 and by Bakamana Yunupijū in 1984. In 1989 Rose Guywaŋa became Associate Principal in a mentored situation while continuing her part-time studies for her Diploma of Education, and in 1992 was appointed Principal. In response to the community's desire for their young people to learn Yolŋu languages other than Djambarrpuyŋu, Guywaŋa initiated the school's Dialects Program, which ran successfully from 1989 to 1996.

When Guywaŋa went on leave prior to her retirement in 1996, Valerie Dhaykamalu became Principal in Training and then Principal from 1997 to 2001. Yolŋu staff who completed training through Batchelor College and became qualified classroom teachers also included Daisy Bandaka, Daphne Banyawarra, Phyllis Batumbil, Valerie Bulkunu, Ian Moŋgunu, Dorothy Gapany, Joanne Garŋgulkpuy, Rosemary Gundjarraŋbuy, Kathy Guthadjaka, Elaine Maypilama, Elizabeth Milmilany, Nancy Mänurr, Helen Nuŋgalurr, Jenny Wulumdhuna, Evonne Mitjarrandi, Wendy Yälurr, and Heather Yeparra. Also, Elizabeth Djandilŋa Thorne completed her teacher education through Canberra College of Education.

In 1984 and 1986 the College's bilingual program went through the formal accreditation process and in 1986 Shepherdson College was granted formal, permanent bilingual status, receiving a plaque from the Department of Education in recognition of this success. In 1993 and 1998 the College was again successfully appraised.

Following the Collins *Learning Lessons* Report in 1999, the term 'bilingual' was phased out and bilingual schools became 'two way learning' schools. A review of

two way schools every two years became government policy. In 2001 our school achieved provisional Two Way status and the following year full Two Way status again. Biennial reviews were conducted again in 2004 and 2006. The reports of all these reviews have common recommendations: ongoing professional development for Yolŋu staff; cultural awareness and Teaching English as a Second Language theory and practice for Balanda teachers; a focus on developing teaching teams; and strengthening links with the community. Unfortunately, these recommendations are yet to be satisfactorily implemented on a sustainable basis (Fig. 25.4).

2008 was a very tumultuous year for Shepherdson College. The community of Galiwin'ku experienced the full force of the Northern Territory Intervention and the arrival of a permanent police presence; the devolution of the Galiwin'ku Town Council to make way for the creation of the East Arnhem Shire Council; and an influx of Balanda into the community, building new housing.

Also, early in August, the Principal and Assistant Principal Secondary suddenly left the community with less than 24 hours notice. As the Assistant Principal Primary was on study leave at this time, the College was left without any permanent senior leadership. Then, on October 14, after national literacy and numeracy test results had been released, the Education Minister, Marion Scrymgour, mandated English as the language of instruction in all Northern Territory schools during the first four hours of each school day. (See Devlin, Chap. 18, this volume). Staff and community joined a much louder 'voice' in challenging this decision, which meant that, once again, bilingual programs were severely threatened.

The community had already entered into negotiations with the NT government for an Education Partnership agreement, but these negotiations ceased when agreement regarding bilingual education was unable to be reached. On the second last day of the school year, Marion Scrymgour visited Galiwin'ku and was



**Fig. 25.4** Shepherdson College gateway—erected for the official naming of Shepherdson College in 1970 and restored in 2001. The original commemorative plaque had been lost over the years, but a replacement was commissioned for the 40th Anniversary College celebrations in August 2010

welcomed to a large community gathering on the lawns beside the church. The Minister appeared to listen respectfully as a number of community elders powerfully presented their case for the school's bilingual program to continue, but she did not change her decision.

At the beginning of 2009, the Department's policy, *Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of each School Day*, came into effect. Officially, no exemptions were allowed, but the then Principal of Shepherdson College said that we were to continue teaching according to the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) Language Maintenance outcomes. A new model of language usage was developed by the Assistant Principal Primary. Beginning literacy in first language was continued in Transition and Year 1, but formal instruction in English literacy was introduced in Year 2. The 'Four hours of English' policy was not officially replaced until June 2012, but then a change of government in the NT two months later meant that the new policy allowing bilingual education could not be implemented.

This sudden, and apparently final, announcement of a change in policy came as a huge shock to the school staff and community, just as it had on December 1, 1998 (when the NT Department of Education told our College Principal that Bilingual Education was to be phased out by the end of 1999). Policy changes such as this have a severe impact on staff and the community and their ongoing ability to trust one another and work together. Staff who felt they had been working under the Department's direction to deliver a school program that was educationally sound, building on the work of the previous decades, and in line with community aspirations, suddenly became the 'meat in the sandwich' as public servants, responsible to the government of the day, required to follow Departmental directions, but unable to continue delivering a sound bilingual program based on good principles of learning and teaching.

### ***Forty Years on and Looking to the Future***

Galiwin'ku and its nearby homelands now serve a population of about 2 500 with a school-age population of more than 800. In 2014 Shepherdson College had an enrolment of over 600 students. The 'bilingual program' currently being delivered is a very weak one. Since 2007, when a newly appointed Principal and Secondary Assistant Principal arrived, there has been no formal instruction in Yolŋu Matha in the secondary section of the school and, since 2013, very little instruction in first language (L1) literacy beyond the early years.

Though the school has had a strong history of Yolŋu involvement in teaching and leadership positions, today only one qualified Yolŋu teacher, Valerie Bulkunu, remains on staff as a class teacher, whereas the school has about 25 qualified Balanda teachers and 20 Yolŋu Assistant Teachers and casual tutors (paid from School Council Funds).

## Curriculum

The Language Maintenance Indigenous Languages and Culture (ILC) component of the Education Department's NTCF is the prescribed curriculum resource for the L1 literacy program. As well as language and literacy outcomes, it includes outcomes for cultural knowledge and understandings for each level of schooling from the first year of Primary through to the Middle Years of Secondary.

The school languages policy states that beginning literacy instruction is mostly in Djambarrpuyŋu. At the same time, students learn to speak English through a literature-based English as an Additional Language (EAL) program, *Walking Talking Texts: A framework for Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language* (NTDE 1995).

The Djambarrpuyŋu Structured Language Arts Programme (SLAP), developed between 1978 and 1983, is still the main L1 literacy program for the early childhood and primary areas. Resources are currently being renewed and made more accessible through the Shepherdson College Language and Culture website (<http://shepherdsoncollegelpc.com.au>). These are to include teacher guides, student worksheets, and sequenced sentence and story readers. Also on the website are new resources created in the last few years for teaching phonological awareness, including an alphabet song, handwriting booklets for each of the 31 Djambarrpuyŋu sounds, and a set of 100 cards for teaching the blending and segmenting of sounds.

A comprehensive program of Yolŋu Matha literacy instruction has been developed over the years. It includes children being read to daily, being given opportunity to enjoy 'reading' for themselves, instruction in phonological awareness using Cued Articulation and other phonics-based activities, learning sight words, use of the structured readers, and group and individual 'language experience' writing. Strategically planned activities, with cultural as well as language outcomes, such as bush excursions, are used to generate group and individual texts, which are in turn used for shared or individual reading activities. In reality, few classes are currently able to implement this program due to lack of functioning teaching teams.

### *Team Teaching*

A critical factor for the success of the school program is team teaching—Balanda and Yolŋu teaching staff working together in teams (see Graham, this volume). Balanda teachers are dependent on their Yolŋu colleagues for the delivery of L1 instruction and each member of the team has particular roles. The Yolŋu teacher's strengths are L1 fluency, family and cultural knowledge, engagement strategies for Yolŋu students, and community recognition. The Balanda teacher's are 'western' pedagogy, familiarity with curriculum frameworks, planning and monitoring

learning, and system-reporting requirements. Ideally, each member of the teaching team shares responsibility for two-way mentoring and learning from each other, as well as for their students' learning. Specific times for team programming and preparation and Learning Together should be timetabled.

These scheduled Learning Together times, where Yolŋu and Balanda teachers learn and plan together and build a team culture of respect and sharing, are critical to the development of effective teaching teams. Though the focus of these sessions will vary from learning about language and culture, to teaching and learning strategies, to assessment, to moderation, or program development, the critical element centres on the title—'learning together'. This is a time when, through the sharing of their different skills, experience and knowledge, both Yolŋu and Balanda develop their capacity to provide more effective learning activities for their particular students.

## The Teacher-Linguist Position

The position of teacher-linguist (more recently titled Senior Teacher Two-Way and now Senior Teacher EAL/D) is a pivotal position in a bilingual school the size of Shepherdson College and is critical for maintaining effective team teaching throughout the school. This person needs specialised knowledge about language acquisition and the teaching of literacy, especially knowledge of Yolŋu languages and culture and working with Yolŋu students and teachers. As well as being responsible for the professional development of Yolŋu staff, the teacher-linguist plays a critical role in the induction of non-Indigenous staff, also having oversight of the development of language resources and their use in classrooms. Responsibilities of the position include:

- Professional development—providing advice and support for staff in all areas of the Bilingual Education program; collaborating with senior staff to provide professional development for all teaching staff in the implementation of the program; delivery of training programs for Yolŋu literacy workers; delivery of literacy programs for Yolŋu teaching staff and part-time instructors; and performance management for self and others in the Literature Production Centre (LPC);
- Curriculum development—supporting the delivery of the Djambarrpuyŋu and EAL languages program in classrooms by working closely with the staff, community, curriculum officers such as EAL Coordinators, and the departmental Language Resource Officer to further develop curriculum materials and program implementation guidelines;
- Resources development—coordinating, in collaboration with the LPC Supervisor, the production of a range of materials to resource the languages program; managing the organisation, maintenance, storage and archiving of resources; and overseeing the use and maintenance of computers, multi-function printers, cameras and other production equipment.

- Implementation in the classroom—ensuring effective classroom practices, particularly in language teaching, and in collaboration with other staff producing-program implementation guidelines;
- Management—maintaining a productive balance across all areas of the position, including balancing everyday tasks with longer term projects and goals; overseeing the work of the LPC Supervisor and Literacy Workers; setting timelines and monitoring work progress; networking with outside agencies; and working with other members of the school leadership team to support the ongoing implementation of the Bilingual program;
- Language work—learning to speak and write the Djambarrpuyŋu language more fluently; learning more about Yolŋu culture; developing further connections with the community; and overseeing translation, editing and checking; and
- Reporting and evaluation—collaboratively with the school leadership team and the departmental Language Resource Officer, developing baseline data and school targets for reporting against improvements in Indigenous Language and Culture, EAL and Mathematics outcomes to the school community and the system; in collaboration with other senior school staff being responsible for the evaluation of the Bilingual program; preparation and presentation of evaluation documentation; and documenting and making accessible knowledge of the school and Galiwin'ku community including the history of the program and its resources.

## Professional Development

Yolŋu literacy teaching strategies and methods promoted for use in the classroom are basically the same as those used in 'mainstream' English literacy teaching. For a greater understanding of classroom practice and the ability to develop strategies that really fit with their language and culture, Yolŋu teachers require an in-depth understanding of how their languages work in comparison with English. They are the ones who already have the 'inside' knowledge of their students' language and can best develop engaging resources that are not only grammatically correct, but convey real meaning and information. Good progress has been made in developing a Djambarrpuyŋu metalanguage to talk about sounds, syllables, punctuation and word classes. An understanding of these language and text features helps Yolŋu teachers with their own reading and writing skill development as well as their teaching. Knowing how the grammar of Djambarrpuyŋu compares with other Yolŋu languages helps them to decide the priority and sequence of teaching the numerous obligatory Djambarrpuyŋu suffixes. As children begin to write longer texts in different genres, understanding how the discourse suffixes work is particularly important in the production of cohesive text.

Understanding linguistic principles also helps Yolŋu teachers to manage some of the problems that have occurred through changes in the children's language.



Because of the shift in the children's language with regard to the contrast between the 'voiced' and 'voiceless' plosives and the lenition of the initial syllables of pronouns, it has become necessary to teach spelling rules. Yolŋu staff still need to decide whether they should encourage children to write words as they now pronounce them, when and where English loan words are acceptable in children's writing, and whether it is necessary to particularly teach forms or expressions that are being lost from the children's speech; for example, *bon* is now being used instead of *dhawal-guyayjan* for English 'born'.

All first-language-English-speaking staff need knowledge of the theory and practice of bilingual education. Before arriving at Shepherdson College they should understand that they will be expected to team teach with a Yolŋu teacher—someone who has a lot of knowledge about their students' lives, languages and culture, but may not necessarily have 'paper' teacher qualifications. Yolŋu staff have suggested that every non-Indigenous staff member (whether principal, teacher or school counsellor) should be allocated an appropriate Yolŋu mentor.

To improve attitudes towards Indigenous languages, to begin to appreciate their richness, and consequently improve their teaching, non-Indigenous teachers also need knowledge of phonology, orthography, grammar and discourse. As EAL teachers, they need to know how the sounds of Djambarrpuyŋu compare and contrast with the sounds of English. Just as they have difficulty hearing and producing the contrast in words like *wanha* 'where' and *wana* 'arm' they should be able to appreciate the difficulties that their Yolŋu students have in hearing, producing and writing the strange sounds of English that are not part of Djambarrpuyŋu phonology. Yolŋu staff working with older students are often expected to translate 'western' curriculum concepts such as 'democracy' and 'sustainability'. Often, Non-Indigenous teachers don't understand how difficult this can be—that Yolŋu staff need to understand the English words themselves, and then have the time to work through these concepts in their own language, and come to consensus about the words they are going to use to talk about these ideas.

