Submission to the Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities being conducted by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs

Dr Brian Devlin
Charles Darwin University
August 31, 2011

> *We say a quality education for our children must do the following things:*
> *1. Respect and complement our Yolngu cultural heritage at all times including our language, law, ceremonies and customs*
>
> *2. Prepare our young people for the modern world without disadvantage and with all the opportunities available to all young Australians.*
>
> (Wali Wunungmurra, NLC Chairperson, speaking at Garma, 2011. To see all the notes based on his address, please refer to Appendix 3 of this submission)

PREAMBLE

Assistance in the preparation of this submission is gratefully acknowledged. Extensive, helpful notes were prepared by Kathyn McMahon and CL0611 and CA0611 (two NT DET employees). Nancy Devlin and Kathryn McMahon also sought some school-based contributions which could be included. Information was subsequently provided by 'XP0611', an experienced ex-principal of a bilingual school and 'CP0611', the current principal of a remote Two-Way (or bilingual) school in the NT. Other informants include Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe, Gemma Alanga Nganbe Karrkirr Kinthari, Walbinthith Lantjin, Tharrngka Tchinburrurr, Mirrkun Nemarlak, Nganani Bunduck, Daninh Bunduck, Kinmarri Mullumbuk, Kuwampam Melpi, Mankanak Lantjin, Pelli Dumoo, Diyini Lantjin, Parlun Tipiloura, Kabanin Ngarri, Ngumanhuk Dinding Melpi, Namengkena Nemarlak, Marlem Kolumboort, Deminhimpuk Bunduck, Yerampuwup Bunduck, Tjinbururr Tchinburrurr and Alawu Kungul.

The following submission, which responds to all of the Inquiry's eight terms of reference, has been prepared as a statement by one individual. However, it incorporates contributions from scores of Indigenous people, together with a few non-Indigenous perspectives, so it is best regarded as a hybrid statement that pools together many voices from remote workplaces and communities.

Others have suggested changes, contributed material, and/or agreed to add their name at the end to indicate their support for the content. Their contributions have been cited, with acknowledgement, in the text of this submission. Their institutional affiliation and e-mail address has been provided where appropriate. See Appendix 1.

Readers of this submission who would like an outline of the background and context which informs this submission are invited to turn to Appendix 2.

INTRODUCTION

The author is pleased to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, which is currently inquiring into language learning in Indigenous communities. His frame of reference is the Northern Territory.

Although comprising 17.5 per cent of Australian land mass, the NT only has one per cent of the population (227 7161 out of 22 155 429), but of all jurisdictions it has the highest proportion of Indigenous people (approximately 30 per cent of the total), the largest number of Indigenous language speakers (55 705 or 52.4 per cent) and the greatest ratio of people (44 per cent) living in remote or very remote areas. Given these differences it would seem to make sense to treat the NT as distinctive, rather than as an extension of Queensland or some other State for policy development purposes.

About a quarter of the 53 662 Indigenous NT residents included in the 2006 Census reported that they only used English (that is, 19,086 people or 26.8 per cent). Another 42.8 per cent (22 951) claimed to speak both English and an Indigenous language very well or well. Given that about 14.8 per cent neither indicated how proficient they were in English nor what their other language affiliation was, it can be concluded that somewhere between 15.6 to 30.4 per cent of the NT Indigenous population did not speak English proficiently, according to the 2006 census. It will be interesting to see what the trend is in this regard as indicated by the 2011 census figures.

In Australia about 56,000 people speak an Indigenous language. Of these, about 18 per cent speak an Australian creole (Kriol) according to the 2006 Census. In 2006 the ABS calculated that 44 717 NT residents had a language background other than English, equivalent to around 51 per cent of the population. The 2006 census found that, of the total NT population, 15.1 per cent (29 192 people) speak an Indigenous language. The largest group of Indigenous language users (5 417) identified as speakers of Arandic language varieties; 77 per cent (4 173) claimed to speak it well or very well. The second largest group are the 5 097 who identify as Yolngu speakers; 68.7 per cent (3 501) claimed to be proficient; that is, to speak it well or very well. What these figures could be taken to indicate is that intergenerational language shift is more evident in the northeast of the Territory than it is in the Centre.

In its last annual report the NT DET acknowledged that "For many Indigenous learners studying in remote schools, English is rarely used in their communities outside of school. This means that while at school they are learning English as a foreign language". Of the NT's 188 schools, 79 are attended solely by Indigenous students; 82 are classified as very remote Indigenous schools, not including 46 Homeland Learning Centres. In 2009 Indigenous students comprised 43.4 per cent of all NT school enrolments. Although school is compulsory for children once they turn six, in very remote schools the mean attendance rate for Indigenous students is 61.8 per cent, but in five schools it is less than 30 per cent.

Until recently, Departmental policy, insofar as it takes account of Indigenous culture and Indigenous languages, only gave priority to the former. In the *Annual report 2009–10* it was stated that

> The department consulted with regions and schools regarding ongoing implementation of Indigenous language and culture (ILC) programs for students from Transition to Year 12 *to build a better understanding and appreciation of both traditional and contemporary Indigenous culture*. A key focus was on maximising ILC learning outcomes by differentiating the curriculum for different learner groups and resources that are relevant and meet their needs [Author's emphasis].

It is worth noting in passing that the word 'bilingual' was not used once in this report. However, at the time of writing (noon, August 31) NT DET has just released a revised and slightly more flexible policy, *Literacy Framework for Students with English as an Additional Language (EAL)*, which appears to be a step in the right direction.

Building on that summary profile the author will now address each of the terms of reference in turn.

(1) THE BENEFITS OF GIVING ATTENTION AND RECOGNITION TO INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Devlin (2011a) has summarised these benefits as follows:

> The case *for* the use of Indigenous languages is generally couched in terms of more efficient learning, enhanced self-identity, economic feasibility, and equity; particularly equity—as Connie Nungarrayi has put it (ABC, 2009), 'Our children are entitled to learn in their own language: the language of this country and this land'.

Indigenous people have clearly and succinctly explained what these benefits are from their point of view:

> 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

3

> in the English language easier. Children will enjoy coming to school every day to learn.
>
> (Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe and Gemma Alanga Nganbe, Personal communication, August 21, 2011)

> We are proud that we have a lot of information that some other white Australians like linguists want to learn. We know about many bush foods and how to prepare them. We have country names and a lot of knowledge that our ancestors have passed on to us. We want our languages to be respected, not just respecting English language.
>
> (Karrkirr Kinthari, Walbinthith Lantjin, Tharrngka Tchinburrurr, Mirrkun Nemarlak, Nganani Bunduck, Daninh Bunduck, Kinmarri Mullumbuk, Kuwampam Melpi, Mankanak Lantjin, Pelli Dumoo, Diyini Lantjin, Parlun Tipiloura, Kabanin Ngarri, Ngumanhuk Dinding Melpi, Namengkena Nemarlak, Marlem Kolumboort, Deminhimpuk Bunduck, Yerampuwup Bunduck, Tjinbururr Tchinburrurr and Alawu Kungul. Personal communication, August 12, 2011)

Over a decade ago Garngulkpuy, Batumbil & Bulkunu (1999) warned that the Indigenous Languages and Cultures component of the NT Curriculum Framework needed to be protected by strong partnerships between the Education Department and indigenous communities so that there a balance between the attention given to English on the one hand and local languages and cultures on the other. Failure to achieve that could cause "bad relationships", they said, especially if "long standing developments are actively undermined".

Benefits may be intended by well-meaning policy makers, but not realised in practice for reasons that Peter Shergold (2011) has succinctly explained

> Public servants are not bad people, Indeed, those who work in Indigenous affairs, both black and white, usually begin with a genuine desire to make a beneficial difference. That, I'm pretty sure, was my ambition. Only with time did I come to realise that goodwill too rarely translated into the benefits I had anticipated. By the time I ended up in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, I was already painfully aware that in public policy the very best of intentions can result in the very worst of outcomes.
>
> I had come to recognise that the making of policy (the sexy end of the job for most senior public servants) was nothing without its effective delivery. I was frustrated at how little the real-world experience of community-level bureaucrats influence either the design of policy or its administration (p. 169)
>
> The problem is that no matter what the government policy, the means of delivering it too often externalises responsibility. Bureaucrats – along with social workers, case managers, lawyers, teachers and doctors – use their professional power to take control. They may not think so, but they do… (p. 170)
>
> (Shergold, in Pearson, 2011,pp.169-172)

For that reason Shergold adds, "The local school communities require concomitant authority to continue to pursue their own approaches to educational philosophy, curriculum and governance. Individuals and communities need to be recognised as collaborators in the design and delivery of government policy" (Shergold, in Pearson, 2011, p. 172).

To offset some of the difficulties Shergold (2011) has outlined, two experienced NT educators have jotted down many questions which need to be considered as well as some possible solutions (CL0611 and CA0611, personal communication, August 21, 2011). See Appendix 4.

(2) The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

The third objective of the Indigenous Languages—A National Approach program is "Working with Languages to Close the Gap". The National Approach explains that "In areas where Indigenous languages are being spoken fully and passed on" it is important to ensure "that government recognises and works with these languages in its agenda to Close the Gap". The Northern Territory Government is keen to close the gap, but since late 2008 its way of doing that has marginalised Indigenous languages.

Devlin (2011a) explains:

> Alarmed by the publication of national test averages in September 2008 which showed that Northern Territory students, particularly those in remote rural areas, were lagging behind, the Northern Territory government abandoned its commitment to support bilingual programs (NT DEET, 2006) and introduced a new, ad-hoc policy the following month. On October 14 2008, several days after the former, well-respected head of the education department had been sacked, the Minister for Education announced a new regulation. Henceforth, all Northern Territory schools would be required to teach in English for the first four hours of every school day.
>
> The government's evidence concerning schools with bilingual programs was presented to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on November 26, 2008. Two documents were tabled: *Data for bilingual schools in the Northern Territory* (DET, 2008a), and a policy development paper, *Transforming Indigenous education*. It was the first document that was introduced as evidence to support the change of policy and to justify the October 14 decision to require the use of English for the first four hours of every school day.

The effects of such changes have been poignantly articulated by the people at Wadeye:

> 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.
>
> (Tobias Nganbe, Gemma Nganbe, Karrkirr Kinthari, Walbinthith Lantjin, Tharrngka Tchinburrurr, Mirrkun Nemarlak, Nganani Bunduck, Daninh Bunduck, Kinmarri Mullumbuk, Kuwampam Melpi, Mankanak Lantjin, Pelli Dumoo, Diyini Lantjin, Parlun Tipiloura, Kabanin Ngarri, Ngumanhuk Dinding Melpi, Namengkena Nemarlak, Marlem Kolumboort, Deminhimpuk Bunduck, Yerampuwup Bunduck, Tjinbururr Tchinburrurr and Alawu Kungul. Personal communication, August 12, 2011)

Another Indigenous view, conveying the same sort of conviction and passion, was put by the former Principal of Yirrkala School, Mandawuy Yunupingu, when he, the author and others met with the former Minister for Education and Training on February 4, 2009. The following extract is taken from notes made at that meeting:

> I want to talk about Yolngu strength; either in the English or the Yolngu Matha speaking domain. Yolngu leaders see our language as sacred. Yolngu kids think in their own language which can then inform them about English and their own form of understanding, about its meanings and its values. That shouldn't be underestimated. Ignoring this is the view of seeing Yolngu children as under-privileged. I consider Yolngu children to be as clever as any one else in the whole world. They should not be asked to leave their cleverness outside the classroom door. Not my kids or my grandkids. They should have equal rights, the same rights as any kids in the world, whether they are Chinese, or Balanda, the equal right to learn in their own language and to be judged as equal to anyone else.

Drawing on his experience as an Indigenous scholar and advocate, Noel Pearson has advocated just as strongly against the mainstream view that it is time to move forward with English and to leave Indigenous languages in the dustbin of history:

> The Australian languages, and the literatures and cultures that live or have lived through them, are the most important things we have in Australia. Their revival, growth and use in all social, political, educational, commercial and cultural domains are the most important matter for Australia's future.
>
> We have put so much effort into English-primary schooling – which we call the "class domain" as opposed to the "culture domain" - in the Cape York Academy's community schools, because without mainstream education, functional communities, strong families and economic integration, you can't do anything, let alone maintain culture…….
>
> It is with the next step of our school reform, in the culture domain, that we are attempting something truly new: the development of Direct Instruction-style programs in Australian languages. The scripted lessons that are being

6

> developed for the Hope Vale School are exclusively in the Guugu Yimdhirr language.
>
> Education in Australian languages is not new; but teaching in Australian languages should not be done primarily because some children know too little English when they start school. It should also be done where children know more English, or predominantly or only English; this is the principle of the culture domain in Cape York, where languages are dying. Teaching children in Australian languages is only one instance of speaking to children in Australian languages so that they learn them as their mother tongues. If children do not learn Australian languages as mother tongues, Australian cultures cannot live.
>
> If you don't know an indigenous Australian language, learn one (People with no indigenous Australian family may learn the language of the area with which they have the strongest ties.) If you know an indigenous Australian language, improve your grasp of it; literacy in Australian languages is still rare.
>
> Then speak it to the children. This is the noblest and worthiest cause for an Australian patriot.
>
> (Pearson, 2011, pp. 228-229)

The current principal of a remote Two-Way (bilingual) school in the NT has also put forward a recent school-based view on this matter:

> The foremost indicator that is used to measure the educational gap is the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests. These tests are designed to test the literacy and numeracy skills of mainstream Australian students who speak English as their first language. There is a great deal of focus that the NT Department of Education has placed on improving the Year 3 NAPLAN results of indigenous students.
>
> However, for students who begin school not speaking English, achieving the Year 3 NAPLAN benchmarks is not a realistic goal. They must read and understand the content of the test and then respond in writing or by selecting the correct answer from multiple choices. International research in to language learning shows that it takes three to five years to gain basic interpersonal communicative skills in a second language (where face-to-face contextual support and props are required to assist in meaning) and five to seven years to gain cognitive/academic language proficiency, where higher order thinking skills are required, such as for analysing, synthesising, evaluating and classifying (Hakuta et al., 2000). The Year 3 NAPLAN tests require cognitive/academic proficiency. Year 3 students (8 years of age) from non-English speaking communities have simply not had sufficient time to acquire the level of English required to read, understand and respond to questions in the NAPLAN tests, given that they begin learning English when they are five years old. It is not an indication of a shortcoming in their learning. It is frustrating and disheartening for my Year 3 students who attend school daily and work hard in class to be forced to sit a test, without any support, which is well beyond their level of English.

7

Aiming at Year 3 NAPLAN benchmarks is a reason why bilingual programs are not supported by the NT Department of Education, as it has made a commitment that 75% of NT students will meet the Year 3 NAPLAN benchmarks by 2012/13.

Research in the United States shows little difference in the English language proficiency of students who speak English as an additional language from Kindergarten through to Year 2 regardless of the teaching approach that was used (whether it be English only, bilingual, ESL-pull out – where children are taken out of the mainstream class and taught English intensively in small groups). However, Thomas and Collier (2002) found that by Year 6 students in bilingual programs are ahead on English language performance compared with students with an English-only (ESL) program. The bilingual students' achievements on English language tests were close to those of native English speakers.

