



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

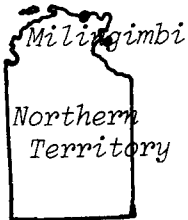
In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

ACROSS AUSTRALIA

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER

EVALUATION OF AUSTRALIAN BILINGUAL EDUCATION:
SOME INITIAL IDEAS DIRECTED AT OBTAINING
A JUST AND THOROUGH APPROACHM. Christie,
Milingimbi, N.T.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1973 parliamentary session, the Australian Federal Government introduced a

campaign to have Aboriginal children living in distinctive Aboriginal communities given their primary education in Aboriginal languages...and to supplement education for Aboriginal children with the teaching of traditional Aboriginal arts, crafts and skills mostly by Aboriginals themselves.

Following that announcement, a committee was formed to investigate the possibilities of bilingual education and to direct the setting up of some initial programs. Five schools originally changed to a bilingual education program, and the number has grown to almost twenty. The original schools have now been in operation for five years, and there is a call for their evaluation. The government has expended large sums of money on the development of the programs, but there is still discussion concerning their possible future. Some of the key issues concerning bilingual education in the Northern Territory have not been resolved, and much of the development of programs was taken over by people of initiative in individual schools. This may or may not have been a good thing, but for the purposes of evaluation, we are presented with a very complex and freely structured situation. A just and constructive evaluation of all that has happened thus far will be difficult but invaluable for the government, the administrators, and the teachers.

The purpose of this paper is not to provide a plan for a thorough evaluation study. Its aim is not even to provide ideas for potential evaluators. The intention is simply to argue for the importance of a just and comprehensive evaluation study which

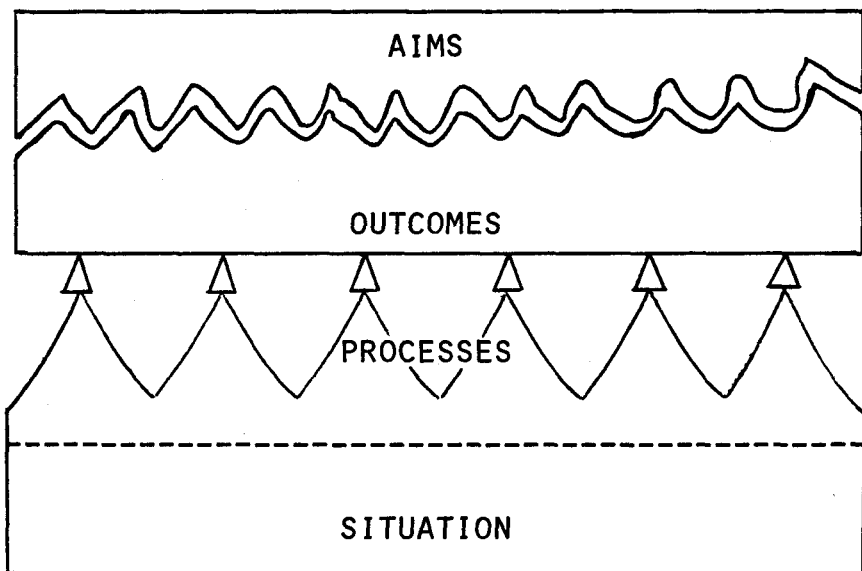
considers academic achievement to be a small but significant part of any education process, and which considers the bilingual education program to be one of the most complex, but potentially one of the strongest and most important institutions in a culturally pluralistic society.

THE TOTAL SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The Education Process Schematised

To evaluate only academic achievement, or even all the changes in behaviour and ability found in the children, would be to avoid some of the major difficulties and benefits of a bilingual program. For this reason, one of the outstanding prerequisites to a just evaluation is a clear statement of what is to be evaluated, as well as how. Spolsky, Green and Reed's (1974) model can easily be modified to show elements important to evaluation (Fig. 1).

