



# 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.

## Book Reviews

bonus. It is not meant to be a comprehensive work, but for primary school students it is adequate. Along with colleagues, I am looking forward to using the accompanying compact disc, which will bring the entries to life.

**Editor's Note:** This Review originally appeared in *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1994/Number 2:67-68. We thank *Australian Aboriginal Studies* and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for allowing us to reprint it here. □

### ***Aboriginal Languages In Education***

**D. Hartman and J. Henderson (Eds)**

Institute for Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs, 1994, ii + 389 pp.

***Reviewed by Melanie Wilkinson***

This is an invaluable compilation, reflecting the wide-ranging development in Aboriginal language and culture programs during the last twenty years. This has been a time of dramatic change for the place of Aboriginal languages in schools and their recognition by governments and wider society. The process of establishing and developing programs is far from complete. It is also complex. There is a growing group of people who have been involved in the process and who have had time to reflect on the situations in which they have been involved. The views of several such people are presented in this volume.

The book is made up of twenty-eight articles. The first presents an overview of the issues. The rest are presented in two sections. The first section, ten articles, offers descriptions of particular programs. The second section is entitled 'Issues'

and consists of seventeen articles, covering a broad range of topics which reflect on local situations, particularly types of language contexts, state/territory approaches, curriculum design, assessment, literacy, the development of training programs for Aborigines involved in language programs, and issues that have been raised and debated in the literature.

The situations described reflect an increasing support for programs in a range of contexts, from bilingual programs for first-language speakers to heritage programs where there are no living speakers.

The authors are teachers, teacher-linguists, principals, curriculum developers, academics from the fields of education, linguistics and anthropology. All the contributors have had first-hand experience in school programs or the delivery of training for those involved in such programs. The book is thus a reflection on the actual practice of supporting maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture in schools. It is not about policy development providing support for Aboriginal language maintenance *per se*, nor does it provide details of curriculum for particular programs.

The editors, who themselves have had many years' experience in language programs within Central Australia, have appropriately identified their audience as teachers and others directly involved in language/culture programs, education administrators and policy-makers.

Much of the early development in language and culture programs occurred with the introduction of bilingual programs for schools in Northern Territory communities where Aboriginal languages were first languages. As these were relatively well resourced and ongoing, there have been personnel around with time and experience

## Book Reviews

to ponder and write about them. Several of the issue-focused articles thus grow out of experience and consideration of programs in this context: see articles/descriptions by Cook and Buzzacott on Yipirinya School, Lanham *et al.* on Docker River School, Reynolds on the Ltyentye Apurte Community Education Centre, Christie on the Yirrkala Community Education Centre and the Laynha Homeland Schools, Gale on bilingual education programs in Aboriginal schools, and Baarda on the impact of the bilingual program at Yuendumu from 1974 to 1993.

Nicholls' 'Vernacular language programs and bilingual education programs in Aboriginal Australia: Issues and ideologies', Harris' 'Teaching Aboriginal languages in Aboriginal schools: Some issues', and McConvell's 'Two-way exchange and language maintenance in Aboriginal schools' also devote attention to this area but within a broader perspective of Aboriginal languages in schools.

Other articles considering programs and associated issues in first-language contexts include those by Hartman on the 'Intelyape-lyape Akaltje Project: Arrernte curriculum development' and Goddard on the 'Pitjantjatjara story-writing contest, 1988'.

Relatively newer on the scene are the heritage programs, such as those described by Varcoeon, 'Nunga languages at Kaurna Plains Schools', and Amery on 'Heritage and second language programs'. The book predominantly addresses programs for Aboriginal students, although some consideration of programs for non-Aboriginal students can be found in Henderson (pp. 18-20), Amery (pp. 144, 150), Hudson (p. 167) and Marmion (pp. 376, 379).

A number of chapters focus on contexts where full knowledge of a language or languages is

restricted to older people, including articles by Donaldson on 'Alphabet books', Johnson on the 'Djabugay language at Kuranda State School', Wrigley on the 'Gogo School language program', Green *et al.* on the 'Alekenge language program', Bowden on the 'Arrernte language program at the Ntyarlke Unit of the Catholic High School, Alice Springs', Amery on 'Heritage and second language programs', Hudson on a 'Framework for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in primary schools', Hoogenraad on 'Grass-roots Aboriginal language and culture programs in schools in the Barkly and Sandover Regions of the Northern Territory' and Ganambarr on 'Gurrurr-Yarrata'.

The Bucknalls' article, 'We want to keep that language ...', describes developments in Western Australian Aboriginal Independent Community Schools. These schools occur across a variety of language contexts and have been evolving language and culture programs for about the same time as bilingual programs in the Northern Territory.

Concrete suggestions for assessment are proposed in McConvell's article, 'Oral proficiency assessment for Aboriginal languages'. Delivery of programs by bodies outside educational institutions is considered in Marmion's article on the Yamaji Language Centre. Aboriginal language worker training is addressed in articles by Sharp and Injie on 'Training language workers in Western Australia', Crowe on 'Aboriginal languages in teacher training at Batchelor College' and Tindale on 'Training for Aboriginal language teachers in Central Australia'.

Two chapters are written by Aborigines. A few are jointly authored by Aborigines and non-Aborigines, but most chapters are written by non-Aborigines and thus reflect on the practice and

## Book Reviews

thinking of non-Aborigines working with language and culture programs in communities, schools, Aboriginal training institutions and the bureaucracy. As several authors stress, programs involve integrating expertise, provision of resources and training and official recognition of the program. Any program also has to respond to specific local needs.

It is still by no means automatic that a community wishing to start a language/culture program will easily find the necessary resources, personnel and administrative support. It must also be recognised that a few communities have actively chosen not to have such programs and this is acknowledged in various places in the book. This choice highlights a fundamental principle, acknowledging Aboriginal ownership of programs.

This volume is a dense and demanding read because of the range of situations, issues and voices presented. It will be a rare reader who has experience and expertise in all the areas covered. Henderson's introductory article, 'Aboriginal languages in education: A summary of the issues', is useful, outlining issues raised within chapters as well as isolating additional issues and giving some more explicit recognition. In part it serves as a conclusion, moving the discussion beyond what is presented in the body of the book.

There is a weighting towards programs that are well resourced and long standing, as well as those occurring in the Northern Territory, but the book covers enough different language contexts and potential types of programs to offer encouragement and something of value to all. It fills a vacuum of readily accessible information about what is, and has been, happening in Aboriginal language and culture programs.

**Editor's Note:** This Review originally appeared in *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1995/Number 1:75-77. We thank *Australian Aboriginal Studies* and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for allowing us to reprint it here.

**Melanie Wilkinson** is the regional linguist, East Arnhem Region, Northern Territory Department of Education, Nhulunbuy. □

### ***Conned!***

**E.M.D. Fesl**

University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1993, 265 pp.

### ***Reviewed by Ian Green***

For those of us involved in Australian language issues, this book should have been a landmark publication. Its author, Eve Mumewa Fesl, has solid academic credentials: she holds a doctorate in linguistics, has occupied several academic posts, and has a long record as an outspoken language-policy activist. So we come to this book, a product of her doctoral research, with strong expectations. Here, we might think, we will find something exciting and interesting – if not some original research, at least some unique synthesis of already available material, an authentic Koori voice speaking to us through the medium of Western scholarship. Unfortunately, this is not the case; in virtually all respects, this is a disappointing work. There is little here that is new in itself; there is nothing that has been put together in an interesting way. The book is poorly written and only loosely, ramblingly organised. And the standard of scholarship gives no indication