

8 *Critical reflections on the history of bilingual education in Central Australia*

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... the introduction of bilingual education programs in NT Aboriginal communities in the early seventies was a marvelous and highly symbolic event signal[ing] a fundamental, positive, and irreversible change in the relationship between Aboriginal languages and formal educational structures in Australia. This was naive optimism, of course. Sadly, what is surely an inalienable right—to use and develop one's native language—is not safe from forces of economic and sociopolitical contingency. (Ken Hale, 1999:42)

To deny a people an education in their own language where that is possible is to treat them as a conquered people and to deny them respect. (The Honourable Kim E. Beazley Senior, 1999)

1. Introduction¹

In 1972 the Federal Government of Australia decided to “launch a campaign to have Aboriginal children living in distinctive Aboriginal communities given their primary education in Aboriginal languages” (Whitlam 1972).

¹ The author is employed as a linguist by the Northern Territory Department of Education. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily endorsed by my employer. I take full responsibility for the views expressed. I wish to acknowledge discussions on bilingual education over the last decade with my linguist colleagues and educators who work, or have worked, in the NT, particularly at IAD and with NTDE. I also acknowledge my indebtedness to the many Aboriginal people I have worked with and who have taught me since 1983. I am especially indebted to the long-term staff working in Warlpiri schools. I dedicate this paper to the memory of Kay Napaljarri Ross (d. 21 October 2000), who served Yuendumu School for 25 years. Abbreviations used: NTDE – Northern Territory Department of Education; BIITE – Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (was Batchelor College); ESL – English as a Second Language; TESL – Teaching English as a Second Language.

The proposal was made to Whitlam earlier that day by the Honourable Kim Beazley, Senior, then Federal Minister for Education responsible for education in the NT, on the basis of his observations of remote Aboriginal schools in the late 1960s when he was Shadow Minister for Education. In the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission school, literacy was taught in *both* English and Western Arramta. In other bush schools—where teaching was in English only—children were easily distracted by Beazley's presence as a visitor and clearly were not following the lesson, while in Hermannsburg school, "if I went into their classroom where the teacher was teaching in Aranda, . . . nobody swung around and looked at me. Their focus was on what the teacher was saying" (Beazley 1999).

Beazley and Whitlam were responding to the obvious logic that, *ceteris paribus*, any child would learn best if instructed in their own, first language, rather than in a foreign language. The 'all things being equal' is of course the rub, and is the point of this essay.

In June 1974 Geoff O'Grady and Ken Hale carried out a survey of bilingual education programs newly being established by the Federal Government in a small number of Aboriginal communities in the NT. They produced a short report including twenty-five recommendations, discussion of the recommendations, and an introduction in which they described the major premise underlying their recommendations,

that the success of any education program depends upon the extent to which the school is an integral part of the community which it serves. . . .one of the goals of bilingual education should be to enable Aboriginal communities to gain local control over the education of their children and young adults, with the role of non-Aboriginals becoming more consultative in nature—i.e., more consultative than directive. . . . We . . .urge generally that maximum efforts be made over the coming years to engage Aboriginal people in the implementing of the bilingual education program. (O'Grady & Hale 1974)

This paper uses this premise and their recommendations to put the short history of bilingual Aboriginal education in Central Australia into a critical perspective, in terms of the history of Aboriginal education, the history and developing functions of literacy in the vernaculars, the history of the use of English by Aboriginal people, and in particular, the changing role of local Aboriginal people in the education of the children in their community.² The aim is to provide a basis for judging the success or failure of bilingual education relative to so called 'English only' Aboriginal schools and Aboriginal education in the NT in general.³

I examine these issues with respect to Northern Territory Central Australia, an area that stretches from *Lajamanu* and the Gulf of Carpentaria to the SA border (see Map 1).⁴ It covers four major language areas, with 58 Aboriginal schools, many of them small, and more than 3,170 Aboriginal students. Only 11 schools had bilingual programs. See Table 1 for additional detail and see the map for the language areas, bilingual schools, and other communities mentioned in the text.

2 The recommendations are listed in full in the Appendix to this paper, but without the accompanying discussion. Recommendations are referred to by the number given in the Appendix.

3 'English only' is the term that has been used by NTDE to describe Aboriginal schools where, supposedly, the only language used is English.

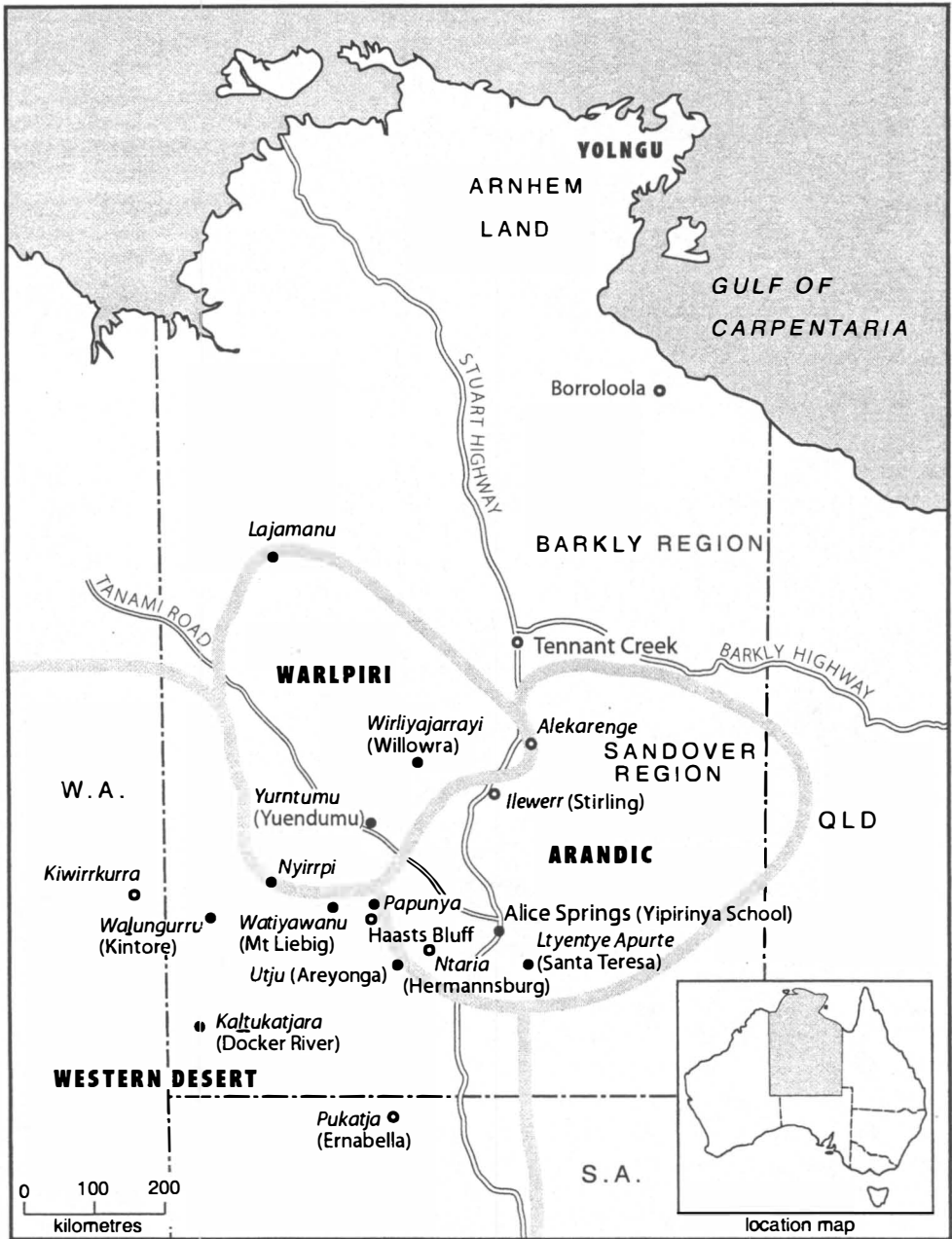
4 The local Aboriginal language orthography version of placenames is in italics; the official place name is in plain style, unless it is identical to the local version, like *Lajamanu* (see Map 1).

