

Indigenous Languages and Culture in Northern Territory Schools Report 2004 - 2005

Executive Summary



DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NORTHERN TERRITORY

Foreword

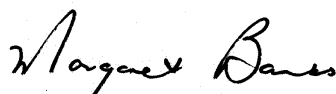
The *Indigenous Languages and Culture in Northern Territory Schools* report highlights that there are many examples of excellent Indigenous languages and culture programs being delivered in schools throughout the Northern Territory in urban, rural and remote settings.

The teaching of Indigenous languages and culture in our schools is important for two reasons:

Firstly, there is irresistible evidence to show that when the home languages and cultures of students are reflected in their learning experiences and learning environments, students achieve better levels of learning. We owe it to our Indigenous students, who constitute forty percent of our student population, to provide the best possible standard of education we can, to ensure participation and achievement outcomes for Indigenous students continue to improve.

Secondly, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people of today are fundamental to the Northern Territory's future social and economic vitality and wellbeing. Schools are rightfully a place to assist all young people to gain intercultural understandings that will provide the foundations of mutual respect among our diverse communities.

The implementation of the recommendations of this report will ensure that all students in Northern Territory schools have access to relevant and high quality Indigenous languages and culture programs. I look forward to working with educators and school communities to progress the recommendations of the report and to promote and celebrate the Northern Territory's distinctive and rich cultural heritage.



Margaret Banks

Chief Executive, Department of Employment, Education and Training

COVER: HUNTING FOR TURTLE, CULTURE STUDIES, MANINGRIDA CEC, NORTHERN TERRITORY 2004.
Rexine Taylor, Leanne Gaykamangu, Polly-Anne Rankin, Sherong Byrnes-Ankin, Nicola James.
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BACKGROUND

The Indigenous Languages and Culture in NT Schools Review commenced in September 2003 in response to recommendations from the *Learning Lessons* report (Collins, 1999)¹. In particular the review responded to the recommendations that Indigenous perspectives should be strengthened in all Northern Territory (NT) schools and high-quality curriculum material, providing an understanding of Australian Indigenous languages and culture, should be made available to schools. The *Learning Lessons* report noted that while system policies that support Indigenous languages and culture programs exist; they are not actively or consistently applied at a system or school level. The *Learning Lessons* report also made recommendations about the Two Way Learning Program including the establishment of system policy to support it.

Since the commencement of this review there has been an imperative set by the NT Government to have an increased focus on Indigenous languages and culture programs in Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) schools and ‘put bilingual education back on the agenda’ (Ministerial Statement, 24 August 2005).

REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Indigenous Languages and Culture in NT Schools Review was tasked to deliver a document to Executive Group that:

- describes the continuum of Indigenous languages and culture activity in NT schools including a resource and funding index,
- summarises the views of DEET personnel and school staff regarding access to, and appropriateness of languages and culture resources,
- provides findings and recommendations regarding future directions for the range of Indigenous languages and culture programs in NT schools,
- provides findings and recommendations regarding future directions for the Two Way Learning program, and
- develops a draft NT government policy to guide the development and delivery of Indigenous languages and culture initiatives and programs in all NT schools.

¹ In particular the review addressed the following recommendations: 106, 107 and 108, and in relation to Two Way Learning, 100 and 102. The full recommendations are at Appendix A.

DATA GATHERING, METHODS AND OUTCOMES

The Indigenous Languages and Culture in NT Schools Review collected evidence using the following methodologies.

1. Twenty-eight NT schools and educational institutions were consulted. Seventy-one percent of school consultations were with remote schools. General Managers Schools and Indigenous Education Portfolio Principals made school selections. Of the twenty-eight schools chosen for consultations, all fourteen government and non-government Two Way Learning / Bilingual Education schools were included. A further eighteen schools were selected based on a range of criteria that included:
 - cross representation including urban, regional and remote, and primary and secondary schools that were likely to demonstrate good practice in the development of Indigenous languages and culture programs and initiatives, and
 - schools that received Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) Indigenous language and culture funds.
2. Telephone surveys were conducted with all NT Government and non-government schools to gather information on the type of programs operating in the schools.
3. The following eight key stakeholders were interviewed:
 - Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages,
 - NT Education Advisory Council,
 - Department of Education, Science and Training,
 - Council of Government School Organisations,
 - Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee,
 - Australian Education Union,
 - DEET Two Way Learning staff, and
 - School parents, guardians and community members, with a particular focus on Indigenous communities at the Two Way Learning schools.
4. Two external consultants were employed to provide evidence based reports on:
 - A survey of Two Way Learning in the NT with evidence based examples of best local and international practice, and
 - An analysis of Indigenous languages and culture programs and initiatives in NT schools.

