



# 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*.

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## Differences Between Bilingual Education and Two-Way Schooling <sup>1</sup>

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Over the past months quite a few people have asked me what the differences are between bilingual education and two-way schooling. I will try to contrast the two models in this paper, partly because it's worth doing anyway and partly because it might be one way to reveal some differences between genuine two-way schooling and pseudo two-way schooling. Of course this is just one white person's view, and involves extrapolations from the types of things that actually are happening in, say, a half dozen schools, to what may happen as a result of a wider shift to Aboriginal control of school philosophy and curriculum.

I think there is still room for non-Aboriginal people to have views about two-way schooling because they are still an important part of the staff make-up of two-way schools. To be empty-headed on an issue, or to have a religious type fervour about it without theoretical foundations makes one neither more responsive to Aboriginal leadership nor a better listener to Aboriginal people. What matters is for Whites to have opinions or to theorise without trying to say how any *particular* group should be going about it. Slogans are no substitute for theory, and this is a field which is still under theorised. Theoretical discussion, even if it involves disagreement, increases awareness of alternatives, increases theoretical consistency and improves longer term perspective.

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1 For those who are interested in a more detailed analysis of this type of schooling, at least from one white person's perspective, see Harris, S, 1990, *Two-way Aboriginal Schooling: Education and Cultural Survival*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

2 I wish to acknowledge the stimulating feedback on an earlier draft of this paper given by Michael Christie. This should not be taken to imply that he would now be comfortable with all the views expressed in this draft.

Of course there is more than one type of bilingual education and already more than one type of two-ways or both-ways schooling, but those distinctions are not important to this paper. I will discuss ten contrasts between bilingual education and two-way schooling, speaking about both in a broad sense.

Regardless of which model of two-way schooling a community follows there will be three defining criteria:

1. It is initiated by Aboriginal people with them 'owning' the idea;
2. It will be controlled by Aboriginal people, especially local Aboriginal people, and
3. The reproduction of Aboriginal culture, maintenance of Aboriginal languages (inside or outside the school) and an insistence on doing things in Aboriginal ways will be a conscious, planned and deliberate purpose of changing the school. This will be true regardless of the model used and regardless of whether or not Aboriginal languages (either an old Aboriginal language or Kriol or Aboriginal English) play a central role in the school.

According to these criteria, if homeland centre schools are excluded, there are still relatively few two-way schools in Australia, with perhaps five or six of them in the NT. In this paper some of the ten contrasts between bilingual and two-way schools relate to shifts in emphasis while some are more fundamental. There is also overlap between some of the points but that is a way of emphasising various issues.

#### 1. Source of leadership.

Two-way schooling can only be the result of local initiative, where Aboriginal people own the idea and define how school should be. Bilingual education is generally the result of centralised 'pro-Aboriginal' initiative, with approaches in different schools showing a high degree of consistency across a state education system. In broad terms the contrast between two-way schooling and bilingual education is bottom up versus top down. Because of this there will be much wider variation between two-way schools than between bilingual schools. This matter of control is the most

crucial point because without asking who controls what is happening, bilingual education and two-way schooling could have, from the outsider's point of view, very similar looking aims and motivations, such as a strong emphasis on the importance of Aboriginal languages and English, and a strong emphasis on Aboriginal teacher training. Within bilingual education it is possible to have a strong emphasis on Aboriginal culture and language without 'Aboriginalising' the decision making process in the school. Bilingual education can be implemented by whites with Aboriginal help, but two-way schooling can only be implemented by Aboriginal people, perhaps with some help from non-Aborigines. Thus the matter of control, the political dimension of two-way schooling, is the most important matter of all. Any process is political when it involves decisions about who controls limited resources in competition towards achieving different priorities.

## **2. The role of Aboriginal languages.**

Virtually all Aboriginal children speak Aboriginal languages: either an old Aboriginal language or Kriol, or Aboriginal English. Any of those Aboriginal languages could have a central role in two-way schools if that type of model were chosen.