The research worldwide is clear that bilingual programs are the most effective way to teach students who are learning an additional or foreign language. In Australian cities such as Sydney and Melbourne bi-literacy programs are being implemented in areas where there is a high concentration of students from a particular language background (eg Richmond West Primary School in Victoria which teaches through Mandarin and Vietnamese as well as English). In these schools, the first language is taught by qualified teachers who are proficient in that language. However, the NT government will not provide – or aim to provide – this best practice model for indigenous students who speak English as an additional or foreign language.

It is true that many remote communities do not have many (or any) local indigenous teachers. However, it is viable (and has been the case in some bilingual schools) that teaching assistants work together with a qualified teacher to deliver a bilingual program. What is needed is for local indigenous people to be trained to deliver the initial indigenous literacy program in the early years of primary school.

However, there is no longer training provided in communities for local people to become teachers or assistant teachers. In the past, the RATE (Remote Area Teacher Education) program was provided in remote areas which produced some teachers and many assistant teachers from communities. This generation is now gradually retiring and there are few people to replace them. Undertaking training in Darwin or Alice Springs is not an option for many local people who have young children or can not live away from their partner/family for cultural reasons. The training that is currently available is to become a fully qualified teacher meeting the national registration board standards. This is not accessible to many remote indigenous residents.

Providing training in communities which is targeted at up-skilling people to work in their local school would be a valuable and achievable pathway for remote indigenous students completing Year 10 or 12.

8

> Given the chronic shortage of indigenous first language teachers, as a transitional arrangement, it would aid the goal of Closing the Gap if there were training and positions available for indigenous school workers who can deliver an initial indigenous literacy program for the early years. Much like the Aboriginal Community Police Officers, whose training is targeted at policing specifically in remote communities and to work as part of a team within a police station. The approach outlined would create a much needed human resource for community schools to improve the level of education of the next generation of students and provide meaningful employment for local people.
>
> For non-indigenous teachers working in remote schools, there should be encouragement and support for learning the local language and working together as part of a team alongside local indigenous assistant teachers and teachers.
>
> (CP0611, personal communication, August 15, 2011)

(3) THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF INCLUDING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN EARLY EDUCATION

The Indigenous point of view about these benefits has been expressed clearly and succinctly by people at Wadeye:

> 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, 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.
>
> (Tobias Nganbe, Gemma Nganbe, Karrkirr Kinthari, Walbinthith Lantjin, Tharrngka Tchinburrurr, Mirrkun Nemarlak, Nganani Bunduck, Daninh Bunduck, Kinmarri Mullumbuk, Kuwampam Melpi, Mankanak Lantjin, Pelli Dumoo, Diyini Lantjin, Parlun Tipiloura, Kabanin Ngarri, Ngumanhuk Dinding Melpi, Namengkena Nemarlak, Marlem Kolumboort, Deminhimpuk Bunduck, Yerampuwup Bunduck, Tjinbururr Tchinburrurr and Alawu Kungul. Personal communication, August 12, 2011)

An important ethical option for education planners and policy makers is to keep social justice to the fore when planning any education actions, so that projects are

9

designed with the aim of closing the equity gap by reducing the impact of negative factors; i.e., those factors which contribute to illiteracy, poor education outcomes and high school absenteeism rates among disadvantaged groups. This ethical vision focuses attention on the elimination of social and economic barriers and the reduction of any structural determinants that sustain inequalities, inequity or exclusion.

10

3.1 World Bank

In the early 1980s the World Bank's view was that distance teaching was more cost-effective than indigenous language education (Treffgarne, 1981, p.163). The arguments used against the use of Indigenous languages were mainly economic, functional and political. However, by 2006 the World Bank had changed its view, and come out strongly in favour of bilingual education, acknowledging (2006, p. 3) that:

Children learn better if they understand the language spoken in school. This is a straightforward observation borne out by study after study (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Dutcher, 1995; Patrinos & Velez, 1996; Walter, 2003). Even the important goal of learning a second language is facilitated by starting with a language the children already know. Cummins (2000) and others provide convincing evidence of the principle of interdependence—that second language learning is helped, not hindered by first language study. This leads to a simple axiom: the first language is the language of learning. It is by far the easiest way for children to interact with the world. And when the language of learning and the language of instruction do not match, learning difficulties are bound to follow.

3.2 World Health Organisation

The WHO is urging national governments to tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources. It is enjoining them to emphasise social justice; to work for material, psychosocial and political empowerment; and to create the conditions for people to have control over their lives (WHO, 2011). This imperative applies to State and Territory governments as well.

3.3 Professor Sir Michael Marmot

In several important national studies Marmot has advocated creating an enabling society that maximises individual and community potential and enables all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives. For further information see Marmot (2011) and Marmot & Wilkinson (2005).

3.4 Professor Patricia Broadfoot, Vice Chancellor of the University of Gloucestershire

As Marmot Review Commissioner she has called for a reduction in the social gradient in skills and qualifications. Governments have been asked to ensure that schools, families and communities work in partnership to reduce the gradient in health, well-being and resilience of children and young people, and to improve the access and use of quality lifelong learning across the social gradient.

3.5 Professor James Heckman

Heckman, who has won the Nobel Prize for his work as an economist, draws attention to the economic value of human skills formation to a nation and to the world more generally. He argues that investment in the education of young children is a crucial priority (Heckman 2000, 2005). In his view fostering language proficiency, especially literacy, should be a key focus of investment in the young, for literacy

11

"begets many other skills and can be regarded as an index of 'self-productivity', because it constitutes a 'key part of our capacity to increase our capacity'. As he puts it:

If we don't provide disadvantaged young children with the proper environments to foster cognitive and non-cognitive skills, we'll create a class of people without such skills, without motivation, without the ability to contribute to the larger society nearly as much as they could if they'd been properly nurtured from an early age. Neglecting the early years creates an underclass.

(Interview with James J. Heckman)

3.6 Principal of a remote Two-Way (bilingual) school

CP0611, the current principal of a remote Two-Way (bilingual) school in the NT, felt it was important to provide the Inquiry with a "real world" perspective from a teacher/principal working in a community. The comments contributed by this informant earlier this month have been set out below. In the accompanying e-mail CP0611 noted that the contribution was prompted by the "many DET managers and politicians who feel 'it's all theory' and don't appreciate how all this affects day to day teaching. So if you could indicate that these comments were made by a principal or teacher currently working in a remote school, that would be good" (CP0611, personal communication, August 15, 2011).

> In the context of indigenous communities where a language/languages other than English are the main mode of communication, there is a very clear need for the use of mother tongue in early education. In these communities children begin school with little or no understanding of English and having had little or no exposure to books and other written materials. This means that school is a particularly alien environment to them and they have trouble adjusting to the routines of a classroom. When teaching and instruction is conducted in English – a foreign language- it makes this process of adjustment even more difficult for young children.
>
> During the crucial first few years of schooling, while the children are still learning to understand English, if teaching is conducted wholly or largely in English, the students will not comprehend a significant portion of what is being taught to them. Conversely, the teacher will not comprehend contributions made by students. This breakdown in communication between teacher and student is widespread in remote classrooms and is likely to impact significantly on learning.
>
> It is important to recognise that the experience of remote indigenous students can not be likened to that of migrant students who come from non-English speaking homes. These students attend schools where communication with other students is in English, and communication with people in the community is in English. For remote indigenous students, the vast majority of their communication is with others who speak the same language as them. It is only in the classroom that they are exposed to English – and even in the classroom and playground, the children speak to each other in their first language. It is only the teacher who speaks to them in English.

12

In my experience of teaching in early childhood classrooms in remote indigenous schools, there is a marked difference in learning when the teaching is conducted in the children's first language as opposed to when it is done largely in English. When an English book is read to them and they are invited to contribute ideas about what is happening in the story, predict what may happen next or discuss the meaning of the text, the children make very limited contributions. A great cognitive load is placed on the children to try and decipher what the story might be about and to then try and share their ideas about the story in a way that the teacher can understand them. They use single words and hand gestures and often become frustrated when they can not express their thoughts.

I have also found that the children do not readily link the written word to the spoken word. The children are accustomed to family members relating stories orally but they have generally not been read to at home. So they assume that the teacher is holding up a book containing pictures and then making up a story as they go. They do not appreciate that the words are the same each time and that they relate to the printed text. The children are focused on deciphering the story and this task is generally taxing enough on their faculties, without having to also try and comprehend what the written symbols indicate.

In contrast, when a first language book is read to them and the children can participate using their first language, a much richer discussion about the book takes place. The children follow the story and it is then possible to point to the written symbols and draw a link between the symbols and the spoken word. The children display the desired reading behaviours much more readily.

Indigenous languages have a consistent graphophonic relationship with the written symbols unlike in English where there is no consistent relationship between the sounds and the letter, eg the sound "fruit" could also be made using the following combination of letters: "froot", "frute", "frutt" or even "phroot". This makes indigenous languages a much more accessible medium through which to teach literacy. The fact that indigenous languages use the Roman alphabet means that most of the basic phonetic knowledge children gain by acquiring literacy in their first language carries over to when they are learning to read and write in English.

When teaching literacy only through English in the remote indigenous context, students are effectively being asked to learn to read and write through a language which they don't understand or speak. This is an arduous task for even the keenest learner. For five, six year old children who are coming to grips with the routines of a classroom (which is vastly different from the routines of their homes) this is a task that makes learning frustrating and alienating.

Most teachers will accept that children need to acquire oral English before they can really participate in literacy activities. This means that literacy is postponed until the children have a basic grasp of English. However, by using

13

a bilingual approach, literacy can be effectively taught using the first language while simultaneously teaching English oracy without the need to delay literacy learning.

In my experience, students who attend school regularly and go through a bilingual program successfully acquire literacy in their first language and basic English oracy by Year 3. Then in Year 4 they move in to a more English-based teaching program and successfully transfer their literacy skills over to English. The quality of their written English by around Year 6 reflects the strength of their first language literacy and their English oracy – those students who developed good first language literacy are the very same who achieve strong literacy in English.

Below is a transcript of my assessment of English oral language of a five year old student (who was midway through Transition). She is being asked to talk about a book that has been to read to the class and discussed over the term. While the questions are posed in English, the student responds in her first language. Despite having learned about this in class for 3 weeks, the student was under the impression the monkey character in the book was a mouse. The student's first language word for mouse is *minkiri*. The combination of the word "monkey" sounding like *minkiri*, and the fact that the monkey character looked vaguely like a mouse (with large ears and a long tail) led to the child being confused about what animal this character was. In a non-bilingual classroom, where all subjects are taught through English, there is likely to be a host of misunderstandings of this type without the student or the teacher realising. **NOTE: the name of the student has been changed for privacy.**

TEACHER	STUDENT'S RESPONSE	Body Language and Non Verbal
Hello , how are you?	Natalie	Confident, clear responses.
Good, how are you feeling?	Um…Lowi (this is her nickname)	
Ok, now we're going to look at this book. Can you tell me about the book, what's happening?	Papa (dog)	
Papa, yes there's a doggie. What else can you see?	Alo...mutuka (hey…car)	
Mutuka? Yeah, they're going in the car?	Yeah	
Where are they going?	Alo…um…rapita (rabbit)	

14

TEACHER	STUDENT'S RESPONSE	Body Language and Non Verbal
Ah, rabbit. Very good. You tell me about the next one.	Kapi (rain)	
Kapi, yes there's a big rain.	Anangu…papa (people…dog)	
Papa's going too. What's happening here? You try and tell me in English.	Jumpa	
Jumper, very good.	And papa.	
And *papa*. Why are they wearing jumpers?	Wari (cold)	Hugs herself and shivers to indicate cold
Yeah, *wari*, it's cold. Very good.	Um…kanta (?)	
What's she doing?	Kumpi (hide)	
Kumpini, she's hiding, that's right. What about this page?	Um…wataringi (?)	
He has a sore leg, *tjina pika*. Sore foot. What's the dog doing?	Mai (food)	
Mai, yes he's looking at the food. Now, tell me about this one.	Papa…papa…papa (dog)	
Yes, what's the dog doing?	Mutukai (in the car)	
Yes, he's in the car.		
Do you know what this is?	Minkiri (mouse)	
Minkiri? He's not a mouse!	Yeah, look (points at monkey)	
Monkey. Yes, he's a monkey.	Monkey.	
Minkiri is called "mouse". See this one here, this is "mouse".		

In non-bilingual schools, teachers are not expected to understand the children's first language (in fact, I have met teachers who have taught in remote schools for several months and did not even know what language their

15

students spoke). In most remote schools, where first language is not part of the teaching process, the above discussion between teacher and student would most likely involve the teacher not understanding or valuing the student's responses and therefore not building on the knowledge that the child is bringing with her. It is accepted amongst teachers that people learn most effectively when going from the known to the unknown (rather than from the unknown to unknown). Yet, in most remote schools (as they use a non-bilingual approach) students are asked to learn from the unknown to the unknown (i.e., to learn new concepts through a new language).

In non-bilingual remote schools, teachers are generally surprised by how limited their students English is and resort to teaching phonics and lists of "most commonly used words in English". I have personally seen this in many classrooms, even from senior teachers. This is a seriously flawed way of teaching content or a second language. Learning to sound out words that the children do not understand is a largely pointless exercise, and lists of most common words include words such as "the" "a" "an" "of" etc. While these words do occur frequently, their meaning is gleaned through the context of the sentence, and not by being taught in isolation. Yet this is what many teachers in remote classrooms do. The language skills and knowledge that the children bring with them in to the classroom is ignored and instead, school becomes a game of parroting words after the teacher and barking at print ("c-a-t cat, b-a-t bat" etc). Phonetic awareness is certainly important, but it is only a small part of a much larger learning process that children in mainstream primary schools undergo.

As the above transcript demonstrates, the student was unable to learn very much about a simple text she had been taught through English over the course of several weeks. When all subjects, such as science, maths, history, SOSE etc is taught only through English, it is likely that students will not comprehend a great deal of what is being taught.

In order to appreciate the benefit of using indigenous languages for first language instruction in classrooms, it is important to put ourselves in the shoes of young remote indigenous children to whom English is a foreign language. Think of how frustrating it is to try and learn something new (such as a new computer program or assembling flat packed furniture). Now imagine that you are an English speaker and all you have are the Japanese instructions. It would not be surprising if you gave up or had little understanding of the task. Yet this is what we expect young children in remote classrooms to do each day.

(CP0611, personal communication, August 15, 2011)

(4) MEASURES TO IMPROVE EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN THOSE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES WHERE ENGLISH IS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Just as funding is made available to education authorities to help newly arrived overseas students participate in mainstream schooling, comparable targeted assistance is given to educational organisations serving Indigenous communities. For example, the *Schools Assistance Bill 2008* set aside $43.0 million under the English as a Second Language—New Arrivals Program. Similarly, Indigenous students from

16

non-English-speaking backgrounds receiving their first year of formal instruction in English attract funding for English as a Second Language (ESL-ILSS) programs to the value of $3.4 million in the NT ($3,561.11 per student).