Table 1: The language areas and details of Aboriginal schools

Language area	Languages and dialects	No. of Aboriginal schools ¹	No. of small schools ²	No. of bilingual schools (1998) ^{1,3}	Aboriginal enrolments (1999) ¹	No. of trained Aboriginal teachers ⁴
Barkly	Warumungu and other languages, but typically using Aboriginal English or Kriol	10.2	8	NIL	399	1
Northern Arandic	Eastern & Western Anmatyerr, Alyawarr, Kaytetye	18.4	15	NIL	795	2
Southern Arandic	Eastern & Central Arrernte, Western Arramta	11.7	8	1.7	564	5
Warlpiri	Warlpiri (five dialects)	4.6	1	4.2	640	10
Western Desert	Yankunytjatjara & Pitjantjatjara; Eastern Luritja & Pintupi Luritja	13.1	6	5.1 (3.1) ³	774	5
TOTALS for Central Australia		58	38	11 (9) ³	3172	23

NOTES

1. Not including the Tennant Creek Primary and High Schools, with high proportions of Aboriginal students, or Yirara College of the Finke River Mission in Alice Springs, which has secondary aged boarding students from remote Aboriginal communities across Central Australia. *Alekarenge* has Warlpiri (47%), Alyawarr and Kaytetye (35%), and Kriol (18%) speaking students. The bilingual Yipirinya Independent Aboriginal School in Alice Springs has classes for Eastern & Central Arrernte and for Western Arramta (70%), Warlpiri (17%) and Luritja (13%). These have been apportioned in the table to the appropriate language areas, such that, for example, the Warlpiri contingent at *Alekarenge* is counted as 0.47 of a school and the Warlpiri contingent at Yipirinya is counted as 0.17 of a school, and these are added to the figure 4 (for the four Warlpiri schools in Warlpiri country) to give a notional 4.64 schools (rounded in the table to 4.6). *Ltyentye Apurte* is an Eastern Arrernte Catholic Education bilingual school.
2. Schools with one or two teachers, including 16 schools with visiting teachers only.
3. Bilingual programs were phased out in Government schools in 2000, and replaced by so-called 'Two-way Learning' programs. *Walungurru* (Luritja) and *Kaltukatjara* (Pitjantjatjara) lost their teacher-linguist and other resources given to (most) bilingual schools and are currently not official 'Two-way Learning' schools. *Nyirrpi* (Warlpiri) and *Watiyawamu* (Luritja) never had resources such as a teacher-linguist, but are officially Two-way Learning' schools.
4. There are also further trained Aboriginal teachers who are not teaching for a variety of reasons.



key: ● bilingual school (February 2000) ● non-bilingual school ■ language area (approximate)

Map 1: Schools and Communities referred to in text

1.1 What is bilingual education?

Bilingual education means just that: education in which two languages are used—in Aboriginal Australia, typically the students' own first language, the vernacular, and the language of the dominant society, English. But the reality has been far from simple, with often contradictory interpretations evident in policy, in the official recommended models of bilingual education, in actual practice in bilingual schools, and in the philosophy of 'two-way' expressed by Aboriginal people. For a thorough discussion see the review of *Bilingual Education in Aboriginal Australia* by Gale (1990).

My definition of bilingual education is deliberately naïve, because I believe that an obsession with models and aims has led to a blindness to the *bi* in bilingual, and for that matter the *two* in 'two-way'. This has led to a frequent failure to give equal value to the role of *both* English and the vernacular, and more seriously, a failure to apply the *bi* to education in the Aboriginal bilingual context.

In this essay I address three vital questions:

- (a) What does bilingual and bi-educational, or 'two-way', schooling mean to indigenous Australians?
- (b) Is it the right of these indigenous minorities to be educated in their vernaculars?
- (c) What does it mean for these indigenous minorities to take responsibility for the education of their children?

I will explore these questions in terms of three positions, that of the opponents of bilingual education, that of the Aboriginal people whose children are being educated, mainly in remote communities, and that of the (non-Aboriginal) proponents of bilingual education, including those who implemented bilingual education programs.

2. The historical setting

The outstanding feature of the contact history of Central Australia, crucial to an understanding of the current situation, is how rapidly European settlement occurred, how traumatic the consequences were, and how rapidly Aboriginal societies had to adapt to a totally changed situation. Initial settlement took place in the 1870s, and within a decade most pastoral leases along the Stuart Highway had been taken up, and then later those to the east. The resulting destruction and transformation of the traditional social order continues to destabilise all aspects of Aboriginal life, including both traditional Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian education. While the area further to the west and into WA remained almost free of pastoral leases, and the last Aboriginal people known to have come from the bush into a settled community—*Kiwirrkurra* in WA—did so only in 1984, the western communities have not been exempt from the transforming and destructive influences.

2.1 Vernacular language maintenance and English

Aboriginal people started learning English soon after first contact with the invading English speakers (see Gillen's letter of 5th June 1896 in Mulvaney et al. 1997:118). Today almost all Aboriginal people speak at least some English, although it continues to be true that some old people, and some very young children, speak almost none. Conversely, almost no

English speakers learn the vernaculars, a consequence of the asymmetry of the power relationship.

In the area under discussion, the Western Desert dialects, Warlpiri, and the Arandic languages and dialects are still spoken as first languages, even to some extent in Alice Springs. The most common lingua franca is Aboriginal English, but so also are Aboriginal languages such as Luritja, Warlpiri, Arrernte, and Alyawarr. From *Alekarenge* northwards, in the Barkly region, the traditional languages are declining in daily use, replaced by Aboriginal English and, increasingly, by Kriol, which in many respects resembles Aboriginal languages. Over the last two decades, many people, including children, are spending increasing amounts of time in the larger population centres such as Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Borroloola, and Katherine. This has the potential to cause a shift to Aboriginal English and then to Kriol even in apparently monolingual Aboriginal communities. It also seriously affects school attendance and hence educational outcomes. The loss of the traditional language and the shift to Kriol poses special problems for an understanding of the notion of 'two-way' schooling. While children are the crucial pivot in language decline, they are also pivotal in language revival. While the school is not the only agency of language maintenance, decline, or revival, many Aboriginal people rightly see the school as a major locus of language maintenance or revival (see §4.1).

2.2 Schooling and literacy

The first Aboriginal school in Central Australia was established in 1887 at Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission (now *Ntaria* community). Instruction and literacy teaching was in *both* English and Western Arrarnta from about 1896. Sadly, this early bilingual program had ceased by the 1970s (Kral 2000), although two newly qualified Western Arrarnta teachers have begun to try to re-establish a 'two-way' program. After the auspicious start in Hermannsburg, it was not until the late 1930s that any further literacy teaching in another vernacular, Pitjantjatjara, was attempted in Central Australia, at Ernabella Mission (now *Pukatja* community) in SA. An Aboriginal Mission school was established in Yuendumu after the Second World War (Noel Coutts, pers. comm.), but as late as the 1960s the Commonwealth Government would not fund Aboriginal mission schools if the medium of instruction was not English (Gale 1990:51, quoting Beazley 1964). From 1950 to the early 1970s the Federal Government education service established Aboriginal schools in most Aboriginal communities, but there remain areas with small Aboriginal populations that are out of reach of a school, and it is believed that a substantial proportion, perhaps 5 per cent, of Aboriginal children are still not enrolled in any school.

Literacy for Aboriginal people living in remote communities was introduced only with schooling, and there are still very few daily functions for literacy on Aboriginal communities outside the school.⁵ It is important to see Aboriginal literacy in perspective. It took many centuries for literacy, in Latin, to become established in Britain. King Alfred the Great, in the late ninth century, was literate, and indeed wrote in both Latin and English (Anglo-Saxon), but for many centuries after this, the majority of English kings were illiterate (Strang 1970). It was not until the early twentieth century that (near) universal literacy in English was attained in the UK. Though Aboriginal people in remote Australia are yet to attain anything

⁵ See Gale (1997) and Kral (2000) for the history and developing functions of vernacular Aboriginal reading and writing.

like universal literacy, by such historical standards the development of Aboriginal literacy has been rapid and spectacular in the extreme, and this despite neglect and lack of support: O'Grady and Hale's (1974) plea to "flood the place with literature" (recommendation 21), though poignant, was unfortunately not acted on.