## Management and Leadership

For our school program to be effective, the whole school community, led by the Principal, needs to believe in, and promote, the value of bilingual education. Also, the school needs to find ways to address its identity as a Yolŋu institution. This includes the deployment of Yolŋu staff into all areas of school operations (see Stockley et al., this volume).

A clash of two systems has become evident. The Department of Education is a pyramid-shaped, hierarchical system that takes its orders from the top, while the Yolŋu system operates more in a democratic circular way, where each person has equivalent input, as one family member to another, and each is respected as one of many 'players in the field'.

These two basic structures constantly clash—at administration levels, curriculum levels and classroom levels—often leaving Yolŋu staff with a sense of frustration, exclusion and disempowerment. In the late 1990s a number of qualified Yolŋu staff, exhausted by these struggles, retired or found other employment. This ‘brain-drain’ of Yolŋu staff from Shepherdson College has benefited other community initiatives, but combined with a lack of ongoing professional development opportunities for younger Yolŋu has left the school in a critical situation with insufficient numbers of Yolŋu staff who have the literacy skills to teach L1 literacy reading and writing.

There are currently no Yolŋu in senior positions and, as a group, they feel they are being excluded from decisions about the curriculum and management of the school. Specific compulsory times for Yolŋu staff meetings and professional development for Yolŋu staff are imperative.

## School Council

Shepherdson School Council was constituted in 1990 and over the years has been very actively involved in the management and direction of the school. In 2010 our school Cultural Advisor put forward the idea of a more representative Council, and members from every Yolŋu clan were elected. However, since 2012, the School Council has not met regularly and school governance has been largely in the hands of the senior leadership team (Principal, Assistant Principals and the Registrar). An active, informed School Council is critical in strengthening links with the community through facilitating input from parents and enabling participatory democracy, so that parents and the community are involved in the decision-making processes that affect the school and its students.

## Conclusion

Yolŋu worldview is a major enabling factor for our bilingual program, for Yolŋu have a strong sense of identity and attachment to their languages and culture, and Yolŋu teachers and parents believe fiercely in the importance of teaching them.

Our Indigenous languages keep our identity and culture strong. We understand everything in our world through them, from the rise of the sun to the setting of the sun, every part of our lives and heritage, and what we pass on to our children and grandchildren. The essence of our identity and culture is in our language including the way we teach and learn... We want our children to learn our own languages. We don't want to lose our language for our own identity depends on it.

(Indigenous Teachers of Shepherdson College 2011, p. 2)

The following ‘bridge metaphor’ was developed by Yolŋu teachers during an English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) professional development day

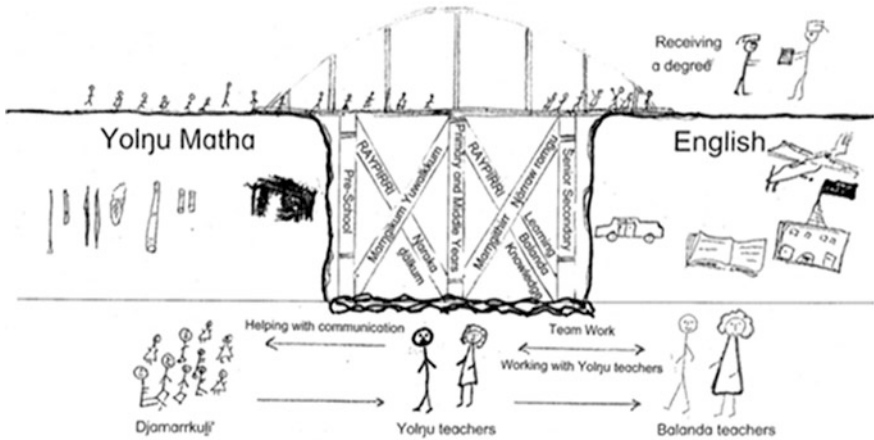


Fig. 25.5 Yolju adaptation of the bridge metaphor

in 2011. The bridge foundations are the different levels of schooling, supported and strengthened by different aspects of Yolju cultural knowledge (Fig. 25.5). This metaphor illustrates how Yolju teachers perceive their role and responsibilities in this important task of teaching reading and writing in both Yolju Matha and English.

The current Yolju parents of Shepherdson College are proud of their school, and its history, which has as its foundations the sharing of knowledge and values between the first Christian missionaries and the Yolju elders, who in 1970 named it Shepherdson College. Though there has been a move within the community for an independent, parent-controlled school, most families want their children to be able to receive their schooling at Shepherdson College, as have so many of them.

Bilingual education is not just about the language of instruction and the development of learning materials. It requires a whole-of-school pedagogy, the development of a learning community, where the language and culture of all students and staff is respected and celebrated, and where the knowledge and expertise built up over the last 40 years is shared and further developed.

For too long Shepherdson College has been left without systemic guidance. The NT Department of Education must support bilingual education at Galiwin'ku by making genuine commitments to address issues raised numerous times by school staff and the School Council. These issues include general neglect, lack of facilities, and the infrastructure sufficient to meet the needs of 800 students (the estimated school-age population of Galiwin'ku and its nearby Homelands); the need for an increase in the number of permanent positions for Yolju staff; and ongoing professional development for all staff, but especially Yolju staff.

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## Chapter 26

# Reminiscences: Working Together in a Bilingual Classroom

Nancy R.F. Devlin and Dorothy Gapany

### Nancy's Story

My bilingual education experience was primarily at Shepherdson College on Elcho Island in 1984 when my husband, Brian Devlin, was principal of the school. We had arrived in Arnhem Land in February 1979 and lived at Yirkala for three years before moving to Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island in 1983.

Relationships were very special to us from our first week onwards in 1979. Two and a half years later when we were still at Yirkala my mother died in the United States. While I was very sad, I found comfort in knowing if anything happened to me, my yapa mala ('Yolŋu sisters') would look after our children, Michael and Jenny. While we had good relationships with local people in Papua New Guinea and other countries we worked in, they were never as close or as deep as relationships we made in Arnhem Land. It really meant something to be adopted into a clan.

I did not go to Elcho to teach, but within a month of our arrival a teacher left to take up a position at Batchelor College. As there was no one else the department was sending right away I said I'd help out until the Education Department could find a replacement. By default, I began teaching in the post primary section of the school with Trish Joy as senior teacher. I'd worked with Trish at Dhupuma College, before it had been closed down by the Northern Territory government for economic reasons, and was happy to work with her again. This section of the school did not have a bilingual program and we all had our own classes without assistant teachers. Two of the teachers were a married Indigenous couple.

Later on though I was very fortunate in being able to work in partnership with three sisters: two of them in the bilingual program at the main school, and another in the homeland program. All were very hard working and dedicated women who

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were as interested in providing an education to students as I was. The reason I had this special opportunity to work with more than one assistant was because in the middle of the year, when Dorothy Gapany had a baby, her older sister, Mary Nāndama, came to work in the school with me.

I was lucky too because this was not the first time I had worked in a cross-cultural educational setting with a partner. My very first teaching job, which I really enjoyed, had been working in an experimental school program with students in Harlem in New York City. We had worked as family teams with one of us being a male and other a female. One of us was a qualified teacher and the other was from the community and had a degree in another area. My partner was from the Bronx and was also a semi-pro football player. I think he and I were put together because they were concerned for my safety as the only 'white girl' among the six teachers in our group or indeed in the whole school that housed many other experimental programs. Many of the things I learned in that job I was able to apply later to my team teaching on Elcho, as it included learning how to be respectful of one another and to combine our different strengths to create a better teaching experience for the students. It was essential, if we were to have a functional bilingual class, that we worked this way and not as our duty statements said, with one of us as the teacher and the other as the assistant. We needed to have equal status between us both when working with the students and at other times.

Working with Gapany was rewarding, as she was always as much the teacher as I was. We would discuss *everything* we were going to teach first, and only then would we teach the children. We not only discussed teaching-learning activities, we performed them for each other, before introducing them to the children. That was our approach to team teaching (see Graham, this volume). Our aim was to make sure we were developing the concepts according to the Year Five curriculum as well as where we observed the students understandings to be at.

In most learning areas we would teach the concepts first in Djambarrpuyŋu. For example, in most Maths lessons, we would first use concrete materials, sometimes bush materials like stones or sticks and other times more Western materials, like MAB blocks, that could be manipulated by the students. Gapany would take the lead lesson. Then we would have the students work together. Next I would take the students and we would work in English developing the students' understanding further and relating it to further abstractions using Arabic numerals. The students would then work independently and both Gapany and I would assist the students directly. This Maths lesson would inform us about the next level we wanted to reach with the students.

We followed this process in all our work: beginning with Djambarrpuyŋu and continuing the development using English too. In English, we tried to use an experience-based approach as much as possible, but we were also very aware of developing the students' spelling and grammar as well as their vocabulary. Being in a Year Five class, most of the students had basic reading skills in both languages. As is typical in any classroom, we had some students who were more advanced and others who were still learning the skills of reading. Our teaching partnership helped us here as well, because we were able to work on an individual, one-to-one basis

more readily than in a class with only one teacher. This type of teaching, using two languages, gave the children more than one bite, so to speak, of the same cherry. It also helped to consolidate learning in a way that only using one language does not.

Later, when Njandama took over Gapaný's position, we followed the same type of process, beginning with our discussions, either before or after the students were in the classroom. With Gapaný, it was usually before school and with Njandama after school as it suited their personal situations better. The most important thing was that we met to discuss what we had done and needed to do on a daily basis. We needed this time because during the day we were both always teaching.

Our classroom was divided in two sections, with one half for English and the other for Djambarrpuyñu. Professional development workshops and readings in bilingual education said that it was best to separate the two languages. Many times we would be teaching different complementary lessons using our own first language. Due to our discussions, we knew we were doing the work the students were ready for and we were developing their learning together.

Most mornings, on most days, we began by working together on our lessons with handwriting and a group language lesson on the board. We would discuss the sentences and the grammar for the lessons in both languages. The sentences were not a direct translation, but an interpretation. If we were not sure of the spelling of a word we would conspicuously consult the dictionary or ask an expert as we had the teacher-linguist's office right next door to our classroom. This was to encourage the students to do the same thing in their writing. If they couldn't find a word, they needed to first look it up in a dictionary and then ask for help. Our group sentence for the students led on to individual daily writing in both languages.

Many of the class's experiences were written up as big books using both languages and following the same method as described for our handwriting and personal writing above. Some were conceived by us—like excursions to different parts of the island, but others were not. One of my favourite books was all about Cyclone Ferdinand, which almost came to Elcho Island and our preparations for it. Unlike Cyclones Lam and Nathan in 2015, which unfortunately destroyed many houses, we had been lucky, as the cyclone veered into the coast before its destructive winds could hit our community. It was, however, an exciting event and a great stimulus for writing. The stories and illustrations in the book were similar in both languages. Another one that really stands out for me still was our Christmas big book. The students decided to tell the story of Jesus in the English version, but in the Djambarrpuyñu version it was all about hunting and fishing and what they were looking forward to doing in the Christmas holidays. All the books we wrote together also had separate stories and illustrations from the different children. It was exciting and fun for all of us, as we were all learning from these experiences. The parts we wrote as a class were always, like our handwriting lessons, on the board, edited and grammatically correct. These books we kept throughout the year as they were very important teaching tools, serving as language models. When writing them, we tried to increase the students' vocabulary as well.

Looking back on a long career in education, it seems to me that many of my favourite positions were when I was working in a team. Two people working well

together is definitely much more productive and effective than the same two people working separately. Like in any relationship, it takes time and hard work at really communicating with each other and, very importantly, it is not hierarchal. I felt very privileged to have taught that class with two very dedicated sisters who were always there and students who were mostly there. I think our average class attendance was 83 percent. Some students who did not come regularly at least came often enough for us to know we were really teaching them, as we could build for the most part on what they had already studied.

The idea of working from where the students were performing was something we established in our classroom. Writing about it today, this is meant to be a given premise, but in the 1980s many more teachers taught the content as described in the curriculum and the students' own abilities were not really considered. Our type of teaching fitted in with my background in Special Education.

I feel very fortunate to have had this bilingual education experience as a part of my career and feel today that it is still the best and most economical way to teach if we really mean what we say that all children have a right to learn. A good bilingual classroom will strengthen a student's understanding and ability to work in all languages. Really working from what the student understands and can do is just sound teaching practice for all students. As Gapany says, in the following section, we felt empowered by our experience together.

After I finished writing my story I shared it with Gapany. Once again it felt great to talk and work together, to reaffirm our thoughts through sharing together.

## **Gapany's Story**

I was very excited to read your story, Nancy. It gave me courage to share our team-teaching experiences at a professional development session at Shepherdson College in 2015 and also to write this chapter.

We were always sitting down and planning, actually. It really helped to do the day's work. We talked about what worked and ways we had to change things to suit the kids and the environment in the classroom. If I understood a subject I would just go along with it, but if I had problems like for Maths, it was difficult. I'm not good at Maths and you helped me with using those mathematical words and helping me to understand them better so I could explain it to the kids.

We worked in topics or themes, focusing on just that one topic at a time. It really helped being able to work together and to work separately when I didn't need to go and talk to you about a topic. For example, when I would understand that topic and just go along working with the kids. Using Yolŋu Matha was a very great help for me and to use my own language to teach our djamarrkuli ('children').