The information provided in the two consultant reports has been embedded in this review².

² A comprehensive description of the review methodology, including the schools that participated in the consultations, can be found in Appendix B: Background to the Review.

DEFINITIONS OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The review took a broad view of the implementation of Indigenous languages and culture programs and initiatives in schools. The review explored Indigenous languages and culture as a program area, a teaching context, a methodology, and as an integrated perspective in relation to the key curriculum areas. It also considered the importance of incorporating Indigenous cultural symbols in the physical environment of schools to raise the awareness and status of Indigenous languages and cultures relevant to the local school community.

For the purpose of the review, *Indigenous* refers to Australian Indigenous populations, and particularly the Indigenous peoples of the NT. This contrasts with the use of *Indigenous* in the curriculum context; 'Indigenous Studies' is a core element of compulsory curriculum in the NT. Indigenous in this curriculum context refers non-specifically to Indigenous peoples globally. The report recognises and refers to the diversity of the languages and cultures of the Indigenous peoples of the NT.

TWO WAY LEARNING

The review was tasked to investigate the Two Way Learning Program in NT schools and make recommendations for the future of the program. The Two Way Learning Program is the current manifestation of the original Bilingual Program that was introduced into the NT in 1973.

At the broadest level, bilingual education can be described as a method of teaching that uses two languages as the medium of instruction. Two way learning has been used synonymously in the NT to describe a variety of bilingual education programs, giving rise to some confusion. Two way learning is not synonymous with bilingual education but one of many possible bilingual approaches.

While there are four bilingual models that have been implemented in the NT, including two way learning, the bilingual approach most commonly implemented is the step model, where students are taught in their local vernacular and are introduced to English oracy and literacy over the first years of schooling (Devlin, 2004).

Bilingual education is informed by the view that the initial attainment of literacy skills in a student's first language will lead to greater success in the acquisition of second language proficiency (Devlin, 2004). Bilingual education is also an important means of maintaining and revitalising non-mainstream languages and cultures.

In 2004 the Two Way Learning Program in the NT provided eleven bilingual programs in ten DEET schools. There are additionally three remote Catholic schools and one Independent school in the NT that provided bilingual programs.

While the review conducted a preliminary examination of the data in regard to the efficacy of the bilingual approach in NT schools, particularly in relation to the education gains in English literacy, a full evaluation of the approach was not within the scope of this review.

The review explored the need to develop specific policies, practices, guidelines and methodologies for bilingual education, to support the program and strengthen its sustainability into the future.

FINDINGS

1. *Indigenous languages and culture in the NT education context*

- 1.1 Education research suggests that students demonstrate improved learning outcomes when there is connection between the home and school cultures.
- 1.2 In 2004 ninety-seven percent of all schools in the NT provide some form of Indigenous language and culture programming, and forty-seven percent of schools provide regular, weekly curriculum programs.
- 1.3 One of the barriers to teaching Indigenous languages and culture in schools is the inadequacy of definitions of language and culture, and what constitutes authentic and appropriate curriculum.
- 1.4 NT schools are using the NT Curriculum Framework (NTCF) as a basis for their language and culture programs.

2. *Policy, guidelines and reporting*

- 2.1 The NT Board Of Studies (NTBOS) policy statements – *1998 Australian Indigenous Languages Policy and Guidelines, Transition – Year 12*, and the *1997 Australian Indigenous Studies Curriculum Policy and Implementation Guidelines, Transition to Year 12* – describe goals rather than actions and, as a consequence, there is no requirement for schools to adopt the policy.
- 2.2 There are different levels of awareness and understanding in schools about the policies relating to Indigenous languages and culture studies, including the current NTBOS policies. This can be attributed to the fact that these policies are not made widely available to schools and are out of date in relation to current curriculum policy.
- 2.3 The WA Aboriginal Education Strategy provides a relevant reporting model that could inform the development of accountability measures for DEET schools.
- 2.4 Schools want guidelines, including case study examples, for the implementation of Indigenous languages and culture courses. There is a significant body of materials being developed in Curriculum Services Branch that will contribute to the development of guidelines.
- 2.5 There is scope to request a variety of Indigenous languages and culture data information through School Annual Reports.

