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BILINGUAL PROGRAMS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

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The main focus of this analysis will be on three programs, in particular Milingimbi, Bamyili and Yuendumu.

J. Harris and J. Sandefur (1984) define bilingual education as "the use of two languages in a well organised program". The NT Department of Education's Bilingual Education leaflet (1987) extends this definition to include the qualifications -

the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well organised program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue.

Craig (cited Harris & Sandefur, 1984 and Russo 1979) indicate that there are varying degrees of bilingual education and bilingualism. Craig suggests six models ranging from monolingualism in the dominant/national language through to monolingualism in the home language of the community. He suggests monoliterate bilingualism as the best compromise (cited Harris & Sandefur, 1984) where initial literacy is in the dominant language with maintenance of aural/oral fluency in the home language.

Russo on the other hand suggests six stages of bilingualism beginning with "Layman" - he believes that only about 20% of Aborigines have attained this level. It is characterised by a basic understanding of the dominant language, English, but with little ability to communicate in it. His sixth stage is the "poet" stage, characterised by an excellence in language use of both home and dominant languages, a stage very few ever attain. He suggests that a building process of bilingual education should be adopted in four stages, commencing at oral fluency in the home language, proceeding through initial literacy in home

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language with oral English, developing into the alternate use of both languages, finalising in the dual use of both languages.

The model preferred by the NT Department of Education is their suggested Model I, which is a variation of Craig's "transitional Bilingualism" (cited Harris & Sandefur, 1984) and Russo's "Standard Classroom Bilingualism" (1979). It is characterised by early literacy in the home language, commencing at preschool with pre-reading oral development, developing with an increase in English use and focus until Year 5, where it is hoped that 80% of the children's instruction can be in English with maintenance of the home language utilising the other 20%.

The Department's other proposal is Model II, which is similar to Craig's "monoliterate Bilingualism". It is considered to be assimilationary (Shopen et al. 1987) as it results in English only being used. Both Milingimbi (Gale, McClay, Christie & Harris, 1981) and Yuendumu follow the recommended Model I program with early literacy in the vernacular (home language). However, Bamyili follows a 50/50 or "partial bilingual" (Craig, cited Harris & Sandefur, 1984) program. It uses half Kriol and half English, beginning in Preschool (Murtagh, 1979).

The main aims of all three programs are to develop language and concept development in Aboriginal children; develop a better understanding of both cultures and languages; foster a purpose for the use and continued maintenance of English and the vernacular while preserving in writing the cultural and linguistic traditions of their particular Aboriginal language (Moeckel, 1983; Murtagh, 1979; Baarad, 1982; Gale, McClay, Christie & Harris, 1981).

Research from overseas and Australia focuses on -

1. The ability of children to learn more than one language
2. Mother tongue maintenance in bilingual programs
3. Improved academic ability of children in bilingual programs
4. The influence of the home and parents.

1. THE ABILITY OF CHILDREN TO LEARN MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE

Redlinger (1979) cites several researchers who confirm that children have the ability to learn two or more languages with

varying degrees of fluency. There is some dispute, however, over whether the child's fluency in more than one language is affected positively by learning the languages by differentiating by person, i.e., mother speaks L(a); father speaks L(b). The child learns both languages by associating the languages with the people and speaking to them appropriately. The separate entities hypothesis is supported by Padilla and Liebman (cited Redlinger, 1979) but is disputed by evidence from Bergman (cited Redlinger, 1979). It is suggested that interference or language mixing occurs if there is not differentiation by person.

However, the research at Milingimbi (Gale, McClay, Christie, & Harris, 1981) and Bamyili (Murtagh, 1979) presents evidence that interference is mediated in a bilingual program. Murtagh (1970) cites a study in which English and Kriol facilitation was tested, and states that the results indicate that by Year 3 Bamyili bilingual students showed a trend towards language separation, with negative transfer or interference from English to Kriol. This was not the trend for students in the monolingual program. There is no reference to whether the children in the monolingual program were taught in English by Kriol speaking Aborigines. Allen (1985) has suggested that such teachers, in times of confusion, may revert to Kriol and thus teach a mixture of the two languages. This would be a mitigating factor.