One form of two-way education can reflect a community's decision to have only English in the school, with the parents looking after Aboriginal matters in the home. (If this is an accidental decision which is really just a continuation of the old type of non-bilingual schooling then it doesn't qualify as two-way, but if it's a deliberate community decision then it is genuine two-way education because it is a reflection of Aboriginal control). Admittedly this stretches the definition of two-way schooling - as opposed to two-way education pretty far but I see it as being one type of two-way schooling provided it is a part of a planned and deliberate parental strategy, which includes the role of the school, to train children to be able to live in two worlds.

However, in most two-way schools Aboriginal languages have a very important role, which is also true for bilingual schools. The difference is that in bilingual programs non-Aboriginal curriculum specialists usually are the ones who decide the ways in which those languages will be used.

In bilingual schools Aboriginal languages, for example, tend to be used for the same sorts of Western-type or school-type academic purposes for which English is used, such as for learning through question and answer, through speculating, hypothesising, generalising, summarising and so on, and used to achieve the same sort of sequential skills development that Western kids in Western schools would be achieving in English.

More specifically in bilingual schools the purposes for writing and reading in an Aboriginal language will be more like typical English purposes than like spontaneous Aboriginal ones. As Aboriginal teachers control the Aboriginal language writing program more in their schools a range of contrasts in purposes for writing in those languages and in English emerge. Some of these contrasts are: that instead of using written Aboriginal languages to develop academic skills, some Aboriginal teachers see writing in various clan languages as a high priority in terms of clan identity maintenance. (The emphasis on writing in a variety of clan languages may be limited to Arnhem Land where that variety of languages exists.) And instead of using writing in Aboriginal languages to build a literary tradition especially a large permanent body of good quality writing - some Aboriginal writers see the practical, temporary message function as more important. Also, fiction, while present is not as important as in English writing, the storage of knowledge, while present is not as important as in English, and in contrast there is more personalised, contextualised writing. Also the emphasis is wider than on individual children, rather it is on group activity of mixed ages. And in the place of critical evaluation of other people's writing, there is more acceptance, with writing seen as a means to share social ends. In fact while products of writing are to some extent seen as marks of achievement and ends in themselves, the process is seen more as a means to share experience with particular people about particular places and events. And while a Western type program will approach writing as a steady, routine, continuous task, Aboriginal people will tend to prefer to write in intensive bursts of activity. While bilingual schools will try to foster such indigenous purposes for vernacular writing, two-way schools will emphasise this opportunity more, provide a stronger context for it, and ultimately produce wider differences between each school as writing programs are tailored more for each local community.

### **3. Responsibility for the maintenance of Aboriginal languages.**

In bilingual schools non-Aboriginal staff feel some direct responsibility for the maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture. In two-way schools the non-Aboriginal staff are just as committed to those goals but realise more clearly that it is an Aboriginal issue to be solved by Aboriginal people. They will still offer support, but not from a leadership position.

### **4. The role of non-Aboriginal specialist staff.**

In bilingual schools specialist staff are encouraged to trust their own professional judgement and genuine commitment to Aboriginal people as sources of setting work priorities. They consult Aboriginal people and work with Aboriginal people, but the priorities are set by themselves. In two-way schools the specialist's work priorities are set by Aboriginal people. Thus the specialist curriculum developer's role changes from steel-hand-in-velvet-glove-leader/encourager, to something which perhaps can be fairly described as a specialist-servant. This means that the non-Aboriginal specialist curriculum support person /language researcher/printer staff person in a two-way school may end up doing work which from the Western perspective is in a different order of priorities from before. So there is a different rationale for what's worth doing and a different line of accountability.

### **5. Decisions about appropriateness in the Western domain.**

In a bilingual program non-Aborigines tend to be in charge of all aspects of the Western domain of the school, and Aboriginal staff, supported or even primed by key White staff, tend to be in charge of the Aboriginal domain. The key Whites, while often in excellent personal relationships with the Aboriginal staff are still the experts behind the scenes, and Aboriginal staff in this context rarely obtain real involvement from Aboriginal parents. In two-way schools the Aboriginal people - both staff and parents and unschooled elders - have control over both domains of the school, even if non-Aborigines are doing most of the English teaching there. This alters lines of accountability too. So we can talk about Aboriginal/English bilingual schooling, but we have to talk about Aboriginal two-way schooling. In two-way schooling if the non-

Aboriginal staff are trusted by the Aboriginal people they will probably be free to teach the Western part of the curriculum by whatever methods they think best, but the parents will want to be able to vet the appropriateness of content, school organisation, values and emphases.