(5) THE EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL BENEFITS OF ENSURING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCY AMONGST INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Attaining English language proficiency is an important objective for all students in or from Indigenous communities. The educational and vocational benefits of such proficiency are readily apparent. However, attempts to build capacity, train for employment and help students to avoid marginalisation count for little if the bleak cycle of intergenerational unemployment and welfare dependency is not replaced by more widespread involvement in paid work or creative and entrepreneurial activities

(6) MEASURES TO IMPROVE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING SERVICES

A simple and achievable reform would be mandate interpreting services for clients whose English language proficiency is insufficient to cope with professional interactions such as legal cross-examinations. A recognised national expert in the field of linguistics and the law (Cooke, 1998) has concluded that ASLPR3+ is 'the lower level of English language proficiency that would enable NESB people to cope linguistically with a straightforward police interview about events and circumstances pertaining to criminal offences' (Cooke 2002, p. 36). Cooke justifies this conclusion by noting that since Level 3 is the nominated requirement for paraprofessional interpreter training and is also the level at which a person is "able to perform effectively in most informal and social situation pertinent to social and community life and everyday commerce" (2002, p. 36):

> it seems reasonable then to posit ASLPR Level 3 as the lower limit of English proficiency that would enable NESB people to cope linguistically with a straightforward police interview…. Significantly it is also at this level that learners can be expected to cope with native speakers speaking at normal rates of speech. This level does not however entail the competency required to understand police jargon (words such as *offence, charge, bail, unlawful wounding, wilful murder*) without these terms being first explained in ordinary language. Nor does this level of proficiency ensure that subtle meanings carried by circuitous expression will be understood. And it does not imply sufficient competence for dealing with the more complex language of the courtroom.

(7) THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT MAINTENANCE AND REVITALISATION PROGRAMS FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

A group of Indigenous informants have explained what the current situation is in one remote school:

> 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

17

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 3 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."

(Tobias Nganbe, Gemma Nganbe, Karrkirr Kinthari, Walbinthith Lantjin, Tharrngka Tchinburrurr, Mirrkun Nemarlak, Nganani Bunduck, Daninh Bunduck, Kinmarri Mullumbuk, Kuwampam Melpi, Mankanak Lantjin, Pelli Dumoo, Diyini Lantjin, Parlun Tipiloura, Kabanin Ngarri, Ngumanhuk Dinding Melpi, Namengkena Nemarlak, Marlem Kolumboort, Deminhimpuk Bunduck, Yerampuwup Bunduck, Tjinbururr Tchinburrurr and Alawu Kungul. Personal communication, August 12, 2011)

.

Three years ago there were eight maintenance programs and one revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages in government schools. These were curtailed on October 2008. The Catholic Education sector and other organisations followed suit. One highly respected educator with more than 50 years experience working with Aboriginal people at Nguiu reports that

Bathurst Island is a sad place re language. Both Catholic Ed and Tiwi Land Council put a stop to our Bilingual Programme at the commencement of last year. Our Tiwi teachers did NOT stand up for the programme. I wrote to CEO and expressed my complete disgust, especially as to what this would mean for the dignity of the Tiwi teachers. They have an oral language and culture programme at present. (XP0611, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

Devlin (2011b) has detailed the maintenance and revitalisation programs that were in operation at remote Government schools three years ago:

In early 2008 a Northern Territory Government website explained that the *Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006-2009*

commits the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to "strengthen the bilingual program and improve its effectiveness and sustainability to deliver outcomes." (Priority 1: Literacy and Numeracy Programs)

(NT DEET 2008)

Using the definition in that same strategic plan the bilingual education approach was explained as:

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

18

the curriculum.

(NT DEET 2008)

According to that definition, only eight NT schools in 2008 offered bilingual programs. Somewhat ambitiously these were referred to then as 'Indigenous Language Maintenance' programs. These were known as Model 1 programs in the 1970s and would later be referred to as examples of 'step' or 'staircase' model bilingual education. 'Language Revitalisation', on the other hand, was the term used for the Wubuy program at Numbulwar as this language was only used by older generations of speakers not by the children.

As NT DEET explained on its website:

> Language Maintenance programs aim to extend and develop learners' first language skills in listening and speaking, reading and writing. Students learn initial literacy through their first language and use literacy as a tool for their first language study throughout their schooling. The knowledge and skills that students learn in their first language assists in their learning of, in and through English.
>
> (NT DEET 2008)

In early 2008 the eight NT DET schools with bilingual (LM) programs, alongside the one school that had a Language Revitalisation program, were listed on the government's website (NT DEET 2008) as follows:

School	Languages	Program Type
Areyonga School	Pitjantjatjara, English	LM
Lajamanu School	Warlpiri, English	LM
Maningrida CEC	Burarra, Ndjébbana, English	LM
Milingimbi CEC	Yolngu Matha, English	LM
Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku	Yolngu Matha, English	LM
Willowra School	Warlpiri, English	LM
Yirrkala CEC	Yolngu Matha, English	LM
Yuendumu CEC	Warlpiri, English	LM
Numbulwar	Wubuy (Nunggubuyu)	LR

(8) THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES POLICY IN DELIVERING ITS OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANT POLICIES OF OTHER AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS.

It is commendable that in August 2009 the Commonwealth Government inaugurated a strategy for maintaining Indigenous languages. However, *Indigenous Languages—A National Approach 2009* is only two years old, so it would be premature to appraise the efficacy, effectiveness or impact of this initiative.

19

[Original signed]

Dr Brian Devlin
Associate Professor, Bilingual Education & Applied Linguistics
School of Education
Charles Darwin University
DARWIN NT 0909
AUSTRALIA

REFERENCES

Australian Government Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, *Indigenous Languages—A National Approach. The importance of Australia's Indigenous languages*. Retrieved August 13, 2011 from http://www.arts.gov.au/topics/indigenous-arts/indigenous-languages-national-approach

Cooke M. (1995). Interpreting in a cross-cultural cross-examination: An Aboriginal case study. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 113*, 99-111

Cooke, M. (1998). *Anglo/Yolngu communication in the criminal justice system*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of New England.

Cooke, M. & Wylie, E. (1999). Is an interpreter necessary? A test of English to establish the need for an interpreter for people involved in legal proceedings from a non-English speaking background. Retrieved May 21, 2009 from www.nla.aust.net.au/content.php?id=9

Devlin, B. (2011a). A bilingual education policy issue: biliteracy versus English-only literacy. In N. Purdie, G. Milgate & H. Bell (2011), *Two way teaching and learning—Toward culturally reflective and relevant education* (ch.4). Melbourne: ACER. [See Appendix 2.]

Devlin, B. (2011b). The status and future of bilingual education for remote Indigenous students in the Northern Territory. Manuscript submitted April 30, 2011 to the *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*

Dutcher, N. (1995) The use of first and second languages in education: A review of international experiences. *Pacific Islands Discussion Paper Series, 1*. East Asia and Pacific Country Department III, World Bank.

Eades, D. (2008). Telling and retelling your story in court: Questions, assumptions and intercultural implications. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice, 20*(2), 209–230.

20

Garngulkpuy, J. Batumbil, P. & Bulkunu, V. (1999). The role of language and culture in community schools. *Ngoonjook Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 16. Batchelor NT: BIITE.

Heckman, J. (2009). James Heckman: An Economist's perspective. [Online video] James Heckman's strong advocacy of early childhood investment. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6213958070024039321#

Heckman, J.J. (2005). Lessons from the technology of skills formation. National Bureau of Economic Research, *Working Paper #1142*, February 2005.

Heckman, J.J. (2000). Invest in the very young. Working Paper, Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from http://www.HarrisSchool.uchicago.edu.

Interview with James J. Heckman http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/region/05-06/heckman.cfm

Marmot, M. (2011). Fair society: Healthy lives. Presentation to the Menzies School of Health in Darwin on July 29, 2011

Marmot, M. & Wilkinson, R. (Eds.) (2005). *The social determinants of health*. Oxford University Press.

Pearson, N. (2011). Radical hope, education and equality in Australia. Black Inc.

Treffgarne, C. (1981). The World Bank on language and education: A lot more could have been done. *Comparative Education, 12*(2), 173-171.

World Bank (2006). Language of learning, language of instruction: Implications for achieving education for all. Human Development Network. Retrieved July 17, 2010 from http://www.seameo.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=259&itemid=156

World Health Organisation. Retrieved August 9, 2010 from www.who.int/social_determinants

21

Appendix 1: Individuals supporting the views outlined in this submission

Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe and Gemma Alanga Nganbe
OLSH Thamarrurr Catholic School

Roslyn Wheatley
Indigenous Education Coach (Higher Ed)
N.T. Department of Education and Training
Arnhem Region, Nhulunbuy

Sr Teresa Ward
Teacher Linguist
Our Lady Of The Sacred Heart Thamarrurru Catholic School, Wadeye *(NT)*

Kathryn McMahon
PhD research student
Charles Darwin University

Nancy Devlin
Lecturer
Charles Darwin University

'XP0611', an experienced ex-principal of a Catholic bilingual school

'CP0611', the current principal of a remote Government Two-Way (or bilingual) school in the NT.

CL0611 and CA0611, two experienced NT DET employees

22

Appendix 2: Devlin, B. (2011). A bilingual education policy issue: biliteracy versus English-only literacy. In N. Purdie, G. Milgate & H. Bell (2011), *Two way teaching and learning—Toward culturally reflective and relevant education* (ch.4). Melbourne: ACER.

Chapter 4

A bilingual education policy issue: biliteracy versus English-only literacy

Brian Devlin

In the early 1970s Australia began a remarkable experiment. At some remote Northern Territory schools the educational program would henceforth include languages spoken by Aboriginal groups who had little or no exposure to literacy. Not only that, the children would be taught to read and write in the local Aboriginal language as part of a vernacular literacy program before bridging to literacy in English.

In many countries only the national language can be used in an educational program. This is the case in Indonesia, for example, where even widely spoken languages with literary traditions, such as Javanese, are bypassed in favour of Indonesian, the language of national unity. In the Asia–Pacific region Australia has been only one of a handful of countries which have been willing to invest in educational programs that support languages spoken by small ethnic groups. Vietnam and Papua New Guinea are other nations which have seen value in this approach. In multilingual societies with a colonial past it is not a straightforward task to determine the language of instruction in schools.

Whether Indigenous languages should be allowed a key educational role in early childhood programs turns out to be 'a fundamental dilemma to politicians and planners', as Treffgarne (1981, p.163) has observed. The arguments advanced against the use of Indigenous languages seem to be primarily economic, functional and political. For example, the economic argument was at the heart of the World Bank's view in the 1980s that distance teaching was more cost-effective than indigenous language education (Treffgarne, 1981, p.163). As Treffgarne went on to say, expense is 'the ultimate determining factor in policy making' (1981, p. 167). The same World Bank report stated that 'the emphasis on local languages can … diminish an individual's chances for further education and limit the access of specific groups or countries to the international body of knowledge' (Treffgarne, 1981, p. 165).

The case *for* the use of Indigenous languages is generally couched in terms of more efficient learning, enhanced self-identity, economic feasibility, and equity; particularly equity – as Connie Nungarrayi has put it (ABC, 2009, 'Our children are entitled to learn in their own language: the language of this country and this land'. It is worth noting that the World Bank (2006, p. 3) has recently changed its view, and has acknowledged that:

23

> Children learn better if they understand the language spoken in school. This is a straightforward observation borne out by study after study (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Dutcher, 1995; Patrinos & Velez, 1996; Walter, 2003). Even the important goal of learning a second language is facilitated by starting with a language the children already know. Cummins (2000) and others provide convincing evidence of *the principle of interdependence* – that second language learning is helped, not hindered by first language study. This leads to a simple axiom: the first language is the language of learning. It is by far the easiest way for children to interact with the world. And when the language of learning and the language of instruction do not match, learning difficulties are bound to follow. (My emphasis)

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, as entirely new vernacular 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 group, for example. However, these languages were really known only 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.

This chapter takes up the question of whether it is appropriate for a literacy program to be introduced in an Aboriginal language first with the aim of supporting better achievement in English, particularly reading and writing in English. So that the question is not investigated in the abstract, which would limit the chapter's practical utility, it has been explored with reference to a particular jurisdiction (the Northern Territory) and a defined time period (1973 to early 2011). In addition, so that the chapter does not become uncomfortably academic or needlessly complex, the focus has been adjusted so that it foregrounds four main aspects:

- community preferences
- government policy
- evaluation and research findings
- test results.

The argument can be briefly summarised as follows.

There is some evidence to suggest that initial vernacular literacy can be effective in promoting subsequent English literacy. This theoretical claim has influenced positions adopted by UNESCO since 1953, the World Bank since 2006, the Australian Commonwealth Government from 1973 to 1978, and the Northern Territory Government from 1979 to 1998 and from 2005 to 2008. The claim is most commonly referred to in the academic literature as 'the interdependence principle' or 'the interdependence hypothesis'.

In remote areas of the Northern Territory, communities have generally indicated that existing vernacular literacy programs are of value to them and ought to be retained. However, alarmed by poor student results on standardised tests since 2008, the Northern Territory government reneged on its promise (NT DEET, 2006) to

support vernacular literacy programs and introduced a new, ad-hoc policy directive in late 2008. Rather than explaining the basis for the policy change, the government resorted to fuzzy, ambiguous statements supported by questionable evidence (NT DET, 2008a), while moving ahead quickly, but not always consistently, to implement a new 'English first' policy.

The chapter examines in more detail each claim in the bare-bones argument that has just been outlined.

Although the thrust of this argument may appear to be anti-government or party political in its intent at first glance, it is not. My position is one of sympathy for the complexities of official decision-making. Partly for that reason, the chapter does not base its claims on abstract axioms such as human rights, as valuable as such principles are, nor does it use them as a way of highlighting inequities in provision for remote rural schools, as illuminating as such an approach might be. The intention is to ground this chapter in the messy realities of contemporary Indigenous education, so that the various policies and programs that have been designed to bring about improvements in student learning can be judged realistically and fairly against the government's own standards and resolutions. The chapter concludes with a handful of recommendations that might usefully be taken on board by decision-makers.

The theoretical claim

It has been claimed, with some evidence, that vernacular literacy in the early stages of schooling can be effective in promoting English literacy in the later school years. The basis for this claim has been explored in numerous publications, so only a quick outline will be offered here.

The theories put forward by Professor Jim Cummins, an Irish-Canadian expert on bilingual education, constitute the key theoretical framework that helped clarify the relationship between developing the child's first language (L1) and proficiency in English, the second language (L2). A more elaborated version of this theory (known initially as the interdependence hypothesis, then as the interdependence principle) was also developed by Cummins (1978a & b, 1979a, b & c 1981a, b & c, 1986, 1987, 1991, 1999a & b).

Although it was not an intuitively obvious theory, it did make sense of a considerable body of research, and it provided some evidence-based answers to the commonsense objection that what was needed was more time on task – to learn as much English as possible in early childhood – rather than allowing time for children to learn to read and write in their own language first.