The Aboriginal vernaculars were at first written by German or English speakers, using ad hoc spellings, and the use of ad hoc spellings by English speakers continues to prevail, giving rise to a plethora of spellings, e.g. for language, place, and personal names, each the creation of someone trying to capture the very different sound system—phonology and phonotactics—of an Australian language as they think they heard it (see Hoogenraad 1993, Appendix 3: 'On writing and pronouncing Aboriginal languages'). However, standard practical orthographies have now been developed for all languages in Central Australia.

The orthography that was developed for Pitjantjatjara in the late 1930s was subsequently used, with adaptations, for other Western Desert dialects. Warlpiri did not get a standardised orthography until 1972, developed at *Lajamanu* by SIL, and Eastern and Central Arrernte got one in the late 1970s, developed in Alice Springs by IAD and Yipirinya School. This was subsequently used, with adaptations, for other Arandic languages and dialects (see papers by Green, Green & Turpin, Breen and Koch, this volume). Since the 1970s, orthographic conventions have been developed in consultation with literate speakers of the respective languages.

Unfortunately, orthographic conventions in use across Central Australia differ for closely related languages and even for dialects of the same language and even across state boundaries for the same dialect! Orthographic uniformity would be of great practical advantage for education across the region. Given the functional strength of the English writing system despite the vagaries of English spelling and dialect differences in the pronunciation of vowels (see Stubbs 1980:43–72), and the success of orthography and spelling reform in large nations (e.g. Malaysia and Indonesia in 1979), this is not an impossible goal.

When bilingual education was introduced in 1973, Aboriginal languages were still relatively poorly documented. Since then, there has been much more research, which has led to discoveries that are relevant to the writing of these languages, and to a growing realisation of their richness and complexity. The first texts were transcriptions of oral texts or translations of English texts, and these needed editorial interventions and decisions to be made without recourse to a body of written texts. Aboriginal people writing in the vernacular had to adapt the composition practices they learnt for English to the needs of vernacular writing. There is a need to allow Aboriginal writers to modify the orthography, writing conventions, and writing styles as their experience of writing in the vernacular grows, since the orthographies are not necessarily optimal for reading (Hoogenraad & Harrison 1999b):

In the initiation of a Bilingual Program in a new community, therefore, we envisage the possibility of the program starting with a 'half baked' orthography. We believe that this would not be detrimental in the long run, it would, indeed, give the Aboriginal people an enhanced opportunity to be involved in the decision-making which would lead to a revised writing system. (O'Grady & Hale 1974, discussion under recommendation 20)

Unfortunately this vision and their appeal "that everyone concerned try to think in a more relaxed way about orthographies" have gone largely unheeded.

3. The beginning and the end of bilingual education in the NT

No education program will succeed if it is not supported by the community. There was clearly community support for the new bilingual programs in the 1970s (Dhaykamal 1999; Graham 1999; Baarda 1994; Garngulpuy, Batumbil, and Bulkunu 1999; and Warlpiri Teachers at Lajamanu 1999). But the enthusiasm for bilingual education generated in Aboriginal communities has been consistently underestimated by the Government and by Education Department officials, because there is almost no real communication between Aboriginal communities and government, and their Indigenous consultative bodies are constituted by government appointment and hence are not necessarily representative of Aboriginal people, especially those in remote communities (People of Nguiu 1999).

From the beginning, Aboriginal people saw bilingual education as “the first real recognition by Government of the value of Indigenous language, culture and law”, whereas “Government and bureaucratic proponents” believed it would result in “improved school attendance and better outcomes in English literacy and numeracy” (Collins 1999:121). In fact the new bilingual programs engendered an air of excitement. In July 1974, Ken Hale ran a program of Warlpiri literacy and linguistics for Warlpiri assistant teachers and others associated with the new bilingual education program in *Yurntumu* (Hale 1999, Baarda 1994). His fares were paid by the local store—the Yuendumu Social Club. In 1983, several Warlpiri people told me about this experience with evident excitement, and to this day they retain and use the technical linguistic discussion of the Warlpiri sound system and grammar taught to them by Ken Hale. As late as 1999 Alice Nelson-Limbiari Nangala/Napurrula, who had travelled from *Alekareng* to *Yurntumu* to attend Hale’s program, was still referring to it (Jane Simpson, pers. comm.).

Support for the development of the new programs came from experienced field linguists—Bible translators and research linguists such as Ken Hale (see recommendation 14). A Departmental bilingual support unit employed a dozen or so staff, including an anthropologist, ESL specialists, and six linguists, five of them school-based. Linguists assisted in the development of written materials and helped local Aboriginal adults to read and write the vernacular. These linguists did not require teaching qualifications, so from 1976 the position of teacher-linguist was established. A teacher-linguist needed to be a trained teacher, ideally with substantial experience of Aboriginal bush schools, but there was no requirement that they have any linguistic qualification or experience (Laughren 1988; Gale 1990, and Sommer 1991).

3.1 Early and continuing opposition

There was opposition to bilingual education from the beginning. Beazley (1999) describes how, after the announcement by Whitlam that Aboriginal children would be given their primary education in Aboriginal languages, “Next morning [15 December 1972] when I arrived at the Education Department there was turmoil... , they said, it would be impossible. . . . This was hated by many. Distinguished individuals regarded the preservation of Aboriginal languages as an evil”. Although such antipathy could still be expressed publicly in the 1970s, such views are now considered improper. Nevertheless, the underlying ideology, which does not recognise the legitimacy of Aboriginal languages in a ‘modern, progressive’ Australia, persists. See for instance the views recently expressed by the Chief

Minister of the NT, the Honourable Denis Burke, that providing interpreters for Aboriginal people “to my mind is akin to providing a wheelchair for someone who should be able to walk” (Crossin 1999).

From at least 1976 there were rumours that government support for bilingual education was waning and might be withdrawn (see for example Eedle 1976, a Department of Education circular to counter these rumours). There was a drastic reduction in system support for bilingual programs from the 1980s onwards, so that for instance by the mid-1990s the support staff were reduced to one Principal Education Officer responsible both for Aboriginal languages and for bilingual education, and four regionally based linguists responsible for support for bilingual programs, for other Aboriginal language programs in non-bilingual schools, and for giving linguistic advice on the teaching of English as a second or foreign language.⁶

Passive resistance by Education officials is well documented by Sommer (1991). From the beginning, the bilingual programs also had to contend with resistance from some of the teachers: “There still remain small pockets of resistance and a few individuals who appear to be opposed to the principle of bilingual education, not only teachers but also non-Aboriginal personnel living in Aboriginal communities” (Department of Education 1974, §22).

Why are only some schools bilingual? Most bilingual schools were established in the first decade or so after 1973. To become bilingual the community and the school council had to apply to the Education Department. But if the school’s principal was unwilling (Warlpiri Teachers at Lajamanu 1999:52), then it was highly unlikely to happen and totally unlikely to succeed. A lack of sanctions and an absence of effective monitoring of what actually happens in classrooms in daily practice also meant that the classroom teacher could undermine the bilingual program with impunity, and the principal could simply not run the bilingual program in the school (Baarda 1994, Warlpiri Teachers at Lajamanu 1999:52). The Haasts Bluff bilingual program ceased functioning in the early 1990s, without any formal community decision, and *Lajamanu* lost its teacher-linguist and literacy workers between 1991 and 1997 and these were reinstated only after extended community pressure (Warlpiri Teachers at Lajamanu 1999:52–53).

As a result, over the last two-and-a-half decades, many nominally bilingual classrooms, and even nominally bilingual schools, were in fact ‘English only’. It is probably the case that many students who went through a supposedly bilingual program were in effectively non-bilingual, ‘English only’, classrooms for much or even all of their schooling. This is relevant for judging the success of bilingual programs, but it is undocumented.

3.2 The end

The opposition to bilingual programs finally prevailed. On the 1st of December 1998, the NT Minister for Education and Training announced that “. . . the bilingual program will progressively make way for the development of ESL programs” (the Honourable Peter Adamson 1998). Aboriginal educators, the bilingual schools, and the affected communities were not consulted in the 1998 review of NTDE that led to this decision (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). At least some non-local staff in bilingual schools

⁶ In mid-2000 a Government decision further reduced the number of Linguist positions to three, and they were renamed ‘Language Acquisition Officers’ (Czernekzyj 2000).

applauded the decision, showing that the bilingual program had operated without their active support or despite their passive resistance.

