



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.

REVIEWS

Work Papers of SIL-AAB, Series B Volume 12 - Papers in Literacy, December 1984, Ed. B. Larrimore. Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines Branch, P O Berrimah, Darwin NT, 5788. 172 pp.

Reviewer: M. Christie*

The latest edition of Work Papers from The Summer Institute of Linguistics - Australian Aborigines Branch, contains four articles on various aspects of the development of literacy programs in non English-based Aboriginal languages. Spectators in the field of Australian linguistics may be interested in the first two articles which continue the apparently never-ending discussion on Anindilyakwa vowels.

Anindilyakwa, spoken on Groote Island, is such a complex language that it has even rated a mention in the Guinness Book of Records.

These two papers, while too difficult for anyone but a trained linguist to understand fully, provide insight into the huge complexity of linguistic work. After more than 20 years of analysis, some of the best linguists in Australia are still trying to work out which are the phonemic Anindilyakwa vowels, where they occur, how they change, and therefore, how they should be written for the easiest reading and writing.

The third paper outlines the development of Kunibidji reading materials at Maningrida, in Arnhem Land. Once again, this paper is confined to a discussion of the linguistic aspects of materials development, something which most teachers have little to do with. In a sense the paper documents the author's struggle to match up sound theories and principles of teaching reading, with the complex linguistic structures of Kunibidji. For example, while it seems true that a whole-word "look-and-say" approach works well in initial reading programs with Aboriginal children, what must we do in languages where prefixes constantly change the word roots, or where there is a huge selection of male and female, singular, dual and plural, inclusive and exclusive pronouns which are also tacked on to the verb? Can a look-and-say approach be successful in a language with such little constancy of word forms?

* Michael Christie, formerly teacher linguist, Milingimbi, N.T.

This paper seems to me to be a good example of the application of sound pedagogical principles to teaching a language which, if not more complex than English, is certainly complex in quite different directions.

Moving on another step in the development of literacy programs, the final article in this book details two workshops held with adult Warlpiri speakers at Lajamanu, south west of Katherine. The first was a general literacy workshop conducted for seven and a half hours per week over about a month; the second was a writers' workshop conducted over sixteen days. I had always had doubts about the effectiveness of short, intensive workshops as opposed to long-term, on the job development of literacy skills. However, this article convinced me that a well planned well run workshop can really start the literacy ball rolling, for those people who would like to read and write a lot more, but simply haven't had and are not getting the appropriate experience. The workshop setting provided the opportunity for participants to concentrate exclusively on their literacy skills for a while. The meeting together in a special place, with a special goal for a short, intensive period of work, seems also, to me, to reflect the Aboriginal style of doing things.

The article details the wide range of exercises which were developed to help with specific skills in reading and writing. The advantage of the workshop setting seems to be that all these skills can be identified, practised, integrated, and directed towards the attainment of personal goals. But what were these goals? Could, for example, the participants have chosen to read other than religious materials? To what extent were they, - or for that matter were those Aboriginal people involved in the Anindilyakwa vowel research, and the Kunibidji readers - consulted as to their goals, or their reactions to what was presented to them? The whole book leaves me with the uneasy feeling that the authors may have, at times, neglected to involve the aspirations, intuitions and reactions of the Aboriginal people themselves in their work. But it also outlines some of the important contributions which linguists in the Northern Territory are making to Aboriginal education.

.....