Teaching in both languages was a good part of the teaching, getting together, learning together, and developing professionally together. We met every morning before the lesson. Talking, learning, planning, preparing and then when the kids



came we already knew the routine. The kids then knew what they had to do too when coming in the class. It really helped us.

But going back to 30 years ago, working with middle primary kids, older kids, it was very different from now, because both of those kids are different age groups. Some of the stories, when I was reading your paper and reading those stories, really made me think about what I am doing now that I'm working at FAFT, Family as First Teachers, and working with mums, young mums, and working with kids from zero to three. From that time, planning together is what worked well for both of us. It really helped my teaching career. Working with you was like a good team. Planning together, sitting down, going over the program, or a topic we were going to teach that day, and it really built and made it strong for me, especially as the Yolŋu teacher in the classroom working with a Balanda teacher like you and having to have that little bit of knowledge, understanding what we are about to teach during that day.

There were times when there were challenges too. We had some struggles and very hard kids and there were things that we had to work out to be able to capture those messages or learning pace for those kids. As a Yolŋu teacher, teaching my own children, I had to see kids learning.

We spent at least half an hour in the morning every day and also we had to plan to go out to the community to meet parents of kids that hadn't been coming to school for a few days. We saw the importance for that child to be able to come to school and learn so it was very good, but it's not happening now. Those times were very good for both of us, Yolŋu and Balanda, going out engaging with families going to those houses and caring. Telling them we wanted to see those kids learning and caring for those kids. We had to sit and listen to them. Sometimes we asked them what we could do. What is a good thing? What can we do better?

One way is to share, Yolŋu and Balanda, in Professional Development sessions and Yolŋu Matha classes. We don't have those Yolŋu Matha classes now, but when we did had have them it was empowering Yolŋu teachers to teach. It was giving empowerment for us to teach our own kids and we felt much better for having those lessons, Yolŋu Matha lessons, taught in the school. It was good to have the cultural activities where Yolŋu taught Balanda teachers. It was good for the school that there was community involvement. We should be seeing things happening in our school instead of school separate, community separate. We should be doing things together. We just don't have to go to school when there's like an open day or night. We want to see community involvement. Like Fridays, that was a day that we had our own learning space.

We have to have our own space to be able to see it for ourselves. What things would make it better for the kids and for us and for the school? It's not just us blaming parents when kids fail. When teachers are blaming parents that they're not sending their kids to school every day it isn't good for Balanda or Yolŋu. Sometimes we are failing kids; it's not just how we can do better for our kids, but how we can do better.

When I shared your story recently, I was talking about team teaching. I said something like aggressive teachers aren't helpful. I said that angry teachers are not on, because it's not helping the child. It is only discouraging the child and we don't want that happening in the classroom. Kids don't like it. The parents don't like it if this is happening.

### **Nancy's Note**

We then talked more about the Family as First Teachers program Gapany is working in now. As a Family Liaison Officer, she is working with young mothers, babies and children up to three years old. She feels it is important work as it is helping young mothers to raise their babies to be stronger, happier, and more ready for preschool. When I asked her what languages were being used, she said both English and the mothers' language. She also told me that her husband, Maratja, is working in a program for helping older students and there he is using both languages too.

Sharing together, building relationships together, made us both stronger people back in 1984. This bond is still there more than 30 years later. When Gapany and I relived some of the experiences we had together we agreed that teaching partnerships like this might help in planning a stronger future for the children at Galiwin'ku.

## Chapter 27

# Reflections on My Years at Elcho and Mäpuru (1978–2015)

John Greatorex

### Starting Out and Adapting

It was by coincidence that I ended up teaching at Shepherdson College on Elcho Island. My first trip there had been in the early 1970s, during the 1974–5 Christmas period when I visited Don and Rhonda, family friends. Several years later, in 1978, when I was looking for a teaching position somewhere, anywhere in Australia or overseas, and finding that there were very few jobs available, I happened to be interviewed for a position at Elcho. I was lucky to win that position on the island, probably because I had previously visited it, I was fairly practical, and came with a rural background.

I arrived on Elcho early 1978 to take up an upper-primary teaching position. At this time Shepherdson College ran a bilingual program in which literacy in three Yolŋu languages was being taught: Djambarrpuyŋu, Gälpu and Gupapuyŋu. Gupapuyŋu was introduced when the program began, but was being phased out as the majority of students spoke Djambarrpuyŋu. The students in my upper primary class were the last to learn Gupapuyŋu literacy.

From the outset it was clear to me that the local people inhabited a very different world from the one I saw through my Western eyes and heard with my Western

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Facilitated by Brian and Nancy Devlin, based on recorded Skype sessions with John, who was at Mäpuru, on March 3 and April 14, 2015.

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ears. The locals lived by different values and followed a way of life that was quite different from anything I had experienced before. It seemed to me like a parallel universe—one largely invisible and inaudible to my non-Yolŋu senses and thinking. It was rather like looking at Sydney harbor—recognising the landmarks, the hills, buildings shops, cars and people—while at the same time looking out into the harbour, aware that there was another interconnected world beneath the water’s surface.

## Getting to Know the Yolŋu People

I think I experienced and responded to Elcho life somewhat differently from many other teachers. Certainly, we had all come with the intention to do the best job we could, but I think I realised fairly quickly that I wouldn’t be a successful teacher if I isolated myself from local families. I remember realising within the first few weeks that language and the way I interacted with students, their families and co-Yolŋu teachers would be a key to my success or otherwise as a teacher. There seemed to be several aspects based on a theme. Firstly, using a vernacular language was, and still is, a key to showing respect to Yolŋu. If I didn’t show genuine interest and make a sincere attempt to learn at least one of the Yolŋu languages (broadly referred to as *Yolŋu Matha*), then I was being disrespectful to the locals. Secondly, if I couldn’t hear and understand Yolŋu Matha, how could I even contemplate understanding what the local people were saying, or appreciate this other way of seeing the world? Finally, if I didn’t understand how Yolŋu Matha worked, with respect to its syntax and semantics, then I would be a poor, ignorant teacher of numeracy and English as a Second Language teacher. There was an immediate imperative for me to acquire a detailed knowledge of how local languages worked, and also of local maths. Otherwise I would be setting myself up to fail and not doing my best for the students in my class or their parents and extended families.

A month or so after my arrival I was invited to sit with a family who lived not far from the school. Following this initial visit and shared cuppa I’d regularly visit this family. Often, after preparing lessons and setting up the classroom for the next day, I would share meals with my new family. Occasionally I would stay overnight, get up at dawn, go home, shower, then get myself to the classroom well before school started. I entered into this new familial relationship with Dick and Julie, my mum and dad with good heart, good-faith and trust. Together with their extended families, they spent considerable effort and time educating me. After that initial relationship had been established, I was offered the opportunity to share an Education Department house with Ian and Mercy. Ian’s father and grandfather were prominent elders and both Ian and Mercy were teachers. They were returning to Galiwin’ku with their children from Ngukurr to teach at Shepherdson College.

Quite fortuitously, this offered me the opportunity to observe and have my eyes opened to the complexity and structure of the Yolŋu world. It also helped me to understand that this world was not visible through English and increasingly, I began

to appreciate that my work as a teacher at the local school was either disturbingly dismissive or ethnocentrically ignorant of Yolŋu knowledge, political structures and teaching practices.

During these early years at Elcho I enthusiastically attended language classes with Dianne who worked in the Bible Translation Centre. The lessons she offered were a legacy from mission days. They followed a long tradition requiring mission staff to study language, the foundation of which were set over 100 years ago. After an international gathering of church leaders in 1912 when the NT had been apportioned among numerous religious denominations, and east Arnhem Land (Yolŋu Land) had been allocated to the Methodist Overseas mission, John Burton in 1927, the General Secretary of the Methodist Overseas Mission at the time, formulated “a policy that called for insistence upon (mission staff) communicating in the people’s language” (McKenzie 1976, p. 42). Burton knew that missionaries could only begin to understand local systems of governance and therefore be more productive in their work with local peoples if they spoke and communicated in local languages. Fortunately, the flow-on of this policy meant that mission staff were required to study a Yolŋu language and undergo regular exams to assess language competence.

## **Attempts to Make Schooling More Meaningful**

It has become clearer to me over the years that the Yolŋu world is rich and profound. It is also vastly different from the one that I, as a non-Yolŋu, inhabit.

I am regretful now that, when I was working as a teacher at Shepherdson College, my focus was entirely on English and Western Maths. I was aware of another system out there, but it was my job, and I was paid to socialise the students into a Western way of seeing the world and to learn Western values. I was one amongst many that accepted that it was for families to teach their children Yolŋu knowledge and values outside of schools hours. The schooling offered in the classroom was thought to be innocent. While this was the view of most, if not all teachers, there were at the same time determined efforts in the late 1970s and 1980s to actively involve Yolŋu in school decision-making and in the teaching program.

Shepherdson College is located in a large town with representatives from numerous clans. Each clan has their own language, estate and history. In the town, closely connected clans and families occupied several camps or suburbs. Children from Beach Camp didn’t often attend school, nor did those from Gärul. I feel these children (and others) realised that they were marginalised. Some children needed to walk through camps occupied by other clans, or were uncomfortable attending classes filled by confident students from the more prominent families. Many of these students understood that this was not their land, and in a way were showing their respect for the land custodians by not attending school.

In the 1970s, 80s and 90s most town residents did not feel comfortable and at ease living in the town on someone else’s land. To show respect for landowners, the

majority of residents would not speak publicly about issues involving their daily lives. With about twenty clans represented in the town's population, governance was complex. There were so many families from clan estates across Yolŋu Land. Many residents lived surrounded by their close relatives in the numerous 'camps'. There was Beach Camp, Gärul, Middle Camp, Narrani, Top Camp, Guluwurru, to name a few. Often houses in these camps were identified by clan affiliated names.

The school didn't attempt to reflect this structure in the way classes were populated, and so by default undermined Yolŋu governance systems and Yolŋu social capital. Parents were always unanimous they wanted their children to be learning their own clan languages, and wanted to have greater involvement in the curriculum so that their children grew up with a strong Yolŋu and clan identity. One senior Yolŋu teacher made a point by speaking her own language in class, not the nominated Djambarrpuyŋu, even though the students took some time to adapt to her language. Perhaps she thought it inappropriate and presumptuous to speak and teach someone else's language.

## **Yolŋu-Initiated Reforms**

Numerous attempts were made by principals and staff to be more responsive and inclusive of Yolŋu. In the 1980s Yolŋu educators tried to bring about meaningful change to the way the school operated; for example, the Dialect Program was introduced by the Yolŋu Principal, Rose Guywanga, with the support of all staff. The idea was that Yolŋu teachers and their adopted Balanda (non-Yolŋu) teachers would work collaboratively with those children with whom they were ancestrally connected. They would instruct and guide the students to gain appropriate clan knowledge and language. A number of significant texts were created during this time.

Unfortunately, the Dialect Program did not last, largely through lack of funds, including money to pay the teachers—the recognised knowledge authorities—but also because of uncertainty on the part of Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu teachers about how to jointly negotiate the Dialect Program curriculum.

The Yolŋu educators in the school had many proposals, many of which were viewed as too complex or expensive to implement. These included excursions to clan estates, re-grouping students by introducing clan-based classes for the primary section of the school, the establishment of classrooms in clan-based camps and a proposal that work performed by all school staff was recognised by equal pay for all staff.

While most proposals were rejected, some were implemented. In the 1970s in consultation with parents a class for Gärul children was established. Two teachers were assigned to this group, a family member and a non-Yolŋu adopted into the Yolŋu teacher's family. During the years this class operated, it usually had 100 per cent participation (actual enrolments/maximum enrolments) and attendance due to

the active encouragement of Elders who daily brought all the students of their clan to school.

*Raypirri* (good behavior) classes were conducted by Elders within the school. *Buṅguls* (‘dance sessions’) were also arranged by Elders at the school each Friday in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For a short period management of the school was handled by a group of Senior Yolḷu educators.

Even so, as I look back, I believe we were not as successful as we could have been had we listened more carefully and sensitively to what Yolḷu had been telling us, not just with respect to school organisation, but also to the curriculum.

## Teaching Mathematics

What is maths? A working definition of maths for me is the way a culture describes the world. When I describe a car I talk about fuel consumption in how many litres per 100 km, the vehicle cost, percentage depreciation, how many passengers it will carry, the octane of the fuel, gear oil viscosity, tyre air-pressure, and so on. When my Yolḷu family describes a car they will refer to it by name, perhaps Djalḷiny or Giyapara, names originating from ancestry.

It was as difficult for Yolḷu students to see numbers as quantifying the surrounding world as it was for me to see the world in a Yolḷu way, an interlacing kinship web, one (through the generosity of my Yolḷu families) that connects and incorporates me with the surrounding world, including the winds and clouds. Though many non-Yolḷu have studied Yolḷu languages with us at Charles Darwin University, there are few, if any that have a detailed knowledge of that aspect of Yolḷu maths as described through *gurrutu* (‘kinship’).

The values attached to numerals in the classroom aren’t broadly lived or a meaningfully experienced reality in daily Yolḷu life, as they are in my whitefella life. Numbers cannot have meaning when spoken or as scribbles on a whiteboard in a classroom, and may only become meaningful when I somehow come to relate them to my lived experiences of number. In this context the students were not provided the opportunity to understand what the teachers were saying numerically. And, unfortunately, teachers like myself were unaware that not only were we talking jargon, but a parallel, foreign way of describing the world.

