

## 7.5.2. A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF VERNACULAR EDUCATION

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### 7.5.2.1. THE PERIOD UNTIL 1962

Prior to 1962 there was no official statement at all as to any policy re vernacular education. Very largely in government agency schools there was no such teaching as the government had committed itself to the teaching of English. In church agency schools there were a variety of approaches. At one end of the scale there was a 'universal' two-year programme where children learnt to read and write their own language and where other subjects were taught in vernacular and from which brighter pupils were selected to go into the English programme. Often vernacular as a subject extended into the English programme as well. In the middle of the scale there was a two-year programme of vernacular as a subject in the first two years of the English programme, to make children 'literate' in their own language. At the other end of the scale in church agency schools there was no vernacular at all. It depended very largely on how important the local missionary or missionaries felt vernacular to be.

Where it was taught it was often badly taught. Usually untrained teachers were used for the task and the mechanics of reading, for example, was taught but no regard was paid to comprehension; and where the mechanics of writing was taught it was assumed that children would be able to put words together into sentences and sentences into paragraphs and letters and stories. Teaching was usually poor.

There were also times when the teachers were, at best, hesitant speakers of the language themselves. And in addition there was often little in the way of reading material or syllabus for the course. There were also, happily, exceptions to all the above.

But with the above situation it was not surprising that government education officers were not overly impressed with the bulk of the vernacular education in schools. It was not of good quality.

#### 7.5.2.2. THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 1962 SYLLABUS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In 1962 the first real syllabus for primary schools in Papua New Guinea was produced by the Education Department. It was widely welcomed. And in it there was a definite place given to vernacular education. Part of the preamble to the syllabus reads as follows:

##### THE PLACE OF THE VERNACULAR.

English is to be taught in all Primary T schools in accordance with this syllabus.

The place of the vernacular in the Primary T school [Primary T schools were those following the Territory syllabus as opposed to Primary A schools which followed an Australian syllabus - these latter mainly for expatriate children being educated in Papua New Guinea] is a somewhat vexed question in Papua New Guinea. This is particularly so since there are over seven hundred languages spoken by approximately two million inhabitants. No one language is spoken by a sufficiently large number of people to make production of books in the vernacular feasible (with the exception of a very limited range of scriptural material).

The Government takes the view that the need for a national language is paramount. The teaching of English must be fostered by all possible means and with ever increasing efficiency.

On the other hand it is not the intention of the Government that most vernaculars become extinct. The aim is to develop a nation of bilinguals, people who prefer to use the national language in public and commercial dealings but who retain their skills in their mother tongue.

From the school point of view the dilemma is what language policy will lead to facility in English - the national language.

It is NOT a scientifically proven fact that prior literacy in the mother tongue is necessary for successful teaching in a second language. Several experiments purporting to prove this claim have been reported but all have marked weaknesses of design or efficiency of teaching which invalidates the conclusions. At most we have the views of a number of field workers in places where there is bilingualism.

The Department of Education has an open mind on the question. It considers the evidence inconclusive especially in view of recent success with English teaching without prior literacy in the vernacular. Its attitude to vernacular teaching is conditioned by

- (a) past failures in vernacular teaching in Papua New Guinea due to the inadequacy of the teachers,
- (b) the absence of any approved syllabuses for the teaching of the vernacular,

- (c) the lack of suitable reading material for small children plus the lack of other suitable follow-up reading material and/or suitable technical books in the vernaculars.

The Department considers that schools teaching a vernacular can only be successful where these three conditions are met. Since at present they cannot be met in Administration schools, these schools will use English as the medium of instruction. Educational authorities which propose to teach the vernacular in schools for which recognition is sought must fulfil the following conditions:

- (1) English must be taught at least concurrently with the vernacular. The time devoted to English must be at least the minimum recommended times as set out under Hours and Times of Instruction.
- (2) The vernacular taught must be the vernacular of the area in which the school is situated.
- (3) The teachers must be competent to teach that vernacular. For registered teachers evidence that the language is their mother tongue is sufficient evidence. Evidence of competence must be presented when the vernacular is not the mother tongue of the teacher.
- (4) A full syllabus for that vernacular must be prepared and then approved by the Syllabus Development Committee. The Committee has appointed an evaluation sub-committee of teachers, themselves competent in at least one vernacular to make recommendations on the adequacy of the syllabus. The syllabus need not be printed but there must be sufficient typed or duplicated copies to provide one for each teacher.
- (5) There must be evidence that adequate vernacular reading material is available for the children. Minimum adequacy for first approval will be material covering the reading needs of children to the end of Standard II.