The interdependence principle has not gone unnoticed. Together with the research evidence which supports it, it has influenced positions adopted by UNESCO, the World Bank since 2006, the Australian government from 1973 to 1978, and the Northern Territory government from 1979 to 1988 and from 2005 to 2008.

The Northern Territory experiment

Immediately after its election in 1972, the Whitlam government resolved to initiate bilingual education programs in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools. As the then

25

Minister for Education, Kim Beazley Snr, recalled in his memoir *Father of the House* (2009, p. 206):

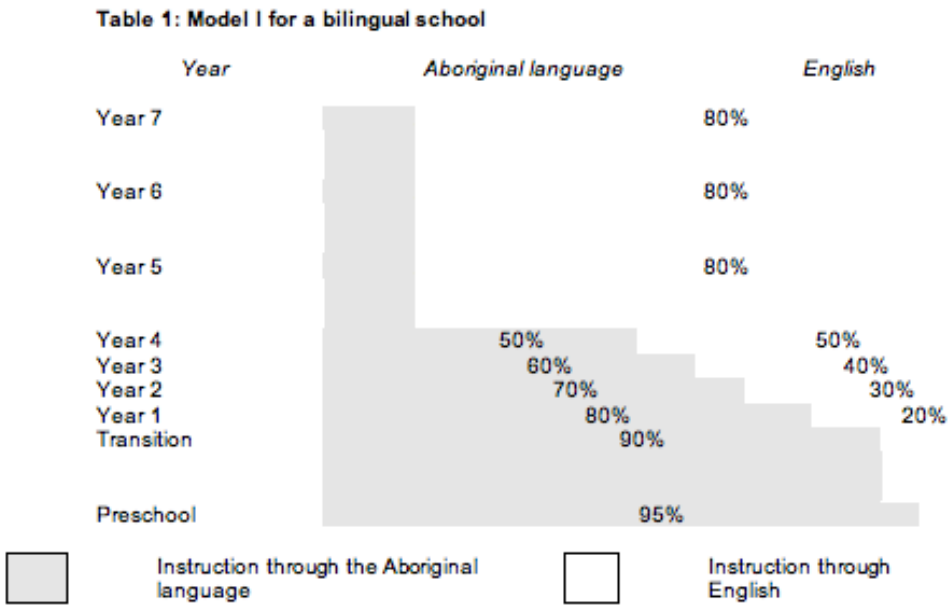
> As soon as we were elected, I proposed to Whitlam that there should be Aboriginal schools teaching in the local language. Two hours later, to my astonishment, the radio news carried a prime ministerial announcement that, where appropriate, Aboriginal languages would be the medium of instruction in the Northern Territory.
>
> … During the next three years, teaching began in twenty-two Aboriginal languages. For many Aboriginal children, school ceased to be an alien place, and a lot of parents got involved for the first time in their children's schooling.

What is valuable about this reminiscence is that it highlights the program's spectacular and idealistic beginning as a federal government initiative that had the advantage of enjoying bipartisan political support and generous funding, which is partly why it was able to be so ambitious. It also highlights the central role that literacy in the students' own languages was to play in the program.

Watts, McGrath & Tandy (1973) recommended two types of bilingual program as blueprints which could be followed by schools. The first, Model I, was a biliteracy program in which students learned to read and write in their own language before being bridged to English literacy by around year 4 (NTDE, 1986; Harris & Devlin, 1997, p. 4).

26

Table 4.1: A Model I (or ‘step’) program for a bilingual school



Implementation of the Model I (or ‘step’) program varied across Northern Territory schools, depending on the availability of trained Indigenous teachers. Some schools ran step programs from transition to year 7. However, sometimes the bilingual program ended up becoming an early-exit transitional model by default—that is, educational use of students’ first language ceased after a few years—simply because there were not enough Aboriginal teachers available to staff the vernacular language side of the program.

As most programs set up during the 1970s and 1980s were based on Model I guidelines, the bulk of the resources available at that time were directed to supporting them (Harris & Devlin, 1999), so it would be fair to say that they represented the Northern Territory Department of Education’s preferred model of bilingual education from 1974 until at least 1986. For example, 15 out of 16 bilingual programs in the Northern Territory in 1986 were based on the Model 1 design (NTDE, 1986, p.15). The only exception was Yipirinya. What this meant was that from the early 1970s onwards the recommended model for Northern Territory schools with bilingual programs was one which sequenced L1 and L2 literacy. Ability to read and write in the Aboriginal vernacular (L1) was seen to be a prerequisite for the introduction of literacy in English (L2).

At *no* time was it ever considered that students should not bridge to English.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Milingimbi school delayed the introduction of English literacy until near the end of primary school to increase the likelihood that students would become really proficient in their vernacular reading and writing before bridging to literacy in English. Similar strategies were widely advocated in the literature on bilingual programs in North America and were justified with reference to available research findings (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Lee, 1992, p.2). However, the official view in the NT was that ‘students should be transferred to reading in English as soon as they are confident readers in their own language: for some this may be at the end of year 3, but perhaps for others at the end of year 4’ (letter from Les

27

Robertson, Senior Education Adviser, Pre-Primary: Bilingual Education, to Dieter Moeckel, Principal, Umbakumba School, 25 August 1978; Department of Education file no. 90/2639 f 2). It was certainly expected that students would generally bridge to English literacy once they reached the mid-primary years.

The theoretical claim of the Model 1 approach is that the attainment of literacy skills in one's first language is an important determinant of success in learning to read and write in a second language (Devlin, 1997, p. 83). Cummins (1976) identified two thresholds which have important consequences for a bilingual child's cognitive development. If the first threshold is not reached, neither of the child's languages is developed to an age-appropriate level, which is likely to result in poor academic performance. This may occur when a child is removed from a supportive first language environment and put in a second language learning situation where development of the first language is neglected. If the first threshold is attained but not the second, only one of the child's languages is developed to an age-appropriate level. However, once the bilingual child has passed the second threshold, the child has age-appropriate proficiency in more than one language. As a balanced bilingual, the child is now likely to show some positive cognitive effects as well as some advantages over monolinguals, including more pronounced metalinguistic awareness. Model I biliteracy programs, as a rule, aimed to help students reach both thresholds.

In summarising the relationship between Model 1 and the underlying theory, Devlin (1997, p. 81) identified one potential area of weakness:

> Given that the interdependence hypothesis is substantiated by the literature, what all of this means is that the Model 1 biliteracy programs advocated in the Northern Territory can be defended on the grounds that they derive from well-founded theoretical assumptions about the benefits that L1 literacy can confer to students learning to read and write in a second language. What is less clear, however, is what level of proficiency in L1 needs to be obtained by the bilingual student before the putative benefits of bridging from L1 to L2 literacy can be realised. The threshold hypothesis was developed in an effort to answer this question.

There was also a Model II program. This program, in contrast to Model I, was designed around the use of the spoken Aboriginal language in the belief that this could assist the acquisition of English literacy (see table 4.2).

28

Table 4.2: A Model II program for a bilingual school

Table 2: Model II for a bilingual school

Year	*Aboriginal language*	*English*
Year 7	80%	
Year 6	80%	
Year 5	80%	
Year 4	80%	
Year 3	80%	
Year 2	50%	50%
Year 1	60%	40%
Transition	70%	30%
Preschool	95%	

Instruction through the Aboriginal language

Instruction through English

The differences between the two programs were spelled out in the Northern Territory Department of Education's *Handbook for Aboriginal bilingual education in the Northern Territory* (1986), which suggested (NTDE, 1986, p. 15) that the Model II bilingual program was 'in both educational and social terms, a highly desirable option'.

On achieving internal self-government in 1978, the Northern Territory government took over control of programs formerly run by the Commonwealth government, including the bilingual education program. By 1987 the 'Bilingual Unit' had been reduced to just two head office positions, and by 1990 to just a single Principal Education Officer. The main consequences of diminished head office support, in the short term, were that fewer inservice training programs were arranged for teachers and specialist staff, fewer school visits were made, and centralised curriculum development for bilingual schools virtually ceased.

A longer-term consequence of the reduction of head office staff was that bilingual programs in remote schools came under stronger community control, particularly as the number of Aboriginal teachers and principals increased. In some cases, schools trialed new 50/50 bilingual programs; at some sites programs went into decline.

The reduction in head office support for bilingual schools was partly offset by a combination of Aboriginal Education Program curriculum initiatives and stronger on-site curriculum development activities in some schools, for example at Yirrkala. As bilingual education matured in the Northern Territory it evolved in different directions. At Yirrkala, for example, it became modified by local Yolngu conceptions of learning, as expressed by such metaphors as *garma* and *galtha,* once Indigenous leadership in the teaching–learning program became a real possibility (Marika, 1998).

Table 4.3 gives a brief listing of the first Northern Territory bilingual programs, indicating the years they commenced.

29

Table 4.3 The establishment of Northern Territory school bilingual programs (source: NTDE documents including file 93/483, folios 27, 40–1 & 176, and suggestions made by Paul Bubb and Peter Jones).

Year	School	Language	Notes
1973	Angurugu Areyonga Hermannsburg Milingimbi Warruwi, Goulburn Is	Anindilyakwa Pitjantjatjara Arrernte Gupapuyngu Maung	
1974	Oenpelli (Gunbalanya) Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku St Therese's (now Murrupurtiyanuwu) Yayayai (Papunya outstation) Yirrkala Yuendumu	Kunwinjku Djambarrpuyngu Tiwi Pintupi-Luritja Dhuwaya and dialects Warlpiri	Lasted 4 years and subsequently failed accreditation Originally Gupapuyngu Moved to Papunya after about 2 years Formerly Gumatj
1975	Pularumpi (formerly Garden Point)	Tiwi	Lasted 2 years
1976	Barunga (formerly Bamyili)	Kriol	
	Haasts Bluff	Pintupi-Luritja	Lasted around 16 years
	Numbulwar	Nunggubuyu	Lasted 4 years (recommenced in 1996 for a few years)
	Wadeye	Murrinh Patha	
1977	Umbakumba	Anindilyakwa	Lasted around 5 years
	Willowra	Warlpiri	
1978	Maningrida	Ndjébbana	
1979	Docker River	Pitjantjatjara	
1981	M'Bunghara Homeland Centre Waityawanu	Pintupi/Luritja Pintupi/Luritja	Lasted around 9 years
1982	Lajamanu (formerly Hooker Creek)	Warlpiri	Established as a result of agitation
1983	Walungurru (Kintore)	Pintupi/Luritja	
	Yipirinya	Eastern Arrernte Pitjantjatjara Warlpiri Western Arrernte	Became an official independent Aboriginal school with a bilingual program in four language varieties after having operated as a 'defacto'

30

			program for several years before that.
1984	Papunya	Pintupi-Luritja	Established as a result of agitation
1986	Maningrida	Burarra	Established in response to 'strong community requests'
	Nyirrpi	Warlpiri	
1987	Mt Liebig	Pintupi-Luritja	
1989	Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa)	Eastern Arrernte	Established as a result of local initiative
1996	Numbulwar	Nunggubuyu	Re-established as a result of local initiative

By the early 1980s evidence of community support was a precondition for starting any new bilingual program. As I read through the departmental files for every bilingual school during 1986 and 1987, I would invariably find a sheet of quarto or foolscap typing paper that outlined a short request from a community followed by a dozen or so signatures. Considerable importance was attached to the support and involvement of people outside the school and to the need to negotiate with them about the programs being run for their children.

The professional development of staff was a priority. As a result, the School of Australian Languages (SAL) was set up in 1974 to provide support for bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory. For example, between 1974 and 1989, SAL ran five accredited language and linguistic courses (Caffery, 2008), although these were relatively short-term and did not provide the teacher-training credentials required for teachers by the Department of Education. That was the task of Batchelor College, later known as Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

In 1983 the Northern Territory Department of Education clarified and codified the objectives of bilingual education in the form of eight official aims. It used these as a frame of reference for an accreditation exercise in the 1980s, and incorporated them into a *Handbook for Aboriginal bilingual education in the Northern Territory* (1986), which guided the work of staff for many years. Simply summarised, the eight aims were as follows:

1 to teach children enough English and maths to cope

2 to help pupils improve their schoolwork

3 to improve children's image and sense of identity

4 to prepare children for what would be mostly English language instruction by year 5

5 to promote the professional development of Aboriginal staff

6 to give children the chance to read and write well in the vernacular

7 to widen and strengthen links between school and community

8 to improve understanding between the two cultures.

As the program evolved, however, it became apparent that the main priorities of Indigenous educators/community members were somewhat different. As Harris and Devlin (1999) observed:

31

> Bilingual education as a White-conceptualised, White-led and top-down reform had to be only a temporary phase if bilingual education was to achieve its full potential as a tool of broad educational reform. Language is never a force on its own. It is only a tool to achieve various ends. What were the ends to be achieved? (Paulston, 1994, pp. 6–7). To begin with, the White policy makers and administrators' goals were as a top priority the achievement of better academic results … What are the Aboriginal goals to be achieved? At the 1987 Applied Linguistics Conference at Batchelor College (the proceedings of which are recorded in Walton and Eggington, 1990) about 300 Indigenous people said, in many ways, what amounted to two ends to be achieved through bilingual education: (1) Aboriginal *control* of schools and (2) schools to become a support for Aboriginal language *maintenance.* Those are now the social pre-conditions from which bilingual education can achieve community support.

Achievements and benefits

One benefit of bilingual education was improved community–school relations. As Beazley (2009, p. 206) has reported, 'for many Aboriginal children, school ceased to be an alien place, and a lot of parents got involved for the first time in their children's schooling'.

A second benefit was improved attendance. For example, when Northern Territory evaluators compared one school with a bilingual program (St Therese's at Nguiu) against the half a dozen schools without bilingual programs in a reference group, they found that 'pupil attendance figures were high, averaging 94.6 per cent for the period from 1974 to 1981, compared to 73 per cent for the reference group; a highly significant difference' (Devlin, 1995, pp. 26–27).

A third positive consequence of allowing Indigenous children to be bilingually educated is that they began to perform slightly better than their peers in schools without formal bilingual programs (DEET, 2005). Evidence in favour of bilingual education was reported by the Department of Education and Training (DEET, 2005) and incorporated into its next strategic plan (DEET, 2006).

Larger schools with bilingual programs provided enclaves in which Indigenous artists, writers and storytellers could create illustrated vernacular language and English texts. Some of these publications were of high quality, which resulted in some very pleasant, although unexpected, outcomes. For example, on September 25 1980, I noted the following in my professional diary.

> Ms Anne Ingram, of Collins Booksellers, rang from Sydney on Wednesday to advise that Mr D Yunupingu [an Aboriginal artist and printer employed part-time by the Yirrkala Literature Production Centre] had been awarded a cash prize and a medal. His book, *The land of the rainbow snake*, has just been selected by the Premier of NSW for a special children's award. *The land of the rainbow snake* was illustrated by Mr Yunupingu. Ms Ingram advised that the prize of $500 and the medal were being forwarded this week.