The results from Milingimbi demonstrate a similar finding in that many children in the bilingual program are biliterate in English and Gupapuyngu (vernacular) by Year 3 and demonstrate good writing ability (Gale, McClay, Christie & Harris, 1981), whereas their predecessors from the monolingual program demonstrated poorer language skills even to Year 7.

2. MOTHER TONGUE MAINTENANCE

Research conducted by Mallory (1981) cited Cohen, 1975) into Spanish maintenance in children from Spanish only speaking family backgrounds participating in monolingual school programs, demonstrated a transferring to English only use both at school and at home. Those students participating in the bilingual program, in contrast, were maintaining their Spanish and using it more.

Redlinger cites research by Christian which highlights three factors influencing maintenance of the mother tongue:

1. Exclusive, or near, use of MT in the home by some person.

2. Absence or restriction of television programs in English.
3. Use of MT in teaching language and academic subjects in general.

The need for such extremes is not suggested by Australian research. Baarda (1982) suggests that the bilingual program has renewed the use of Warlpiri (vernacular) and given it back its respect within the Yuendumu community and school. The Bamyili experience (Murtagh, 1979) has seen the facilitation of Kriol maintenance within the bilingual program.

Two factors have been suggested that would lead to loss of mother tongue. Craig suggests the first, that is, if full bilingualism were to be employed whereby all subjects in all domains were taught in both languages, it would lead to redundancy and eventual language death of the minority language (cited Harris & Sandefur, 1984). The second is suggested in history. At the birth of Kriol at Roper River Mission the children were taught English with a smattering of Pidgin English. Their parents spoke a variety of languages and so, to communicate, the children developed their own language which, after a couple of generations' use, became Kriol (Harris & Sandefur). The combination of a monolingual education and a diversity of mother tongues leads to the loss of several languages and the birth of a new one.

3. IMPROVED ACADEMIC ABILITY OF CHILDREN IN BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

It is axiomatic that the best medium of teaching a child is his mother tongue...Educationally he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium.

(UNESCO, 1953, cited Harris, S., 1979).

The truth of this statement is clearly demonstrated in the results from Bamyili (Murtagh, 1979) where it was found that, by Year 3, children in the bilingual program demonstrated superior language skills than their counterparts in the monolingual program at Beswick Reserve. Also, it is demonstrated by the results from Milingimbi (Gale, McClay, Christie & Harris, 1981) in which the children in the bilingual program performed

better on seven out of ten tests, compared with their monolingual predecessors.

Sommer (1981) believes that the results from these two studies show that "in Australia the bilingual programme bestows intellectual advantage on the Aboriginal child just as the programmes overseas do", and that "intellectual development" is the most persuasive argument for bilingual programs. He cites Kolers (1966) as suggesting "the bilingual had significantly greater intellectual capacity and ability to cope in the areas of solving problems."

Overseas studies reviewed by Murtagh and Harris, S. (1979) all suggested similar findings. A study by Rosier and Farrell (1976) in Arizona found "initial literacy in the vernacular (an element) of bilingual education proves academically advantageous" (cited Murtagh & Harris, S., 1979). Other studies reviewed were from Mexico, South America, Alaska, USSR, and Greenland. The study from the Philippines (Ramos et al. 1967, cited Murtagh & Harris, S., 1979) although negative in results, did not alter the Education Department's bilingual policy.

The role of the child's first language is seen as the key to this improved academic ability (NT Dept.Ed. Handbook for Teachers in Bilingual Schools, 1980). It is repeatedly suggested that the skills developed through initial literacy in the first language are transferred to the second language (Eedle, 1980; Harris, S., 1979; Gale, McClay, Christie & Harris, 1981). It also allows the learning to progress from the known to the unknown (Harris, S. 1979).

4. THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOME AND PARENTS

Home background is one of the surer predictors of school success.

(Eedle, 1980).

Supportive parents are seen as a contributory factor in the success or failure of the bilingual program and language maintenance.

At Yuendumu the non-supportive attitude of some of the parents and community has been seen as contributing to the truancy of nearly half of their student body of 320 children. This truancy is seen as one reason why the bilingual program is not more successful (Baarda, 1982).

