



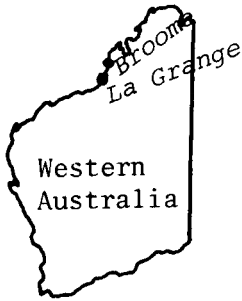
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ACROSS AUSTRALIA.....

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER

TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM

* M. Heaven

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

The La Grange Aboriginal Language Program grew out of a strongly expressed need at our first school council meeting earlier this year [1985]. The Bidyadanga Community Aboriginal Council Chairman, Mr Jack Mulardy, and Vice-Chairman, Mr John Dodo, wanted an Aboriginal language program for some time, as they are very concerned that their people's language will be forgotten. The School Council, in conjunction with the teaching staff, drew up the program which aims to -

- . Maintain the language component of Aboriginal culture at La Grange.
- . Develop children's level of oral confidence in their tribal language to a degree of fluency commensurate with their age and ability level.
- . Stimulate an interest in preserving Aboriginal culture - especially the languages which are spoken at La Grange.
- . Eventually, when the children's confidence in their own tribal language develops, we hope to teach the other languages spoken at La Grange.

At this stage written expertise is not seen as our major goal. As children's level of oracy improves, however, the Community, School Council and teaching staff may decide to try and develop this area as well.

GENERAL INFORMATION

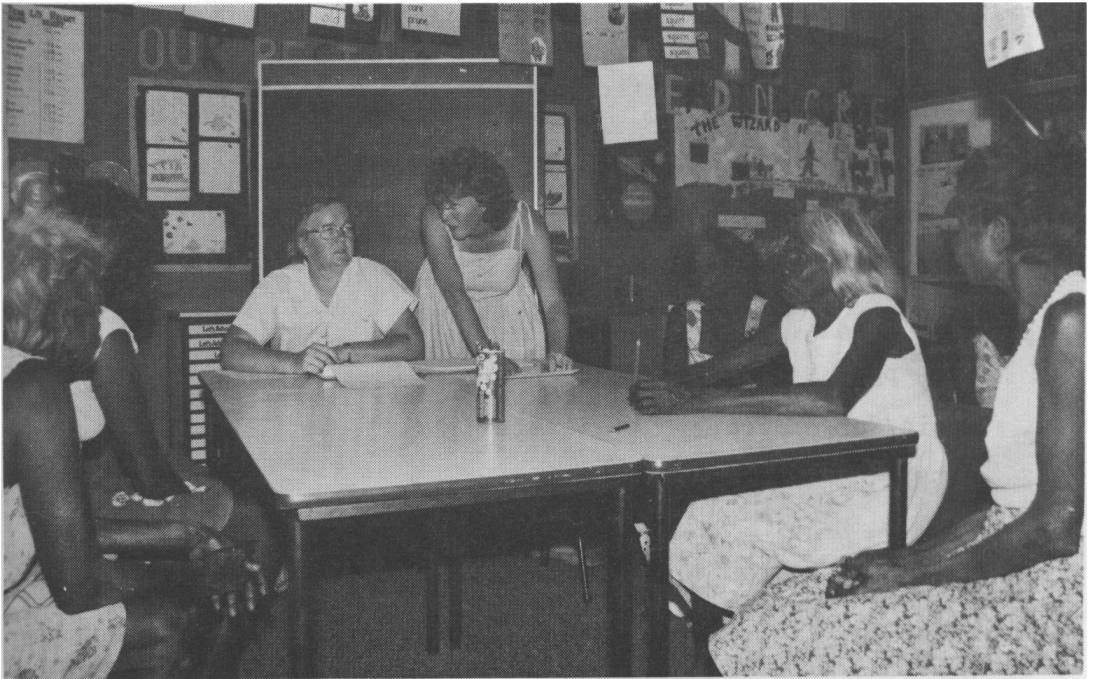
This program is a K-10 program involving all students in our school on a half-hour per day time segment every day.

The five Aboriginal languages which are spoken at La Grange are taught in the program by the Community Elders and parents in

* Michael Heaven, Principal, La Grange School, via Broome, W.A.
Photographs taken by Michael Heaven.

conjunction with the school staff. The five languages are Karajari, Mangala, Nyangumarta, Walmajarri (Jualiny), Yulparija.

The success of the program is ultimately based on the interest, commitment and support of the Aboriginal Elders and parents, who are the real 'teachers' in the program. It is the function of the school's staff to provide a warm, positive learning environment where the children are attentively well behaved and also for the school's staff to provide resource materials and teaching strategies where appropriate.



Elders and teachers planning a unit of work

PROGRAM OUTLINE

1) Thematic areas to be covered.

The language program is based on a weekly theme for the whole school. We are currently working with these themes and plan to expand on these as time, experience and expertise allow.

Fishing

Camp Life

Camp Life

Food - Animal

Food - Plant

Family Structure

Animals

Plants/Trees - identification of species

Plants/Trees - uses including artefacts

Hunting

Hunting

Bush Medicine

Shop Food

Body Parts

Music/Corroboree

Arts

2) Language structures to be taught

Vocabulary

Making sentences

Conversational language

Written language will be taught where student/'teacher' interest is high - at this stage, however, oral confidence is our main aim.

3) Cultural component

The language program is heavily centred around:-

- . Maintaining Aboriginal culture at La Grange (our first year's work on themes clearly indicates this.)
- . Community involvement - at this stage of writing our program was involving no fewer than twenty to twenty-four community Elders on a regular daily basis. We have had up to thirty-three Elders per day but this placed logistical difficulties on effectively deploying so many adults.