My Western culture need to *quantify* the world, separating elements, describing things in minute detail, with temperatures, and pressures and lengths and masses, shade of colour, dollars and cents, angles and curves. We see separation, rather than connectedness. From my limited perspective my Yolḷu family seem to be telling me about shared relationships with things in the world, qualities of kinship, looking to include, looking to connect, to share kinship with each other and elements in the environment.

Nowadays, with increasing conflicts between peoples, greenhouse gas emissions, rises in sea level and the world looking for ways towards connected and sustainable futures, my Western world-view doesn’t easily allow me to talk in a

sustainable way. My mind sees quantities and discreteness, and not so easily connectedness. It seems much of the world could learn from Yolŋu about the interconnectedness, kinship binding peoples, and environments.

My Western eyes see the world as resources, and as divided and composed of discrete units, whereas the Yolŋu way of seeing the world through kinship and connection—between, through and across all things—where people, extended families and the environment diffuse, and dissolve into one another, which offers us a way to move to a more sustainable future. This complex Yolŋu maths can only be taught through Yolŋu languages.

Perhaps the reason Yolŋu maths is not taught in schools is due to a cultural arrogance, ignorance and a dismissiveness, demanding government schools disregard the complex, logical Yolŋu worldview at a time when our planet is under threat.

In summary there seem to be two major points. Firstly, it is unreasonable to expect that students will access the abstract numeracy taught in classrooms if it is not experienced and valued in everyday contexts. It is not easy, perhaps not possible to internalise divergent values to simultaneously value numeracy and Yolŋu relationships. The more students take on numeracy, the more Yolŋu values may move away from connected relational understandings of the world and sustainable futures. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to hold the values of one system and operate competently and productively in the other.

Secondly, teachers are unaware of what they don't know. Teachers such as myself thought, "Well, if we expose students to numeracy enough times in the classroom, they'll eventually pick it up". Teachers coming from a non-Yolŋu world are generally ethnocentric in assuming somehow that the Western way is, inherently, how the universe is structured. These same teachers haven't been offered the training to recognise and understand there are other ways of mathematically seeing the world: Other worlds to their own, parallel, complex, logical mathematical understanding of the world that the kids bring to school.

The kids are not failing; the system is failing the kids. Even though we did comparatively well with Maths and numeracy years ago during bilingual accreditation in the 1980s, we could have done much better. As well as failing to recognise that this other parallel universe existed, we were failing to allow what is already out there, a meaningful place in the curriculum.

## **The Hidden Curriculum and the Problem with Just Teaching in Basic English**

Schools are socialising instruments, directing children to a Western way of thinking, guiding students to see the world with Western glasses. It is the issue of the hidden curriculum. We used to say in the 1970s and 80s, with respect to Yolŋu children going to school, "Well, it's a parental responsibility to teach young



children about their own cultural background. Children come to school to learn the skills and ideas they need to survive in this modern world.”

In my early days at Shepherdson College that view was generally accepted. So, in the classrooms, we were demanding kids to leave sense of self and cultural identity outside the classroom door. We were directing our students to value a whitefella view of the world, leaving them sort of hollow because we were not supporting and acknowledging in the classroom who they were and how they connected with each other and the environment.

One of the narratives of Western society is the importance of individual endeavor and competition. If one works as hard as one can, there is a prospect of becoming secure materially, and a self-made person. Competition is an integral part of classrooms in most Australian schools. However, as indicated earlier, Yolŋu narratives seem to be built upon knowing oneself as part of an interconnecting, all-encompassing web, where land, plants, people and animals and other elements of the environment are regarded as kin and thought to be interconnected.

Some decades ago, when teaching in a Darwin high school, I met a group of students who came from homes where their mother tongue was spoken, written and read. Many of these students were also able to go on to study their mother tongue at a Year 12 level. They did exceptionally well at school, both academically and socially. However, the achievement of this group of students was in stark contrast to another group of students who came from homes where the parents had decided to speak *only English* to their children. Unfortunately, both the parents and students had very limited English, and so the conversations between them were unsophisticated. It appeared to me, as their ESL teacher, that these students had not developed deep, complex language either in their mother tongue or in English, and as a result they were not developing the academic language needed to perform well at school. I was sure this second group of students were not being developed intellectually, but in fact were being dumbed down at home and at school. I think we were also doing the same thing to students across the Yolŋu lands.

Of course, we must listen to the advice given to us by parents on whether or not they want bilingual-bicultural programs to be offered at their local schools. We also have a responsibility to ensure decisions are evidence based on evidence and not solely on ideology. Nonetheless, the point needs to be made that at Shepherdson College in the 1970s and 1980s students were taught basic literacy in Djambarrpuyŋu, but were not challenged through being exposed to rich texts; that is, sophisticated, intellectual, political and philosophical texts that included complex grammar, in a variety of Yolŋu genres, taught by knowledge custodians. Instead, the most difficult Djambarrpuyŋu texts encountered by students in the formal language program would perhaps have been at a Year 2 level.

## Schooling in the Smaller Townships (also Referred to as Homelands)

As I stayed on at Shepherdson College on Galiwin'ku I became increasingly supportive of Yolŋu living on their custodial estates. I vividly recall that of all the people I spoke with, all would have enthusiastically returned to their place, to their clan estates, had that been feasible or practical.

The longer I stayed on Galiwin'ku, the more I was being sensitised by my Yolŋu family to begin to hear what they were saying, to understand how Yolŋu languages connected what my English had tended to separate. In particular I refer here to an extending and interconnecting sense of self, of a oneness with country and the environment.

We often talk about small remote Indigenous townships as *homelands* or *out-stations*. I think this feeds a political agenda based on race, so I prefer to use the term 'townships', when referring to small, remote, permanently occupied settlements. These are places where people can live on their ancestral lands, where they can be in *place*, where Yolŋu governance is practised. People living in these townships on their custodial lands do so despite enduring hardships, and against the pressures to move to the larger towns for bureaucratic convenience because it represents the future they see for themselves, their children and grandchildren. In my early days on Yolŋu land, I didn't know any Yolŋu who wanted to stay on Elcho Island, who felt secure there, or envisaged a future for themselves and their families on the island. All the people I knew felt a strong spiritual and emotional pull to be on their own custodial lands.

I was told that there had been school visits to at least one of these smaller townships during the Mission days, but these did not continue after the government took over Shepherdson College from the mission. I do know that Donydji and Mäpuru requested equality of schooling for their children. These calls for assistance were ignored by government. For example, Mäpuru residents wrote to the Education Department in 1976, without success, to ask for a school to be set up in their township. Then after repeated requests, in 1984, both Mirrŋatja and Mäpuru families saved up sufficient funds to purchase materials and build their first classrooms.

The schooling service offered was unique to remote Indigenous townships. Once they passed the required trial period, a Homeland Learning Centre was established. While local assistant teachers-in-charge were employed full-time, visiting teachers would fly, or drive in, for between 1–4 days a week. At Shepherdson College student participation and attendance was significantly higher than at the main campus (see: [www.culturalsurvival.org.au/2004\\_2way\\_HLCs/AttendancePatterns.html](http://www.culturalsurvival.org.au/2004_2way_HLCs/AttendancePatterns.html)).

## Mäpuru

I mentioned earlier that when I was first at Elcho I used to spend considerable time with Dick Munuṅgu and his family. Dick is my Yolḷu dad and Julie Maminyinawuy, his wife, my mum. At the same time I was developing a close relationship with the Mäpuru old men: Galḷdhuna and Kevin Gäṭji. Galḷdhuna in particular, took me under his wing and used to warmly welcome me to Beach Camp whenever he was at Galiwin'ku.

After some time I realised that the land where Mäpuru was located, where the airstrips had been built and the first infrastructure erected, was Wobulkarra country, Dick's country. He had grown up as a child, down near the coast not far from Mäpuru on the creek that runs to the sea at Marrnyamanṅguli. I then learnt that Dick called these two men *mori*, ('father') and shared a close kin connection with them. It is likely that these old men were supportive and encouraging of me because of their close kinship with Dick.

From time to time I would visit Mäpuru by boat and walk in the 8–10 km from the boat landing, and then go back again on weekends. When the school building was finished in 1986, it continued as a Homeland Learning Centre.

Many elders were very keen to have permanent teachers living at Mäpuru. These included Kevin, Jackie Nḷuluwidi—the Assistant Teacher in Charge who has worked in the Homeland Learning Centre and now school for about 30 years (see the case studies at [www.culturalsurvival.org.au](http://www.culturalsurvival.org.au))—and his uncle Kevin. Despite repeated requests for a permanent teacher going back to 1976, as mentioned earlier, no support was forthcoming from government. This did not deter Mäpuru residents, who were determined to succeed, as they were motivated by the desire to provide for their children and grandchildren.

On November 26, 2007 Katrina Bolton reported on this issue for the ABC. In that report Yiṅiya Guyula explained that

We have asked so many times, people from Department of Education. We have spoken, we have written letters, we have complained as far as probably up to the Minister for the Education, and people have always knocked us back and I guess were not interested in listening.

Katrina Bolton added,

By contrast, there's one school in the Douglas Daly that has five white students, and it gets a teacher full time. The Education Minister says Mäpuru deserves to be congratulated for getting so many children to school but he says there are limits on what the government can provide.

Paul Henderson, who was NT Education Minister at the time, responded by saying, "I've asked the department to look at how we can better provide education services right across the Northern Territory to these very small isolated communities where it's just not feasible or logistically appropriate to have a fully-fledged school". However, it has to be said that Tipperrary Station had at least one permanent teacher for a small group of non-Indigenous children in 1985, whereas none

of the homeland schools associated with Shepherdson did, even though they had more students, and Shepherdson College as well as homeland communities had asked for them.

In 1998 Mäpuru elders wrote to the Education Department again, asking for a teacher to be based there. It just didn't happen, and so community members became frustrated. They wanted a school to be made available, as it was elsewhere in Australia. They wanted to be treated as equals, but unfortunately they were not, so they decided to pursue another option; namely, to move towards becoming an independent school, involving a two stage approach through the Northern Territory Christian Schools Association (NTCSA). Eventually, approval to do this was granted in 2010.

Establishing schools where families are living on their ancestral estates meant a greater certainty of high attendance, the likelihood that 100 per cent participation would be achieved, and depending on the non-Yolŋu teachers' sensitivity and ability to listen, guaranteed parental involvement in the school.

Although there are about 10,000 speakers of Yolŋu languages, there has been limited attempts (with one notable exception) by schools to develop an academically rigorous developmental program incorporating Yolŋu knowledge and knowledge practices.

What I am observing through my involvement with schools on Yolŋu Land is that while parents, teachers and the students themselves expect student progress in English, literacy and numeracy, parents are not expecting this progress at the expense of their first language and cultural progress. This is a major part of what is not articulated by parents but forms a major misunderstanding in the Western schooling partnership process. We also seem not to have understood that in order to achieve this, students must have actively been taught sophisticated academic programs of study based on Yolŋu knowledges by appropriate Yolŋu authorities. Students need to be developed and extended intellectually through their first language in order to be confident and intellectually prepared to study academic Western curricula. This is not happening. Schools are not allowing Yolŋu students to develop and grow intellectually.

Perhaps it's time to tell a short story. Several years ago, while teaching at Charles Darwin University I invited a guest speaker to talk to a class. Nākarma explained to the class how he had lived and travelled his ancestral estates with his families until he was about eleven years old. He then decided to attend Shepherdson College, so he and his family walked from Mirrŋatja to Elcho Island. Because of his age he was placed in Year 7, but because he didn't speak or understand any English he was quickly moved down to Year One. Over the year he progressed through the classes and caught up with his peers. He then left Shepherdson College, attended Dhupuma College and then Nhulunbuy High School before returning to Elcho where he took up working in the aircraft hangar. Cleaning and helping in the hangar suited him. Soon he found himself in Ballarat working on MAF's planes and studying and obtaining his private pilot's licence. After telling his story, a young student asked, "You achieved all that after only starting school at 11. What could

you have achieved if you had started school when five years old? Perhaps you could be a minister in the government?” Nākarrma’s reply was swift and succinct. “I wouldn’t have achieved if I had attended Shepherdson College at 5. My land, the environment and my elders educated me. They taught me how to behave respectfully, to remember, to hypothesise, theorise and to think. I learnt to be proud and confident. If I had attended Shepherdson College from an early age I would have been stunted in my social and intellectual development. I do however strongly believe that schools need to be located in homelands, where Elders and parents have authority and can work with schools for the futures of their children.” (For the past eight years Nākarrma has been the lecturer for the Yolŋu Studies program at Charles Darwin University.)

At Mäpuru we are following a path which mirrors Nākarrma’s experience. As a community driven school we acknowledge the school is owned by the community and that as whitefellas our role is to facilitate, so that outcomes are productive, meeting the demands of Elders, the community members and both state and federal Education departments. Yolŋu values have prominence in the school, alongside Yolŋu ways of seeing the world so that students’ Yolŋu identity is not challenged, but deeply enhanced. We attempt to achieve this by listening carefully and attentively to our Elders and Yolŋu teachers. We recognise their authority to make decisions for their children, and are guided by their decisions. We work as a team, hand in hand, to deliver a rigorous curriculum, respecting the leadership of our elders Marathuwarr, Bambalarra and Wulŋuwulŋu, and the experience and dedication of the Yolŋu teachers Jackie Nuŋuwidi, Roslyn Malŋumba, James Burkiyalawuy and Rebecca Gamadala alongside the dedication and experience of the teaching principal Linda Miller.

