



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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Extracts from -

BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS IN ABORIGINAL
COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Department of Education
Canberra. 1973.

In January/February 1973 at the request of the Minister for Education, the Hon. Kim E. Beazley, an Advisory Group was set up to make recommendations for the implementation and development of a program involving teaching in Aboriginal languages and the incorporation in the school curriculum of further elements of traditional Aboriginal arts, crafts and skills. The members of the group were:

Dr. Betty H. Watts, Reader in Education, University of Queensland, Mr. W.J. McGrath, Inspector of Schools, Aboriginal Education Branch, and Mr. J.L. Tandy, Department of Education, Canberra.

It is believed that many teachers will be interested in the thinking behind the bilingual education program and the manner of its recommended implementation.

The extracts which follow set out the rationale and the recommended progress through the educational program. The recommended roles of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff members will be outlined in the next issue.

1. RATIONALE FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

1.1 The Advisory Group believes that the educational program pursued at present in schools in the Northern Territory, with English as the language in which literacy is sought, has achieved success for a significant number of Aboriginal children. At the same time it believes that a majority of the children have faced marked difficulties in their educational progress. It holds the view that the optimal educational, cultural and social development of the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory can best be fostered through the institution of a program of bilingual education. In making the following recommendations, it has adopted the definition of bilingual education formulated by the United States in framing its Bilingual Education Act (Title VII ESEA) :

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

a legitimate pride in both cultures."

RECOGNITION OF AND RESPECT FOR THE LANGUAGES AND CULTURE OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

1.2 The educational program in a school serving an Aboriginal community should recognize and respect the language/s and culture of that community.

1.2.1 The school should be the agent of cultural continuity rather than of cultural discontinuity, with the non-Aboriginal Australian culture being introduced in a manner acceptable to the people.

1.2.2 The school should help to foster the children's pride in their ethnic identity and aid their development of favourable self-concepts.

1.2.3 The school, through its teaching personnel, should offer the children effective and acceptable models from within their own ethnic group.

1.2.4 The school program should be developed and implemented in such a way that the adults of the community feel an involvement in and responsibility for the education of their children.

1.2.5 The above goals can be achieved only when the language of the community is an integral part of the school program.

LANGUAGE FOR INITIAL LITERACY

1.3 The child's first language should, in general, be the language in which initial literacy is developed.

1.3.1 The psychological meaningfulness of the reading process is more easily established through the normal range of reading readiness activities when the child's first language is used.

1.3.2 Oral fluency in the language is an essential pre-requisite for success in reading; at present limited fluency in English creates marked difficulties for many children when initial literacy is required in that language.

1.3.3 Motivation is likely to be higher when greater meaningfulness and interest are secured through the use of the child's first language.

1.3.4 The decoding process in the Aboriginal languages is rendered simpler and easier than in English since linguists recording the former have achieved a marked regularity of phoneme/grapheme correspondence; this is in contrast to the written English language.

1.3.5 Overseas programs (particularly those conducted by the Summer Institute of Linguistics) suggest that, once literacy skills have been established in the child's first language, transfer of the skills to the reading and writing of a second language is less difficult than the child's accomplishment of initial literacy in the second language.

THE NEED FOR SUBSEQUENT LITERACY IN ENGLISH

1.4 Once literacy skills have been established in the child's first language, it is essential that he become literate in English also.

1.4.1 The Aboriginal people to whom the Advisory Group has spoken have expressed a strong concern that their children become literate in English.

1.4.2 The social and economic well-being of the Aboriginal people is dependent, in part, upon literacy in English.

1.4.3. The cultural well-being of the people, particularly in relation to their interaction with non-Aboriginal and other Aboriginal Australians and in relation to their continuing development of their own culture, within a nation-wide and world-wide framework, requires literacy in English.

1.4.4 The optimal educational development of the children cannot be secured through the medium of Aboriginal languages only; the full range of resources for such development cannot be adequately translated.