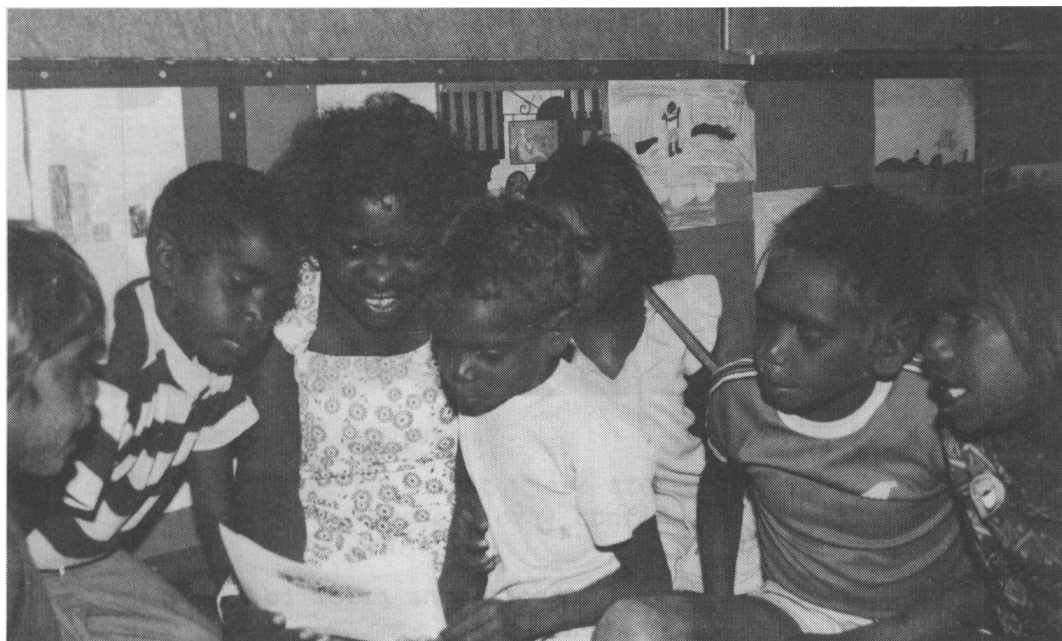
Elders assembling on the school lawns prior to classes commencing

The Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community Council is so concerned about the need for a language program at La Grange (and also very interested in what we are attempting to do) that they are paying the community Elders to come and teach the language in our school. Although it is only our first year, student and community interest and enthusiasm are very high and we have every indication this will continue.

We have made arrangements to borrow, on a long term loan from our Regional Office, a set of tools and equipment for use in making Aboriginal artefacts. With these we plan to further stimulate the use of Aboriginal languages - again we will be using community Elders as our teachers. We also plan to develop our own set of tools and equipment so that our program will be independent of the need to borrow equipment.

The school was fortunate in receiving a \$2,000.00 grant from the Western Australian Multicultural Education Advisory Committee in June of this year [1985] and a further \$500.00 from the Aboriginal Education Branch of the Education Department.

It is important to emphasise that we are trying to plan our activities around a theme and let the language flow from this, rather than simply planning what language will be used.



Sharing a story

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

All of our children have been grouped according to their tribal language grouping, and each day at Language Class time various groups meet in a classroom allocated to them as a base. The children and their teachers - both existing school staff and community teachers - then work on the theme for the week on the following program:-

- Day 1 - Vocabulary development; drills; picture word association, etc.
- Day 2 - Excursion - using the Bidyadanga community bus or the school's truck to a local venue which ties in with the theme for the week.
- Day 3 - Language experience based on the previous day's outing. We have utilized the services of the Kimberley Educational Printing Services (a project funded by the Priority Country Area Program) to print multiple copy readers in each of our five languages, based on the language experience booklets generated in language classes.
- Day 4 - Story/Legend/Song - Elders will tell stories on legends and sing songs for the children to learn based on the week's theme. These stories/legends/songs will be taped using the school's cassette recorder (bought specifically for use in this area and to obtain good quality recordings). The stories/legends/songs will be kept in the library for individual student, class or community borrowing, as well as being made available to neighbouring schools where there are speakers of the five languages found at La Grange.
- Day 5 - Sentence work/Patterning using language and basing our activities on such productions as the *Tracks* reading series published by the Department of Education, Northern Territory, and other books/stories pertinent to the current theme.

Throughout the week, constant revision of work previously covered will take place.

During class time community teachers and the children are encouraged to speak in their respective tribal language at all times. We are also attempting to encourage the parents and community Elders to speak in their traditional language at home and elicit Aboriginal

language responses from the children to further develop the children's sense of pride in their cultural heritage and also their language fluency.

After a number of very successful attempts at language plays and role play in general, we plan to make greater use of this as a means of instruction.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT PROFICIENCY

- 1) At the commencement of the program all the children were classified into groups characterised by their degree of proficiency in the use of their tribal language according to the following scale:

1. Zero proficiency.



10. Able to speak confidently without assistance in real life situations.

At the end of each term when the project is being revised, we re-assess each child in terms of his/her progress along this continuum. We realize this is a somewhat subjective process but at this early stage of our development we have been unable to determine any formal test of proficiency that we can adapt for our children.

- 2) Teachers checklist topics and vocabulary areas covered during our theme approach. As work is revised and checked, children who are mastering their vocab./word usage will have this treated on their checklist.

EVALUATION OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

At the conclusion of each term the School Council, teaching staff and Community Language Class teachers meet and discuss the effectiveness of the program and, if necessary, modify the program accordingly.

The overall evaluation at the end of the year will determine the direction and emphasis for the program's continuation in 1986.

It is abundantly clear to everyone associated with the program that the overall sense of self-worth of the Aboriginal people at La Grange has received a major boost through the program. This is reflected in student and adult community members' pride in their language, their school and themselves.



Group work