

Indigenous Languages Policy in Australia

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0. Introduction

The Auchmuty report (1970), *The teaching of Asian languages and cultures in Australia* was the result of the work of a government advisory committee, headed by Professor JJ Auchmuty. Chapter two of the report dealt with the rationale for Australian interest in Asia and noted the political, economic, trade, business, cultural and social reasons why Australia needed to reappraise its traditional attitudes towards Asia. (Auchmuty 1970:11-20) (Henderson 2011)

The recommendations of the Galbally Report of 1978 became the basis for government policies for migrant services over the next decade. While this led to a number of improvements (more Grant-in-Aid workers, ethnic schools, English language tuition and translation services, better communication and information, Migrant Resource Centers, the setting up in 1980 of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) for research and policy advice, the extension of ethnic television task force), inadequacies remained. Furthermore, it resulted in intense competition between groups for limited government funding. Diana Batzias and Michael Liffman, Community Educator from 1977, were instrumental in developing both written and practical responses to the Report

and also to refugee ‘crisis’ at this time. (Langfield 1996)

Regarding indigenous languages in education in Australia, Joseph Lo Bianco(2010) reviewed it and described the policies as “40 Years of Policy Upon Policy”. Till 1967 Aboriginals were not considered as Australian citizens and could not vote. Many Aboriginals were rounded up and put on reservation or missions. Every aspect of their life was controlled by a superintendent who was always white. He supervised their whole lives. When the government began to deal with multiculturalism, they put Aboriginals in the same basket.

1. LOTE (Languages Other Than English) vs. Aboriginal Languages

In 1982, the Department of Education investigated the condition of language education at schools and submitted the report *Towards a National Language Policy* to the parliament. It led to the establishment of the Standing Committee on Education and Arts in the Senate. This committee collected a huge quantity of data and materials, however, the report did not influence the establishment of the first national language policy directly. So Joseph Lo Bianco who was required to re-investigate by the parliament, published the first national language policy of Australia in 1987. Furthermore, the second report called *Australia’s Language* came out in 1991. This report recognized the need to support ESD which means English Second Dialect which is a close cousin to ESL. Regarding LOTE, National Collaborative Curriculum Development identified it as one of key subject areas.

According to Clyne (1994), the irony was that Australian Aboriginal Languages had to struggle to find a place in the LOTE program. So this is an example of multiculturalism and LOTE versus Aboriginal Australia. The whole idea of LOTE was based on European and Asian languages as opposed to involving Aboriginal languages.

Priority languages

The NPL (National Policy on Languages) identified nine languages, reflecting a balance of regional, community and broader international interests, as ‘languages of wider teaching’: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Modern Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. The ASC (Asian Studies Council) promoted seven languages, including Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian as ‘first tier languages’ and Hindi, Korean and Vietnamese as ‘second tier languages’.

State and Territory language policies have all identified priority languages, which will receive the bulk of support in schools, or have articulated criteria underlying support for particular languages. Criteria include the status of the language in terms of its global, regional, and/or national or domestic importance. The following languages are priorities in State and Territory language policies: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island languages, Arabic, Auslan (Australian Sign Language), Chinese, Croatian, French, German, Indonesian/Malaysian, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Modern Greek, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish and Vietnamese. Of course, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian and Japanese are priority languages in all States and Territories. In addition, Italian, Modern Greek, Arabic and Spanish have special significance in all or most States.

(4.8.1, Australia’s Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy, Companion Volume to the Policy Paper, Minister for Employment, Education and Training, August 1991)

The School Language Program (SLP) is based on the Australian Language and Literacy Policy embodied in the White Paper ‘*Australia’s Language*’. The program promotes the development of language skills through support for programs in languages other than English, including support for professional

development of language teachers.

There are two elements in the School Language Program:

- 1) The Priority Languages Incentive Element which provides support for provision of course of study in languages other than English;
- 2) The Community Languages Element which provides support for the teaching of languages other than English by providing funding for education programs in community languages.

Priority Languages Incentive Element (PLIE) grants are available to schools of educational institutions in respect of students who completed an accredited Year 12 course in a declared priority language in their State in the previous year. Schools or educational institutions must be eligible to receive general recurrent funding in order to be eligible for PLIE grants. Every year State Ministers with responsibility for education declare eight priority languages for their State from the following list of fourteen:

Aboriginal languages, Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese.

In 1992, a total of some A\$5.4m was paid Australia wide by the Commonwealth under PLIE in respect of 10 of these 14 languages. No grants were paid in respect of Aboriginal languages, Russian, Korean or Thai. These four languages were either not declared in 1993, or had no eligible students in 1992, in any State or Territory in Australia.

2. The most recent report on supporting indigenous language programs in schools

- 1) The Government recently commissioned the *Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools – A Way Forward* report, which revealed that between 2006 and 2007 over 16,000 Indigenous students and 13,000 non-Indigenous students located in 260 Australian schools were involved in indigenous language programs, covering over 80 different Indigenous languages.
- 2) Significant funding for languages education is being provided to the states and territories through the National Education Agreement for languages, allowing jurisdictions flexibility to determine how funding is allocated. Funding can be used to support and maintain Indigenous language programs operating in government schools.
- 3) \$56.4m is also being provided over 2009 to 2012 through the *Schools Assistance Act 2008* to support the teaching of languages, including Australian Indigenous languages, in non-government schools.
- 4) Several jurisdictions are currently establishing programs to strengthen the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in schools, including a proposal by New South Wales to develop national senior secondary Indigenous courses.