THE NEED FOR THE CONTINUED STUDY OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

1.5 Once initial literacy has been secured in the child's first language there is need for him to continue the study of that language, so that -

- (a) he may master the full richness of that language;
- (b) his cognitive development may be fully fostered;
- (c) he may achieve increasing satisfaction through expression in the oral and written forms of that language;
- (d) he may contribute to an emerging literature in that language.

THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN THE EARLY YEARS

1.6 At present, the curriculum of early education is implemented in English; in many schools some use is made of an Aboriginal language to assist children.

1.6.1 This must place a too-heavy burden on many children in their attempts at learning. For many their grasp of English, both receptive and expressive, is extremely limited and for them the teaching-learning situation is inefficient and stress-provoking.

1.6.2 The security and well-being of the children would be enhanced if the language of the classroom were the familiar language of the home and the community.

1.6.3 This increased sense of security would, in addition to the contribution it makes to the personal development of the children, also foster higher motivation and more efficient learning.

1.6.4 Included in the objectives of the early education program are psycholinguistic development, cognitive development and the development of a store of early fundamental concepts. The degree to which later educational goals can be achieved is determined in part by the success in meeting these early objectives. Optimal psycholinguistic and cognitive development will be fostered if the language of instruction is the child's first language; the use of English as the language of instruction when the children have only an imprecise and imperfect grasp of this language is a major inhibiting force in their cognitive development.

THE LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION IN LATER YEARS OF THE PROGRAM

1.7 When the children have -

- (a) achieved early educational goals through the medium of their own language;
- (b) achieved a degree of fluency (receptive and expressive) in oral English, and
- (c) moved towards literacy in English,

both the Aboriginal language and English should be used as the languages of instruction, each being used in its appropriate place.

1.7.1 The Aboriginal language would remain as the appropriate language for Language Arts in that language and for Aboriginal Studies (conducted sometimes by Aboriginal members of the teaching team and sometimes by Aboriginal adults from the community.) In other areas of the curriculum, at certain stages, the Aboriginal language may also prove to be the more appropriate language of instruction.

1.7.2 There would be a gradual transition, probably beginning in the last year of the Infants' School, to English as the language of instruction. Throughout the middle years of schooling, English would gradually become the language of instruction for areas of the curriculum other than those mentioned in 1.7.1.

2. RECOMMENDED MODELS

2.1. The recommended models are based on considerations of the Aboriginal cultures and their location within the wider Australian context, educational, psychological and linguistic principles, the availability of teaching teams consisting of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members, and overseas research and development projects.

The major model, which could operate in schools where there is a single Aboriginal language acceptable to the community and where linguistic analysis and recording of that language are sufficiently advanced, is set out below:

2.2.1 The principles incorporated in this model include the following -

2.2.1.1. The language of instruction in the early years will be the Aboriginal language, with those aspects of the present English language environment being retained where appropriate.

2.2.1.2. During these early years, English, in its oral form only, will be taught as a second language. Initially learning situations will be informal and unstructured; gradually there will be a transition to more formal and structured learning situations when there will be concentration on the units of language as well as more informal approaches.

2.2.1.3. Literacy will be established first in the Aboriginal language.

2.2.1.4. When the children have mastered literacy skills in the Aboriginal language and when they have achieved a sufficient command of oral English, literacy in English will be commenced.

2.2.1.5. As oral fluency and literacy in English are established there will be a gradual transition to English as the language of instruction for many areas of the curriculum.

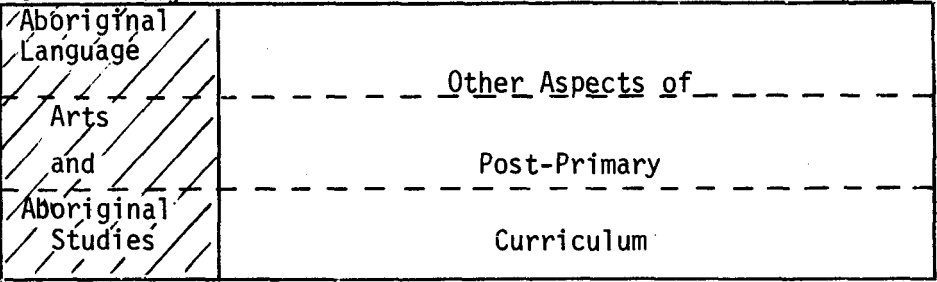
2.2.1.6. Language Arts in the Aboriginal language will be continued throughout the entire school program.