The announcement was met with distress in most Aboriginal communities, not only by the Aboriginal staff in the schools but also by many others in the community, especially senior leaders, who saw this as a disparagement of their traditional language and culture. Despite the widespread protests by Aboriginal school staff and community members from a large range of remote communities during 1999, the decision was confirmed by the NT Education Department in 2000, though as a concession twelve ex-bilingual Government schools were allowed to run the as yet undefined 'two way learning' programs (Collins 1999:125–7, 130), albeit under stringent assessment of outcomes not applied to NTDE's other Aboriginal programs (Czernezkyj 2000).

The decision to phase out bilingual programs in the NT was part of a wider review of education (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). This highlighted the crisis in Aboriginal education, indicated by the abysmally low levels of English and English literacy being achieved by most students in Aboriginal schools. As a result, Senator Bob Collins was commissioned to carry out a review of Aboriginal education for the NT Government in 1999. Although bilingual education was specifically omitted from his terms of reference, he found that as a result of the Government's 1998 announcement "many people in the communities affected . . . wanted to talk about nothing else" (Collins 1999:119).

The Review confirmed the poor outcomes of Aboriginal students: "eleven to sixteen-year-old students in remote Indigenous schools were averaging around Year 2–3 levels" (Collins 1999:17). Of course, this begs the question of what reasonable outcomes would be in such schools, given the short history of Aboriginal education and literacy discussed in §2.2 above. Though Collins (1999) did not find that the bilingual program was responsible for poor outcomes, the Review does not always make it clear that the failure of Aboriginal education extends to 'English only' schools (e.g. Collins 1999:127; see Nichols 2000 for a critique of its uneven handling of language issues). Like O'Grady and Hale (1974), the Review emphasised the need for "the direct involvement of parents and communities in the delivery of education services to their children" and highlighted "high teacher turnover and poor attendance" as key factors (Collins 1999:17, 19). The Review confirmed that "trained local [Aboriginal] teachers are much more stable than non-local teachers" (Collins 1999:89), and added "that persuading local Indigenous people to undergo the long process of teacher training is a good long-term investment for improving Indigenous education" (Collins 1999, quoting Hoogenraad 1999:13).

The Review expressed the belief that the term bilingual education "no longer reflects what is happening in classrooms, and is so divergently interpreted and misunderstood that it should no longer be used". It suggested that the term be replaced by "two way learning", a term which removes the current tendency to see learning in the vernacular and in English as somehow in competition. The evidence is that competency in one tends to be reflected in competency in the other, and in any case, vernacular instruction is taking place regardless" (Collins 1999:125). Teachers in 'English only' schools often complain that they should be resourced like bilingual schools since their classrooms are also bilingual, operating in both English, the language of the teacher, and the local vernacular, the language of the pupils and assistant teachers (see Hoogenraad 1993 and 1994). In line with this, the Review framed five recommendations about 'two-way learning' (Collins 1999:130, recommendations 98 to 102):

98. extend 'two-way learning' programs to all communities that want it,
99. such programs should be rigorously assessed,
100. a formal policy should make NTDE support explicit,
101. the program should be flexible enough to cover the range of language situations,
102. there should be high-level research into the use of the vernacular in the classroom.

Though less than a quarter of Aboriginal schools in the NT were accredited to deliver bilingual programs, they contained more than 45 per cent of the Aboriginal students. So about 55 per cent of students in Aboriginal schools are in classrooms that are not getting the extra support that bilingual programs get, and more than three-quarters of Aboriginal schools, most of them small, have no access to supported vernacular language programs that meet the needs of their students. This raises the problem of how to provide the necessary support for 'two-way learning' programs if they are extended to all communities but resources are not increased.⁷ This issue is taken up in §6.

In view of the history of effective resistance to officially established and accredited bilingual education programs on the part of some school staff (see §3.1 above), it is necessary to implement recommendations 98 and 100 above, which sanction the establishment and support of 'two-way' programs in communities that want them, and to heed O'Grady and Hale's recommendation 1. But almost a year after the release of the Collins review, there is no evidence that any of these recommendations except perhaps recommendation 99—rigorous assessment—will be implemented.

3.3 Aboriginal mobility

Collins (1999:141–148) notes that low attendance—typically two-thirds of enrolments—is a critical factor in poor performance. It results from two factors: the extreme difficulty of settled life in under-resourced, poorly serviced communities, and the very high mobility of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal mobility is a crucial factor for every aspect of service delivery to Aboriginal communities. This mobility has increased enormously over the last two decades, due to better transport, increased disposable wealth, and the lifting of institutional controls over Aboriginal people (Peterson 2000). A recent detailed Centre for Remote Health study by Warchivker et al. (2000) in one remote community in the NT shows a mobility rate of about 35 per cent over the period of one year. This corresponds closely to the results of a careful monitoring of attendance by *Yurntumu* school, which indicates that, despite an overall attendance rate of 66 per cent, attendance is around 95 per cent of those children actually in the community on any one day. Warchivker et al. (2000) show that mobility is largely based on ceremonial travel and family visiting, which reflect deep-seated and positive cultural values. The implications are that school attendance cannot be increased substantially without far-reaching changes in these cultural values and/or in the modes of delivery of education. This can only be achieved by an ongoing dialogue in the Aboriginal communities.

⁷ In fact, resources have been reduced: see Northern Territory Department of Education (1999) and Czernezkyj (2000), an NTDE memo to ex-bilingual schools.

4. Aboriginal people's involvement in education

Given O'Grady and Hale's (1974) view "that the success of any education program depends upon the extent to which the school is an integral part of the community which it serves", it is vital that we understand the Aboriginal view of education. The majority Aboriginal view is based on the following premises—see Aboriginal contributions to *Ngoonjook* (vol.16, 1999):

- It is necessary for Aboriginal children to learn to speak and write English well.
- Aboriginal children should learn 'two-way', with equal weight given to the local community's language and valued knowledge and to English and mainstream knowledge.
- It is the community's responsibility to teach and maintain the local Aboriginal language, and most Aboriginal commentators, but by no means all, believe that the school is a major vehicle for this.

4.1 The concept of 'two-way' and 'two-way education'

The use of the term 'two-way' by the education system, by educationalists since Harris (1990), and by Collins (1999) in fact usurps its long use by Aboriginal people in Northern Australia. There is an ongoing Aboriginal dialectic on the relationship between traditional culture and Law and the new order they must adapt to since the invasion of their countries by Europeans. This is an issue that is widely discussed by senior traditional Aboriginal people under the rubric 'two-way', but also 'two-idea', 'two-law' etc. This not only recognises that Aboriginal people now live under two laws, in two cultures, but strives to reconcile them and give them equal status ('level' in Aboriginal English).

McConvell (1982:61–63) reports that in 1975 "the concept of 'two-way school' was widely used" in the Kimberley, and he reports especially on the detailed exposition of the concept by the Gurindji leader Pincher Nyurmiyarri Janama. The term 'two-way learning' was also used by the Arrernte people who established Yipirinya Independent school in Alice Springs in the late 1970s. Keeffe (1988:41) reports that in 1987 Murphy Roberts, an Aboriginal teacher from Papunya school said, of Anangu (Aboriginal) and Walypala (White) aspects of education: "They are not separate paddocks". And Engineer Jack Japaljarri, a senior Warlpiri man from *Kunayungku* and *Karliwampa* near Tennant Creek, used the term 'two-idea' during a meeting about mining exploration in 1988 to indicate that while in the past there was just one Law, today there are two, Aboriginal Law and 'white-fella Law' (Ross & Hoogenraad 1988:10–11; Hoogenraad 1994:177). During my survey of the Barkly and Sandover regions (see Map 1) during 1990 and 1991, I heard the term 'two-way' used frequently, unsolicited, by senior Aboriginal men throughout the regions in the context of discussions of the introduction of Aboriginal language and culture programs into their community's school. Jenny Green (pers. comm.) heard it used in much the same way by an Anmatyerr man in *Ilewerr* community in March 2000. There are no Aboriginal people that I am aware of who consistently advocate that Aboriginal people should not adopt, and adapt to, aspects of 'White' culture. 'Two-way' is an evolving ideology about how that adaptation should take place (Hoogenraad 1994).