Bilingual programs produced some confident graduates who were literate in their own language and English. So much so much that Senator Trish Crossin (2009) felt moved to tell the Australian Senate in October 2009 about

32

> a significantly high achiever in Yirrkala in North-East Arnhem Land by the name of Yananymul Mununggurr. She is now the CEO of Laynhapuy Homelands Association. You do not become a CEO unless you are competent in English, literacy and numeracy and in your own language. Yananymul is a product of bilingual education. And why is that? It is because she went to school every day of her life. It is because she attended 200 days a year for 15 years of her life, and despite the fact, and probably because of the fact, that she was in bilingual education, she has achieved so extremely well.

For the record it is worth noting that Yananymul was a diligent middle primary student at Yirrkala when I started work there as a teacher–linguist in 1979.

From the outset one of the objectives of bilingual education was to ensure the continuing professional development of Aboriginal teachers, since the program depended on Indigenous staff playing an important professional role in planning, teaching and assessing. Team teaching was a crucially important feature of a school's bilingual program. It was never acceptable for Aboriginal education workers to stagnate as teacher aides, assigned menial and subservient roles. What was needed was a relationship of equals so that balanced bilingual–bicultural learning became a real possibility for students.

It was to be expected that the decision to implement bilingual education programs would involve a host of challenges, for it meant a radical departure from an English-centric, Western, non-Indigenous curriculum to one that incorporated initial literacy in Indigenous languages. Ensuring the continuity of non-Indigenous staff was a particularly daunting task, given that the average tenure of a teacher in an isolated settlement school is eight months (Doyle, 2009), but that difficulty was matched by the disruptions caused when Indigenous teachers were absent because of sickness, attendance at ceremonies or a desire to spend time out on their homelands.

Attendance rates fell at all isolated schools in the post-mission era, regardless of the type of program, although bilingual programs generally fared better in this regard (Devlin, 1995). While comparative reports indicated that schools with bilingual programs often achieved better rates of attendance than so-called 'English-only' schools in the 1980s, they were not immune from the problem of poor attendance, which severely limited what teachers were able to achieve.

Other problems included designing programs that prepared students appropriately for post-school life where employment opportunities were limited, and in most settlements this was generally the case. The prevalence of *otitus media* (middle ear infection) was just one reason why teachers needed to monitor their students' hearing abilities, in addition to assessing their proficiency in two languages.

Staff with professional responsibility for the efficient operation of bilingual programs had other challenges to deal with. It was reported to Caffery (2008) by one of her informants that 'Good confident literacy was unusual even among literacy workers; and less so among teacher trainees unless they were themselves the best graduates of the bilingual school system'. In some programs there were competing orthographies to adjudicate (eg., the Anindilyakwa language at Umbakumba in Groote Eylandt in 1986).

Virtually since their establishment, bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory were opposed by most senior education officers (Harris & Devlin, 1999). When official support was diluted or taken away, because of vacillations in

33

government thinking, or the appointment of unsympathetic principals, it proved to be inordinately difficult to maintain the momentum of a dual-language program.

Since their inception in the early 1970s bilingual programs have attracted more than their fair share of criticism. Any program premised on an interest in pluralism, inclusion, vernacular languages and local systems of knowledge, alongside English and the more mainstream curriculum, soon became the target of sly innuendo, if not outright attack, from those who subscribed to more assimilationist beliefs. There were also issues concerning the appropriateness of domain separation and the status of Kriol. For Harris (1990) bilingual schooling involved "two semi-autonomous cultural domains" and a 'culturally compartmentalised' school (1990, p.16) controlled by Aboriginal parents. McConvell (1994) preferred the metaphor of two-way exchange rather than domain separation. As for Kriol, the argument over whether it warranted a role in the classroom or not was never satisfactorily resolved (NTDE files 87/938 and 91/2937).

So a constant challenge facing staff associated with these programs was to ensure that as much as possible all aspects of their operation were defensible and clear. The rationale for bilingual education, it seemed at times, had to be explained to visitors, to every new official and minister, and to incoming staff, over and over again. The opposition was always there, but, like black body radiation, it not always apparent or readily detectible. Even so, despite its detractors, bilingual programs won a loyal following and produced some encouraging, although patchy, results.

In 1998 some NT politicians felt sufficiently emboldened to announce that bilingual education would be phased out. However, in the face of concerted opposition, they relented and settled instead on a compromise arrangement (known as ‘two-way education’), which allowed them to save money by closing down some programs while continuing to provide fluctuating and diminishing levels of support for those remaining for the next ten years.

Research and evaluation

Over the last three decades a modest pool of research and evaluation results has encouraged defenders of the bilingual approach and given them a basis for arguing that such programs can work well, despite logistical difficulties, provided they are well organised and appropriately resourced.

Early Northern Territory research on bilingual education produced some favourable findings (eg., Murtagh, 1979, 1982; Gale, McClay, Christie & Harris, 1981). What was missing from such studies, though, was the use of experimental designs that include randomised sample selection or the calculation of effect sizes, which would allow definitive conclusions to be drawn about program efficacy.

Edward J. Murtagh, a linguist from Stanford University, assessed the results obtained by 58 students in years 1–3 in two schools, one with a bilingual program, and one without. (The two schools were Bamyili and Beswick, which are located east of Katherine and about 450 kilometres southeast of Darwin). His cross-sectional study was conducted over ten 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 ‘posttest only, nonequivalent control group’ design. Murtagh (1982, p.16) reported that

34

> the results of this study indicate very definite trends towards the superiority of bilingual schooling over monolingual schooling for Creole-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 L1 and L2, and were found to be better able to separate the two languages.

Gale et al. (1981) undertook a longitudinal comparison of year 5–7 students using tests in oral English, English reading, English writing and mathematics. As such, their study could be classified as a multiple-group, time series design. The researchers reported consistently better results for the bilingually schooled students, and these results were statistically significant at the year 7 level.

By requiring schools with bilingual programs to undergo accreditation procedures from 1980 to 1987, the Northern Territory Department of Education added to the stock of knowledge about program effectiveness with a series of reports that generally found in favour of the bilingually educated pupils, thus providing valuable in-house, departmental evidence in favour of bilingual education (see, eg., Richards & Thornton, 1981; Stuckey & Richards, 1982; Richards, 1984; Markwick-Smith, 1985).

In 2005 the Northern Territory Employment, Education and Training commissioned a review of bilingual education. Several consultants were engaged and a statistician with little knowledge of bilingual education was asked to do some number crunching on the test results of remote Indigenous students for the 2001–04 period. He then compared the performance of schools which had bilingual programs against those which did not. When these results were published (DEET, 2005), it was clear that across the network of isolated rural schools, students were not generally meeting minimum threshold levels.

However, what the results also showed, and for the first time, was that there was a trend. Compared to their peers in schools without formally organised bilingual programs, bilingually educated students tended to make a slower start (as evidenced by lower year 3 test scores) but were overtaking their peers by years 5, and still held a lead over them by year 7, although the gap had narrowed (DEET, 2005). The significance of this graph was not lost on senior departmental officials. I received a phone call one Friday evening from a senior departmental officer who passed on the good news that the information would be presented to Northern Territory education department executive staff at a briefing session. The results had also shown that attendance was better in bilingual schools during the 2001–04 period. The findings were qualified, but it was recommended that bilingual education programs be given more support. These favourable results were subsequently picked up the Department of Employment, Education and Training and incorporated into its strategic plan for the 2006–09 period (DEET, 2006).

Community preferences

It is crucially important to note that, in remote areas of the Northern Territory, communities have generally indicated that existing vernacular literacy programs are

35

of value to them and ought to be retained. See, for example, the plaintive letter which the author was asked to hand to the former minister for education in early 2009:

> Dear Marion, I was a teacher in Yuendumu school for over 30 years since before the Bilingual Program started in 1974. All my children and grand-children went to school every day and they all read and write English and Warlpiri. Now I am retired as a teacher but I still do some work for Mt Theo Youth program. I am writing about our Warlpiri language. We want our language to be written down and stay strong into the future for generations and generations. We don't want it changing and getting mixed up and becoming weaker.

The author of that letter has since passed away. An important measure of benefit, I have argued elsewhere, is the *value* of a program when considered from a human, quality-of-life perspective (Devlin, 2009b). People's views count every bit as much as the ideology of government politicians, who are inevitably swayed by short-term considerations – arguably they count more, since it is the people who the government serves. People know what they want and care about, and so they sign petitions, write letters to put their views and vent their frustrations. While it may come as a surprise to mainstream Australia and to the Northern Territory government, Indigenous people in remote settlements know what they value. Currently, they do not feel they are being listened to, which is causing immense frustration. Keynes once offered a sardonic reason to explain why: 'There is nothing a Government hates more than to be well-informed; for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult' (Banks, 2009).

The new language policy

Alarmed by the publication of national test averages in September 2008 which showed that Northern Territory students, particularly those in remote rural areas, were lagging behind, the Northern Territory government abandoned its commitment to support bilingual programs (NT DEET, 2006) and introduced a new, ad-hoc policy the following month. On October 14 2008, several days after the former, well-respected head of the education department had been sacked, the minister for education announced a new regulation. Henceforth, all Northern Territory schools would be required to teach in English for the first four hours of every school day.

The government's evidence concerning schools with bilingual programs was presented to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on November 26, 2008. Two documents were tabled: *Data for bilingual schools in the Northern Territory* (DET, 2008a), and a policy development paper, *Transforming Indigenous education*. It was the first document that was introduced as evidence to support the change of policy and to justify the October 14 decision to require the use of English for the first four hours of every school day.

On November 30 2008, the *Northern Territory News* reported that 'Last week, Ms Scrymgour tabled in parliament a report she said proved bilingual schools have worse results than other remote schools.' In fact, the report proved no such thing.

The minister explained that, 'in the interests of transparency', she was tabling 'material from the Department of Education and Training which clearly shows' how

36

she had made her decision. However, this material was neither transparent nor complete, as Devlin (2009b, 2010) has shown. The data document was deficient in at least three main ways:

- it was based on a poorly selected sample, thereby threatening the external validity of the findings;
- it provided an incomplete data set; and
- it misreported national test scores as points rather than ranges.

These deficiencies call into question the reliability of NT DET's analysis and the soundness of its comparative claim that 'bilingual schools are not performing as well as their [sic] non-bilingual schools across the standard measures of school performance' (NT DET, 2008a, p. 2). This claim was based on 'the average performance of all students across the 8 remote bilingual schools that offer a full P–12 program compared with the 8 non-bilingual remote schools' (NT DET, 2008a, p. 2).

Figure 1 of the report lists the schools used for comparison:

Non-bilingual schools	*Bilingual schools*
Alekarenge CEC	Lajamanu CEC
Angurugu CEC	Maningrida CEC
Borroloola CEC	Milingimbi CEC
Gapuwiyak CEC	Numbulwar CEC
Kalkaringi CEC OLSH	OLSH Thamarrur CEC
Ngukurr CEC	Shepherdson College CEC
Ramingining CEC	Yirrkala CEC
Xavier CEC	Yuendumu CEC

The criterion for selecting the *bilingual* schools in the sample was that they had to 'offer a full P–12 program'. This allowed the document's authors to eliminate Areyonga, a school with a bilingual program, which had a student attendance rate in 2008 of 79 per cent.

However, the same criterion was not applied to the schools which did not have bilingual programs. This allowed the inclusion of Xavier as a 'non-bilingual school' (NT DET, 2008a), even though it was a *secondary* institution that did not offer a full P–12 program. In selecting Xavier and not its bilingual feeder school, Murrupurtiyanuwu, the authors were able to include, on the non-bilingual side of their ledger, the graduates of a bilingual program. It is worth noting here that Murrupurtiyanuwu (formerly known as St Therese's) had been one of the best performing bilingual schools in the Northern Territory. In 2003, for example, it won an Australian Literacy Award for English literacy.

Including Xavier, while excluding Murrupurtiyanuwu, weakened the demarcation between the treatment group (those with bilingual programs) and the control group (those without). In no sense could the students at Xavier be said to represent a relevant comparison group. This weakness alone would have been sufficient to invalidate the sample, as well as the claim that bilingual schooling had been compared with non-bilingual schooling.

A different selection criterion might have been more appropriate, such as comparative school size or location by language area. However, even accepting that

37

offering a full P–12 program might have been an acceptable basis for inclusion, it is clear that an error was made in the application of this criterion.

A second criterion applying to the bilingual schools group was that they needed to be offering a bilingual program. On that basis Numbulwar should not have been included, for in 2008 it actually ran a *revitalisation* program that introduced students to a local language. Children did not learn in or through that language; it was not used as a medium of instruction.

Selection bias is a problem that researchers are generally at pains to avoid, for they know that it can threaten external validity and the generalisability of results. In this case the bias arose from the way in which a small sample of schools was drawn from the wider population of interest. A defective sampling model does not provide an adequate basis for generalising about the wider population of interest. Evaluation and measurement experts use the term 'external validity' to refer to the approximate or relative truth of generalisations. If the selection criteria are such that a sample is neither representative nor fair, then any comparative generalisations made on the basis of that sample will lack validity; to put it more precisely, they will lack external validity.

The usual way to guard against selection bias is to employ random selection procedures. Given that the population of interest – 16 schools – was small, however, it would have been better to set up a more representative sample by including all eligible schools. This would have been a much more defensible procedure.

Putting these concerns about the invalid sample to one side, it would be appropriate now to examine how the data were presented for each of the 16 schools.

For each of the eight schools with bilingual programs, four pages of tabulated information were included; that is, there were 32 pages in all. Two main data elements were combined to constitute an individual school profile: attendance rate and the percentage of students achieving benchmark on the Multilevel Assessment Program numeracy and literacy tests administered by the Northern Territory for the years 2005–07. Collectively, the impression is created that the results are unacceptably low; but the point of the evidence was to show that the results for students in schools with bilingual programs were *more* deplorable than the scores attained by students in the comparison schools. Unaccountably, the data document tabled in parliament in November 2008 (NT DET, 2009a) did not allow that comparison to be made, since it withheld the 32 pages of comparable statistics for the 'non-bilingual schools'. This was done even though making all relevant primary data available for secondary re-analysis is the kind of principle one would expect policy-makers to respect, especially those whose rhetoric advocates transparent, evidence-based decision-making.

Given that only eight of the 16 schools – the eight 'bilingual' schools put under the spotlight – were profiled by means of a four-page statistical analysis, it would be fair to say that incomplete Northern Territory assessment and attendance data had been presented, then manipulated, in order to serve a polemical purpose.

The third weakness of the Northern Territory data document is that it is less precise than the NAPLAN summary report on which it is partly based. The NAPLAN results are expressed as ranges; that is, as mean scale scores followed by a plus and a minus. For example, the mean scale score for year 3 reading on the NAPLAN was 308.3 ± 19.6, meaning that there is a 95 per cent chance that the actual average for year 3

38

students lay somewhere between 288.7 and 327.9 on the common national scale. The national figures include confidence intervals, a standard way of indicating a degree of uncertainty, but the Northern Territory evidence presented to parliament did not. Ranges are used in the national data to express the degree of uncertainty. In the Northern Territory data document, scale score means were expressed as points rather than ranges. Degrees of uncertainty were ignored. Figure 2 of the *Data for bilingual schools* document compared the NAPLAN scale score means attained by students in bilingual schools with those attained in other remote CECs, but the incomplete dataset did not make use of the confidence intervals that accompany the national scale (0–100) and which were used to present the 2008 NAPLAN test results (MCEETYA, 2008).