Figure 1
The (Bilingual) Education Process



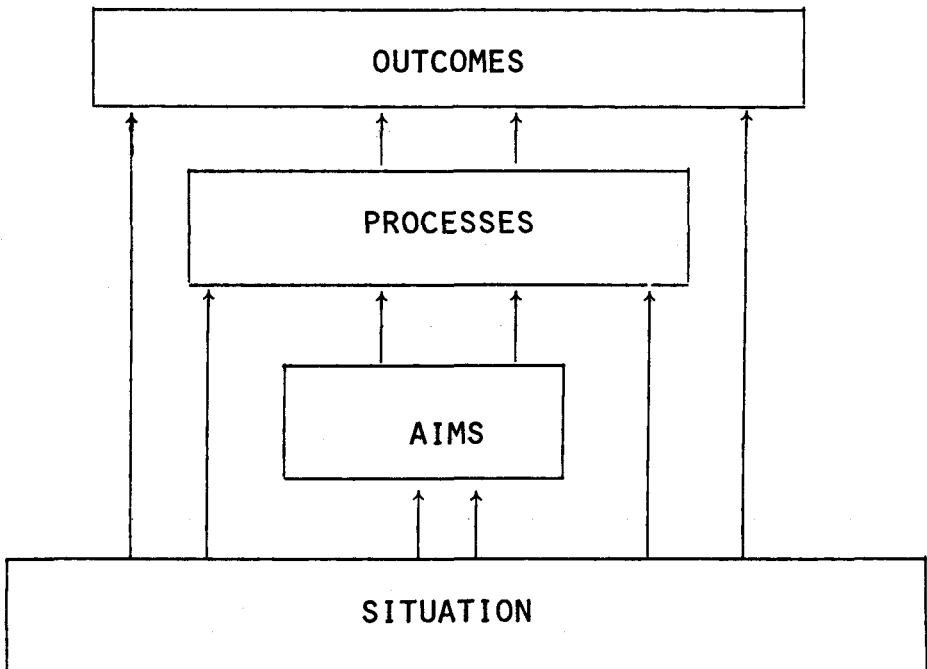
This conceptualisation interprets education as an attempt by the real, to achieve the ideal. It is an idea which has a number of inadequacies, but it is useful in that it gives us four focuses for our evaluation. We can also see from the diagram that the processes are, to a large extent, dependent upon the situation and grow out from it, and they orient towards the aims. The outcomes are related to the aims in that a good system endeavours to

have the outcomes fit the aims as closely as possible. The diagram makes plain the fact that how well the outcomes fit the aims is dependent not only upon how good are our processes, but also upon how realistic are our aims. This is not to say that the aims of the Aboriginal bilingual programs represent the resultant silk purse hopefully to be made out of a situational sow's ear; rather, the more realistic are our aims, the greater chance we have of a productive and coherent education process.

Patterns of Interrelationship Schematised

The four levels (viz. situation, process, aims and outcomes) can be arranged hierarchically so that we can see the pattern of interdependence (Fig. 2).

Figure 2
Pattern of Interdependence of the Four Levels



The *situational* level is not influenced by any of the other variables. It is the given. It is generally considered to be the independent variable (although it can be, along with the aims and processes, considered as a dependent variable. See p.37).

The *aims* are dependent upon the situation, i.e. the aims are formulated from the attitudes, values, priorities and materials in the situation.

The *processes* are directly affected by both the aims and the situation. For example, the reading process is chiefly dependent upon what the school is trying to do - its aims, and what materials, teachers and other facilities are available, i.e. the *situation*.

The *outcomes* are affected by both the process and the situation. (The aims generally do not affect the outcomes directly, but only in so far as they are catered for by the processes). For example, the outcome of the oral English program is determined by both the linguistic and cultural background of the children. This, of course, has implications for both education and its evaluation.

High and noble aims do not necessarily lead to optimum processes. An aim is only good if it can generate, from the situation, a workable and productive process.

To teach post-primary girls typing may well be a good aim. But in a school with very few and very old typewriters, and with no one who knows how to touch-type, it is not a good aim. It's a poor aim.

Similarly 'efficient' processes do not necessarily lead to optimum outcomes. A process is only desirable if it can interact with the given situation to produce optimum outcomes.

A particular programmed reading instruction kit may well teach reading to some children efficiently. It may well be a good 'process'. But if Aboriginal children cannot cope with its European middle-class orientation, and are poorly motivated by programmed instruction, it is not a good 'process'. In this situation it is a poor process.