Of course this situation is very fluid now in two senses. First, White teachers in such schools will continue to seek teaching methods with which Aboriginal kids are comfortable but through which Western content and skills can be taught effectively. Examples of these are teaching through group rather than individual work; by workshopping rather than direct teaching; by putting more emphasis on modelling than on direct instruction; by joint teacher-student group construction (of various types of writing, for example) and by using the question and answer technique less. And second, more and more Aboriginal teachers will want to teach in the Western domain, but setting aside White teacher ideology about this, my guess is that there will be a good bit of variation between communities on this issue. At the present time this is, quite legitimately, more an ideological issue than a practical one. It is also an issue which ironically seems to concern Whites more than it does Aborigines.

#### **6. Curriculum development in the Aboriginal domain.**

In bilingual education programs curriculum work in Aboriginal languages tended to be achieved by small teams of specialist White and Aboriginal staff working together in the school setting, with the White person generally setting the pace. In two-way schooling Aboriginal language work is achieved by a much wider range of Aboriginal people: teachers, parents, elders and children working in groups and more often closer to the physical setting which is related to the content being dealt with. Also, in two-way schooling more of the Aboriginal learning is likely to take place in intensive bursts, ('binge learning' one observer called it), whereas in bilingual schools the work in both domains is more even, marching to the well established Western timetable, though this is not necessarily more productive.

#### **7. Duties of the non-Aboriginal teacher.**

In a two-way school the duties of non-Aboriginal teachers become narrower. They cease being policy setters or school designers.

They have four main jobs:

- (a) to support the goals of the Aboriginal School Council;
- (b) to teach those aspects of the Western curriculum which the school council has endorsed, and teach the Western cultural knowledge that contextualises those skills and bodies of knowledge. (If this Western cultural knowledge is not taught in the Western domain the Western curriculum will be largely unusable head knowledge, only retrievable in the school context, if any, and leaving the Aboriginal learner still dependent on the White interpreter/minder/middle-person; in other words leaving the 'Aboriginal industry' intact);
- (c) to make the 'hidden' part of the Western curriculum - or the Western culture capital if you like - public, explicit and specific;
- (d) to trust Aboriginal people in or out of school to maintain Aboriginal culture, and support them where asked to, for example, through technical support.

#### 8. **A new emphasis on the importance of context.**

Thinking about the purposes of two-way schooling and the increasingly wide recognition that no school system or school subject is culturally neutral, has increased awareness of the crucial interconnectedness between all aspects of teaching. Teaching processes, content, functions, purposes and even ways of doing things and administration all are either culturally authentic or alien. (Borrowings from another culture which are incorporated into that culture and recognised as such by the members, are authentic parts of that culture, and while demarcation lines are not always clear and while there is always some overlap between cultures, the general validity of this principle remains.) For example, if an Aboriginal dance which has a particular purpose in particular contexts is performed on the school verandah then it may no longer be the same dance. (The matter of whether or not an Aboriginal dance on the school verandah is authentically Aboriginal depends on who controls the purpose of it and how and why it is done. The function of Aboriginal knowledge-making is to reinterpret what has always been known into the current context of the learners. Similarly in art and dance, authentic creativity lies in reinterpreting - in ways consistent with contemporary Aboriginal values and priorities -

what has been given by the ancestral creators in the light of who and where the Aboriginal inheritors are today.) Or, writing in an Aboriginal language which fills English type purposes is not really Aboriginal writing but an Aboriginal representation of Western writing. Or, English learned in a sterile context unrelated to the body of English-culture - general - and - specific knowledge which allows English to be used *appropriately* is not really English but some strange caricature.