The discussion of 'two-way' in the Aboriginal community is neutral as to the role of the school. As a rule, Aboriginal women are more likely to want the vernacular included in the school's program, while men are less likely to unless they have seen it done successfully. (It is

also the case that very few Aboriginal men teach in schools.) The following shows people's change of attitude after they saw a successful program in action:

At *Ilewerr* in 1990 a group of senior men were very guarded and I was convinced they were too polite to tell me that they were opposed to the inclusion of Anmatyerr language in the school. But in 1991 they were enthusiastic about the idea; they had been on a school trip to *Ltyentye Apurte*, and were most impressed with its Bilingual Education program, commenting especially on the fact that they had seen English and Arrernte written side-by-side, on equal terms [they actually said 'level']... (Hoogenraad 1994:181)

Significantly, with the help of a supportive teacher, two senior women and two younger literate helpers began teaching Anmatyerr and Kaytetye in Stirling school in 1998. They were supported by the linguists Jenny Green and Myf Turpin from the Central Australian Dictionaries Program at IAD (see Green & Turpin, this volume). Men were supportive of the program. It has since lapsed because of a lack of support both from the system and from a new teacher.

Although the concept of 'two-way' is compatible with bilingual education, it is at variance with NTDE's accepted model, which specified only that initial literacy and initial teaching should be in the vernacular. Though the official aims of bilingual education were relatively broad, and the aims remained fairly constant, the order in which they were presented, and in some cases their wording, has changed dramatically (Laughren 1988: compare for instance Department of Education 1973 and 1979 and Northern Territory Department of Education 1989). Tellingly, the aim "to develop closer communication, involvement and mutual understanding between school and the community it serves and promote in children and their parents a positive attitude towards education and school attendance" has been consistently listed seventh out of eight, contrary to the central place given to this by O'Grady and Hale in 1974 (see the Appendix and above) and by other proponents of bilingual education. In practice, the aim of instruction in the vernacular was not properly supported, and even the aim of teaching initial literacy in the vernacular was not achieved in many bilingual programs.

The development of the child's first language—the vernacular—was never one of the aims, and very few bilingual programs have undertaken explicit vernacular (first-language) development, as opposed to developing initial literacy in the vernacular. However, it is clearly the case that what Aboriginal people—especially Aboriginal school staff—expected from bilingual education was 'two-way' education, in which *both* the vernacular and English were 'level', i.e. of equal status. Raymattja Marika's 1998 Wentworth Lecture (Marika 1999a, also 1999b) provides an eloquent statement of this from the point of view of a Yolŋu (Northeast Arnhem Land) educator.

In Central Australia, the Warlpiri schools—*Yurntumu*, *Lajamanu*, *Wirliyajarrayi*, and *Nyirrpi*—have been developing a Warlpiri curriculum for over a decade (Egan 1999, Warlpiri Teachers at Lajamanu 1999). It began in 1988–1989 with workshops to develop a curriculum for secondary-aged Warlpiri students (Hoogenraad 1990 and 1991). Senior people developed a classification of traditional Warlpiri knowledge, organised around the central concept of 'Country'. 'Country visits' is the central teaching and learning strategy, whereby students camp on their own personal country in the company of their senior family who are responsible for that country. The knowledge and skills learned are then followed up in subsequent classroom lessons. This educational concept has been widely adopted and adapted by other language groups and communities across Central Australia and the Barkly. The Intelyape-lyape Akaltye Project has developed an early childhood Arrernte curriculum,

with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation of Holland. It has been accredited by the NT Board of Studies (Intelyape-lyape Akaltye Project Team 1997). It is hoped that implementation of the curriculum in two Arrernte bilingual programs will begin soon.

It is clear from these processes of developing local vernacular education programs that what Aboriginal people expect from a 'two-way' education program is that it will develop their children to *both*

- become fully participating members of their own society, *and*
- be able to participate in the wider Australian society on equal terms with other Australians.

This vision is clearly much broader than conceiving bilingual education as merely the use of two languages, and I will use this as a working definition of 'two-way' education in Aboriginal Australia. Such programs would develop not only English but also the child's vernacular, just as the English-speaking child's English proficiency is developed in mainstream schools, and they would do so by teaching the society's valued knowledge.

While Aboriginal people agree that gaining a strong command of spoken and written English is very important, they are usually content to leave the responsibility for the English part of the program to the non-Aboriginal teachers (see Burgman 1988). I will argue that it is essential that this should be a shared responsibility between local Aboriginal educators and non-local educators.

4.2 Aboriginal people as teachers

Reason tells us that to learn you need to understand the teacher's language, something that is by no means intuitively understood by many monolingual English speakers, including teachers. Especially for young children, the ideal language of learning and instruction is therefore their first language. For children in Aboriginal schools in the NT this means the language of the community, which will be either a traditional vernacular, a creole (e.g. Kriol), or Aboriginal English, as recognised by recommendation 17 of O'Grady and Hale (1974; cf. also recommendation 16).

Since there were no trained Aboriginal teachers in the NT when formal schooling began to be extended in the 1960s, and there were still very few when bilingual education began in 1973, the classroom teachers continued to be non-local, with no knowledge of the vernacular, and there was little likelihood that they would learn it fluently (Graham 1999, Baarda 1994). The solution, then as now, was to employ an Aboriginal assistant teacher. This job title is promising: not a teaching assistant, but an Assistant Teacher, because (in theory) they have to teach the children in the vernacular. But they are not trained as teachers, they are not even trained to interpret for the teacher, and they are actually not even trained to assist the teacher, though they are typically both older and more experienced than the teacher. Moreover, the teacher is not trained to co-teach with an assistant teacher (Graham 1999).

In properly functioning bilingual classrooms (by no means all!), Aboriginal assistant teachers had a clear teaching task, to teach literacy in the vernacular and, in theory at least, to instruct in the vernacular, with the trained teacher unable to provide much direct assistance. By contrast, most Aboriginal teaching assistants in 'English only' schools have no clear teaching task. In fact, some cannot read or write, an indication of the lack of value placed on them as teachers by the education system.

After the initial decade of consolidation of the bilingual programs, in the mid 1980s a substantial proportion of assistant teachers, especially ones who had been working in bilingual classrooms, began training as teachers. This took them out of the classrooms and the community for extended periods of time. Themselves the product of 'English only' schooling in the 1950s and '60s, with relatively low levels of spoken and written English, the majority took until the mid-1990s to complete their full teacher training. It is an indication of their enthusiasm that they persevered.

Aboriginal teachers trained by Batchelor College and employed by NTDE make up the largest cadre of trained Aboriginal professionals from rural communities in the NT. The majority of them started their teaching apprenticeship as assistant teachers in bilingual schools. For instance, in 1995 two-thirds of Batchelor College teacher graduates were from bilingual schools, and four out of five of the Aboriginal principals are in bilingual schools (all in the Top End). Of the twenty-three trained Aboriginal teachers now teaching in Central Australia, 78 per cent are in bilingual schools (see Table 1). This is arguably the greatest achievement of bilingual education in the NT to date, and it is the most potent mechanism for the community to exercise its responsibilities and rights to educate its children.

These Aboriginal teachers are in a pioneering role, needing to develop new ways of teaching literacy and oral language in both the vernacular and English, more closely adapted to the children's language abilities and learning strategies and the realities of their learning environment. They undertook the long process of teacher training with the expectation that they would be teaching bilingual programs, which they understood as being 'two-way' programs, developing their students' education *both* ways. The withdrawal of support for bilingual programs has the potential to undermine their aspirations. They need support to develop appropriate curriculum, materials, and teaching methods, including the 'other half' of 'two-way' programs—a vernacular education syllabus (O'Grady & Hale 1974, recommendation 8). Given that the majority of them are the first generation to have the benefit of any schooling, they also need ongoing mentoring and professional development if they are to reach their full potential, as noted by O'Grady and Hale (1974, recommendations 2, 5, and 6). Mentoring for Aboriginal teachers, and more recently also for assistant teachers, is now provided by NTDE in partnership with BIITE.