The situation, aims, process, and outcomes form a system. Educational planners plan for an efficient and productive system based upon optimum interaction. Evaluators must evaluate the same things, determine first the nature of the system and then its efficiency, its cost versus benefit, its morality, and other things.

VARIABLES IMPORTANT TO EVALUATION

Education is an immensely complex issue and bilingual education especially so. There are a number of variables of which an evaluator must be conscious, and make some decisions about, before a just evaluation can be made.

Bilingual Education as a Dependent and an Independent Variable

The bilingual programs of the Northern Territory should be observed and appraised as both a dependent and an independent variable. Paulston (1976) says:

Bilingual education is the result of societal factors, and unless we attempt in some way to account for those socio-historical, cultural, and economic-political factors which lead to certain forms of bilingual education, we will not be able to understand nor assess the consequences of that education. (p.2)

Every part of the program can be seen as an effect rather than a cause - the situation, the aims, the processes and the outcomes. The evaluator looks at the levels as a complex system of cause and effect, evaluating each level, and the interaction amongst all the levels in terms of the educational, sociological, psychological, political, economic, cultural, and linguistic implications.

A comprehensive evaluation would need to present both a comprehensive picture of bilingual education as a dependent variable, and a statement as to its whole systematic efficacy as an independent variable.

Formal versus Informal Programs

One of the problems with evaluating Northern Territory programs is the past failure of administrators and planners to differentiate between formal and informal bilingual programs. The schools range from those with all Aboriginal teachers, comprehensive vernacular literacy schemes, and large Aboriginal culture components in the curriculum, to those with an informal bilingual component using Aboriginal teachers and materials as much as possible, but as yet, not to any large extent. The evaluation must differentiate between formal and informal programs and judge the weaknesses and strengths of each. Each is likely to have its advantages which could easily be lost if the two were confused. The evaluator's report would also speak of the benefits and problems found with each of the two types, making recommendations as to their future development.

Planning and Evaluation

Harris (1975, p.20) has pointed out that planning and evaluation are two opposite sides of the same coin. When looking at the outcomes level, the evaluator must be continuously conscious

of the statement of aims (see Appendix for the aims of bilingual education in the Northern Territory).

The aims must be evaluated in two ways. Firstly, the evaluator must ask about the aims themselves: "In the light of current theory, and given the present situation, are these aims good aims? That is to say, are these aims culturally fair, are they academically appropriate, are they relevant, are they realistic, are they attainable?"

And secondly, the extent to which the aims have been realized. The evaluator must ask: "In terms of these aims, has the program been a success? In what ways has it been a success and to what extent?"

Of course, the evaluator must also account for those outcomes which are not reflections of aims. Figure 2 shows how lamentably indirect is the connection between aims and outcomes. The aims have a partial influence upon the processes which in turn have only partial influence over the outcomes. If the aims and outcomes are too disparate, the evaluator must make recommendations towards a more cohesive and realistic system of planning.

Quantitative versus Qualitative Methods

A careful balance must be maintained between quantitative and qualitative methods of assessment. Some areas pertinent to the evaluation lend themselves to quantitative assessment, like some aspects of academic performance, but an evaluator must also be skilled in observing, synthesising and understanding those aspects which need to be qualitatively assessed, like teacher training or administration.

The evaluator must be careful to justify the methods he uses, and ensure that they are the most appropriate methods and instruments in each situation.

Morality and Pragmatism

A call for justice indicates the possibility of moral issues in bilingual education and its evaluation. Moral issues are found in all aspects of a system where government requires and enforces school attendance, and in a cross-cultural setting the issues are even more complex. To what extent is a government justified in spending disproportionate amounts on the education of minority groups? To what extent are we to allow cultural, sociological and psychological considerations to override academic considerations?

If an evaluation indicates lower academic scores, but higher levels of social and psychological adjustment after bilingual education, which will take priority?

Sometimes extra expense on non-academic aims is justified on a cost-benefit basis, with claims that what is spent on culturally fair education will be saved in the future with less government expense on mental and physical ill-health, fewer racial problems, etc. To what extent are we justified in allowing (or in not allowing) economic considerations to overrule? The tide of opinion throughout the world is nowadays generally asserting the rights of individuals to freedom of religion, language, and culture. The International Labour Organization, for example, has declared its support for each child's individual right to an education in his mother tongue.