In addition to the above, we spend considerable time in two other areas. Firstly, we embed students in the depth of their identity. As a whole of township team we develop rich and rigorous programs that actively teach students to develop intellectually, to articulate and philosophise about their Yolŋu world and their futures in a rapidly changing world. Both the NT Curriculum Framework’s Indigenous Language and Culture curriculum and the Australian Curriculum inform us of agreed year level targets and breadth across the range of subject areas.

Secondly, we certainly try and interweave Western learning, numeracy and literacy and to embed the Western learning as much as we can in practical experiences towards the aspirations and vision of Mäpuru families for their children’s futures of “...independent lives of dignity in their ancestral estates”. So Mäpuru’s existing micro-enterprises of a shop, and two cultural tourism enterprises Arnhem Weavers and Men’s Business feature prominently in our experiential learning, in contrast to practicing to do, students do actively participate in these real world businesses and apply their English, maths and ICT skills to the tasks involved.

We also believe that the students *cannot* understand numbers written on a whiteboard or in a book, until they conceptually know what the numbers mean in their heads. No matter how many times we write these abstract figures on a whiteboard or they see them in books or in newspapers, they are not actually connecting, conceptually, so it is not productive time. When these skills are

integrated in real life action, such as the enterprises outlined above, the students start to develop more of a holistic understanding. Because of this, we have started a student run shop to sell goods that support families to live and thrive at Māpuru.

The numeracy and literacy skills based on this student-managed shop, alongside completing the ongoing practical tasks of ordering, selling, writing invoices and completing stocktakes, help students to begin conceptualise number. Classroom numeracy is often contextualised through such activities as managing the shop, using the eftpos machine, weighing and pricing vegies, identifying and ordering supplies, including part for mowers, cars and bikes, calculating volumes of oil for differentials, fuel consumption during trips.

In the little shop the students run, students order the goods, price them and sell them, including secondhand clothes, for \$2, \$3, \$4 and \$5. They sell tyres, barks, cups, shoes, plates and lawnmowers. You name it, they order it, and they sell it. A high-quality speaker phone allows students to hear and to participate when seeking quotes or ordering goods. The locally managed food co-operative is another place where students spend time. This food co-op was started in the school thirteen years ago and was originally setup to allow township residents to buy food locally without having to charter a plane to buy food and to allow students to assist in the management of the co-op.

Just after the co-op opened, Māpuru matriarchs in association with the school invited women to visit them on country. This has been an invigorating and refreshing experience for all participants. The Māpuru women, who collectively call themselves the Arnhem Weavers ([www.arnhemweavers.com.au](http://www.arnhemweavers.com.au)), guide visitors over their country, spend meaningful time together and teach how to gather resources and local weaving techniques. The benefits of these weaving workshops are many fold to the school students. The visiting women are in many ways unique. They come to listen, learn and be in 'place' with Yolŋu. When the students teach the women visitors, they take the role of experts and are paid to teach. This role gives the students pride and self-esteem in themselves. These workshops also give the students an opportunity to meet and speak English, to engage with women who are keenly enthusiastic to learn from them, while at the same time observing that Yolŋu knowledge is valuable and that white women are willing to pay to listen and learn from them, an important lesson that the richness of the Yolŋu world is spiritually sustaining.

Students are exposed and engage with a range of English literatures. Sometimes it might be songs, sometimes it might be books, but usually it's a more holistic approach that relates to books and songs in a particular negotiated theme that we've decided to pursue. We look in depth at the idioms and the colloquial language, and we study those for a term or two terms, so that we're really getting a clear understanding of what the English is really saying, and the concepts behind the themes.

It's become apparent, right through the years I've been teaching, that we often assume that the students understand more English than they really do. Students may be quite competent at accurately reading an English text but often have little sense of the meaning. This is very similar to my observations of non-Yolŋu people

learning Yolŋu Matha. Yolŋu Matha students can often read text quite well, but often have considerable difficulty coming up with a satisfactory translation. This is often because the meanings of words don't match, because of limited exposure non-classroom English and because words meanings are formed in different ways. For example, in Yolŋu Matha the same object may have different names depending on the context of use.

Students are reading or hearing spoken English in the classroom, but it's been obvious to me that even though children might be reading quite capably, often there's limited comprehension of what they've just read. Take a simple word like 'puddle'. Yes, students can read *puddle*, but may have no idea what it is. This is one reason why we spend a considerable amount of time working on the vocabulary, relating it to the work that we do, and making sure that we put it into a context so that the kids can grasp what's going on.

## **Stories About How Mäpuru School Is Making a Positive Difference**

The response from elders and families regarding the operation of the school has been extremely positive. The students are, without exception, happy, cooperative, enthusiastic, respectful and polite.

### ***A Practical Example of Working Bilingually and Biculturally***

For the last two years we have collaborated with Elders in the theme of following the history and songs of the *Mukarr* turtle hunters. We've been on two excursions, but the most recent was over a week where we traced the travels of the students' ancestral *Mukarr* turtle hunters from the Mitchell ranges near Donydji, out to Bamaka on the Wessel Islands. *Djuŋgaya* ('custodians who have inherited rights to land and seas and sea-lands') came from Gapuwiyak, Miliŋinbi and Elcho. Sixty parents, Elders and students went on this excursion. We followed those sites. The children heard the stories and danced, re-enacting their ancestors. They looked at the sites and the footprints, the harpoon ropes, the turtles, and the meanings of some of those were described. They heard their names. Many students heard their name sung as part of the epic songs, or described in the history at the sites visited. They visited each of the sites with the relevant authorities. We are still doing follow-up work on this excursion now. In the classroom, we mapped, wrote texts in various genres, transcribed and translated, edited and subtitled videos in both Djambarrpuyŋu and English.

Elder and authority Nākarrma reported that he doesn't know anyone alive who had visited all those sites. The excursion was about the young people feeling proud

of who they are, and knowing their history—gaining an in-depth knowledge of history, by walking, sharing, participating in ceremonials on that country allows them the confidence and self-esteem to walk tall.

The ways Elders and the school plan excursions through an ongoing discussion. Elders direct the school on where we are going, with continuing negotiations with custodians to ensure all authorities are in agreement. Each and every place we visit has direct and real connection for each and every student in the school. Before we go we expect students to have insight into where we are going, what we will be doing and why they are going to do it. Although considerable discussion, negotiation and planning marks each excursion, we are always responsive to changing circumstance and needs. We are continuing our study of the Mukarr history and may in the future revisit specific places for further study.

Before we go anywhere students hear stories relevant to their age groups. We would talk about why we are going. Why are we doing this? Who's going to be involved? Why would they need to be involved? So they have much more background. When we do go to these sites, the children understand: "Oh, that's why we're here, and that's why those people are there. They just haven't come because they want to come, they have come here because this is their aunty's country or this is their *māri* country ('belonging to their maternal grandmother and great uncles') and there's no one else to represent this place".

When we went to the Wessel Islands, we were guided by senior custodians. So they took us to select places connected directly with the Mukarr hunters: the country that we went to and the springs we saw. At one particular site a *lungu* ('harpoon spear') landed and formed a spring and, as Yinjiya said, others, the custodians, said it went deep into the country, implying that the knowledge was deep and mysterious and something to be pondered and thought about. It couldn't easily be spoken in literal words.

We recorded the excursion on iPads and video cameras. We invited filmmakers, colleagues of Nākarrma to accompany the excursion. They made recordings of the songs and the dances and the stories. The recordings the students made on their iPads are being edited, transcribed using transcribers and translated at the moment. After the excursions the students re-visited each site, they listened to the stories, songs. They then made their own little books on their iPads, electronic books, out of each site where we visited.

But perhaps some of the most important recordings taken during the excursions were by students and their family members using mobile phones and ipads. During one re-enactment most of the observers had one, with some people having two mobile phones or ipads in their hands recording the proceedings. These recordings are still being watched and listened to by families across Yolŋu lands.

I feel here we have a very strong relationship with all the extended families of the students at Māpuru. That is possible because we are working biculturally and bilingually. It helps that some of us have long term connection with families. But the key element is that we take what Yolŋu say seriously, trying hard to hear with our whitefella ears. Having lived on Yolŋu land for a while, our limited



understanding of language and cultural protocols hopefully helps us to understand what Yolŋu are saying and what Yolŋu would like in their school.

Our presence, acting as facilitators to interact with bureaucracies and Western systems, enables Mäpuru residents to feel they can make the best future possible for their children on their own custodial country. On country, locals have the drive and initiative with their hunting, gathering and good nutritious food, where the children are spending a considerable time with their family, rather than wandering around the town trying to work out who they are in the town maintained largely for bureaucratic convenience. So in this way I believe we are actually supporting the initiative that Yolŋu have to make their own future, and the bilingual-bicultural school at Mäpuru is an important part of that.

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## Chapter 28

# Digital Futures for Bilingual Books

Catherine Bow, Michael Christie and Brian Devlin

The complexity and diversity of the Indigenous languages landscape in Australia preserves ancient systems of ecological and environmental knowledge, spiritual and philosophical traditions, and unique modes of social and political organisation. The richness inherent in these languages and their stories is a cultural value not to be underestimated. Recording and printing of these stories in vernacular languages gave them a new life on paper, in the years of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. Today's new technology allows these stories to have yet another life online, one not bound by material substance, and accessible now to a global audience. This chapter will address the issues involved in the preservation of these stories and efforts to make them accessible to audiences that are considerably wider than those for which they were originally developed, and some implications of the changes associated with the shift from oral to paper to digital modes.

In the digital mode, printed pages can be reconfigured in various ways, such as plain text, reproductions of the printed pages as image files, or web-versions in HTML. Released from the constraints of paper, the texts and images become available for reconfiguration enhancement (with the addition of sound files for example), and made freely available for mass distribution and reengagement with their owners, the storytellers their descendants, as well as the wider public through online delivery. The digitisation of printed materials allows preservation of endangered paper artefacts, access to these by new means, and opportunities for engagement or re-engagement by both familiar and new audiences.

The introduction of bilingual education programs in remote Northern Territory (NT) schools was an acknowledgment of the right of Aboriginal children to an education in their own languages and English, as well as representing an implicit acknowledgment of the intrinsic value of Aboriginal languages and their culture and knowledge practices to the wider world. The implementation of these programs

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was accompanied by major efforts to develop vernacular literature in local languages. The production of hundreds of books for use in classrooms was part of a plan to “flood the place with literature” (O’Grady and Hale 1974); that is, to provide sufficient teaching and reading material to enable both children and adults to develop strong literacy skills in languages with which they were already familiar, prior to transitioning to English literacy, usually around Year 4.

The production of these resources involved an appropriation of Indigenous knowledges within a Western technological and pedagogical framework, as traditional stories were recorded and transcribed, then printed on paper, and used for developing text literacy. This brought previously oral-only stories into a written mode, enabling a different means of transmission and a different degree of permanence. This meant that the larger bilingual programs had certain requirements, including the setting up of Bilingual Resource Development Units (BRDUs), more commonly known as Literature Production Centres (LPCs). Local LPCs were equipped with offset printing machines (typically AM220s), and later computers, with desktop publishing software and printers. In addition to the physical tools, the logistical requirements included identifying, training and employing local literature workers who worked with qualified linguists and teacher-linguists to produce books which were printed locally by literature production supervisors. These roles required learning techniques such as recording, transcribing, printing, desktop publishing and text layout. Illustrations were mostly done by local artists, some of whom worked casually or part time, although some were literacy workers. Aboriginal literacy workers were encouraged to develop new sets of skills in turning oral stories into written texts, and often providing English translations for them. The development of local community-led curriculum development also fed into the production of literature, involving a serious engagement with traditional Aboriginal epistemologies and a corresponding change in the nature of the literature. It is interesting to note that not all the products of this era of literature production were widely used in the classroom context or wider community (Christie 1995), which may reflect a different perspective of the representation of knowledge within literature, where for Yolŋu “the long process of negotiation and experimentation were the learning exercises, and the books merely its product” (Christie 1995, p. 83, Footnote 10).

Changes in policy (Devlin 2011) that saw the reduction of support for bilingual programs and a return to English as the focus language for teaching and literacy not only resulted in reduced emphasis on remote Aboriginal teacher education, but also the closure of many LPCs and vernacular literacy programs. The books produced in each community no longer had a significant place in the schools, and were often lost, destroyed, or left aside. An entire corpus, thousands of books, became endangered—particularly in their role in the ongoing cultural life of remote communities, where parents and grandparents continued the work of teaching the new generation their languages and culture—and were largely excluded from the school context.

The establishment of the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages was a response to the threat posed to this valuable body of literature and offered a solution

using digital technology. With funding from the Australian Research Council and in partnership with the Northern Territory Department of Education and the Australian National University, with the subsequent addition of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory Library and NT Catholic Education Office, an online digital archive was created Bow et al. (2014). Its purpose was to collect as many of these books as could be found, to digitise them and make them available with the permission of their owners on an open access website, now available at [www.cdu.edu.au/laal](http://www.cdu.edu.au/laal) (see Fig. 28.1). The purpose of the archive is threefold: first, to preserve resources of immeasurable value, rescuing them from dusty sheds and sometimes worse fates as space-conscious principals sent boxes of books to the tip or for burning to create space in the school. The second purpose was to allow wider access to these stories, which the internet enables and Open Access practices support, as the funding for the project was to establish a research infrastructure, but also to make the materials available to a much wider audience. The third was to reopen the question of postcolonial knowledge work (Christie and Verran 2013), as new possibilities for engagement with these materials presented themselves.