Providing these requirements are met educational authorities are free to conduct schools using the vernacular as the medium of instruction up to Standard II. English must be used as the medium of instruction beyond Standard II level. The vernacular as a subject can be continued beyond Standard II.

Supervisory officers are instructed to offer every assistance to schools which produce evidence that the above conditions have been met.

Schools which cannot meet the five conditions are to be firmly discouraged.

As a result of the above passage from the 1962 syllabus, a small number of syllabuses in various vernaculars were prepared with accompanying primers and readers. These syllabuses were presented and approved by the committee set up. But many who had been involved in the teaching of vernacular literacy were discouraged by the five conditions set, and ceased teaching it. Others elected to continue teaching it outside the primary school system and receive no Government assistance

towards it. From 1962 on, then, the amount of vernacular literacy taught in schools was very very little indeed. The Revised Primary Syllabus issued in 1967 carried a complete re-print of the 1962 statement on vernacular education, and so the position did not at all alter.

#### 7.5.2.3. THE 1971 PRIMARY SEMINAR

In 1971 a Primary Seminar was held of only Papua New Guineans who discussed what they would like to see in the primary syllabus. There was a growing disenchantment with primary education as it seemed to result in a majority of pupils becoming divorced from the community in which they lived, and alienated from their own society, by their own choice. The seminar was a group of thinking Papua New Guineans concerned about the situation. The seminar was to recommend ways to obtain what was felt desirable for primary education. Amongst the resolutions were:

- RESOLUTION 4 : Teach children to respect the view of their parents and the village community.
- RESOLUTION 5 : Teach children to examine the values and beliefs of their own culture.
- RESOLUTION 14 : To teach children how to work towards a better society; that this can be done through selecting good things from the old and adding to them new ones which are suitable for our society in Papua New Guinea.
- RESOLUTION 16 : To teach the children how to reconstruct their cultural heritage through practising traditional dancing, folk songs, drama, art and craft and so forth.

The Director agreed to all of these with the one modification below:

Children should be made aware of the values and beliefs of their own culture but should not be expected to examine them critically. There is a need for people in Papua New Guinea to identify their own values. Teachers will be encouraged to promote discussion of their own society amongst themselves so that their own values and beliefs may be expressed in their school curriculum.

Principals of Teachers' Colleges will be requested to ensure that their Lecturers emphasise a programme of getting students to ascertain their own ideas of values and beliefs and to incorporate these into training programmes. Schools and Colleges should put into practice the expression of these values and beliefs through cultural activities such as dancing, drama, art and craft.

#### 7.5.2.4. DR V. McNAMARA: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING THE VERNACULAR ONLY IN SCHOOLS

Inherent in these resolutions, though not explicitly stated, was the subject of vernacular. This (vernacular) took on a new lease of life and people began to become interested. A paper prepared by Dr V. McNamara, the First Assistant Director of Education, was discussed at the ninth and tenth meetings of the National Education Board in September and October 1971. One section of the paper gave the following advantages and disadvantages of using the vernacular only in schools:

##### ADVANTAGES

1. Children coming to school for the first time are educated in an atmosphere that is made less foreign by a familiar language.
2. Skills learned at school may be more readily imparted to the local community.
3. More involvement by the local community in school affairs may be anticipated, since the community should know more about what the children are learning.
4. The cultural heritage of the local community is more likely to be preserved.
5. There could be a pay-off in creativity if children are encouraged to express themselves in their mother tongue.