2.2.1.7. Aboriginal Studies in those areas of Aboriginal culture approved by the community, for those age groups and sex groups approved by the community, will be conducted in the Aboriginal language.

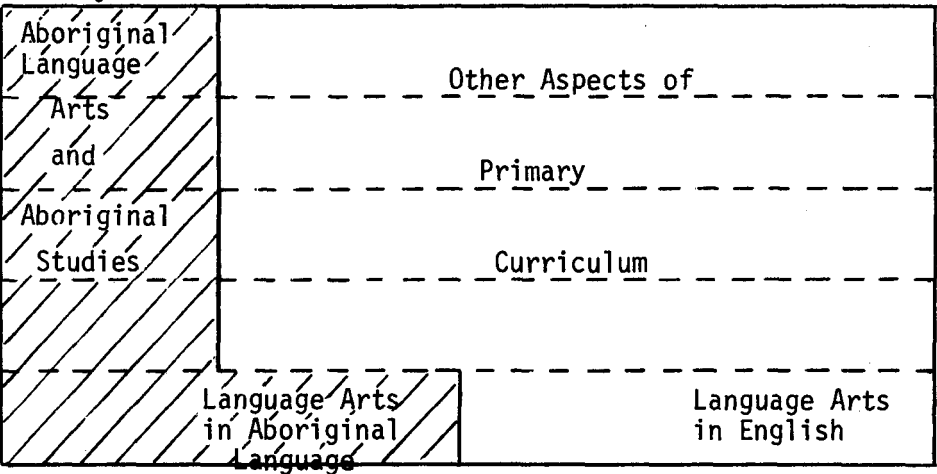
2.2.1.8. Each of the two languages, Aboriginal and English, will be presented only by native speakers of the language.

2.2.2. The timetable in the above model must be interpreted as a flexible timetable. The sequences can be determined in advance, but the timing of achievement of the successive stages cannot, at this point, be predicted.

Post-Primary

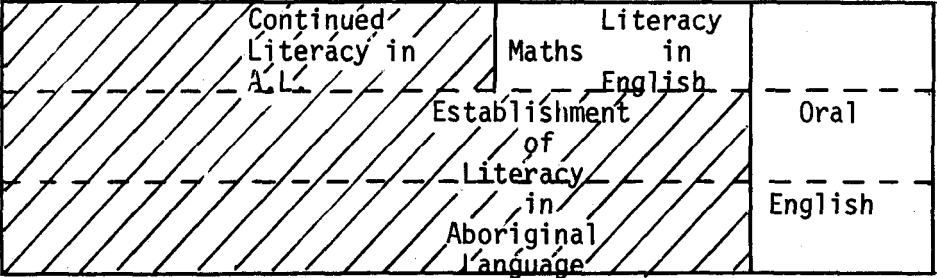


Primary



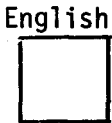
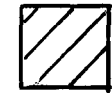
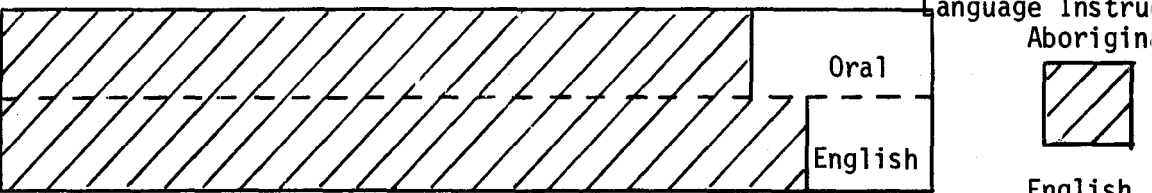
(1)

Infants



(2)

Pre-School



- (1) Gradual transition to English as the language of instruction.
 (2) There will be individual differences in timing of transition from literacy in Aboriginal Language to literacy in English.