The evaluator has to make moral judgments himself, *and* evaluate and report on the moral climate relevant to bilingual education, at local, national and international levels.

MORE PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Who Will Evaluate?

An ideal team of evaluators would compose three members:

- .. a social scientist with an advanced degree in education and anthropology to head the team;
- .. an experienced administrator from the Department of Education;
- .. an experienced and capable teacher who has taught in an Aboriginal bilingual program for a number of years.

The above three people would have some experience in the three major problem areas of bilingual education - theoretical, administrative, and practical.

Besides the above, the following qualifications should be evident on the team:

- at least one member should demonstrate some sophistication in the use (and limitations) of psychometric tests;
- at least one member should have observed bilingual education in action overseas;
- all the members should have had sufficient academic background to ensure that they have adequate understanding of the theoretical issues involved in bilingual education;

- all the members should have, through their personal history, demonstrated that they have at least an open mind concerning bilingual education.

The task of an evaluator is not to make a point. It is to look at what is going on, to apply his knowledge and experience to an interpretation of the situation, and to communicate to everyone interested and involved his findings and his recommendations.

How Will They Evaluate

A good evaluation cannot be done quickly. Not only do the evaluators have to know their field, and be experienced, but also they must be given sufficient time at each school to go over each consideration carefully. A month would probably be the minimum period of time for an evaluator to spend in a community with a bilingual school.

A good evaluation would include both quantitative and qualitative assessments at all levels of the model. The evaluator would need to be a skilled questioner, test administrator, interviewer, observer, and analyst, and someone who could sympathetically evaluate the sensitive balance between the academic and the sociological/psychological aims of the program (see Appendix).

When Will They Evaluate?

Ideally, the longer a program is running, the better chance we have of evaluating it fairly. A program needs time to get over its initial difficulties (like literature production) and its initial advantages like the Hawthorne effect. Even if academic improvement or regression is measureable after a year or two, differences in attitudes, in language ability, in behaviour or self-image will take considerably longer to take effect.

On the other hand, the time, money and energy expended on any education program should not be kept up indefinitely without some indication of the program's worth. We need a minimum time for the program to take effect and to run normally before it can be evaluated.

Probably a tentative evaluation could be made after five years. This tentative evaluation would tell whether or not the program had overcome its initial difficulties, or whether or not the difficulties it was experiencing were likely to be overcome. It could present recommendations that the program be continued, discontinued, or that the evaluation be put off for a while because

the results were unconvincing either way, or because the program had not yet developed into a working process.

The possibility of deriving satisfactory recommendations after five years is almost entirely dependent upon the abilities of the evaluators. A system of periodic ongoing evaluation in problem areas would be a likely recommendation of the first evaluation committee.

Pitfalls for the Evaluator

The most common pitfall, and probably the most dangerous one, is the failure to consider all the issues involved. The U.S. government, for example, has tended to concentrate solely upon academic achievement in its evaluations, but academic achievement really constitutes only a small part of the total situation. Working from Spolsky, Green and Reed's model, we have a much greater chance of covering all, or nearly all, of the factors involved, including the sociological, economic, psychological and academic effects of bilingual education, in relation to both the Aboriginal children, and the Aboriginal teachers and communities involved. In the Northern Territory some of the factors may be more, or less, significant than in the American South West, but here we have a model which gives us a thorough framework for our evaluation.

Another pitfall is the failure to present a balanced view. The situation is extremely complex and one aspect, for example, oral English ability, can easily be emphasized disproportionately.

A poor evaluation will not evaluate in terms of the aims of the program. A bicultural school will never have the same aims as a monocultural school, so should never be evaluated in the same way. An evaluator should not only answer the questions, "Are our aims realistic and worthwhile?" but also, "Are the aims, as *stated*, being achieved?"

At the same time, evaluation should be made of the effects the program had *in spite of* the aims as well as because of them. Many programs (e.g. the Bereiter Engelman) have been demonstrated as achieving their aims, but the aims were themselves determined to be weak, and focused on to the exclusion of less tangible, but more valuable aims, like social and emotional development.

CONCLUSION: THE ENDS OF THE EVALUATION

A good evaluation report will tell people about the initial situation, the aims and processes developed in terms of the situation, and the outcomes of the interaction of the three.

