



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.

BILINGUAL PROGRAM - THE AURUKUN EXPERIENCE WHERE FROM? WHERE TO?

*G.C.Kretschmann

The intention of this paper is to briefly explain the development of Bilingual programs in Australia, their application to the Aurukun situation, the problems encountered at Aurukun, and directions for 1988 and beyond.

HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL BILINGUAL PROGRAMS IN AUSTRALIA

The Watts and Gallacher (1964) report into curriculum and teaching methods used in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory concluded that, while traditional methods of instruction in English were far from effective and that Bilingual education was preferred, the lack of appropriate resources would prevent successful Bilingual education.

The situation changed dramatically in 1972 when the then Prime Minister (Hon. E.G. Whitlam) announced that a campaign would be launched

to have Aboriginal children living in distinctive
Aboriginal communities given their primary education
in Aboriginal languages.

(Press Statement No.16,
14 December 1972)

Watts *et al.* (1973) laid down guidelines for Bilingual education in the Northern Territory. The aims were seen to be to -

1. Develop literacy in two languages.
2. Increase school achievement.
3. Improve the understanding between school and community.
4. Develop a healthy self concept in Aboriginal children.
5. To further bicultural understanding.

It is important now to understand the Northern Territory experience in order to place in context the Aurukun Bilingual

* Principal, State School, Aurukun, Qld 4871

Program which commenced in 1973. At this time the school was still run by the Presbyterian Church.

Watts *et al.* (1973) proposed two models for Bilingual education. The first was for those languages that had been analysed and recorded by linguists and the second for those languages that had not. For the purpose of this discussion, the former shall suffice.

Literacy would first be established in the Aboriginal language and then, after intensive oral instruction in English as a second language, literacy would be achieved. A transition English medium curriculum, with provision for retention of the Aboriginal language to teach Aboriginal language arts and Aboriginal Studies, would be made. This transition would take place in Year 4.

As programs expanded and developed the Northern Territory Department of Education (1980) identified five stages for implementation and development of Bilingual education, viz.

1. Negotiation
2. Linguistic analysis
3. Materials production and personnel training
4. Basic biliteracy
5. Bilingual/Bicultural education.

Each stage was a prerequisite for the next and success rested very largely on key personnnel, viz.

1. Teaching team - including teacher and Aboriginal teaching assistant.
2. Principal committed to the philosophy.
3. Linguist - responsible for reliable/practical linguistic information.
4. Teacher/linguist - responsible for co-ordination of the Bilingual Resource Development Unit and overseeing the professional development of teaching staff.
5. Literacy production supervisor - responsible for producing literature for the school and community.
6. Aboriginal literacy workers - e.g., writers, illustrators and printers.

Programs were to be reviewed annually.

To date few studies into the effectiveness of Bilingual education have been undertaken and results obtained have been inconclusive. The following problems, though, have been identified (Mills, 1982) :

1. Bilingual programs are very expensive.
2. Staffing:
 - . teacher turnover is high;
 - . specialists are difficult to find and retain;
 - . Aboriginal teachers are irregular in attendance.
3. Irregular student attendance;
4. Pedagogical concerns, e.g., the balance between the Aboriginal language and English.

(Mills, 1982)

AURUKUN BILINGUAL PROGRAM

As previously stated, the Aurukun Bilingual Program commenced in 1973 when the school was still controlled by the Presbyterian Church. At that time staff of the Summer Institute of Linguistics were based in Aurukun analysing the Wik Mungkan language (the local lingua franca) in order to undertake the task of translating the New Testament into Wik Mungkan and to produce a Wik Mungkan dictionary.

The original program was based on the Gudschinsky method, designed for adults. It was considered too analytic for children and was replaced in 1975-76 with an experience based approach utilising "Breakthrough to Literacy" type materials (Evans, 1979).

The program was further revised in 1977-78 and operated in that form until 1987. By 1985 the Department of Education (who had assumed control of the school in 1975) recognised it as a 'language associated program' (Garrone, 1985).

In those years much material for student use was produced. Community input was significant and focused on the bilingual co-ordinator. Program implementation during these years fluctuated according to, among other factors:

- . Principal/teacher support.
- . Community support.

- Availability and regularity of teacher aides.
- Availability of production workers.
- Attendance of students.
- Non-availability of a teacher/linguist.

In summary, the Aurukun State School Bilingual Program has as its aims those set down by Watts *et al* (1973) and followed the first model they proposed.

AURUKUN STATE SCHOOL BILINGUAL PROGRAM - PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

In 1982, Beasley sounded the first note of warning regarding the Bilingual Program. Referring to the previously discussed five stage plan and the programs at both Aurukun and Pormpuraaw State Schools, he stated:

It is my belief that the Queensland programs will stagnate, or at least operate at far below their optimum efficiency, while inadequate staffing, funding and facilities are available at Stage 3 of this plan. Further, the attempts being made within the schools to remedy these inadequacies from within their own resources are putting an unfair strain on already heavily committed and often dedicated staff in the schools. The real progress that has been made has involved tremendous effort, with little evidence that this is appreciated outside the schools. The present programs are therefore heavily dependent upon a very few committed people in the schools, and are very vulnerable to staff changes. The lack of an established entitlement to special staffing, funding and provision of equipment such as accredited bilingual schools in the Northern Territory may now expect is a major weakness in Queensland.

(Beasley, 1982)

From 1984 to 1987 another factor became obvious. Staff began to question the practical, if not the theoretical, basis of the program. Concerns were expressed that the program did not take account of modern theories of language acquisition. This period also coincided with the absence of any on-site bilingual program professional support staff. This situation continues to the present

At this point it is appropriate to expand upon Beasley's concerns and look at the specifics of the five point plan as they relate to the Aurukun State School Bilingual Program.