Such a procedure is in breach of MCEETYA protocol 3.1.1 Truth in Reporting, which specifies that reported data 'should contain appropriate references to the confidence intervals/error bands that apply to published data' (MCEETYA, 2009).

In short, it can be said that evidence tabled in the legislative assembly in November 2008, with the aim of substantiating the October 14 decision, was invalid, incomplete—deliberately withholding crucial comparative information in order to create a misleading impression—and simplistic. Fortunately, once nationally comparable data on all Australian schools became available (ACARA, 2011) it became possible to examine the government's case against bilingual schools in more detail,. It turns out that the claims made in parliament in November 2008 about the comparatively poorer attendance rates and test score results attained by students in bilingual schools were all false.

In November 2008 it was claimed that 'The attendance rates in bilingual schools are less than the attendance rates for non-bilingual schools across all year levels (DET, 2008a, p. 2). However, a comparison of the official, publicly available attendance rates (ACARA, 2011) for the schools in question in 2008 (excluding Xavier, because it does not meet the P–12 requirement), shows that there was no difference.

Table 4.4: Comparison of attendance rates for DET's 'non-bilingual' and 'bilingual' schools in 2008 (ACARA, 2011)

Non-bilingual schools'	%	Bilingual schools	**%**
Alekarenge CEC	44	Maningrida CEC	49
Angurugu CEC	39	Lajamanu CEC	51
Borroloola CEC	51	Milingimbi CEC	64
Gapuwiyak CEC	55	Numbulwar CEC	56
Kalkaringi CEC	59	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School	54
Ngukurr CEC 60	72	Shepherdson Coll CEC	46
Ramingining CEC	60	Yirrkala CEC	66
		Yuendumu CEC	44

39

Mean	54	Mean	54

Both sets of figures are worryingly low; this should be the real focus of attention. Even so, the government's claim, alleging worse attendance in schools with bilingual programs, has to be challenged, especially as it was one of the reasons offered as support for the new 'English first' policy announced on October 14, 2008.

The *Data in bilingual schools* (NT DET, 2008a) document put forward a second claim to support the Northern Territory government's decision to phase out 'step' model bilingual programs; namely, that bilingual schools were alleged to have achieved better academic outcomes on only three of the 20 items in the 2008 national literacy and numeracy tests compared to non-bilingual schools. The three items were year 3 grammar, year 3 reading and year 5 grammar. Using MySchool data, Devlin (2010) checked the accuracy of that claim and found that the authors had neglected to mention a few other cases where the 'bilingual schools' group did as well or better; in particular, year 3 spelling, year 3 numeracy, year 7 numeracy and year 9 grammar and punctuation.

The Department of Education and Training, under instruction from the minister, turned the October 14 directive into a policy statement called 'Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day' (DET file 2008/2492, DOC2009/00508). This policy had a two-year shelf life, from January 2009 to January 2011. For schools that formerly had bilingual programs, the department's new policy specifically excluded any vernacular literacy programs during morning classes. It was quite explicit about this (NT DET, 2008c):

> 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.

Although an early draft of the policy (DET file 2008/2492) had exempted preschool classes the final version eliminated this concession, indicating a hardline resolve on the part of government to exclude reading and writing in Indigenous languages from morning classes, across the board, and thereby to accord them only an ancillary role, not a foundational one, in school educational programs.

When interviewed in Lajamanu in August 2009, the head of the department explained to Four Corners television reporter, Debbie Whitmont, 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
>
> (Gary Barnes, in Doyle, 2009).

These same points were made by the department head in an address to Australian Council of Educators members and guests at the Museum Theatrette in Darwin on March 29, 2010.

40

Despite such assurances, the ‘English first’ regulation has stirred up some opposition and in some cases out-and-out resistance (Djuwalpi, in Doyle, 2009). This has had some lamentable and divisive effects (Devlin, 2009b).

The ‘Compulsory teaching in English’ policy has dispensed with bilingual programs aimed at developing literacy in Indigenous languages. As I have pointed out, previous bilingual education advisers had advocated the use of a step model of dual language use. This was a common model, used internationally, and there is a significant body of research to demonstrate its effectiveness given good quality leadership and well-designed and well-implemented programs. In the early days of the Northern Territory Bilingual Program one of the main aims was to use children’s first language to develop literacy skills that were then transferred to English literacy development. The bilingual accreditation process that operated from the early to the mid 1980s using an external testing process showed that a number of the programs were successful in meeting this aim.

It is ironic that an Australian Labor government embarked on a sincere and ambitious bipartisan attempt to make a difference in Aboriginal education by starting with the languages children brought with them to school, then helping them bridge to English, while the current Northern Territory Labor government has blamed a systemic failure to achieve better scores on national tests to this educational method, even though only about one in five remote Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory were in schools with bilingual programs.

By the end of 2010 the ‘Compulsory Teaching in English’ policy was due to be renewed. However, the renewal process triggered an unresolved debate in government circles about what form the reviewed policy might take. By February 2011 a stalemate had been reached.

On December 29 2010 the ‘Compulsory teaching in English’ policy was removed from the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training’s website. A new document called ‘Literacy for both worlds’ (NT DET, 2011) was posted in its place, together with some updated guidelines. In an email sent to the author on Tuesday January 11 the executive director of the department’s Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce confirmed that the ‘Compulsory teaching in English’ policy had been replaced by the newer version.

The revised policy (NT DET, 2011) included some important concessions; in particular, it allowed for the return of early childhood vernacular literacy programs that could serve as a foundation for learning to read and write in English:

> Within the prime teaching time, while most teaching will be in English, home language will be used to support quality teaching across all year levels, particularly in the early years. Home languages can be used to introduce and/or explain concepts where necessary. An EAL approach in the early years includes use of home language and gives students an opportunity to hear, use and learn about English. Some remote and very remote schools, in consultation with their communities, will identify early print literacy in both home language and English as intended student literacy outcomes. They may opt to use a biliteracy approach to the end of Year 2 to achieve this.

Two days later, however, the new policy had disappeared from view. Those who asked why were told that the ‘Literacy for both worlds’ document and associated

41

implementation guidelines were not ready and so had been removed from the website to be re-checked and approved before being reposted. At a meeting with two senior department officers on January 19, 2011, I was advised that once a new policy draft had been cleared by the minister's office it would be made available for comment 'before the start of the school year'; 'schools and the community' would then have a period of several months in which they could comment on this draft. Several months later, despite this reassurance, the promised new policy draft had still not appeared. This prompts the conclusion that an intransigent Northern Territory government, acting through the minister's office, has so far resisted any attempt to moderate its stand.

Main concerns

It is hard to know what to regret more: the persistent refusal of policy makers to take account of the abundant favourable research which endorses the value of first language literacy as a bridge to reading and writing in English; the Northern Territory government's seeming inability to adhere to a coherent bilingual education policy; or the plummeting attendance that has followed the removal of step-model bilingual programs from Indigenous schools (Dickson, 2010).

What this chapter points to then are four areas of real concern:

- the Northern Territory government's ad hoc policy making, its lack of commitment to bilingual education and its willingness to tolerate dishonest manipulation of data
- the lack of consistency in federal government policy concerning bilingual education with the result that funding is available for bilingual programs overseas and in New South Wales but not in the Northern Territory
- the calculated extinguishment of Aboriginal partnership (e.g., the Remote Learning Partnership Agreement, n.d.) in developing appropriate educational plans

all of which reflect

- the undeclared assimilationist position that is now evident in the policies and programs adopted by of both levels of government.

Recommendations

- The four-hours-of-English policy should be reviewed, since the exaggerated claims which were put forward to justify its introduction have now been disproved. The data document that was tabled in the legislative assembly on November 26 2008 should also be rescinded.
- The Northern Territory government should clearly explain that it decided to withdraw support for Model 1 biliteracy programs in 2008 for a variety of logistical, financial and administrative reasons, but that it is still willing to agree to another type of bilingual education (Model 2) in conjunction with its renewed emphasis on English literacy and numeracy. This would help to clarify its intentions concerning small remote schools in the Northern Territory and dispense

42

with the need for misinformation, now-you-see-it-now-you-don't policy revisions and amateurish appeals to dodgy 'evidence'.

- It would be beneficial if the government could commit to a realistic timeframe for bringing the academic achievement of remote Indigenous students on the national basic skills tests (NAPLAN) up to par. The Closing the Gap Health initiative was developed by a coalition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as a 25-year plan. The prime minister now reports once a year to parliament on progress towards those targets. As Tom Calma (*The Age*, 2008) suggested when he was Social Justice Commissioner, why not propose a comparably funded Closing the Gap Education initiative which is also linked to a 25-year improvement plan?
- The Northern Territory Department of Education and Training should honour binding agreements with individual school councils. For example, the Wambirrpa (Fish trap) agreement with Yirrkala was negotiated over several years, starting in 2001, before being signed in front of hundreds of people at the Garma Festival in 2006 (Remote Learning Partnership Agreement, n.d). Principle 1 in that agreement bound the department to support the two-way learning program for the next six years at least. That is a principle worth honouring. If in the wider economy similar agreements were breached with such impunity the whole system of contractual transactions based on surety and trust would break down.
- While policy-makers do not need to direct schools to choose any particular type of language program, they should recommend that a firm and durable commitment is made to any programs that *are* chosen, so that goals for students' literacy skills development and language learning are clearly communicated, staff effort is consistently applied, and appropriate resources are allocated. Although programs will differ from school to school, the clear intention in every case should be to develop students' literacy and language skills in line with the relevant curriculum framework. Achieving proficiency in Standard Australian English (learned as an additional language by students in remote community schools) is a necessary and socioculturally appropriate outcome of schooling in Australia. Many non-Indigenous Australians either remain monolingual or attain only limited proficiency in a second language. This is also true of many young people in the Northern Territory's remote areas. A limited command of Standard Australian English will restrict those students' education and employment prospects. For that reason improving language-learning opportunities needs to be a *major* focus for educators and policy-makers.
- Administrators are best able to support English language programs that include well-established and rigorous implementation processes, sufficient resources for teachers and a strong professional development component. Choosing programs with an evidence-based record of success will ensure that a school's own efforts and resources are not unnecessarily diluted as the result of choosing an inappropriate program. Similarly, administrators are best able to support well-implemented Indigenous language and culture programs that aim to improve student learning outcomes in both languages, promote a strong sense of identity and increase the level of Indigenous community engagement in schools. Choosing

43

which Indigenous language to use in a program requires careful negotiation with Indigenous people. It also requires an understanding of language use in the community as well as protocols related to ownership of the language. Making progress in such matters requires persistence, knowledge, and the belief that such efforts are worthwhile: qualities that are in short supply when the imperative is a frantic rush to do something, *anything*, to improve students' results on national tests; even if that means throwing out the bilingual baby with the bathwater.

End notes

Harris and Devlin (1999) is the primary source for the historical overview in Section 3. A number of passages in that section have been drawn from this unpublished document.

Section 6 of this paper is based on Devlin (2009b). This unpublished document is the primary source for several passages in that section.

References

AAP (2008, November 17). Calma backs bilingual education in NT. The Age. Retrieved June 24, 2009, from http://news.theage.com.au/national/calma-backs-bilingual-education-in-nt-20081117-6990.html

AAP (2009, June 15). NSW schools to offer bilingual education. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved June 24, 2009, from http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/nsw-schools-to-offer-bilingual-education-20090615-c82y.html

ABC (2003). Tiwi Islands School wins English literacy award. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/nt/content/2003/s954762.htm

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2011). *My school*. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from http://www.myschool.edu.au/

Amery, R. (2003). An Australian koine: Dhuwaya, a variety of Yolngu Matha spoken at Yirrkala in Northeast Arnhemland. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 99*, 45–64.

August, D. & Hakuta, K. (1997). *Improving schooling for language minority children: A research agenda*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Australian Human Rights Commission (2009). *Social justice report*. Sydney, NSW: Australian Human Rights Commission. Retrieved January 24, 2010, from http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport09/.

Banks, G. (2009). Evidence-based policy-making. What is it? How do we get it? ANZOG/ANU Public lecture series, Canberra, February 4.

Beazley, K. E. (2009).*Father of the house: The memoirs of Kim E. Beazley*. Freemantle, WA: Freemantle Press.

Beukes (2004). The first ten years of democracy. Language policy in South Africa. Paper read at Xth Linguapax Congress on Linguistic Diversity, Sustainability and Peace, May 20-23, Barcelona.

Browning, D. (2008, Dec 6). Which way? the future of bilingual education. In D. Browning (Producer), Awaye. Alice Springs ABC Radio National. Retrieved June 22, 2009 from the ABC database.

Caffery, J. (2008). *Linguistics training in indigenous adult education and its effects on endangered languages*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Charles Darwin University, Darwin.

Collins B. & Lea T. (1999). *Learning lessons, An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*. Darwin: NT Department of Education.

Cumming, A. & Berwick, R. (Eds.) (1996). *Validity in language testing*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Cummins, J. (1976). The influence of bilingualism on cognitive growth: A synthesis of research findings and exploratory hypotheses. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, *9*, 1–43.

Cummins, J. (1978a). Bilingualism and the development of metalinguistic awareness. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, *9* (2), 131–149.

Cummins, J. (1978b). Educational implications of mother tongue maintenance in minority language children. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *34*, 395–416.

Cummins, J. (1979a). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, *19*, 121–129.

Cummins, J. (1979b). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research*, *49*, 222–251.

Cummins, J. (1979c). The influence of bilingualism on cognitive growth: A synthesis of research findings and explanatory hypotheses. In *Working Papers in Bilingualism*, *9*, 1–43.

Cummins, J. (1981a). Age on arrival and immigrant second language learning in Canada. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *2*, 132–149.

Cummins, J. (1981b). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In D. P. Dolson (Ed.). *Schooling and language for minority students: A theoretical framework*, pp. 3–46. Los Angeles: Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Centre, California State University.

Cummins, J. (1981c). *Bilingualism and minority children*. Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students. A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, *56* (1), 18–36.

Cummins, J. (1987). Language development, academic achievement and empowering minority students. In S. Fradd & W. Tikunoff (Eds.), *Bilingual Education and Bilingual special education: A guide for administrators* (pp. 75–97). Boston: College Hill Press.

Cummins, J. (1991). Forked tongue: The politics of bilingual education: A critique. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *47* (4), 786.

Cummins, J. (1999a). The ethics of doublethink: Language rights and the bilingual education debate. *TESOL Journal, 8*(3), 13–17.

Cummins, J. (1999b). Beyond adversarial discourse: Searching for common ground in the education of bilingual students. In I. A. Heath & C. J. Serrano (Eds.), *Annual editions: Teaching English as a second language* (pp. 204-224). Guildford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill.

Cummins, J. & Corson, D. (Eds.). (1998). *Bilingual education*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Cummins, J. & Swain, M. (1986). *Bilingualism in education: Aspects of theory, research and practice*. London: Longman.

Cummins, J. & Swain, M. (1986). *Bilingualism in education: Aspects of theory, research and practice*. London: Longman.