The evaluation should have three chief ends:

1. The ultimate task of the evaluator is to provide documents for a political source. The committee informs the government as to how successful the implementation of their original plan has been, and provides recommendations to the government for further action.
2. The evaluation should also provide help for people planning or working with other bilingual programs.
3. Teachers and administrators in the programs themselves need feedback on what they have been doing, and recommendations as to what future action they should take.

To this end, the recommendations are an essential part of the evaluators' report. They should not be blunt and sweeping recommendations like, "the program would best be discontinued", but constructive and detailed recommendations like, "the literature production at this school is unsatisfactory and could be improved in these ways...", or, "the teaching of reading at this school is very good, and these other schools could and should develop similar programs..." or, "in general the schools with informal bilingual programs show marked improvement in pupil attendance and community involvement, so the idea of informal programs (where formal programs cannot be developed) should be encouraged", or "Aboriginal culture as part of the curriculum appears difficult to organise, and of little value, so should, in these schools, be either redefined or discontinued."

Bilingual education is education dedicated to the idea of cultural pluralism. Working with that idea a system of bilingual education can be evaluated first as a response to a need, or the effect of various societal factors, and secondly as a coherent and productive system working to realise the needs and aspirations of the society where it is found.

Bilingual education in the Northern Territory has made a promising start, and a just and thorough evaluation of progress thus far is essential for the future development of the program.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

- Anderson T. and Boyer M.: *Bilingual Schooling in the United States*, Vol.1, Chapters IV-IX. U.S.Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1970.
- Bratt-Paulston, C.: *Implications of Language Learning Theory for Language Planning: Concerns in Bilingual Education*. Centre for Applied Linguistics, Arlington, Virginia, 1974a
- Bratt-Paulston, C.: *Questions concerning bilingual education*. Unpublished paper presented at the Interamerican Conference on Bilingual Education. American Anthropological Assoc., Mexico City, 1974b.
- Bratt-Paulston, C.: *Bilingual education and its evaluation*. Unpublished paper presented at Seminar on Linguistic Perspectives on Bilingual Education. Washington D.C.: Centre for Applied Linguistics, 1976.
- Department of Education: *Handbook for Teachers in Bilingual Schools*. Darwin, N.T., 1973, revised 1976.
- Gaarder, B.A.: *Political perspectives on bilingual education*. Unpublished.
- Harris, S.G.: Beyond common sense in bilingual education. *The Aboriginal Child at School*, Vol.3, No. 4, 1975.
- Mackey, W.F.: A typology of bilingual education. In Anderson & Boyer (Eds), *Schooling in the United States*, Vol. 2, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1970.
- Mackey, W.F.: The evaluation of bilingual education. In Bernard Spolsky & Robert L. Cooper (Eds), *Frontiers of Bilingual Education*. Newbury House, Rowley, Massachusetts, 1977.
- Spolsky, Bernard, Green, Joanna B. & Reed John: *A Model for the Description, Analysis and Perhaps Evaluation of Bilingual Education*. Navajo Reading Study Progress Report No. 23, University of New Mexico, 1974.
- Watts, B., McGrath, W.J. and Tandy, J.L.: *Recommendations for the Implementation and Development of a Program of Bilingual Education in Schools in Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory of Australia*. Dept. of Education, Canberra, Australia, 1973.

APPENDIX

Stated in their most concise form, the aims of the bilingual program in the Northern Territory are:*

- a) To help each child to believe in himself and be proud of his heritage by the regular use of his Aboriginal language in school and by learning about Aboriginal culture.
- b) To teach each student how to read and write in his own language.
- c) To teach each student how to read and write in English.
- d) To help each child understand school work better by the use of the Aboriginal language.
- e) To give the children skills in oral English, before using English to teach other subjects.
- f) To teach each subject in the most suitable language for learning about that subject.
- g) To help the school and the community to work together and to understand each other.
- h) To help Aboriginals to learn about non-Aboriginals; for non-Aboriginals to learn about Aboriginals; and for Aboriginals from one place to learn about Aboriginals from elsewhere.

**Handbook for Teachers in Bilingual Schools. Revised 1976.*

.....