1. Negotiation

This stage requires the Community to request a Bilingual program. Personal discussions with the principal of the school prior to and at the beginning of the Bilingual Program reveal that the idea of a Bilingual program was suggested by S.I.L. staff in Aurukun at the time. Beasley has indicated that the Community did not ask for the program. When explained to them they were sceptical. It is arguable that the program was structurally flawed from the outset. Community support, a most significant factor, could not be relied upon.

2. Linguistic analysis

Linguistic analysis of the Wik Mungkan language was available and reliable.

3. Materials production and personnel training

- *Appointment of a teacher/linguist* - despite attempts, an appointment was never made.
- *Appointment of a literature production supervisor* - although a part-time appointment of a non-Aboriginal person was made for a short time, the majority of the supervision fell to the bilingual co-ordinator (when available), the principal, or teachers. Mills (1982) emphasises that an efficient materials production centre producing challenging, high quality reading materials in sufficient quantity is an absolute prerequisite for a successful Bilingual program.

This was never achieved in a sustained way in Aurukun.

- *Appointment of Aboriginal literacy workers* - Aurukun trained its own literacy workers (e.g. writers, illustrators, printers) from its own resources. Some Aboriginal people undertook linguistics courses at Batchelor College. As before, training fell to staff members and was not consistent. Aboriginal literacy workers were not regular in their attendance over the long term.
- *Equipment* - while the Department of Education did provide some equipment, e.g., a small press, there was never the

extra equipment, adequate space for production and storage of materials. As always, the school obtained equipment through time consuming submissions and local fund raising. The Department of Education never fully met the costs of production.

- *Preparation of basic reading scheme* - this has been achieved though, as previously stated, it does not reflect the latest theories of language acquisition.
- *Aboriginal teacher training* - the establishment of the Community Teacher Course at Cairns T.A.F.E. was seen as an appropriate development. Only one Aurukun person has completed the course and after two attempts has been unable, to date, to function long term at the school. Teacher aide training has again been on site and has placed an extra burden on the bilingual co-ordinator (when available), the principal or teachers. Teacher aide turnover is also extremely high.

The Aurukun State School Bilingual Program broke down at this stage. Hence, the fourth and fifth stages, i.e. Basic Biliteracy and Bilingual/Bicultural Education were never achieved.

DIRECTIONS FOR 1988 AND BEYOND

As part of this school's Co-operative School Evaluation and Development (C.S.E.D.) undertaken in 1987, a sub-committee examined the Bilingual Program. The sub-committee concluded that the Bilingual Program was not achieving its aim of developing literacy in students and recommended that it be revised. Further, the sub-committee took the view that the Community had to be consulted with regard to its opinion and that, in the short term at least, the problems affecting the previous Bilingual Program could not be overcome.

A meeting of the Aurukun State School Education Advisory Committee was called to discuss the matter. With their assistance a survey was undertaken. The overwhelming majority of those surveyed indicated a desire for both Wik Mungkan and English to be taught but with a greater emphasis on competence in English.

Consequently, the model chosen for the redevelopment was that described by Fishman and Lovas (1970) as "Mono-literate". The objective became to develop a Bilingual Program where oral skills were taught in both English and Wik Mungkan but literacy only in English.

The program was developed in two sections - English (which includes a large bicultural input) and oral Wik Mungkan. The English section is planned by the teacher and implemented by the teacher and teacher aide, while the oral Wik Mungkan is planned and implemented by the teacher aide under the supervision of the teacher.

The program that has been developed has the following features which it is believed overcome some of the previous concerns:

1. The ease with which teachers can use/read/modify the program.
2. The program is based upon modern language teaching practices.
3. The program takes account of changes that have occurred in the community itself, e.g., children coming into contact with English at an earlier age and more frequently than in the past.
4. The program is not dependent upon the attendance of a teacher aide, though it is greatly enriched by such.
5. The program is in response to expressed community desires.
6. The program has its own in-service materials.

CONCLUSION

The program is being trialled in Years 1 - 3 during 1988. At the end of this time it will be revised with the view to seeking Department of Education approval for its long term implementation and the possibility of extension through the school.

REFERENCES

- Beasley, J.S., 1983: Bilingualism - where from and where to?
Bilingual Seminar - Aurukun 20-23 May 1983.
- Evans, M.A., 1979: The Aurukun Program. *Report on Queensland Bilingual Seminar - 1979, Aurukun*. Aurukun State School, 1979, 5.
- Fishman, J.A. and Lovas, J., 1970: Bilingual education in a socio-linguistic perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 4, pp.215-22.
- GARRONE, A.F., 1985: *Officially approved programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Schools, Peninsula Region*. Peninsula Regional Office, Cairns.
- Mills, John, 1982: *Bilingual Education in Australian Schools. A Review*. Hawthorn, ACER.

Northern Territory Department of Education, 1980: *Handbook for Teachers in Bilingual Schools in the Northern Territory of Australia*. Darwin.

Watts, B.H. and Gallacher, J.D., in Mills, op.cit.

Watts, B.H. *et al.* in Mills, op.cit.

LEARNING MY WAY

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON

ADULT ABORIGINAL LEARNING

PERTH - 19-21 SEPTEMBER 1988

All Aboriginal people are invited to share their ideas at a conference on Learning Programs for Aboriginal Adults. Some issues to be considered will be the different learning patterns of Aboriginal people and some of the cultural influences related to learning.

If you wish to know more about the conference or if you would like to speak to us about your work, please contact Clare Mann 09 370 6404 or Wendy Cinch 09 383 0431.

West Australian College of Advanced Education
P.O. Box 66, MT LAWLEY W.A. 6050