Traditional Indigenous storytelling and knowledge transfer has always been largely performative, often accompanied by images and signs, singing and dancing. In the bilingual era, storytelling shifted to a written mode, still accompanied by



Fig. 28.1 A view of the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages at [www.cdu.edu.au/laal](http://www.cdu.edu.au/laal)

images, yet necessitating changes in the delivery of the stories. Oral discursive patterns needed to be reimagined and recreated in the new mode; for example, where intonation enhanced an oral story, this was represented by typographical tricks such as *a—!* and use of CAPITALS and punctuation. The digital era allows the remixing of orality and textuality, where recordings can accompany written texts, even though a ‘read’ story will always differ from a spontaneous oral performance. The original recordings have been lost, but where they are available they can be included in the archive as ‘related objects’ associated with the digital books. Knowledge production can incorporate traditional modes as well as using digital technology to capture and enhance textual practices.

Traditional storytelling practice also involved a known audience, and recognition of appropriate authority and ownership of stories—identifying who had the right to tell the stories and to hear them. In the bilingual era there was a shift, where the audience was neither so limited nor so known, and stories could be shared in very different contexts. A classroom environment creates a very different context from that in which a story may traditionally have been told, with its relationship to land and environment. The authority of the storyteller may also be somehow transferred to the authority of the book, which has its own prestige in Western thinking and pedagogy. There is a consequent diminishing of control over the make-up of the audience, which in a classroom may contain children of different clans, and stories are shared among classes of different ages also. There may be a concomitant power shift from the storyteller to the teacher, as the story dynamic shifts in the hands of a different authority figure. “The purposes traditionally served by the orally transmitted stories are often lost when read to children from a book, especially if read in a classroom by someone who is not the owner of the story” (Gale 1992, p. 45). The availability of materials through collections such as the Living Archive facilitates opportunities for traditional knowledge authorities to reclaim some of this power as they engage with these stories in this digital mode. How might this happen? When previously printed stories come to life in digital forms in the classroom (for example), the owner of the stories, (and all those others who have some managerial responsibility over the stories or images) are again brought to the arena of the formulation and evaluation of truth claims in contemporary space. Young children relearn the authority of elders, and learn from them appropriate (and lawful) ways of creatively configuring and prosecuting their own truth claims using the artefacts of the past. So digitising technologies can actually facilitate a renaissance of ancestral knowledge practices largely lost during the era of print.

Many of the stories produced in the bilingual era, and now available through the include translations into English. Initially this was included for the benefit of a non-Indigenous teacher or student, and to facilitate the process of bridging vernacular literacy and language skills to English, yet a translation into a modern world language effects a significant change on a text, as it involves a recontextualisation and a reinterpretation of its meaning. The passage of time affects the understanding of written stories too as the result of changes in language use, making some older stories more opaque to young learners. Aboriginal staff who have worked with the Living Archive Project staff have sometimes offered to retell and re-record some

stories so that there is a simpler or more contemporaneous version available as well in the archive. Fortunately, the digital era supports such reworkings of stories, making it comparatively easy to include older usages alongside more contemporary ones. The Living Archive allows authorities to enrich resources contained in the archive by adding related items; for example, linking different versions of a story together, or adding audio or video files to a specific resource. This is a rudimentary digital imitation of the complex creative practices of collaborative agreement making in ceremonial and other traditional contexts.

Artwork and illustration practices from the pre-bilingual era relied on the use of natural local elements both as canvases (such as the roof of a bark shelter during the wet season) as media (using ochre, clay paints, and human-hair-and-twig brushes, etc.). In some cases, such as drawing on sand, or painting on the body, the images were transitory, present during a song, the telling of a story, or the performance of a ceremony, but soon blown or washed away. Bark paintings had more permanence, however these still existed as unique works. The introduction of modern technologies of printing using paper and chemicals introduced new levels of permanence and the production of multiple copies of the same image, which was previously unheard of. In the digital era, permanence takes on quite a different meaning, and the opportunities of duplication and reproduction are also boundless. New materials for construction allow both for new means of developing resources as well as opportunities to revisit old resources; for example, in digital colouring of older stories of which there are many examples in the Living Archive (see Fig. 28.2). Illustrations tended to accompany text in the bilingual era, rather than standing apart, although Indigenous artwork has its own language and interpretations which do not rely on text. The digital era sees a further decontextualisation of images and stories, with even less opportunity for interpretation or explanation, as the images and stories may be displaced further from their origins and from those with the authority to explain them. So while more people are able to view, read and enjoy the stories, this increase in audience is offset by a reduction in contextual information. However, the digital era also brings opportunities for recontextualisation, as authorities can link different stories together, or enhance existing story traces (books in the archive) with commentary or annotation, sound or video. The Living Archive is trialling ways to facilitate this recontextualisation under the authority of the creators of the material.

Textual practices vary across the three eras, where originally land, song and image were all forms of text, while in the bilingual era written textuality became the dominant form in the context of Western education, and now, digital technologies support the inclusion of more complex forms of textuality. In the Yolŋu context, a definition of literature incorporates “anything which is made of language and can be read” which would more broadly include land, since the creating ancestors sang and talked the land into being, so that “everything we know is made out of language” (Christie 1995, p. 78). In this view, ceremonial activities, with their attendant songs, dances, paintings and other products, are a form of literature, requiring specific literacy skills to understand and interpret. The introduction of alphabetic literacy to Indigenous communities not only added a new mode of communication of



Fig. 28.2 Example of enhanced technologies on different editions/translations of a book

knowledge, but also privileged a particular form of education through the establishment of schools in the Western tradition. Reducing stories to written form during this historical era, allowed them to be shared across both space and time, thus removing their truth claims from the original contexts of their performance. Negotiation of texts in the transformation from oral to written forms created new dynamics, and required highly skilled technicians.

In the bilingual era, texts of stories could themselves be transformed; for example, in the creation of songs for classroom use (such as the Kaytetye songs which accompany books in the Living Archive) or in development of worksheets involving cloze exercises or word puzzles. In the digital era textuality can be considered even more fluid, as texts can be extracted for reuse, updated, corrected, translated. Literacy has a different significance for Indigenous people in general—while people may be literate in one or more languages, they don't tend to read for pleasure or their own development outside of an educational setting. What does this do to the body of literature produced in the bilingual era?

The digitisation of the body of literature created during the era of bilingual education in the Northern Territory is a further step in the transformation of Indigenous knowledge transmission from oral to print digital media. In a similar way to the expansion of printed materials in Indigenous languages, which opened new affordances in both training and practice for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff in schools with bilingual programs, this further expansion creates affordances in training and practice in the digital era. The sharing and safekeeping of Indigenous knowledges has always involved complex negotiation.

As we move into the digital era, as the possibilities for the appropriation of digital technologies for Indigenous knowledge work open and are explored, we attend to new practices and protocols for these negotiations.

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# Afterword

**J. Cummins**

The dominant themes that emerged for me as I read this remarkable book were the determination of Aboriginal communities to educate their children and their resilience in the face of ill-conceived and unethical policies imposed by politicians still immersed in colonial ideologies. The repeated attempts to dismantle bilingual education programs are ill-conceived because they are evidence-free and have done nothing to boost school attendance. They are unethical because they jeopardise the life prospects of Aboriginal youth and undermine the cultural integrity and continuity of communities. It is clear from the careful documentation chronicled in the preceding chapters that politicians' claims to have consulted with Aboriginal communities and to have acted on the basis of research evidence are quite simply lies.

Although I have personally not been directly involved in either the research or the debate about bilingual education in the Northern Territory (NT), educators working in particular communities have used some of the theoretical constructs I proposed as tools to help plan and justify bilingual programs (see, for example, articles by Murray and Freeman, this volume). The invitation to contribute to this volume provides me with the opportunity both to reflect on how this work has been used and also to integrate these psychoeducational constructs into a broader framework for understanding patterns of achievement and underachievement among students from socially marginalised communities. This analysis draws primarily on ideas discussed in Cummins (2000, 2001) and Cummins et al. (2015).

I will comment on just three issues that underlie much of the discussion in the preceding chapters: (a) the legitimacy of bilingual education as a policy option for educating Aboriginal students, (b) the research evidence supporting the notion of a 'common underlying proficiency' that enables transfer of concepts, strategies, and skills across languages, and (c) what we know about causes of underachievement among Aboriginal and other socially marginalised communities and what kinds of educational responses are implied by these causal factors.

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## The Legitimacy of Bilingual Education as a Policy Option

The outcomes of bilingual education programs reviewed by Devlin (ch. 16, this volume) show clearly that students in these programs perform at least as well in English academic skills as comparable students in English-only programs despite considerably less instruction through the medium of English. Several of the research studies reported significant differences in favour of the bilingual program, although overall achievement levels for both groups were still considerably below expectations.

As the editors of this volume point out in their Introduction, the outcomes of bilingual programs encompass much more than simply achievement in English. A focus only on English language achievement renders Aboriginal languages, and the knowledge generated through them, invisible. Although these outcomes are difficult to quantify, it is reasonable to suggest on the basis of the case studies and narratives in this volume that the bilingual programs contributed to the vitality of Aboriginal languages by extending their domains of use and the functions they serve; the programs also likely contributed to the economic life of communities by providing employment opportunities to those who spoke Aboriginal languages; finally, these programs also raised the status of Aboriginal languages by affirming them as legitimate vehicles for intellectual and cultural exchange. In short, bilingual programs in Aboriginal communities not only provided a strong foundation for students' learning of English language and literacy skills, they also extended students' knowledge of their home languages (L1) into academic spheres and challenged the pervasive devaluation of community identities characteristic of colonial power relations in Australia, Canada, and many other countries.

The academic outcomes of Aboriginal programs are entirely consistent with the general pattern of bilingual education research. For example, the review of bilingual education outcomes conducted by Francis et al. (2006) as part of National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August and Shanahan 2006) in the United States concluded that bilingual instruction exerts a moderate but significant positive effect on minority students' English academic achievement:

In summary, there is no indication that bilingual instruction impedes academic achievement in either the native language or English, whether for language-minority students, students receiving heritage language instruction, or those enrolled in French immersion programs. Where differences were observed, on average they favoured the students in a bilingual program. The meta-analytic results clearly suggest a positive effect for bilingual instruction that is moderate in size. This conclusion held up across the entire collection of studies and within the subset of studies that used random assignment of students to conditions (Francis et al. 2006, p. 397).

Thus, the research on bilingual education demonstrates unequivocally that more instruction through the majority language in school does *not* result in greater academic achievement. In fact, the trend is towards an *inverse* relationship between

the amount of instruction in the majority language and minority student achievement in that language.

The consistent pattern in the research findings across a vast range of sociolinguistic and sociopolitical contexts highlights the fact that policy-makers or media pundits who argue against bilingual education have simply not bothered to read the research. Their arguments are based on evidence-free ideologies rationalised in educational terms.

This is illustrated in the NT context by the government's response to the low achievement of Aboriginal students in remote communities on the 2008 National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). As Freeman (this volume) points out, the government attributed the cause of underachievement to insufficient instructional time in English and mandated that the first four hours of schooling be conducted solely through the medium of English, effectively dismantling bilingual instruction. Minimal consideration was given to alternative interpretations of the low test performance such as the appropriateness of the test for students from very different cultural backgrounds, the length of time for students learning the school language to catch up academically in that language, or the legacy of generations of discrimination and exclusion. Similarly, no consideration was given to the fact that none of the available data suggested that monolingual English programs were superior in outcomes to bilingual programs.

This pattern of policy-making reflects what I have called 'coercive relations of power' where power is exercised by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group, or country (Cummins 2001). I contrast this with 'collaborative relations of power' which reflect the sense of the term *power* that refers to 'being enabled,' or 'empowered' to achieve more. Within collaborative relations of power, power is not a fixed quantity but is generated in an additive way through interaction with others. The more empowered one individual or group becomes, the more is generated for others to share.

In the context of this conception of societal power relations, *empowerment* can be defined as *the collaborative creation of power*. Students whose schooling experiences reflect collaborative relations of power know that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom. Schooling opens up identity options and amplifies rather than silences their power of *self-expression*. Greatorex (this volume) provides illuminating examples of how personal and community power can be generated when education is conceived as a collaborative and decolonising process. As he points out: "the key element is that we take what Yolju say seriously, trying hard to hear with our whitefella ears".

These constructs are relevant for assessing the outcomes of bilingual education programs because the effectiveness of any program will depend not simply on the extent to which the program incorporates students' L1 but rather on the extent to which instruction enables students to carry out powerful, identity-affirming functions with both their languages. Educational responses to underachievement that fail to address the causal role of identity devaluation, and its roots in historical and current patterns of coercive power relations, are unlikely to be successful.