The trained Aboriginal teachers in bilingual schools form a very stable work force—most of them being employed in the same school for a decade or more, first as assistant teachers and later as trained teachers. By contrast, the non-Aboriginal staff in bush schools are generally very short-term (Collins 1999:75–77) and expensive to recruit and to support in rural Aboriginal communities. They also require inservicing on the special requirements of teaching in remote communities where literacy levels are extremely low and the language of the community is not English. Almost none of them have ESL teacher training. Given their relatively short stay (much less than two years on average), the inservicing is not cost-effective in the long term, as it needs to be constantly repeated for new recruits. By contrast, local Aboriginal trained teachers do not need to be recruited, and they tend to stay for the long term, so that inservicing and mentoring have very long-term benefits.

There is some inequity between non-local and local teachers in that only non-local teachers are entitled to housing and to an assistant teacher provided by NTDE. The latter is justified by NTDE on the grounds that the local teacher does not need an assistant teacher to translate for them. But given the poor attendance and the resulting large range of student ability found in nearly all Aboriginal classrooms, a teacher cannot deal adequately with a class of up to twenty-five students without assistance. Furthermore, the Aboriginal teachers that are now teaching went through long 'apprenticeships' as assistant teachers, before and

during their teacher training. Aboriginal teachers have raised the issue that, because they are not entitled to an assistant teacher, the opportunities for such 'apprenticeships' are drying up as Aborigines come to occupy a greater proportion of the teaching positions in a school.

4.3 Teaching teams and partnerships in Aboriginal education

In the absence of a trained local teacher, there need to be teaching teams, comprising the teacher and a trained assistant teacher. If no suitably trained or skilled people are available, then O'Grady and Hale's recommendations 1–6, dealing with the situation of a program's initial development, the professional development of teachers new to the program, and the professional development of Aboriginal staff, need to be implemented. Where there is a paucity of suitably skilled Aboriginal people available, their recommendation 7, which deals with adult education in the community, needs to be implemented.

For trained local teachers the question of English language teaching arises. Currently a team-teaching approach is required in most instances, but this is a changing reality as the competence in literacy and English of succeeding generations improves (see §2.2 above). In early English language instruction, where good clear pronunciation by the teacher is necessary, and for English teaching in the higher grades, a possible innovation could be to have trained *assistant* teachers who speak standard Australian English. However, one of the strengths of Aboriginal teachers as English language instructors is their better understanding of the reasons for the students' mistakes, something which an English speaker without knowledge of the vernacular rarely has. Teachers (or assistant teachers!) with ESL training will be required in Aboriginal schools for the foreseeable future to work in partnership with Aboriginal teachers, and these Aboriginal teachers will require ESL training.⁸

5. Arguments for and against bilingual education

Having provided the educational setting, a short history of bilingual education, and the Aboriginal point of view on 'two-way schooling', I will now review the substance of the current debate between proponents and opponents of bilingual education.

5.1 The opposition's arguments

The opposition to bilingual education appears to be based on the following premises, which are discussed by Nicholls (1999):

- It is necessary for all Australians to speak and write English, as the national language of Australia, while Aboriginal languages are of no practical use.
- The use of Aboriginal languages in schools interferes in the learning of English.
- It is the community's responsibility to teach and maintain the local Aboriginal language, not the school's.

⁸ Aboriginal teachers and assistant teachers have tended to be subject to much heavier scrutiny than non-Aboriginal teachers. The fact is that most non-Aboriginal teachers are also in need of support, especially for the teaching of English.

- The extra resources required for bilingual education do not lead to improved outcomes in spoken or written English.

5.1.1 *The threat to English acquisition*

The evidence advanced for, and against, the belief that bilingual education is responsible for poor results in English is anecdotal and lacks rigour (Devlin 1999). There is strong anecdotal evidence that students in remote Aboriginal schools who perform well in English and literacy from grades 3 or 4 onwards tend to have an old family member who is a very good storyteller, but is illiterate and usually speaks little or no English. And graduates of bilingual programs with good vernacular literacy and strong vernacular language skills almost always also have the best English and good English literacy. This confirms experience worldwide, which reports that in a bilingual situation, good performance in the dominant, mainstream language is dependent on a strong first language (Collins 1999:125, McMahon & Murray 1999). It contradicts the commonly held view that, in remote Aboriginal schools, teaching and using the child's first language will *impede* the learning of English.

Many influential opponents of bilingual education—including government ministers and senior education bureaucrats who have been in a position to influence the ongoing viability of bilingual education in the NT—regard it as a vehicle for vernacular language maintenance at the expense of English. They assert that Aboriginal education was more successful in the past, in the days of 'English-only' mission education. If this were so there must be a generation born before 1945 on bush communities which has better English and better literacy than younger generations. But in Central Australian bush communities there are very few middle-aged Aboriginal people who have really good literacy and English, and those who do had exceptional life histories.⁹ Almost none of the trained Aboriginal teachers (see Table 1 and §4.2 above) are amongst these, and it is the experience of Aboriginal teachers that their best students—including the younger Assistant Teachers and Literacy Workers—are attaining better levels of literacy and English than they have themselves. This needs to be acknowledged and celebrated.

The intake into Batchelor College (now BIITE) teacher education program in the mid-1980s, though predominantly experienced assistant teachers from bilingual programs, was the product of non-bilingual schooling in the 1950s and '60s. Batchelor College had to counsel a substantial number of students to discontinue their studies because their literacy was limited to sight words (i.e. they have no 'word attack' skills, the ability to 'sound out' words they have not encountered before). So the 'English only' education of the past produced failures as well as successes.

But given the additional resources put into bilingual programs—mainly extra staff—the pertinent question remains as to whether students from bilingual programs have better English and literacy than students of the same generation from comparable non-bilingual schools. This is difficult to judge, because until recently, assessment of students in the NT was sporadic, and records have not been kept (Collins 1999; Graham 1999). The more recent

⁹ This evidence is anecdotal, based on the experience of many of my colleagues in Central Australia, though prior to the 1970s better attendance, due to low mobility, did produce better results in the few Aboriginal schools then operating (Noel Coutts and Inge Kral, pers. comm.). Research, including intergenerational interviews, is currently being undertaken with a small grant from the U.N. to collect better data.

National Benchmark testing regime, instigated by the Federal Government, is carried out by the school without any external moderation or supervision, so that the comparability of its results across schools is open to challenge. A strong argument for ending bilingual education programs has been that *on average* bilingual schools *do not* get better results than non-bilingual schools, but the average hides the range of differences. Since the results from individual schools are not available, we are not in a position to judge if properly functioning bilingual programs produce better, poorer, or the same results as comparable non-bilingual programs, or more importantly, what factors lead to better and worse outcomes (Devlin 1999). Poor ESL teaching is certain to be the major factor. An example was *Kalukatjara* bilingual school, where the best of the students were achieving literacy in Pitjantjatjara on a par with the literacy achieved (in English) in mainstream schools. But those same students were achieving very poor outcomes in English oracy and literacy, because of poor and inconsistent teaching, which did not draw on the students' first language abilities.

It has been implied that 'English only' programs in Aboriginal schools are superior because they are immersion programs. There is no doubt that immersion is the best way to learn another language. I learnt English in this way at age 11 as an immigrant from Holland, not in the classroom but from my Australian playmates in the playground and after school. But English cannot be learnt by immersion in Aboriginal communities, as there is no English speaking community to be immersed in (see §2.1 above), and one English-speaking teacher cannot 'immerse' fifteen to twenty-five students in English in the classroom (see Collins 1999:127–8).

Instruction in English in Aboriginal schools—including schools with a majority of Aboriginal students in towns such as Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, and Borroloola—can successfully begin only after the child has acquired sufficient understanding and fluency. So they need to learn English as a second language partly through the medium of their first language. This has rarely been achieved in Aboriginal schools. The fact is that with a few signal exceptions, English and literacy have not been taught well in Aboriginal classrooms, whether bilingual or English only: English is often not taught at all, it is merely used as the language of instruction.¹⁰ Certainly the teaching of English does not begin from an understanding of the relationship between the students' first language and English (Hoogenraad & Harrison 1999a), and there are very few teachers with expertise in ESL teaching. In fact, very few of the ESL Advisors and ILLS teachers are trained in TESL. There is also no structured ESL program to guide the teacher (Collins 1999:129). Ultimately, the only fully satisfactory solution is to have truly bilingual local Aboriginal ESL-trained teachers who can operate equally effectively in the local language of the community and in standard Australian English; only with such competencies would teachers be able to build on the child's attempts at English.