##### DISADVANTAGES

1. The way to further formal education is closed since in High Schools and Technical Colleges the language of instruction is English, and to enter these institutions proficiency in English is demanded.
2. If there is a number of vernaculars there will need to be prepared a large number of different text-books. This will be extremely expensive.
3. Syllabuses will have to be written in vernacular languages.
4. Teachers will have to be found who can teach in vernaculars, or other teachers will have to be given special training in order to teach in the vernacular.
5. Difficulties might arise when teachers have to be replaced or transferred.
6. A community educated only in its vernacular might tend to feel isolated. Such an education might have a divisive effect on the nation.
7. Because of the lack of suitable text-books children will be denied access to a great deal of the accumulated knowledge and experience of the world.
8. Many vernacular languages are too simple in structure to be able to advance children intellectually as far as they could go if they used a more advanced language.

Then followed a section dealing with vernacular in the lower classes and English in the upper:

ADVANTAGES

1. The child is allowed to become adjusted to his environment gradually, in a language setting that is familiar to him.
2. Costs of text-books will not be unduly high since few will be required in the first years of schooling, and these could be produced locally.
3. A measure of literacy in the vernacular would have been encouraged.
4. Some children will be given the opportunity to proceed to higher education.
5. Better use may be made of teachers who can handle the vernacular but are suspect professionally when teaching in a second language such as English.

DISADVANTAGES

1. The task of teacher preparation will be made immensely more complicated.
2. Syllabuses for the lower primary school will need to be produced in a number of dialects. This will be a long and costly process.
3. There will need to be produced separate syllabuses for rural and urban schools since it will be unlikely that a common vernacular language will exist in towns.
4. Inspections of lower school teachers will have to be carried out by Inspectors familiar with the vernacular. Standards may lapse if the inspectorial system proves inadequate.
5. Problems are inevitable in the replacement and transfer of teachers.
6. There is a danger that teaching and learning in the vernacular may be allowed to continue in the upper primary classes, thus hindering the development of English.

Other sections dealt with in the paper included:

A trade language only;

A trade language in the lower classes, English in the upper;

A trade language in the lower classes, vernacular in the upper;

Vernacular in the lower classes, a trade language in the upper;

A trade language and vernaculars in the lower classes, English in the upper.

The National Education Board asked for the paper to be revised and condensed and then at its tenth meeting resolved that the revised and condensed paper was to be issued to interested community groups, District Education Boards, Local Government Councils, etc. to assist them to reconsider and crystalise their views.

## 7.5.2.5. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PRIMARY CURRICULUM 1972

During 1972 the Education Department published *Developments and Changes - Primary Curriculum 1972*. The following sections were included:

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

This syllabus is to be taught in English. The teacher may use Pidgin, Motu or other native language to help the children understand.

Most children commencing Class I will know only their native language and the teacher should encourage them to speak in English. However the teacher must allow the children to express their ideas in their native tongue if they do not know enough English to do so. In some schools it may be possible to teach children to speak and write a native language if a speaker of that language is available.

NATIVE LANGUAGES

Where the Board of Management agrees, teachers who understand the native language well should teach these lessons. These activities can be combined with village visiting.

1. Invite a villager to come into the classroom to tell a story in the native language. Make a summary of the story on the blackboard.
2. Class can visit some village people to listen to their stories. Later, in the classroom, write down the main points of one of the stories.
3. Written composition in a native language.
4. Children write a letter in a native language to a relative telling what happened in school today. Post the letter.
5. Write and design a notice that announces a sporting event or other happening.
6. Practise songs in native language. Prepare a short play.
7. Listen to native language broadcasts on the radio.

A circular from the Education Department that elaborated on the changes and development in the primary curriculum added the following:

The term native language means any language used by Papua New Guineans and includes Pidgin and Motu. The reason for including native languages is not that they should be taught as subjects but rather that they should be included as part of the local culture. Experience has also shown that the vernacular can be a useful medium in helping to explain difficult ideas and concepts to children. Younger children especially appreciate story telling lessons in the vernacular where this is applicable.