In short, the research data are clear that while bilingual education has produced generally positive results in the NT context, it is not, by itself, a panacea for Aboriginal students' educational difficulties. As discussed in a later section, underachievement derives from multiple factors (e.g., poverty, the inter-generational legacy of brutal oppression etc.) and, while provision of L1 instruction *can* address some of these factors (e.g., comprehension of instruction, devaluation of children's language and culture in the wider society), far more than just medium of instruction is involved in reversing school failure.

## The Common Underlying Proficiency or Interdependence Hypothesis

How do we explain the fact that in bilingual programs less instructional time through the majority language results in no adverse academic consequences in that language? I have argued that this pattern of results can only be explained by transfer of linguistic and conceptual skills across languages. The evidence supporting cross-lingual interdependence is clearly summarised by Dressler and Kamil (2006) as part of the Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August and Shanahan 2006). They conclude:

In summary, all these studies provide evidence for the cross-language transfer of reading comprehension ability in bilinguals. This relationship holds (a) across typologically different languages ...; (b) for children in elementary, middle, and high school; (c) for learners of English as a foreign language and English as a second language; (d) over time; (e) from both first to second language and second to first language (p. 222).

In concrete terms, what this hypothesis means is that L1 instruction for Aboriginal students is not just developing concepts and skills in that language, it is also developing a deeper conceptual and linguistic foundation that is strongly related to the development of literacy in English.

The interdependence hypothesis explains why students' L1 language and literacy skills can be promoted in a bilingual program at no cost to their English language and literacy development. It suggests that even (in fact, *especially*) in non-bilingual programs, instruction should attempt to engage students' multilingual repertoires both to scaffold comprehension and production of the target language (English) and promote language awareness. However, the notion of a common underlying proficiency is a psycholinguistic construct and, as such, does not directly address the issue of what causal factors underlie the underachievement of Aboriginal and other minority group students, nor what forms of instruction might respond to and help reverse the impact of these causal factors.

## Causes of Underachievement and High-Impact Educational Responses

Three categories of students (excluding those with special needs) tend to experience disproportionate levels of underachievement: (a) linguistically diverse students whose L1 is different from the dominant language of school and society, (b) students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, and (c) students from communities that have been marginalised or excluded from educational and social opportunities (often over generations) as a result of discrimination in the wider society (e.g., many indigenous communities around the world). Many Aboriginal students in the Australian context fall into all three categories insofar as they come to school with limited or no knowledge of English, their families are living in poverty, and their communities have experienced generations of racism and societal exclusion.

Considerable research has identified sources of *potential* educational disadvantage for each of these categories of student. For example, a home-school language switch represents a potential educational disadvantage but is realised as an actual disadvantage only when the school fails to support students effectively in learning the school language. [1] Among the high-impact instructional responses identified by research to enable students to learn the school language effectively are (a) scaffolding of comprehension and production of language across the curriculum, (b) reinforcing academic language in the teaching of all curriculum content, and (c) engaging students' multilingual repertoires (e.g., García 2009).

The ways in which poverty can exert an impact on student achievement have been highlighted in many publications (e.g., Berliner 2009). They include factors such as access to healthcare and adequate nutrition, housing segregation, lack of access to cultural and material resources in the home, and lack of access to print in the home, environment, and sometimes school. Some of the sources of potential educational disadvantage associated with SES are beyond the capacity of individual schools to address (e.g., housing segregation) but the potential negative effects of other factors can be mitigated by school policies and instructional practices. For example, extensive research has documented the pivotal role that literacy engagement plays in literacy attainment (see Cummins 2015 for a review). Thus, schools serving low-SES students can address the limited access to print experienced by many students in their homes, neighborhoods and schools (Duke 2000) by immersing them in a print-rich environment (ideally in L1 and L2) in order to promote literacy engagement across the curriculum. A consistent focus on reinforcing academic language across the curriculum is also likely to promote students' academic language development.

Finally, there is extensive research documenting the ways in which societal power relations, and their reflection in patterns of identity negotiation in schools, operate as causal factors in explaining underachievement among students from socially marginalised communities (e.g., Bishop and Berryman 2006; McCarty

2005). Ladson-Billings (1995) has expressed this reality succinctly in relation to African-American students: “The problem that African-American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society” (p. 485). Ladson-Billings (1994) has also expressed the essence of an effective instructional response: “When students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence” (1994, p. 123).

The logical implication of this perspective is that schools committed to reversing patterns of underachievement should implement instruction that actively challenges the devaluation of students and communities in the wider society. These forms of instruction have been variously labeled culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995), culturally responsive (Gay 2010) and culturally sustaining (Paris 2012). A common element in these pedagogical approaches is that they promote identity affirmation or what Manyak (2004) has called *identities of competence* in association with literacy and overall academic development.

The educational efficacy of culturally responsive pedagogies is supported by Sleeter’s (2011) synthesis of the outcomes of culturally responsive education in the United States, which reported that literacy pedagogies that challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the wider society produce positive outcomes for students from socially marginalised communities. Silburn et al. (2011) also find supportive evidence for these pedagogical approaches in the Australian context: “A consistent feature of the Indigenous literacy and English learning support programs reporting successful outcomes was the fact that they were delivered in a culturally supportive manner and were designed to integrate with the child’s entire environment of up-bringing i.e. their involvement with and perceived relevance to family, school and community” (p. 46).

Culturally responsive schooling in the context of Aboriginal students will minimally include the following characteristics:

- *Where feasible, bilingual instruction that aims to promote language and literacy skills in both English and the Aboriginal language.* In contexts where bilingual instruction is not feasible (e.g., difficulty finding bilingual teachers or assistants or multiple Aboriginal languages in the school), then the entire school should adopt a proactive approach that communicates positive messages about the value of students’ languages and culture and encourages students to transfer knowledge and skills acquired in English to their home languages and vice-versa.
- *Connecting instruction to students’ lives and to the funds of knowledge in their communities* (González et al. 2005). Greatorex (this volume) documents the profound learning in both L1 and English and the depth of insight that students in Mapuru School developed in the context of Elder-led excursions to ancestral sites. Freeman (this volume) similarly provides an example of how the school can operate as a learning community where parents, community members, teachers and students work and learn together. He describes how the “elders of the Areyonga community lead the students on rich cultural excursions and then

together the knowledge is brought back to the classroom where the elders, teachers and students discuss and record the traditional knowledge, language and culture in Pitjantjatjara using a variety of genres and technology”. This process of tapping into community funds of knowledge not only provides rich L1 literacy experiences but also passes on community-specific knowledge to staff and students that is essential for community survival.

- *Affirming students’ identities in multiple ways across the curriculum.* Obviously, the examples provided by Greatorex and Freeman (and other authors in this volume) illustrate how connecting instruction to students’ lives and cultural backgrounds not only promotes learning but also affirms personal and community identities. An additional example of how instruction can challenge coercive relations of power in the wider society comes from the Canadian context where a group of First Nations high school students had the opportunity to work with Ojibwe elder and artist Rene Meshake to create visual and literary Aboriginal ‘identity texts’ (Cummins et al. 2015; Montero et al. 2013). These identity texts communicated messages about students’ First Nations identity through multimodal images, colours, symbols, song, and language. A central characteristic of identity texts is that when shared with multiple audiences (e.g., through a school web site), they hold a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in positive ways. One of the student participants in this project, Cassandra Bice-Zaugg, a member of Mississauga of the New Credit First Nations, highlighted the centrality of identity for academic achievement in reflecting on the work that she and her classmates had created: “Take away identity and what do you have? If you have a student that doesn’t know who they are, do you think they care about what goes on in the classroom?” (Montero et al. 2013, p. 90).
- Cassandra’s insight is echoed in the experience of Nākarrma, recounted by Greatorex (this volume), who became a lecturer in Charles Darwin university ‘despite’ starting school only at 11 years old: “My land, the environment and my elders educated me. They taught me how to behave respectfully, to remember, to hypothesise, theorise and to think. I learnt to be proud and confident. If I had attended Shepherdson College from an early age I would have been stunted in my social and intellectual development”.

## Conclusion

Recent educational policies in both the NT and many other contexts (e.g., the United States) have been dominated by an ‘effectiveness paradigm’ that focuses on ensuring that students meet universal, one-size-fits-all standards, which are assessed by standardised or state-developed tests. The demand for ‘effectiveness’ and accountability has typically been accompanied by a ‘no excuses’ orientation that dismisses the role of causal factors such as poverty and discrimination embedded in societal and educational institutions. Simplistic and evidence-free ‘solutions’ are

prescribed (e.g., maximise exposure to English) and when these solutions fail to yield improved outcomes, ineffective teaching or lack of teacher commitment are typically blamed.

The failure of policy-makers (in many contexts, not just NT) to consider the causes of underachievement and to identify potential interventions that respond to these causal factors is not just reflective of extreme intellectual laziness. It also reflects an unwillingness to acknowledge the ongoing destructive impact of societal power relations on student achievement and community survival.

The lifework of many of the educators whose voices are heard in this volume stands in stark contrast to the 'efficient-transmitter-of-curriculum' identity implicitly envisaged in current mainstream policies focused on Aboriginal youth. In contrast to government policies that consign issues of power and identity to the margins, educator after educator in these pages articulates a commitment to create interpersonal spaces where power is generated between teachers and students. This orientation is not simply a moral undertaking focused on social justice (although it is that, too); it is also rooted in the empirical evidence regarding high-impact educational interventions that respond to causes of underachievement among marginalised communities. Specifically, if underachievement among marginalised social groups is rooted in the operation of societal power relations, it follows that 'effectiveness' can only be realised when educators, individually and collectively, challenge the operation of coercive relations of power.

## *Endnotes*

This difference in educational support can partly explain the fact that immigrant-background students in Australia and Canada, on average, tend to perform close to national norms on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) but in many European countries the performance of immigrant-background students falls considerably below national norms.



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# Glossary

**Aboriginal** Warlpiri: *Yapa*

Wubuy: *Wurruwurruj*

Yolŋu (Gupapuyŋu, Djambarrpuyŋu, Gumatj, etc) : *Yolŋu*

**Non-Aboriginal** Warlpiri: *Kardiya*

Wubuy: *Dhurrabada*

Yolŋu: *Balanda*

**garma** Yolŋu: *garma* ('a ceremonial site—for circumcision any open sacred ceremony'). Later *garma* was used more metaphorically to refer to collaborative, school-based efforts, in place, under authority, to create knowledge (and agreement). Hence, '*garma*' can refer to such a project (Ngurruwutthun 1991) or curriculum. More generally, it denotes a particular philosophy and practice of education that is centered in the here and now, in particular localities and kin networks, and is guided by Elders. In this volume both Greatorex and Christie discuss this concept. An annual festival at Gulkula is called *Garma* to signify that it is a public ceremony conducted in a recognised open space.

**galtha** Yolŋu: *galtha* ('a coming together of people for a particular purpose, often signified by thrusting a spear into the sand'). Such constituted activities are referred to as *galtha*. The term was extended metaphorically to refer to workshops held over several days, focusing on a single topic such as bark painting, guided by Elders, and involving a lot of negotiation. The products of such a workshop would be filmed, written up, illustrated and published locally under the heading, *Galtha Rom*. (In Yolŋu languages *rom* refers to 'culture, behaviour, law, rule, custom, tradition, habit, way of life or doing things'). *Galtha Rom* workshops were introduced at Yirkala in 1989. Christie, this volume, discusses the *galtha* concept

**Jukurrrpa** Ross, this volume, explains that *Jukurrrpa* is a Central Australian Aboriginal term which is equivalent to the Aboriginal English word 'Dreaming'. It refers to a time, when ancestral beings travelled, shaped and changed the world, to the places where they went and the tracks they followed—as well as the intricate social and natural connections they established

**Model I & II programs** Devlin this volume, explains that two frameworks for bilingual education programs in schools were advocated in the 1970s: Model I, which incorporated reading and writing in Aboriginal languages, and Model II, which did not. Most bilingual schools opted for Model I programs in the 1970s. Model 1 was often referred to as the step-model but it could just as easily have been referred to as the bridging model of biliteracy and bilingual education. One of the aims of such programs was to ‘bridge’ students or transition them from reading and writing in the vernacular to English literacy by mid primary

# Places Index

## A

Alekarenge, 37  
Alice Springs, 5, 8, 12, 36, 37, 44, 56, 76, 78, 167, 169, 171, 173, 211, 220, 233, 242, 253, 256, 260, 269–275, 279–281, 293–295, 299  
Amoonguna, 273, 281  
Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, 81  
Angurugu, 18, 19  
Aurukun, Qld, 11  
Areyonga, Utju, 7, 18, 74, 76, 186, 205, 209, 211, 220, 221, 225–234, 360  
Arltunga, 272, 294  
Arnhem Land, 8, 18, 27, 49, 50, 74, 79, 81, 82, 91, 135, 173, 325, 333

## B

Bagot, 12  
Bamaka on the Wessel Islands, 343  
Bamyili, Barunga, 19, 190  
Batchelor College (later Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education), 106, 134  
Bathurst Island, 7, 11, 20, 113  
Beach Camp, Galiwin'ku, 338  
Belyuen, 12  
Bond Springs, 272

## C

Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics, 253  
Charles Creek, 272, 294  
Crocodile Islands, 74

## D

Darwin, 1, 5, 6, 14, 17, 21, 22, 30, 49, 76, 77, 81, 102, 133–135, 162, 167–169, 179, 181, 185, 195, 242, 247, 252, 254, 256, 274, 280, 285, 291

Deakin University, 79, 135, 136, 143  
Delissaville, 12  
Dhupuma College, 325, 340