Devlin, B. (1990). Some issues relating to vernacular language maintenance: A Northern Territory view. In *Language: Maintenance, Power and Education in Australian Aboriginal contexts* (pp. 53–74). Darwin, Northern Territory University: NTU Press.

Devlin, B. (1995). The evaluation of bilingual programs in the Northern Territory, 1973–1993. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 113*, 25-41.

Devlin, B. (1999a, February 14). Bilingual education and the acquisition of English literacy. Alice Springs News.

Devlin, B. (1999b). The decision to phase out bilingual education in the Northern Territory. Paper presented to the TopEnd Linguistic Circle, Darwin, June 22.

Devlin, B. (1999c). Too many haystacks and not enough needles: The search for robust and trustworthy bilingual education research findings that can assist policy-makers. Talk presented to Centre for Studies of Language in Education Seminar, Darwin, August 13, 1999.

Devlin, B. (2005). The evaluation of bilingual programs in the Northern Territory, 1973–1993. International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 113, 25–41.

Devlin, B. (2009a). A critique of recent government claims about the comparative performance of bilingual and non-bilingual schools in the NT. Paper presented to a Western Desert Shire Council meeting, Alice Springs, June 2.

Devlin, B. (2009b). Bilingual education in the Northern Territory and the continuing debate over its effectiveness and value. Paper presented to Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies research symposium, 'Bilingual education in the Northern Territory: Principles, policy and practice', Canberra, Friday June 26. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/special_eds/20090914/language/

Devlin, B. (2010). Evidence? Achievement? Performance? Official data from the MySchool site, government and NT parliament on Model 1 bilingual programs. Presentation to public forum, 'Indigenous languages in education: Do current policies match our needs?', Darwin, September 9.

Devlin, B., Harris, S., Black, P., Bubb, P., Forster, M., Huang, S., Murray, F. and Parkhill, P. (2000). Student achievement in bilingual and ESL programs in the Northern Territory: A comparative, longitudinal analysis of program

46

effectiveness. Proposal no. A00001387 submitted to the Australian Research Council.

Dickson, G. (2010). No Warlpiri, No School? A preliminary look at attendance in Warlpiri schools since introducing the First Four Hours of English policy. Ngoonjook: a Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues, 35.

Doyle, M. (Executive producer). (2009, September 14). Going Back to Lajamanu. [Television broadcast]. Sydney, Australia: ABC Four Corners.

Fishman, J. (1972). *Readings in the sociology of language*. Rowley, Massachussets: Newbury House.

Fishman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing language shift. Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Fishman, J, (2001). *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift, revisited: A 21st Century perspective*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Available online as a Google book.

Gale, K., McClay, D., Christie, M. & Harris, S. (1981). Academic achievement in the Milingimbi bilingual education program. *TESOL Quarterly, 15*(3), 297–314.

Greene, J. P. (1998). *A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of bilingual education*. Claremont, CA: Thomas Rivera Policy Institute.

Grimes, C. (2009). *Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows*. (with: Bibliography of research relating to language, social identity, social stability and education in multilingual societies.) Darwin: Australian Society for Indigenous Languages. (AuSIL) (64 pages + ii, A5.)

Harris, S. & Devlin, B. (1997). Bilingual programs involving Aboriginal languages in Australia. In J. Cummins & D. Corso (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education*, Vol 5, pp. 1–14. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Heckman, J. (2009). James Heckman: An Economist's perspective. [Online video] James Heckman's strong advocacy of early childhood investment. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6213958070024039321#

HREOC (2000). National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education, Recommendations (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, May 2000). Retrieved on May 17, 2001 from www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/rural/education/reports/index.html

Illich, I. (1979). Vernacular values and education. *Teachers College Record*, 81, 31-75.

Kinslow-Harris, J. (1968). Linguistics and Aboriginal education. *Australian Territories*, *8* (1), 24–34.

Krashen, S. & McField, G. (2005, November-December). What Works? Reviewing the Latest Evidence on Bilingual Education. Language Learner, 7-34.

Langford, B. (2008, November 30). Teachers will mind language. *Northern Territory News*. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.ntnews.com.au/article/2008/11/30/19351_ntnews.html

Lee, P. (1992). A reading through writing vernacular literacy project for Aboriginal students. Typescript. 6 March 1992.

McConvell, P. (2008). Mixed languages as outcomes of code switching: Recent examples from Australia and their implications. *Journal of Language Contact, 2*. Retrieved October 27, 2009 from www. jlc-journal.org

McKay, G. (1996). *The land still speaks*. Review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language maintenance and development needs and activities.

Macklin, J. (2009). Statement on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Retrieved on November 17, 2009 from http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/un_declaration_03apr09.htm

Marika, R. (1998). Wentworth address, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Canberra. [Electronic document.] Retrieved May 5, 2011 from http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/wentworth/wentworthcontents.htm

Marika-Mununggiritj, R. & Christie, M. (1995). Yolngu metaphors for learning. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 113*, 59-62, Fall.

Markwick-Smith, V. (1985). *Bilingual accreditation ongoing report: Shepherdson College*. Prepared for the Accreditation Panel, August 1985. Darwin: NT Department of Education.

MCEETYA see Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) 2008). NAPLAN Summary Report: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy. [Electronic document.] Retrieved June 24, 2008, from www.naplan.edu.au/verve/_resources/NAPLAN_Summary_Report.pdf

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) (2009). Principles and protocols for reporting on schooling in Australia. [Electronic document.] Retrieved June 25, 2009 from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/nap_principles__protocols_for_rep_on_school_2009,27896.html

Murtagh, E. (1979). *The use of two languages of instruction with Aboriginal Australians*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

Murtagh, E. (1982). Creole and English used as languages of instruction in bilingual education with Aboriginal Australians: Some research findings. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 36*, 15–33.

Neill, J. (2006). Meta-analysis research methodology. [Electronic document.] Retrieved November 19, 2009 from http://wilderdom.com/research/meta-analysis.html

Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE) (2006). *Handbook for Aboriginal bilingual education in the Northern Territory*. Darwin: NTDE.

Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment & Training (2005). Indigenous languages and culture in NT Schools 2005–2005. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2009/s2685541.htm

Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NT DET) (2008a, October 27). Data for bilingual schools in the Northern Territory. Document tabled in the Legislative Assembly by Marion Scrimgour on November 26.

Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NT DET) (2008b, November 3). Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day. Draft policy document. Unpublished manuscript.

Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NT DET) (2008c). Policy: Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day. DET file: 2008/2492. Retrieved on January 20, 2011 from http://www.det.nt.gov.au/about-us/policies

Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NT DET) (2011). Literacy for both worlds. DET File:2008/2492; doc2010/08120. Retrieved on January 10, 2011 from http://www.det.nt.gov.au/about-us/policies

Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NT DEET) (2006). *Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006-2009*. Darwin: Northern Territory Government. Retrieved June 22, 2009, from http://www.det.nt.gov.au/education/indigenous_education/strategic_directions/strategic_plan/index.shtml

NT DET see Northern Territory Department of Education & Training

NT DEET see Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment & Training

Rebgetz, L. (2011). Government moves on English teaching'. [Online document.] Retrieved May 5, 2011 from http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/01/17/3114418.htm

Remote Learning Partnership Agreement between Yambirrpa Schools Council and Northern Territory of Australia represented by the Department of Employment, Education and Training. Unpublished ms.

Rolstad, K., Mahoney, K. & Glass, G. (2005). The big picture: A meta-analysis of program effectiveness research on English language learners. *Educational Policy, 19*(4), 572-594.

Richards, A. (1984). Northern Territory Department of Education (1984). *Bilingual Accreditation ongoing report—St Therese's School*. Prepared for the Accreditation Panel, May 1981. Darwin: NT Department of Education.

Richards, A. & Thornton, C. (1981). *Report of the Bilingual Education Program at Yirrkala Community School*. Prepared for the Accreditation Panel, May 1981. Darwin: NT Department of Education.

Romaine, S. (2006). Planning for the survival of linguistic diversity. *Language policy, 5*, 441–473.

49

Simpson, J., Caffery, J. & McConvell, P. (2009). Gaps in Australia's Indigenous language policy: Dismantling bilingual education in the Northern Territory. AIATSIS Discussion Paper Number 24.

Stuckey, P. & Richards, A. (1982). *Report of the Bilingual Education Program at St Therese's School*. Prepared for the Accreditation Panel, May 1981. Darwin: NT Department of Education.

The Age (November 17, 2008). Calma backs bilingual education in NT. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from http://news.theage.com.au/national/calma-backs-bilingual-education-in-nt-20081117-6990.html

Treffgarne, C. (1981). The World Bank on language and education: A lot more could have been done. *Comparative Education, 12*(2), 173–171.

Tsunoda, T. (2005). *Language endangerment and language revitalisation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Urban Institute (2004). Beyond Bilingual Education: Immigrant students and the No Child Left Behind act. Online document. Retrieved July 17, 2010 from http://www.urban.org/publications/900764.html

Watts, B. H. & Gallacher, J. D. & Aust. Dept. of Territories (1964). *Report on an investigation into the curriculum and teaching methods used in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory to C. E. Barnes, Minister of State for Territories*. Darwin, N.T.

Watts, B. H., McGrath, W. J. & Tandy, J. L. (1973). *Recommendations for the implementation and development of a program of bilingual education in schools in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory*. Canberra: Department of Education.

Willig, A. C. (1985). A meta-analysis of selected studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research, 55*(3), 269-318.

World Bank (2006). Language of learning, language of instruction: Implications for achieving education for all. Human Development Network. Retrieved July 17, 2010 from <http://www.seameo.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=259&itemid=156>.

50

Appendix 3 Wali Wunungmurra's address to Garma, August 6, 2011

[Kathryn McMahon's notes of a speech given by Wali Wunungmurra, NLC Chairman]

I want to share with you a great disappointment that I have now and it is about education and training and it particularly concerns my community.

I did not always feel this disappointment as we have achieved great things regarding education and training at Yirrkala. I am now Chairman of the Northern Land Council but I have a lifelong commitment to education and training for my people. I have devoted much of my life to education and training

I have been an adult educator, school manager, senior education and cultural adviser and school council chairman.

I hear non Yolngu voices still telling us what we need if we are to lead a proper life. They talk about excellence and quality as if these are new ideas and goals they have just thought of. Those voices are now telling us what we told them for as long as I can remember. Along the way they insult all of us who have gone before, we did not aim high enough, as if we were not smart enough, not trained properly or not excellent teachers or trainers. Well Yolngu leaders have been talking about excellence and quality for a long time and we are still talking about it today.

Be clear about this; we say a quality education for our children must do the following things:

1. Respect and complement our Yolngu cultural heritage at all times including our language, law, ceremonies and customs.

2. Prepare our young people for the modern world without disadvantage and with all the opportunities available to all young Australians. Our young people must be *ralpa* '(disciplined') and accept working to targets that we set for them and we will be there to support them.

3. Involve us at every level as equal partners- put those two words equal and partners in capital letters and back it up with action.

Why am I disappointed? Well, we have had a great tradition at Yirrkala of honouring these principles. We have done some great things and produced some highly educated men and woman who walk proudly in two worlds, but now as we struggle with new challenges non-Yolngu voices tell us what plans they have for us. They say the right words, but they create confusion amongst my people.

- I see our culture pushed to the background
- I see our involvement as a token only. We Yolngu are consulted but only about what the new plan is
- I see a weakening of commitment to training our own teachers and school leaders
- I see our senior Yolngu staff and council members manipulated by ignoring our ways of working together

51

- I see divide and rule at work
- I see that often we never get the full story
- I see we never get all the options explained to us and we are seldom given enough time to think and carefully consider our position
- I see school councils that Principals and DET officers think they own
- I see discussions usually take place away from our country with English as the main language used
- and last I see agreements and plans we have been part of almost ignored while new plans are put in place for us

In 2007 I signed an historic partnership agreement with the then chief minister of the Northern Territory, Ms Clare Martin here at Garma. This came from my good friend Syd Stirling's vision when he was NT Minister for education -You may remember it - it was a great celebration of careful work over five years. It is called the Yambirrpa plan. Many Yolngu leaders, some now not with us gave their time and wisdom to plan a way forward. Not just ideas and principles but actions as well. Good people in DET worked to put this agreement together. It built on what we had done well and what we can do better - it was about excellence and quality. I was happy then we had fired up our vision - we were excited and enthusiastic about addressing the youth crisis that we identified. Now we find both the plan and those of us who built the plan are ignored. I know morale in the school is low, and also in the community - I know that attendance is still poor and I know we have not engaged all those young people that are lost
I would like some action now - I would like an independent review of our current school programs and the implementation of the Remote Learning Partnership Agreement and the Yambirrpa plan at Yirrkala through our school council. This is so we can jump over the present problems and get back on track. We do not want our future hijacked by taking away our kids future. WE must remember the words that have guided us in the past YAKA GANA always together never alone.

Right now though I want you to listen to these fine educators from Yirrkala and the story they tell about what worked for them, what worked at Yirrkala, what works now and where we should go from here.

52

Appendix 4 Briefing notes prepared by two longstanding NT DET employees

(CL0611 and CA0611, personal communication, August 21, 2011)

The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

To offset some of the difficulties Shergold (2011) outlined, two experienced NT educators have jotted down many points for consideration:

> To provide for the implementation of policy, structures need to
>
> * be ongoing
>
> * be sufficiently comprehensive to cater for all indigenous languages and contexts in Australia
>
> * allow for bottom-up as well as top-down access; e.g. reliance on modern technologies does not result in universal coverage. Some NT communities still do not have internet access or mobile phones. Some have limited TV and Radio access; e.g. one of the 20 designated growth towns did not have access to ABC radio for over a year.
>
> * connect agencies and institutions (indigenous, NGOs, Federal, State/Territory and local government, training organizations) working in or with indigenous languages – interpreting.
>
> * bring together past stories of structures, projects to the role of indigenous languages.
>
> * explicitly allow for Indigenous management.
>
> * provide for access to informed practice – e.g. use of L1 and in education, the practice interpreting.
>
> * provide for the range of language contexts and their specific needs; e.g. Language Maintenance contexts will require explicit attention to achieving communication, given that the lingua franca of communities is not English. This would be across service providers as well as in education.
>
> * provide for work, study, school programs, program development, tertiary programs, research associated with Indigenous languages has and continues to be challenged by being piecemeal 'projects' vs sustained ongoing work. The establishment of a network of Indigenous Language Centres/Language Management committees can be seen as a move to allow for this. A watchful eye to see that 'universal' coverage was managed/maintained over time was not part of this. Sites where centres 'fell over' and parts of Australia including most of the Top End of the NT are now outside this network
>
> Present structures and process are subject to political whims resulting in
>
> * lack of access to historical records documenting what has been done
>
> * disconnected work across/within bureaucracies/NGOs/individuals and no places to go to find out – often because they are having to adapt to the dynamics of language change (which, despite all-Eng policies, has not resulted in widespread use of English in remote communities – language shift ranges from a widening spread of a particular indigenous language bilingual to having to adapt to the dynamics associated with ongoing social change)

53

* a view that there are too many languages and it is too hard

* lack of policies

* tensions between community wishes and top down policies/decisions

* ad hoc/English-only initiatives

Do indigenous communities have access to their traditions and history? Their cultures cannot be accessed outside Australia.