The contention that the community, not the school, is responsible for language and literacy development in the community's vernacular, and that the education system is only responsible for English and literacy in English, is unreasonable and unjust. In mainstream

¹⁰ There has been one positive development. "Since 1998, the Northern Territory Department of Education has used the Commonwealth-funded ESL ILSS [ESL for Indigenous-Language-Speaking Students] program to provide intensive ESL support to students during their first year of formal schooling." (Collins 1999:27). Collins recommends that "as an immediate measure, NTDE with DETYA [the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs] progressively extend the ESL ILSS program across all primary years" (1999:131).

(English) schools, the community is not held to be solely responsible for the student's development of English, the community's language, nor for teaching English literacy.

5.1.2 *The threat to teacher autonomy*

Nicolas Peterson, an anthropologist who was on the Bilingual Consultative Committee during the 1970s, observes (pers. comm.) that the opposition to bilingual education by teachers (see §3.1 above) often seemed to derive from the threat to their autonomy in the classroom, being posed by having to share it with an Aboriginal assistant teacher teaching in the vernacular.¹¹ Primary school teachers, not trained to team-teach, often new to teaching, and having to deal with an unfamiliar and difficult teaching situation, find themselves having to leave a substantial part of the program in the hands of the assistant teacher, who often has more teaching experience, but no training and poorer literacy. In addition, communication is perforce in English, as the teacher does not speak the vernacular. This puts both at a disadvantage. The teaching assistant has to communicate with the teacher in their second language, leading to miscommunication. The teacher cannot understand what is happening in their classroom when the assistant teacher is communicating with the children in the vernacular. In this situation, unless assistant teachers are particularly strong-minded, they easily become passive participants in the teaching process—'pencil sharpeners' at the back of the room, in charge only of discipline.

This, of course, is not to deny that there have also been instances of dynamic team-teaching, giving assistant teachers the opportunity to acquire the skills of teaching while also providing an exhilarating experience for the non-Aboriginal teacher, who takes on the role of 'teacher-educator' rather than just teacher.

5.2 The proponents

The support of bilingual education appears to be based on the following premises:

- It is the child's right to be educated in their first language.
- It is easier for the child to acquire literacy in their first language, leading to better outcomes in English literacy in the long term.
- The child will learn better if instructed in their first language.
- Bilingual education will assist in the maintenance and possibly even the strengthening of the vernacular.

In addition to the widespread Aboriginal support for bilingual education in the NT (see §4), support also came from teachers and others who had formed close associations with Aboriginal people on remote communities, such as the few long-term teachers and their Aboriginal assistant teachers and their families, and linguists (including Bible translators),

¹¹ The history of institutionalised but unconscious racism in Australia is probably largely responsible for this. There is a parallel in the use of Aboriginal interpreters which supports this assessment. Many professionals, such as lawyers and anthropologists, will not use an interpreter because they cannot understand what the interpreter is saying in the vernacular. They are disturbed by the loss of control and seem to prefer to believe that they are in control of the communication rather than accept that there is miscommunication.

anthropologists, and other researchers working closely with Aboriginal community members. Typically, senior Aboriginal men and women were a vital link, and the relationships that developed were ones of mutual respect, in which each side had a different but complementary role together with complementary knowledge and skills to contribute (Graham 1999). Linguists and many teacher-linguists, because of their long-term commitment and the fact that they worked closely with senior members of the communities, have tended to provide both knowledge about and good relations with communities for the schools concerned.

Many such people made an effort to learn the local language, no mean feat, as these languages are quite different from Western European languages. As a result, they tended to develop a healthy respect for the language and an understanding of just how difficult it is for speakers of the Aboriginal language to learn English. To them it was obvious that it was only sensible to teach bilingually in the local school.

5.2.1 Teaching initial literacy

It is important to realise that literacy in one language, if acquired well, will transfer easily to literacy in another language. All things being equal, the learning of initial literacy is going to be easier in the vernacular, and we know that it will easily transfer to English literacy provided that the student has a reasonable command of spoken English. But it is important to ask what conditions have to be satisfied before 'all things are equal'. There need to be teachers or assistant teachers trained in literacy teaching, who speak the vernacular and are literate in the vernacular, an initial literacy teaching program and materials, and enough interesting vernacular reading matter to support a reading development program throughout primary and secondary education (O'Grady & Hale 1974, recommendations 9, 11, and 13).

If these conditions don't pertain it *may* be better to teach initial literacy in English, after ensuring that the students have a basic grasp of oral English and reasonable sound discrimination and pronunciation skills, although this will delay initial literacy teaching, which is also not desirable (see O'Grady & Hale 1974, recommendations 18–21). Another possibility may be to formally teach initial literacy in both the vernacular and in English, something which happens ad hoc anyway. I do not know of any evidence for or against the efficacy of this.

It was non-local teachers who—with Aboriginal teaching assistants and the very few one- or two-year-trained Aboriginal teachers—enthusiastically began to develop the bilingual programs in the 1970s (Graham 1999; Baarda 1994). These teams had no prior experience of bilingual education, little or no linguistic knowledge about the vernacular, and no experience of teaching literacy—especially initial literacy—in the vernacular. The Aboriginal people involved had acquired literacy in the vernacular by transfer from often imperfect English literacy, and there was no long community tradition of literacy to draw on. As a result, initial literacy acquisition in the vernacular was often seen as a rather difficult process. There is a need now to critically re-evaluate vernacular literacy teaching programs to speed up the process of initial literacy acquisition, and to take advantage of the improving literacy of Aboriginal teachers and the improved range and depth of vernacular reading materials now available.

5.2.2 The languages of instruction

In mainstream schools the language of instruction is English, usually even when teaching a foreign language such as Japanese. In remote Aboriginal 'English only' schools, the language of instruction is usually only English, unless the teaching assistant does some teaching, or in the rare instances when there is a local Aboriginal teacher, in which case the language of instruction is the local vernacular, often interspersed with English. In bilingual programs the situation has tended to be more fluid. The language of instruction is still usually English, but assistant teachers have been much more likely to do quite a lot of the teaching. They, and the trained Aboriginal teachers who are increasingly teaching in these programs, are using the vernacular as the language of instruction, again interspersed with English.

I have discussed the need for Aboriginal teachers and assistant teachers, and the need for their support, in §4 above. If the teacher does not speak the vernacular fluently and there is no assistant teacher present—maybe the assistant teacher is away training—then it is necessary to teach in English. So, in the real world, whatever the theory, the non-local teacher has to compromise in order to teach as the circumstances demand.

6. Conclusions

As I have shown, bilingual education was something new in the 1970s, 'pulling itself up by its own bootstraps'. It was without a tradition and existing expertise to call on. Most importantly, the Aboriginal bilingual teaching force was gaining experience and then undergoing training, and is only now experimenting with how to teach truly bilingually, and with help, developing the necessary curricular tools. As a result, there continues to be a need for ongoing critical self-evaluation, re-evaluation, and critique of bilingual programs—and indeed of Aboriginal education in the NT—particularly of teaching practices and of materials in daily use. There is also an unfilled need for detailed syllabuses for both English and the vernacular, to guide teachers, especially new teachers with no classroom experience in this context. We must proceed on the assumption that Aboriginal teachers will continue to teach bilingually ('two-way'), and that this will spread as more Aboriginal people begin their careers as trained teachers, in more bush schools.

The low levels of literacy, numeracy, and formal schooling in the community (§2 *et passim*), Aboriginal mobility and its effects on attendance (see §3.3 above), and the high teacher turnover demand a radical rethinking of the stages of schooling and how schooling is delivered.

6.1 What might a true 'two-way' program be like?

A sound 'two-way' program in a community where the vernacular is a traditional language would include

- initial literacy and numeracy programs;¹²

¹² In the context of the low levels of literacy, numeracy, and schooling in the community, there is a need for senior storytellers and others in the community to provide an enriched vernacular language and literacy experience for young children prior to formal schooling (see §5.1.1). Community agencies such as old people's programs and child care programs, as well as the preschool program in the school, could jointly develop appropriate strategies.