## E

Elcho Island, 185, 325, 327, 331, 338, 340  
Ernabella, SA, 81

## G

Galiwin'ku, 8, 186, 325, 332, 337  
Gapuwiyak, 343  
Gärul, 333, 334  
Gulkula, 135  
Guluwurru, 334

## H

Haast's Bluff, 8, 259  
Hermannsburg, Ntaria, 11, 14, 18, 271

## I

Institute for Aboriginal Development, 275

## K

Katherine, 195  
Kintore, Walunguru, 108, 259  
Kormilda College, 247

## L

Lajamanu, Hooker Creek, 37, 105, 168, 173, 186  
Little Flower Mission, 272

## M

Maningrida, 9, 91, 186, 205, 241  
Mäpuru, 8, 242, 338, 339, 341, 342, 344, 345  
Marnyamananguli, 339  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 42, 251  
M'Bunghara, 259  
Middle Camp, 334

- Miliŋinbi, Milingimbi, 8  
 Mitchell ranges, 343  
 Mt. Liebig, Watiyawanu, 259  
 Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School, 7, 113, 123, 168, 173
- N**  
 Napperby Station, 232  
 Narrani, 308, 334  
 National Aboriginal and Islander Dance Academy, 82  
 Nhulunbuy High School, 340  
 Northern Territory University, 102, 103, 138, 171  
 Numbulwar, 7, 22, 149–152, 155–157, 159, 161, 162, 168, 205
- O**  
 Oenpelli, 19, 21, 190
- P**  
 Papunya, 8, 19, 21, 108, 167, 259, 260  
 Point McLeay, 81  
 Pularumpi (formerly Garden Point), 19, 22
- R**  
 Raukkan, 81, 82  
 Roper River, 11, 19
- S**  
 Santa Teresa, Ltyentye Apurte, 293, 294, 300  
 School of Australian Languages, 253  
 Shepherdson College, 8, 19, 21, 190, 205, 325, 328, 331–333, 336–340
- South Australia, 5, 49, 57, 74, 81, 82, 86, 87, 95, 187, 251  
 Summer Institute of Linguistics, 74, 79, 130, 131, 247, 312
- T**  
 Tangentyere Council, 241, 260, 263, 266, 270, 273, 276  
 Ti-Tree, 35, 44, 167  
 Top Camp, 334  
 Traeger Park Primary School, 56
- U**  
 Utopia, 280
- W**  
 Wadeye, Port Keats, 173, 285, 287, 288  
 Walungurru, Kintore, 108, 259  
 Warruwi, Goulburn Island, 18, 19  
 Willowra, Wirliyajarayai, 35, 36  
 Wobulkarra country, 339  
 Wurrumiyanga, 113, 119, 121
- Y**  
 Yalata, 74  
 Yayayi, 21  
 Yipirinya school, 8, 269–272, 274–276, 279–281  
 Yirara College, 248  
 Yirrkaala, 7, 18–20, 27, 28, 30, 73, 78–80, 82, 103, 133, 135–138, 141–147, 168, 172, 173, 186, 187, 190, 205, 325  
 Yuendumu, Yurntumu, 7, 12, 19, 22, 250

# NT Languages Index

## A

Anindilyakwa, 18, 19, 150, 151  
Anmatyerre, 248  
Arrente, 8, 14, 18, 19, 122, 248, 269–274,  
276, 280, 282, 293–296, 298–305

## C

Central Arrente, 270, 271, 273, 280, 281

## D

Dhuwaya, 78, 79, 135  
Djambarrpuyŋu, 8, 21, 52, 128, 326, 327, 331,  
334, 337, 343

## E

Eastern Arrente, 270, 272, 275, 294, 295  
English, Standard Australian, 86, 90, 120, 204,  
223

## G

Gälpu, 331  
Gumatj, 8, 18, 19, 21, 78, 80, 136, 142  
Gupapuyŋu, 8, 18, 19, 21, 50, 51, 53, 128, 131,  
136, 331

## K

Kriol, 7, 19, 54, 55, 150, 155, 159, 161, 162  
Kunwinjku, 19

## L

Luritja, 248, 271, 280, 282. *See also*  
Pintupi-Luritja

## M

Maung, 18, 19  
Murrinhpatha, Murrinh Patha, 180–182, 184,  
285, 286, 288–291

## N

Ndjébbana, 91, 92  
Ngandi, 150, 151, 155

## P

Pidgin English, 61  
Pintupi, Pintupi-Luritja, 8, 19, 21, 241, 248,  
259, 261  
Pitjantjatjara, 8, 18, 19, 57, 76, 81, 95, 220,  
225, 228, 230, 231, 234

## R

Ritharrŋu/Waagilak, 150

## T

Tiwi, 19, 22, 24, 80, 113–115, 119–122, 124,  
125, 168

## W

Warlpiri, 8, 19, 24, 36, 37, 39, 41–46, 76, 77,  
105, 122, 173, 174, 241–243, 247–257, 270  
Western Arrarnta, 270, 271, 275, 280  
Wubuy (Nunggubuyu), 205

## Y

Yankunytjatjara, 57, 95  
Yolŋu language family, 128

# Other Languages Index

## **K**

Kaurna, [55](#), [81](#), [86](#)

Kriol, [61–71](#)

## **N**

Ngarrindjeri, [81](#), [82](#)

## **Q**

Quechua, [94](#)

## **Z**

Zulu, [94](#)



# Subject Index

## A

- Aboriginal Land Rights Act, 37, 273
- Aboriginal Languages Fortnight, 103, 134
- Aboriginalisation, 7, 91, 103–105, 134, 135, 145–147, 277
- Aboriginal teacher/teacher assistants, 7, 13, 28–30, 44, 45, 50–53, 55, 58, 75, 76, 91, 102, 103, 105–107, 133, 135, 145, 175, 206, 229, 234, 241, 270, 275, 288, 348
- Aboriginal teacher training, 106
- Aboriginal elders, 50, 134, 229
- Arts-based projects, 242
- Assimilation, 2, 12, 37, 38, 81, 88, 142, 212, 256, 272, 281
- Australian Curriculum, 181, 222, 291, 341

## B

- Batchelor college/institute, 106, 134
- Bilingual Education Act, 19
- Bilingual education aims, 18, 19, 54, 114, 187, 189, 221
- Bilingual Education Newsletter, 102
- Bilingual handbook, 18, 77, 221
- Bilingual policy, 32, 95, 102, 149, 224, 240
- Bilingual Program
  - accreditation, 105, 175, 185
  - consolidation, 22, 45, 101
  - evaluation, 187, 190
  - model I (step-model, biliteracy), 18, 50, 114, 205
  - model II (oral), 18, 205, 364
  - maintenance, 205, 206
- Bilingual unit, 13, 17, 101, 102, 107
- Bush trips, 242, 262, 289, 303

## C

- Christie, Michael, 171

- Church, 38, 86, 131, 133, 208, 249, 256, 271, 333
- Church Missionary Society, 64
- Collins review, Collins report, 92, 175
- Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), 277
- Community linguist, 50, 151, 152, 160
- Concentrated language experience, 56, 78, 80, 107
- Country visits, 241, 300
- Creole, 196
- Cummins, Jim, 181
- Curriculum, 7, 19, 22, 27–29, 38–40, 43, 46, 51, 57, 77, 80, 81, 102, 106, 107, 115, 117, 120, 121, 124, 128, 136, 137, 142–145, 147, 151, 156–158, 161, 162, 196, 220, 234, 240, 270, 275, 289, 296, 299–301, 303, 348
- Curriculum development, 107, 108, 137
- Cyclone Tracy, 18, 21, 23

## D

- Digital technology, 171, 241, 349, 350
- Direct instruction, 240

## E

- Elders, 36, 45, 55, 81, 108, 133–136, 138, 141, 143, 151–153, 156, 220, 225, 229, 241, 242, 247, 252, 261, 262, 271, 275, 276, 279, 289, 291, 300, 303, 305, 332, 334, 339–341, 343
- English as an additional language or dialect, 106, 239, 240
- English as a second language, 14, 30, 74, 76, 92, 113, 153, 159, 168, 194, 205, 226, 291, 332

- English literacy, 18, 40, 41, 75, 90, 109, 114, 116, 117, 169, 174, 175, 181, 187, 189, 194, 198, 204, 209, 213, 221, 222, 234, 238, 239, 255, 261, 277, 282, 289, 291, 298, 348
- F**  
 First four hours of English, 210  
 First language literacy, *see* Vernacular literacy, 50, 53, 58, 220, 228, 230, 260  
 Funding, resourcing of bilingual programs, 186
- G**  
 Galtha Rom, 80, 143  
 Garma, 80, 133, 135, 136, 143, 146
- H**  
 Harris, Stephen, 173  
 Homeland centres, 135, 137, 141, 142, 144, 146, 147  
 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 175
- I**  
 Immersion, 199, 229, 298  
 Indigenous Education Review, *see* Wilson Report  
 Indigenous Education Strategy, 234, 238, 240
- J**  
 Jukurrpa, ‘Dreaming’, 43, 249
- K**  
 Kinship, 38, 113, 249, 252, 335, 336, 339
- L**  
 Land and learning, 241, 260  
 Language change, 65  
 Language experience approach, 52  
 Language loss, 82  
 Language maintenance, 7, 43, 53, 87, 92, 93, 104, 117, 124, 125, 149, 205, 206, 237, 239, 270  
 Language policy, 2–4, 85, 86, 88, 94, 95, 104, 165, 243, 282  
 Language revitalisation, 149, 153, 155–157, 159, 161, 205, 243  
 Language revival program (numbulwar), 205  
 Language shift, 6, 82, 121, 150, 205  
 Learning lessons, *see* Collins report  
 Learning on country, 78  
 Learning together, 50, 78, 80, 115, 121, 122, 153, 219, 220, 244, 301, 302, 327, 328
- Linguists, 2, 11, 14, 17, 20–22, 24, 44, 55–57, 116, 128, 130, 131, 133, 134, 151–154, 156–159, 171, 203, 287, 348
- Literacy, 11, 13, 15, 18, 21, 24, 39, 42, 45, 50, 52, 54, 57, 75, 77–79, 88, 89, 91, 92, 107, 108, 110, 114, 119, 120, 122, 128, 159, 174, 181, 182, 189, 205, 221, 224, 237, 240, 243, 252, 275, 288, 289, 300–302, 304, 331, 341
- Literacy production, 108, 252, 255
- Literacy worker, 18, 45, 54, 58, 76, 79, 91, 101, 133, 152, 160, 233, 247, 254, 264, 265, 295, 348
- Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages (LAAL), 259, 348, 349
- Local Curriculum, 7, 107, 108, 127, 150, 156
- Luritja, 261, 263, 265, 266, 270
- M**  
 Malin, Merridy, 173  
 Maths, 29, 52, 53, 59, 74, 107, 108, 115, 143, 146, 153, 159, 162, 190, 221, 228, 248, 295, 326, 328, 332, 333, 335, 336, 341  
 Metaphors, 127, 136, 230, 299  
 Mission, Missionary, 6, 11, 12, 14, 18, 20, 24, 44, 57, 79, 86, 91, 96, 128, 130, 231, 248, 249, 271, 273, 281, 294, 333, 338
- N**  
 National assessment program—literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN), 206, 220, 221  
 Northern Territory Curriculum Framework, Indigenous Language and Culture program, 108, 124, 149, 205  
 Northern Territory Curriculum Framework, 108, 124, 149, 205, 303  
 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), 278  
 Nungarrayi, Jeannie Herbert, 173
- O**  
 Oracy, oral English, 116, 117, 150, 159, 210  
 Orthographies, 8, 18, 130, 274, 290
- P**  
 Pedagogy, 4, 7, 101, 103, 105–107, 109, 114, 116, 120, 124, 133, 135, 223, 239, 243, 277, 300, 303, 350  
 Phonics, 79, 80, 116, 119, 227, 239, 252  
 Place-based curriculum, 136  
 Primers, syllable-based, 119  
 Principal Education Advisor, 102

**R**

- Ranger programs, 241
- Rations, 36, 272
- Remote area teacher education (RATE), 75, 106, 142, 299

**S**

- School council, 103, 105, 143–146, 151, 152, 173, 251, 254, 256, 269, 272
- School policy, 74, 75, 81, 105, 122
- Self-determination, 2, 23, 37, 102–104, 130, 141–143, 145, 147, 269, 273, 278, 281
- Singing, 81, 160, 248, 254, 255, 349
- Step model, *see* Bilingual program-model 1
- Summer Institute of Linguistics, 74, 79, 130, 131, 247, 312

**T**

- Talking number, 65

- Teacher linguists, 45, 91, 107, 227, 234, 244, 269
- Team teaching, 4, 8, 20, 27, 28, 30, 30–32, 74, 106, 113–115, 296, 326, 330
- Town camps, 270, 273, 276
- Two-way learning (TWL), 31, 199, 208

**V**

- Vernacular Literacy, 15, 16, 21, 75, 78, 81, 102, 119, 122, 133, 188, 199, 209–211, 213, 221, 231, 275, 276, 288, 348, 350
- Vocational education and training, 110, 277

**W**

- Walkin, talkin stories, 117
- Walking talking texts, 116, 119, 120, 124, 301
- Warlpiri triangle, 254, 255
- Wilson report, 186, 237, 238
- Wycliffe Bible Translators, 130