How do we ensure Indigenous people of the future have access to their traditions and histories in the words of their own people today – or will they have to rely on the records of people outside their culture and traditions?

It is clear not all indigenous languages are dying; in fact, the numbers of speakers for some languages have been growing. Language shift in remote communities is almost never to English but to another Indigenous language; e.g., Kriol, Dhuwal/Djambarrpuyngu.

What place do we want for Indigenous languages and English in the future?

As an example of learning that has taken place over time, consider the ALPA stores in several remote communities. These have grown from the 'bottom up' over decades. They now employ local people and have a board of directors with many indigenous members. Unsurprisingly, the language used in these stores is predominantly the local indigenous language(s).

Where do people go to find out what is known, or needs to be known about the best use of L1 and L2 for learning in the Early Years, Middle Years and Senior Secondary?

What is the pathway for learning in and about the languages and cultures of the local indigenous community in the local school(s)?

Where are the structures within Australian institutions to provide for this – the research, training, curriculum development, storage and dissemination of information and guidelines? Where is the tertiary institutional base for informing and researching education in these contexts? (as well as for other areas of education; e.g. English literacy and numeracy, history, and so on)

What information already exists? (ACER is setting up a database on work on indigenous education. How would a remote community-based person find out about this?)

Is it coordinated in a way that is productively accessible in relation to particular local contexts for educators (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), language speakers, program developers, curriculum writers for particular local contexts.

(CL0611 and CA0611, personal communication, August 21, 2011)

The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education

Drawing on their long experience in the Northern Territory CL0611 and CA0611 have shared their perspective on the potential benefits of giving vernacular languages an educational role in early childhood programs:

54

> In remote communities where the lingua franca is an indigenous language [using] this [vernacular] allows children to understand about concepts that are being talked about and can be learning across the curriculum while in the early stages of acquiring English.
>
> In fact the use of the first language of the students allows for better learning across the curriculum and across all stages of learning. However, it must be planned; e.g., in Secondary, establishing new concepts in first language to establish understanding and then focusing on the English language. It manages the learning load for the students. It allows them to move more quickly into understanding in another language; i.e., English.
>
> There are a number of considerations concerning the role of indigenous languages in the education of students in remote communities where an indigenous language is the language of daily instruction. (These are referred to as 'language maintenance contexts' in the Australian Indigenous Languages Framework):
>
> * How and when will children use the vernacular language for learning across the curriculum?
>
> * How will their first language learning be strengthened?
>
> * Does the local community want a language and cultures program (in a local language with their knowledge as a subject area in its own right)?
>
> * How will this be developed, implemented, supported and evaluated?
>
> * Is literacy to be learned in L1? (It should be noted that literacy was borrowed at some point by most cultures. It was not invented that often. The right to choose to learn literacy in one's language is not something that outsiders should have a right to decide on rather than the local community, as has recently been the case in some schools in the NT.)
>
> * How to use the L1 to assist in the learning of English?
>
> *If something is deemed to be not working, is that a matter of implementation or evidenced-based theory. Should it be thrown out or reviewed?*
>
> (CL0611 and CA0611, personal communication, August 21, 2011)

Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language

The two experienced NT DET staff have explained what is needed now:

> In remote communities where an indigenous language is the lingua franca the most desirable teachers are bilingual-bicultural. These are rare. For classroom communication to take place, schools have been structured with positions combining qualified teachers with Assistant Teachers speaking the local language. Staff in both of these positions need training so that the communication that takes place in the classroom is the richest it can be for the students to learn. This can be provided through courses and qualifications offered by tertiary institutions targeting both positions.

55

> Local work-based training has proven a successful model of training for assistant teachers, who often have family commitments and prefer to live locally.
>
> Another strategy is for schools to allocate joint planning time. In this time the teachers and assistant teachers focus on how to teach and plan.
>
> For communication to take place teachers need deliberate about what to teach. Too often those non-Indigenous staff teaching through English talk too much and don't spend enough time to ensure communication and understanding take place. There is often too much emphasis on testing and English per se.
>
> Engagement and motivation of students is important for all kids. Teachers who have and active interest in the language and culture of their students have more chance of engaging students.
>
> ….
>
> In the Early Years the foundational skills across the curriculum that are established should be based on the local environment
>
> (CL0611 and CA0611, personal communication, August 21, 2011)

Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services

The two NT DET employees have acknowledged some of the valuable improvements that have been achieved to date, and suggest that more needs to be done, even though this is not likely to be easy in the current climate:

> In the past few years there have been highly positive developments including the recognition and provision of interpreters and an interpreting service for Indigenous languages in the NT.
>
> It would be timely now to review the career pathways for trained interpreters, starting with school programs. The NTCF ILC T-10 provides for some outcomes. However, we would welcome some new VET courses which target students both in schools and post-school.
>
> The training pathway for translators, with its basis in literacy, is less well developed. SIL had a certificate in translation in the past. Many people who currently have high level first language skills in literacy developed them through old BIITE courses and/or school bilingual programs. Given the current reduction in the quality and inclusion of first language literacy learning by NT DET in remote schools and the reduced coverage of remote first language speaking populations in their own language literacy development through BIITE, a future generation of L1 speakers with high level literacy skills in their own language, which is needed for translation, work has been severely threatened.
>
> Yet the requests for translation work continue. It is acknowledged as a skill required by adults in communities but the learning pathways to provide it, especially in the school system have become contentious.
>
> (CL0611 and CA0611, personal communication, August 21, 2011)

56

The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.

The two NT DET employees have explained that, from their perspective:

> There is a dearth of current policy at federal and state/territory level to guide the recognition and use of Indigenous languages in all their diverse contexts.
>
> NSW is unique in having a general policy and NT has one in development.
>
> This lack of policy fosters the splintered structures available to address the recognition and use of Indigenous languages.
>
> We need to move on from having to combat some the myths about bilingual education.
>
> (CL0611 and CA0611, personal communication, August 21, 2011)

57

Appendix 5 Response prepared by Ms Kathryn McMahon, PhD candidate

Submission to the Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous communities

I wish to address the first term of reference: *The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages.* I believe this term of reference covers many aspects of the topic under investigation.

The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages in education in Northern Territory schools are extensive and will, I believe, support the engagement of Indigenous people in the education of their children.

The inclusion of Indigenous community capital in the form of Indigenous leadership and Indigenous languages and cultural traditions in the school system.

On Saturday August 6th 2011, at the Garma Festival in North-East Arnhem Land, the Chairman of the Northern Territory Land Council Mr Wali Wunungmurra had this to say about what is important if we are to make education strong and relevant for children in remote communities:

Be clear about this: we say a quality education for our children must do the following things:

1. Respect and complement our Yolngu cultural heritage at all times including our language, law, ceremonies and customs.
2. Prepare our young people for the modern world without disadvantage and with all the opportunities available to all young Australians. Our young people must be Ralpa[1] and accept working to targets that we set for them and we will be there to support them.
3. Involve us at every level as equal partners– put those two words equal and partners in capital letters and back it up with action[2].

[1] Yolngu matha word denoting rigour, discipline.
[2] Notes taken by author at the 2011 Key Forum, 6th August 2011.

58

Employment and involvement of local community members in the education.

Mr Wunungmurra pointed out three areas that he felt were lacking in the current education system in the Northern Territory:

- I see our culture pushed to the background
- I see our involvement as a token only. We Yolngu are consulted but only about what the new plan is
- I see a weakening of commitment to training our own teachers and school leaders

In this section I would like to address the third point above, as I believe it goes to the heart of the decline in educational success in the NT over the past ten years. Mr Wunungmurra was a graduate from a community-based Adult Education program, as were many other well-known remote area teachers, Mandawuy Yunupingu, Yalmay Yunupingu and the late Dr R Marika, to name a few. Some of these graduates are still working in their community schools as I write, in both leadership and teaching roles.[3]

In the 1980s and 1990s, Batchelor College, 100 kilometres south of Darwin in the Northern Territory, provided a community-based Teacher Education program which produced over 100 teacher education graduates for remote Indigenous communities in NT schools. In September 1998 the then College Director Mr John Ingram reported that the drop-out rate for the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) for the College was under 30 per cent. He went on to say how this attrition rate compared very well with the attrition rate from other institutions and universities. He also reported the following employment outcomes:

> The employment record for graduates with accredited awards since the late '70s is even more impressive: 82.5 per cent of them have jobs, an additional 8.2 per cent are on leave and three per cent are in part time employment. No other

[3] Ms Leah Kerinaiua, Principal of Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School; Mr Tobias Ngambe, co-principal of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr, Port Keats; Imelda Palmer, assistant principal at Ltyentye Apurte CEC, Santa Teresa; Caroline Windy and Tarna Andrews at Areyonga CEC; Dhalulu and Banabapuy Ganambarr Yirrkala CEC; Milmilany and Warmbirrirr at Milingimbi CEC, Valerie Bulkunu at Shepherdson College Elcho Island…

59

university in this country could say that (Alice Springs News, September 9th 1998).

Almost all the teacher education students in the Batchelor College Teacher Education programs in these years were working in bilingual schools across the Northern Territory when they enrolled at Batchelor College to become teachers. Their bilingual and bicultural skills were valued in their schools, and played a prominent role in their teacher education course. Local Indigenous teachers provide a clear link between the school and their community.

Both the educational and economic benefits stemming from the employment of local Indigenous teachers in remote NT schools should be obvious. Since the cessation of community-based teacher education programs in 2000, there have been no new remote area local teacher graduates. This has resulted in the need to recruit more non-Indigenous teachers from all over Australia, the great majority of who have no training in working with bilingual or multilingual students let alone Indigenous students. This is not only a costly enterprise, but may also be resulting in the low attendance rates currently witnessed in some remote NT schools.

I believe that if we are to really engage Indigenous students in education we need to revisit some of the successes of the past in relation to community-based teacher education. Below are some tertiary education strategies that need to be revived in order to encourage people in remote communities to study to be teachers, and to successfully complete their studies[4]:

1 Mixed-Mode Delivery

At Batchelor College in the past, 'mixed-mode' was a form of flexible delivery that evolved over twenty years in response to the educational, social, and cultural contexts of remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This mode of delivery was able to respond to the requirements of remote area students, including their family and ceremonial obligations. Students, for the most part, were based in their home communities and attended intensive workshops several times a year on the

[4] http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/pubs/indigenous/batchelor_college htm

Batchelor Campus, the Alice Springs Campus, in College Annexes in Katherine, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy or Alyangula, or in other communities. In addition to these intensive workshops, students undertook continuing studies in their own communities where they were visited by College staff, or worked with community-based lecturers or tutors.

2. ‘Both ways’ Philosophy

The mixed mode of course delivery supported the College's ‘both ways’ philosophy of education, designed not only to provide students with the opportunity to gain recognised and high quality vocational and academic qualifications, but also to do this through programs that support their respective Aboriginal cultures and languages. All courses (apart from some of the short vocationally specific VET programs) were designed to bring together diverse knowledge (information, practices, values, languages. systems) from Aboriginal traditions as well as those from traditional educational cultures.

Periods in the home community provided access to the experience and knowledge of the people of the community, which was reflected on within the course of studies. Other activities in the community included work experience, practicum, inquiry and research, assignment preparation, instruction, and conferencing with lecturers. Periods on campus provided access to resources of staff, text books, library and other resources not available in the communities. Workshops on campus provide interaction with other students, and dialogue on course-related topics with staff and other students. Field studies provide a broadening experience and further differentiating conceptualisation.

3. Community Study Centres

To support innovative curriculum practices, the College established a network of Community Study Centres in over thirty-five remote Northern Territory communities and entered into a number of 'Community Agreements' with councils, schools, and clinics which established the basis under which the College utilised locally owned premises for both course delivery and student support facilities. The activities of the

61

Community Study Centres was facilitated by a Regional Coordinator integrating them into Batchelor College's multi-campus operations.

The Community Study Centres were meeting places where students gathered to read, to work on assignments, and to communicate with lecturers by phone or fax, or to receive on-site tutoring or teaching.

If we wish to seriously improve educational outcomes in remote NT communities we need to add the strengths that well-trained and skilled local Indigenous teachers can bring to their students' education. It seems to me after almost thirty years experience in Indigenous education in the NT, that the most important strategy to focus on is the re-invigoration of a rigorous 'both ways' community-based teacher education program.

3. Efficacy of learning for children in remote NT schools

There is no educational research in the world that concludes that children learning in a language they do not speak provides strong educational outcomes. On the contrary, there is an extensive body of evidence showing that children learn better if they understand the language that is spoken in school. International scholars like Jim Cummins (2000) have also shown that the important goal of learning a second language is facilitated by starting with the language children already know.

Mandawuy Yunupingu, a former principal of Yirrkala Community School outlined his views on the importance of Yolngu languages and cultural traditions in education and its importance in learning a second language in the following statement. He made this statement in a meeting with the then Minister for Education Marion Scrymgour on February 4th 2009, several months after the NT government had announced the closure of the last bilingual programs in the Northern Territory.

> I want to talk about Yolngu strength; either in the English or the Yolngu Matha speaking domain. Yolngu leaders see our language as sacred. Yolngu kids think in their own language which can then inform them about English and their own form of understanding, about its meanings and its values. That

62

shouldn't be underestimated. Ignoring this is the view of seeing Yolngu children as under-privileged. I consider Yolngu children to be as clever as any one else in the whole world. They should not be asked to leave their cleverness outside the classroom door. Not my kids or my grandkids. They should have equal rights, the same rights as any kids in the world, whether they are Chinese, or Balanda, the equal right to learn in their own language and to be judged as equal to anyone else.

63

Appendix 6 Brief bio statement—Brian Devlin

1. Current work history

Visiting professor, Cologne University, Germany (October 2009-February 2010) and Associate Professor, Charles Darwin University. Dr Devlin has almost 40 years experience as an educator, consultant, writer and researcher in roles that have included evaluator of international projects; UNESCO consultant; primary, secondary, tertiary teacher; teacher linguist; principal,; head of school; Education Faculty Dean; Chair of Darwin High School Council; Chair of NT Education Advisory Council; ACER Council member and Board member; leader of several research groups and centres.

2. Current interests

Vernacular languages (particularly Yolngu Matha), applied linguistics, literature, history, Chinese, Russian and German

3. Current research

Interactive Distance E-Learning for Isolated Communities
Digitisation of vernacular language collections
Homeland centres
Bilingual education policy in the NT

4. Current publications

2011. A bilingual education policy issue: Biliteracy versus English-only literacy. In N. Purdie, G. Milgate & H. Bell (2011), *Two way teaching and learning: Towards culturally reflective and relevant education* (ch.4). Melbourne: ACER Press.
2011, in press. The status and future of bilingual education for remote Indigenous students in the Northern Territory. Manuscript submitted 30 April, 2011 to the *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*.

5. Other

In 2008 Dr Devlin was appointed 'expert of international standing' by the Australian Research Council (ARC) College of Experts

64