- a course that develops all aspects of the children's first language, both written and spoken, along with knowledge of their culture (see §4.1);
- an English course that starts with spoken English from preschool, continues to develop English oracy in an appropriate cultural context, and introduces English literacy as soon as the children can distinguish and articulate the sounds of English and display reasonable fluency;
- a program to develop fluent reading and writing in both the vernacular and English.

In a community where the vernacular is Kriol, a further course, or courses, will be needed to revive or extend the children's knowledge of the traditional language(s) if the community wants that (see O'Grady & Hale 1974, recommendation 15).

6.2 How can bilingual or 'two-way' programs be effectively supported?

The courses described above will require detailed syllabuses and inservicing to guide teachers, as there is no long tradition of teaching such courses to draw on. This includes English, which is not currently being taught effectively in most Aboriginal classrooms (see §5.1.1). Such an English course might usefully be built on a contrastive analysis of English and the vernacular, something to which Aboriginal teachers have proved very receptive (Hoogenraad & Harrison 1999a and O'Grady & Hale 1974, recommendation 12). This will require experienced support personnel to work with the staff from all schools in a 'language cluster' (see below), including a teacher with experience in language teaching—ideally experience in teaching English as a foreign language—and a linguist (O'Grady & Hale 1974, recommendation 4).

Potential programs, curriculum, syllabus and materials development, and professional development all require professional support from an experienced language teacher, a language resource advisor (i.e. a teacher-linguist), and a linguist, working in partnership with Aboriginal teachers and community members (see McRae et al. 2000:29). There will also be a need for both local and centralised literature and materials production services. For these initiatives to be most effective and cost-efficient, it is essential to maximise the number of schools that such support staff can collectively service, as otherwise small schools will never get that support.

The Warlpiri schools provide a possible model for organising 'clusters' of schools in language groups, where Aboriginal educators give each other mutual support in conjunction with other professional staff. In Central Australia, such language clusters might include: the Western Desert schools (Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Luritja, and Pintupi), the southern Arandic schools (Eastern, Central, and Western Arrernte), and the northern Arandic schools (Alyawarr, Eastern and Western Anmatyerr, and Kaytetye) (see Map 1 and Table 1). An added advantage of such language clusters is that it maximises the number of Aboriginal and experienced non-Aboriginal staff who can be involved in developmental work. The experience of the Warlpiri schools shows the potency of such cooperation.

6.3 A summary of the major conclusions

In what precedes, I have demonstrated these points:

- Some bilingual programs were only nominally bilingual, and cannot be used to judge the efficacy of bilingual education compared with 'English only' programs.

- Because of the paucity of rigorous independent assessment in Aboriginal schools and the fact that records were not kept, it is not possible to compare the educational outcomes even of functioning bilingual programs with those of non-bilingual or nonfunctioning bilingual programs.
- True bilingual education is similar but not identical to the Aboriginal notion of 'two-way schooling'.
- It is the child's right to be educated in both their own language and in the language of the dominant society, English. Equity and the achievement of local control of education demands that all Aboriginal schools have access to 'two-way' education.
- The limited transfer model of bilingual education used in the NT, which neglected development of and instruction in the child's first language and culture in favour of initial literacy in the vernacular, did not meet Aboriginal educational aspirations and was not true *bilingual* education.
- The development of the daily use of literacy at the community level and the development of functions for vernacular literacy are prerequisites for successful education.
- True bilingual education requires bilingual teachers who are trained in TESL and fluent and literate in both the vernacular and English. The greatest achievement of bilingual education in the NT has been that it is producing a growing cadre of trained bilingual Aboriginal teachers.
- The establishment and development of a bilingual program takes about a decade, subsequent teacher training by Aboriginal people takes a further decade, and the development of a bilingual teaching style and a bilingual curriculum will probably take another decade. All stages of this process require professional educational and linguistic support and a rethinking of the role of non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal schools (O'Grady & Hale 1974).

But above all, I hope to have demonstrated that there is an urgent need for a true dialogue between educators—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—and senior Aboriginal people ('the old people'), to establish the Aboriginal community's real educational goals and plan how an accommodation can be reached to meet both indigenous and mainstream educational needs.

7. To end . . .

I leave the last word to T.G.H. Strehlow, whose father, Carl Strehlow, began bilingual education in Hermannsburg in about 1887:

Above all, let us permit native children to keep their own languages,—those beautiful and expressive tongues, rich in true Australian imagery, charged with poetry and with love for all that is great, ancient and eternal in the continent. There is no need to fear that their own languages will interfere with the learning of English as the common medium of expression for all Australians. In most areas of Australia the natives have been bilingual, probably from time immemorial. Today white Australians are among the few remaining civilized people who still think that knowledge of one language is the normal limit of linguistic achievement. (Strehlow 1958:27, quoted in Hill 1999:163)

APPENDIX: The O'Grady and Hale recommendations, extracted from O'Grady and Hale (1974)

The thread running through the recommendations is a call for local control (quoted in §1 above). The recommendations (which are interspersed with discussion in the report) are these:

1. That bilingual education programs be established as quickly as possible in communities which request them.
2. That bilingual education programs be run on a half-day basis (8.00 to 12.00), at least during the first two or three years of operation.
3. That the Aboriginal base of the bilingual education staff be constantly broadened.
4. That special provision be adopted for the recruitment of non-Aboriginal staff in Bilingual Education programs.
5. That newly recruited non-Aboriginal staff be given time each day for language and culture study.
6. That provisions be made for the temporary replacement of the bilingual education personnel who are on leave for various courses of study.
7. That adult education facilities at the site of each bilingual program be strengthened and that language-related study constitute a regular component within it.
8. That efforts be continued to develop curricula relevant to the needs of each Aboriginal community with emphasis on the use of the Aboriginal language in teaching aspects of these curricula.
9. That efforts be begun as soon as possible to broaden the scope of educational materials in Aboriginal languages.
10. That the principles of Language Engineering be made known on a community-wide basis, so that the conceptual apparatus of the vernacular can be brought as quickly as possible into alignment with the modern world.
11. That efforts be made to solicit from the AIAS linguistic and anthropological research felt by each community to be relevant to the implementation of the Bilingual Program.
12. That the School of Australian Linguistics¹³ be approached about making a feasibility study of the use of linguistics as a means of teaching scientific method in bilingual schools.
13. That a growing library of tape recordings be established in association with each bilingual education program for the purpose of documenting the oral literature and specialised knowledge of the community.
14. That non-Aboriginal linguists (or anthropologists) doing independent research in a given area be encouraged to involve themselves in the establishment, maintenance and broadening of Bilingual Programs.
15. That in multilingual communities, community feeling and the degree of similarity among the various languages be primary factors in determining the precise form of a Bilingual program.

¹³ Usually referred to as SAL. See Black and Breen, this volume, for a history of SAL.

16. That in implementing Bilingual Education in communities where the linguistic usage of adults and children is markedly different, studies be undertaken to determine which variety of language the children feel most comfortable with, and that they be taught in this medium in their initial school experience.
17. That the English-based creole be used in early education in communities where children speak it as their first language.
18. That the introduction of literacy in English be adjusted according to the proficiency of children in vernacular literacy and oral English.
19. That each new bilingual education program seek to provide training in vernacular literacy for all school children enrolled at the inception of the program.
20. That a final orthography should not be viewed as a sine qua non of a bilingual program.
21. That communities with a beginning Bilingual Program be imbued with the slogan, 'Flood the Place with Literature' as a means of encouraging the most rapid and effective attainment of literacy in the vernacular.
22. That Aboriginal communities be encouraged to appoint individuals or committees to draft a Guide to manners for non-Aboriginal teachers entering the Bilingual Program, and that this document be translated into the English language and be made available in the form of a bilingual brochure.
23. That selected high school students resident at the three Colleges (Dhupuma, Kormilda, Yirara)¹⁴ be enabled to offer Aboriginal language instruction to individual students from the local high schools.
24. That previous efforts to explain the nature of Bilingual Education to a wider Australian audience be expanded.
25. That the Department of Education arrange for the production of one or more feature-length films depicting the Bilingual Education program in operation.

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¹⁴ Dhupuma College no longer exists; Kormilda College is now run by the Church of England and is no longer an Aboriginal college, although it currently still takes non-fee-paying Aboriginal students from bush communities; Yirara College is now run by the Lutheran Church.

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