#### 7.5.2.6. 1973 AND LATER

##### 7.5.2.6.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARK

The year 1973 saw much discussion. At lots of teachers' conferences, in-service group meetings and seminars the subject was debated. Most educated Papua New Guineans felt the practical problems were too great to introduce vernacular and that English would have to stay as the language of instruction and the main language in the primary school. The National Education Board considered at its 24th meeting in October 1973 the feasibility of introducing to all Teachers' Colleges in Papua New Guinea the subject of 'How to Teach Vernacular Literacy in Primary Schools'. The question as to whether it is feasible or not has still (at the time of writing) not been resolved.

##### 7.5.2.6.2. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 1973 FIVE YEAR PLAN

In November 1973 the Education Department published a Proposed Five Year Plan for Education in Papua New Guinea. This was published with a preface by the Minister for Education and was produced for discussion inside and outside the education system. It was explained that its status was that of a proposed plan and not an approved plan. Its chapter 6 on Language Policy has nine interesting points:

1. Since there are so many different languages it is not easy to decide what language policy should be followed.
2. For the conduct of national business it is essential that there be a common means of communication for newspapers, for radio and for Government. This language can be used by a person from one part of the country who wishes to communicate with a person in another part.
3. It is also essential that some citizens can represent Papua New Guinea in international circles and look after the business of Papua New Guinea on the world scene. Much enrichment and growth will come from international contact.
4. In practical terms it is not possible for Papua New Guinea to develop all vernaculars to a stage which would make them capable of expressing complicated technological concepts, nor would it be possible to publish books in more than a fraction of vernacular languages.
5. This plan makes the suggestion that the most useful policy is to make use of the history and tradition of language learning which exists among the people of Papua New Guinea.
6. The language of instruction in Papua New Guinean primary schools will be selected by the community which the school serves.
7. English will remain the language of secondary and higher education.



8. In selecting a language for their primary school, however, the community will need to think about two main factors:
  - (a) whether the teacher knows the language selected well enough to that he can teach it as a subject and so that he can teach other subjects in that language,
  - (b) whether there are teaching materials available for teachers and the pupils to use.
9. Vernacular languages, including Pidgin and Motu, may be taught as subjects in primary schools.

#### 7.5.2.6.3. 1974 INSTRUCTION NO.81 ON IMPLEMENTING THE NEW LANGUAGE POLICY

Ministerial thinking at this stage was that there should be some flexibility in language teaching in primary schools. And so, early in 1974, the Director of Education issued his instruction No.81 on Implementing the New Language Policy. He wrote:

The Minister's new language policy for primary schools introduces a welcome degree of flexibility into primary school language curriculum. At the same time it points out that the freedom to change depends on such resources as the availability of teachers to teach in the vernacular, the availability of such professionally designed curricula and the availability of books printed in the language. Communities wishing to teach the vernacular or in the vernacular must also take account of the requirement that pupils should be fluent in English by Standard 6 if they are to be selected for further education. Because of these difficulties the Minister has limited changes in local primary school curriculum to those specifically approved by the Department.

This Director's instruction is meant to make the decision-makers in primary language policy (Boards of Management, subject to District Education Boards) aware of some of the possibilities and problems, so that they will be able to see the choices open to them in terms of what can realistically be attempted. Boards of Management which make proposals to modify the language of instruction in their schools in 1975 in the light of this Director's instruction, having considered all the possibilities and difficulties outlined below are much more likely to gain speedy approval for such changes as they propose.

A follow up to this instruction, early in 1974, addressed to District Superintendents, will advise them as to which kinds of proposals may be approved without further consideration, and which must be forwarded to the Assistant Director Primary before approval may be granted.

Boards of Management wishing to make changes in their language programme for the 1975 school year must submit their proposals to the District Superintendent no later than 30th. June 1974. Approvals which cannot be granted immediately by the District Superintendent will be considered by the Assistant Director Primary during July/August. Where approval for these proposals is granted, it will be notified to the District Superintendent no later than September 1st. This will give schools five months to prepare for the introduction of an approved language programme in 1975.