#### 9. The non-Aboriginal Principal.

In bilingual schools the role of the principal has been crucial, and so much so that when capable and committed principals left, bilingual programs often took a steep dive in quality. In a two-way school because the role of the Aboriginal School Council is more central to the running of the school, the quality of the principal should not be so crucial. Unfortunately because so much of the school's health revolves around access to administrative resources and the support in Western terms of Western staff, this does not always work out like that. But it will be true more often as more Aboriginal staff become trained in the whole range of skills necessary to maintain a school which has a Western component and some Western staff. In some two-way schools there is no longer a principal's position at all, but a coordinator or some such role, and that change carries its own message. Whatever the name and no matter whether this person is Aboriginal or not, in a two-way school the person in this position, while recognising responsibilities in several directions, will see primary accountability as being to the local people before it is towards the funds-granting central government authority. This is not a matter of ignoring any legitimate authority, as the Government agency is, but a matter of reordering priorities.

#### 10. The Place of Aboriginal adults in school.

In pre-bilingual Aboriginal schools which were really White schools transposed into Aboriginal settings, the unspoken expectation was that Aboriginal adults virtually stopped at the school gate. At least no-one felt odd if that happened. (This is the way urban schools often work, but that doesn't matter so much when the teachers and students both belong to the same culture.) In bilingual schools Aboriginal staff did become central to the whole program, which was probably the single most important contribution of bilingual education to Aboriginal interests. But in these bilingual schools the Aboriginal staff were in team teaching roles harnessed together with non-Aboriginal teachers, virtually as

understudies filling similar roles. However, there is greater emphasis in the two-way system on the *Aboriginal* nature of being an Aboriginal teacher. This will have the effect of allowing schools greater potential as sites of reproduction of Aboriginal culture and reflect greater community support for schools. The participation of local people will become more natural in Aboriginal-controlled schools, and in two-way schools the need for further numbers and higher levels of training of Aboriginal staff becomes obvious.

### **Pseudo two-way schooling.**

Doing things 'two-ways', both for positive motives and because it is fashionable, is now sometimes claimed for almost anything connected to Aboriginal schools which has elements of both Aboriginal culture and Western culture. For example, recently I read about 'the two-way method', referring to a Western teacher teaching about some Aboriginal knowledge and Western knowledge in the same class of non Aboriginal students. I'm not saying that is bad; just that it's not two-way schooling. Two-way schooling must fundamentally be a result of Aboriginal initiative and be under Aboriginal control, whatever other variations it may have.

There are three main ways schools can become 'two-way'. One is by what we can call revolution, such as happened at Strelley and Yipirinya, where the elders and parents asserted themselves until they achieved independent school status with Aboriginal control; achieving all this without having any trained Aboriginal staff. The other way to gain a two-way school is by evolution, which is mainly how places like Yirrkala, Milingimbi and Elcho Island are doing it. Here, while there were other factors involved, one of the main ones was the sheer number of formally qualified Aboriginal staff. These schools achieved a critical mass of Aboriginal teacher opinion, experience, and confidence which allowed a fundamental shift in decision making within the school. A third way that two-way schooling may be introduced is by Aboriginal head office administrative initiative. An interesting current example of this is the Anangu schools in the Pitjantjatjara lands in the North-west of South Australia. Here senior Aboriginal administrators in response to a perceived desire on the part of many Aboriginal parents for a shift in emphasis in schools, including more emphasis on English, are progressively implementing their own approach to two-way schooling, which is likely to see a good bit of variety between schools.

### **The centrality of community based Aboriginal teacher training.**

No matter what the origin or model of two-way schooling, the single most important strategy that will in the long run give Aboriginal people the best chance of achieving their goals will be an emphasis on teacher training which is community based. It is by establishing a relatively large pool of Aboriginal teachers that a community will then have an insurance against changing government policies, loss of competent local or head-office Aboriginal leadership, changes in funding and meeting the need for Aboriginal-directed curriculum development. Curriculum development which goes beyond just translating Euro-Australian curriculum is much harder than is commonly acknowledged. In my experience, of Western teachers at least, only a small proportion of teachers really have the rare gifts necessary to be good curriculum developers. In any case Aborigines may see curriculum development in the Aboriginal domain of school less in terms of forward planning and resource preparation, and more in terms of what actually happens in their teaching contexts. Also, Aboriginal teachers have shown that they may want different styles of employment, such as more shared or half time positions and other variations. Educational hiring and firing need to accommodate this. In any case, numbers of increasingly qualified Aboriginal staff is the best bet here.