In contrast, the positive attitude of the students and community at Bamyili is seen as contributing to the superior development of English language skills (Murtagh, 1979).

The overseas research by Cohen (1975) and Redlinger (1979) has come up with two conflicting results. Cohen's review of Mallory's research suggests that the Spanish speaking parents did not influence their children to maintain their Spanish skills. While Redlinger cites Kuo's research that suggests the supportive nature of the Chinese parents, speaking and reading to their children in Chinese helped to maintain their Chinese. Redlinger (1979) states -

it is shown that children tended to be more proficient in the language which was also evaluated by the parents to be more important.

The advantages and disadvantages of bilingual programs are extensive but highlight both the positive aspects and the problems inherent in most educational innovations.

ADVANTAGES -

- * Preserves and maintains Aboriginal culture and language.
- * Reviews traditional languages and teaches them to the children.
- * Develops competency in both the vernacular and English, where appropriate bilingual programs are used.
- * Utilises vernacular as a bridge to skills transference to English.
- * Reduces fear and stress of the unfamiliar by using familiar language and Aboriginal personnel.
- * Involves a deeper educational role for both the parents and the Aboriginal staff.
- * Develops cognitive and linguistic skills.
- * Enables efficient movement of concrete to abstract thought.
- * Bilingual preschools develop necessary prerequisite reading and maths skills.
- * Develops positive self concepts and self esteem.
- * Utilises Aboriginal teachers/aides as models of language use --- increasing the relevance of language for children.

DISADVANTAGES

The disadvantages are basically problems associated with the bilingual program. It could also be named the "lack of" list.

- * Initially the programs are very expensive, as they need resources and trained staff.
- * Lack of trained teacher linguists especially in isolated communities.
- * Aboriginal staff are reluctant to leave communities for professional development.
- * Non-Aboriginal staff are frequently non-supportive of the program and will not learn language/culture.
- * Aboriginal community is frequently non-supportive of the program.
- * Conflict frequently arises between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff.
- * Diversity of Aboriginal languages in the one community --- no lingua franca (e.g. there are 50 spoken languages in the Northern Territory).
- * Inadequate vernacular resources for all ages and levels.
- * Traditional versus Kriol as language of use with English. The problem is that Kriol is the child's language of communication and research confirms it is the best medium for early learning. The traditional language of the parents is just as unfamiliar to the children as English and theoretically will hinder the child's development.
- * English is not required within the community outside the school environment.
- * Poor attendance by Aboriginal children at school.
- * Shortage of funding.
- * Direct translation from Aboriginal language to English is not always possible.
- * Fluency in English expected by a certain year/grade level is not always possible.
- * High staff turnover.

Although these disadvantages are extensive, it is not a justification for the discontinuation of the bilingual education philosophy. Given adequate time and funds, most of the problems can be addressed and the ultimate benefits to both the Aboriginal and wider community will be enormous. It will result in confident, resourceful people with a workable future. It also aids in the modernising from within the Aboriginal community to enable the people to remain Aboriginal while developing the relevant skills needed to survive in this modern society.

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ABORIGINAL ARTS IN TRANSITION

An exciting and innovative teaching resource has been developed by teachers and community people from across the Riverina. The resource is a kit - *Aboriginal Arts in Transition* which is published by the NSW Department of Education, Riverina Region, Wagga Wagga. Consisting of tapes and a set of five booklets, the kit provides a valuable resource for Aboriginal Studies programs. The titles of the booklets are:- *Traditional Music* (Research, audio tape and lesson plans), *Contemporary Music* (Research and audio tape), *Story Tradition* (Lesson plans, art research, and lesson plans), *Visual Arts* (Adding perspectives to the Visual Arts curriculum), and *Media Images* (a collection of resources about Aborigines in the Arts and an examination of the way media works). The detailed and very comprehensive research by a diverse group of people, the wealth of background information and the practical subject and teaching suggestions make this kit a very important resource for all who wish to study Aboriginal perspectives, especially in New South Wales. The co-ordinators of the project, Kerry Jones and Don Sams, and all those who contributed are to be congratulated on their contribution to the field of Aboriginal Studies.