Set out below are some of the more obvious options open to Boards of Management. Boards of Management should work down the list of options starting with option 1, and consider whether they can meet all the requirements for the option. The requirements get progressively more difficult as we pass down the options from 1 to 6 and we should normally expect a school to try out for a year one of the earlier easier options before committing itself to one of the later harder options.

A Board of Management may choose all, none, or any combination of the options. Alternatively, it may put up its own proposal which will be given full consideration by the Department, and, if considered practical, will be approved.

OPTION	REQUIREMENTS
1. No change. Continue with the present curriculum.	1. Same requirements as in past years.
2. Use the vernacular as the language of instruction in Standards 1 and 2 only (English as a foreign language to be taught as a <u>subject</u> in these grades).	2. All children in these classes speak the vernacular fluently on commencing school. 3. An assured future supply of teachers who speak the vernacular fluently, sufficient for each class at Standard 1 and 2 level.
3. Teach literacy in the vernacular in Standards 1 and 2.	In addition to requirements 1, 2 and 3 above: 4. An adequate supply of suitable materials in the school designed for teaching reading in the vernacular. 5. A clearly worked out programme and methodology for teaching literacy in the vernacular. 6. A clearly worked out programme for the transition from literacy in the vernacular to literacy in English as a foreign language.
4. Teach the vernacular as a <u>subject</u> through the Primary school.	In addition to requirements 1 to 6 above: 7. Sufficient teachers to teach the vernacular as a subject throughout the school. Materials (including a curriculum) adequate to provide a worth-while programme of communication skills in the vernacular.

OPTION	REQUIREMENTS
<p>5. Use the vernacular as a language of instruction throughout the primary school.</p> <p>6. Teach fluency, literacy and communication skills in a <u>lingua franca</u> (Pidgin/Motu/Kate etc.) by grade 6 - that is, teach the <u>lingua franca</u> as a <u>subject</u> (as distinct from teaching in one of these languages as the vernacular - i.e. in a community where all of the children entering school are already fluent in the <u>lingua franca</u>).</p>	<p>In addition to requirements 1 to 6 above:</p> <p>8. Sufficient teachers and materials to offer this programme throughout the whole school (i.e. <u>all</u> teachers would have to be fluent in the vernacular).</p> <p>9. A teaching programme and overall primary school timetable to show how these objectives will be achieved, together with a programme of teaching English as a foreign language (in less time than at present) which will achieve also the objective of English fluency.</p> <p>1. An assured supply of teachers fluent in the lingua franca, in sufficient numbers to teach it as a subject throughout the school.</p> <p>2. A fully worked out curriculum leading from an oral programme (for fluency) followed by a programme to develop communication skills in the lingua franca - to include a timetable showing the relationship of time spent on the lingua franca to that spent on the vernacular, English and other subjects.</p> <p>3. Adequate materials to put the above curriculum into effect.</p>

Once a proposal by a Board of Management has been approved then the Board of Management will be committed to whatever expenses and staffing obligations it says it can meet in satisfying the requirements.

## 7.5.2.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This, then, is the current situation (at the time of writing in April 1974). Whether any community will have a Board of Management for a primary school brave enough to commit itself in this way remains to be seen. Quite a few church schools virtually do this now, but so far none in the government agency. Whether these will venture forth remains to be seen. There will be much professional and administrative work needed to ensure this policy can be implemented. Though flexibility is stated as desired, the document itself is rather restrictive and forbidding. But it is not impossible. Many thinking Papua New Guineans believe that a true Papua New Guinean identity can only be developed in Papua New Guinean languages. Time will tell how successful it is.

EDITOR'S NOTE: There have been recent policy decisions (in September 1976 - see 7.3.2.7. and Appendix to 7.3.2. in this volume) which even more strongly favour the use of English in education in Papua New Guinea. This constitutes a setback for the time being, for hopes of an eventual introduction of vernacular education on a sizeable scale in the schools of Papua New Guinea in general.