As well as having high numbers of Aboriginal teachers, those teachers will need to be trained in such a way that they define their professionalism in terms of understanding and implementing community wishes. One fundamental advantage of community based teacher education is that teacher trainees do their professional training while under the guidance and leadership of clan and community elders. Much of this training involves educational research in the home community, and this allows the community to participate in the training of their own teachers. (This principle does not negate the emphasis placed earlier on the need for Aboriginal teachers to know a great deal about Western culture.)

### **The value of bilingual education.**

It is poor history to evaluate events apart from the context in which they took place or could have taken place. It is now fashionable in some circles to view bilingual education as a second best model of Aboriginal education in comparison to two-ways or both-ways education. That is true only if the conditions make two-way schooling immediately

implementable. Until there is quite extraordinary initiative taken by Aboriginal community leaders, such as was the case at Strelley and Yipirinya, or until there is a critical mass of confident local trained Aboriginal staff, two-way schooling has difficulty being established.

Thus, in most cases if the resources in terms of Aboriginal staff are not present to the extent that by *their momentum* they implement two-way schooling, then a bilingual program is both the best kind of program possible in that school under the circumstances, and the most likely type of program to produce the human resource that will make two-way schooling possible. (Of course, bilingual education while the most likely path towards two-way schooling, is not the only possible one. Furthermore, some schools which for various reasons didn't want or couldn't have bilingual education could become two-way schools.)

### Being 'ready'.

When are Aboriginal teachers and communities ready to take on two-way schooling? That question should be answered by saying that they *are all* ready for a type of schooling which allows access to Western skills, which they can control and which doesn't do violence to their world view or values priorities.

Saying that does not deny that Aboriginal staff in some schools do lack confidence in the face of a seemingly mysterious and very powerful Western type schooling system and tradition. And it does not deny that even normally confident Aboriginal staff can feel professionally lonely and vulnerable when their key supporting peers are away doing further training, or that sometimes inter-group rivalries can confuse the formation of consistent local leadership, or that the level of community interest in schooling varies in relation to local histories.

But it is too simplistic to say that many schools in Aboriginal communities are not two-way schools because the people 'aren't ready'. It would be fairer to say that many don't have a form of two-way schooling because those agencies who manage the schooling system have not been sufficiently creative, flexible and determined to find ways to pass over power, resources and skills tailored individually for each community as necessary for Aboriginalisation in each community.

For example, why can't education authorities employ Aboriginal administrators to negotiate such as three or five year plans with *individual* communities about how to meet the conditions and resources - such as training the critical mass of Aboriginal staff - necessary to achieve two-way schooling in terms acceptable to each community? Why are the goals and time frames so open-ended in terms of each particular community achieving its own ends? Perhaps if everyone took the view that all communities are 'ready', and that staged plans for handing over control need to be worked out with each place individually, then a more determined will could be applied in each case.

To conclude, a brief example will be offered of one Northern Territory school which perhaps might help us at least ask constructive questions. Such was the emphasis on Aboriginal teacher training at this school throughout the 1970s by the Western leadership, that if the Aboriginal staff had continued to attend Batchelor College at the same rate that they had to date, the whole school staff could have been Aboriginalised with formally qualified Aboriginal teachers and the school controlled by Aboriginal people by about 1982. But it didn't happen. Why? I can't pretend to know exactly why, but we could ask some pertinent questions. Was the way that things worked out entirely accidental on the part of the Aboriginal staff? Did the local Aboriginal people have the same goals and vision of the future as the White education planners? Did they need to have such common goals before there could be fundamental change and shifts in control? Did the local people feel they had a real choice in gaining control under terms of sufficient White compromise to promote a feeling of optimism about it? Was the slowdown because there were no Aboriginal head-office education administrators with whom a local plan and time frame could be openly worked out? Recently, nearly a decade later, the Aboriginal staff are taking over, having maintained a bilingual program in the meantime.

Perhaps there is a valuable lesson in that story and the questions which arise from it for those of us outsiders who would like to work out what we really believe about Aborigines being ready; about Aboriginal self determination; about who decides what is appropriate schooling; about what negotiation should entail and to evaluate the relative merits of bilingual education and two-way schooling.