(Garret and Macklin 2011)

3. National Curriculum

In terms of Aboriginal studies, National Curriculum says that children should have an Aboriginal perspective in their studies of Australian history. It would help teachers who perhaps would be teaching in an area where the parents or headmaster were racist. It would give these teachers ammunition to fight case to teach the subject. The teacher could say that “the national guidelines say” or

that “the Federal policy is” and they could also say that it is important to make Australia a culturally rich nation. Another good points are that as people move from state to state in search for jobs their children will not be penalized by having to move to a new school system. Otherwise their children will be disadvantaged from having to change schools and curriculum. (Diorio 1994)

The following is what Garret and Macklin (2011) report on the recent development of National Curriculum and National Attention;

National Curriculum

- 1) The National Curriculum is being developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, initially in English, mathematics, science and history. A second phase of subject areas will be developed in languages, geography and the arts.
- 2) Indigenous perspectives will be written into the National Curriculum to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and respect the language and culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait islanders.

National Attention

- 1) Undertake a feasibility study for the National Indigenous Languages Centre recommended by the NILS (National Indigenous Languages Survey) Report.
- 2) Increase public recognition and appreciation of Indigenous languages by expanding the use of these languages across public and government functions.
- 3) Support greater coordination and assistance amongst Indigenous language centres to maximize their impact nationally and to teach languages not currently supported.

4. The Two-Way Learning Program in the Northern Territory

The government is also putting bilingual education back on the agenda. It is another important teaching methodology, with some initial evidence that results from bilingual appeared generally better than other like schools. More evidence is being collected and evaluated. The program will be discussed within the community engagement process, not imposed on communities, and given its resource – heavy nature will be carefully rolled out. ... Where people see the importance and relevance of sending children to school, regular attendance should follow. Our support of bilingual education will also demonstrate to some communities our commitment to valuing an indigenous contribution to education that should act in itself to improve attendance. (Hon Syd Stirling MLA Minister for Employment, Education & Training, NT Hansard Part 1 – Debates – Wednesday 24 August 2005 Debates – Tenth Assembly, First Session – 16 / 08/ 2005 – Parliamentary record No. 2)

Bilingual education is a formal model of dual language use where students' first language is used as a language for learning across the curriculum, while at the same time they are learning to use English as a second language for learning across the curriculum. (NT Department of Employment, Education and Training Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006 – 2009)

Bubb(2008) indicates the 8 aims of the program:

Aims 1 - 4: (For Student Learning.)

- 1) To use two languages in a structured program to promote students' thinking and learning across all learning areas from the beginning of school so that by the end of the Primary years of schooling, students can access the wider curriculum through English with effective ESL teaching, whilst maintaining L1 as a language for learning.

- 2) To develop and assess student learning, in line with the NTCF outcomes and Senior Secondary pathways, to the level required access further training and education, and to function competently in the local and wider Australian community, in
 - English
 - Numeracy
 - Indigenous Languages
 - Inter – cultural learning across all learning areas.
- 3) To develop a more positive self concept in each student through systematic, planned use of the Indigenous language as well as English as a medium of instruction, and the study of Indigenous knowledge.
- 4) To develop students’ learning – how – to – learn skills in both languages and cultures in a school context.

Aims 5 – 8: (For Whole School – Community Learning)

- 5) To develop closer communication, involvement and mutual understanding between the school and community it serves.
- 6) To facilitate in students and their parents, a positive attitude towards education and school attendance.
- 7) To promote the development of teaching skills, teaching responsibility and formal educational leadership in Indigenous staff.
- 8) To develop a better understanding, among staff and students, of both cultures – that of the Indigenous people themselves and of the non – Indigenous societies.

5. Conclusion

The Aboriginals in the city and the desert are still modern people, they are not traditional Aboriginals. These people probably need to find a middle way somewhere. The benefits of modern life like good housing and having a job

etc is beneficial but they also need some aspects from their own culture. So Aboriginals are in a transition period. In Australia they also have a bigger group of non – Aboriginal people who are becoming more interested in Aboriginal culture. This is good for Aboriginal people who are only 2.5 % of the population and it is true to say that a number of Aboriginal people are gaining control of their own affairs. The situation will change fundamentally for Aboriginal people when the majority of non – Aboriginal people see the issues clearly. So Government and educators need Aboriginal children to stay in the education system longer and see non- Aboriginal people learn more about Aboriginal issues and culture.

- The final estimated resident Indigenous population of Australia as at 30 June 2006 was 517,000 people, or 2.5 % of the total Australian population. Among the indigenous population in 2006, 463,700 or 90 % were estimated as being of Aboriginal origin only, 33,3000 or 6 % were of Torres Strait Islander origin only, and 20,100 or 4 % were of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. (2006 Census of Population)

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