3. *Resources for Indigenous languages and culture programs*

- 3.1 The four main sources of funding for Indigenous languages and culture programs are derived from Australian Government supplementary funding sources. NT Government funds are provided to support the Two Way Learning Program. (Finding 4.4 refers.)
- 3.2 The only funds available to schools that are identified specifically for Indigenous languages and culture programs are Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) funding. These funds can only be directed to Indigenous students. There are no identified sources of funds for Indigenous languages and culture programs for non-Indigenous students.

- 3.3 Eight NT schools have made local arrangements to get assistance from two community based language centres to provide language programs at a total cost of \$48,000. These community based language centres provide expertise that is otherwise problematic to resource.
- 3.4 There were forty-seven Indigenous languages being taught in NT schools in 2004. Funds available to schools as grants for Indigenous languages and culture programs are limited. The \$300,000 that was available through the Australian Government's IESIP in 2004 represents a twenty-three percent decrease in the amount dedicated to Indigenous languages and culture programs since 2000, at which time the amount was \$385,000. In addition to this, schools can also direct other sources of supplementary funding to the development of languages and culture programs.
- 3.5 Schools would like more transparency in the submission process for Indigenous languages and culture grants. Schools would like more information about available funding sources for Indigenous languages and culture programs.
- 3.6 Although schools are developing some excellent resources, and there are many instances where the focus of the teaching programs is similar, resource sharing between schools is rare. Fifty percent of educators expressed a view that it would be beneficial to have access to information about current languages and culture activity across NT schools.
- 3.7 Fifty-seven percent of stakeholders said the priority need, in terms of resources, was the provision of professional development for Indigenous teaching support staff.
- 3.8 The current submission-based process for accessing the IESIP Indigenous languages and culture grants is not designed to encourage collaboration between schools.
- 3.9 DEET does not have ongoing staff positions to support Indigenous languages and culture programs.

4. Two Way Learning and Bilingual Education Programs in the NT

- 4.1 Two Way Learning and Bilingual Education Programs have been operating in the NT since 1973. Since DEET's 1998 review of school education in the NT, and subsequent changes to the then Bilingual Education Program, the number of DEET schools offering the program has declined from sixteen to ten schools with two programs operating concurrently in one of the schools.
- 4.2 The renaming of the 'Bilingual Program' to the 'Two Way Learning Program' in 1998 has created ambiguity, as the approach most schools are taking does not reflect the two way learning theory or methodology. Changes to the program since this time have also resulted in bilingual education being increasingly marginalised in DEET.
- 4.3 Smaller Two Way Learning schools have struggled to sustain viable bilingual programs despite arrangements to support these schools through resource sharing with larger and better equipped Two Way Learning schools.
- 4.4 The total cost of the Two Way Learning Program in 2004 (not including bilingual programs in non-government schools) was \$3.14M. This amount includes all staffing and operational funds

to schools and DEET system support costs. School based literature production centres produce Indigenous language classroom materials that cannot be sourced commercially. Some schools are under-resourced in terms of access to literature production centres. Overall, Two Way Learning schools reported above establishment staff, funding and resources of the program were essential to the functioning of the program.

- 4.5 There have been a number of studies, both in the NT and internationally, that provide evidence for the premise that bilingual education programs achieve higher levels of outcomes, including literacy outcomes in the mainstream language, than non-bilingual programs in similar settings. The review is able to provide preliminary and provisional data to confirm that outcomes for students participating in bilingual education programs in the NT are marginally better than for students in 'like' non-bilingual schools. While the numbers involved do not provide statistical validity, the trends are interesting. It is important to note that like schools were not selected on a resourcing comparison, but on demographic criteria. Overall the Two Way Learning schools' teaching and teaching support staffing levels are twenty percent greater than the like schools.
- 4.6 The Two Way Learning Program and previous Bilingual Education Program have been the catalyst for significant capacity building endeavours with ninety percent of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education teacher graduates coming from the (then) Bilingual schools. More recently there has been a considerable decline in the numbers of trained Indigenous teachers.
- 4.7 The three Language Resource Officers that support Two Way Learning schools perform different roles depending on their individual skill sets and are not all providing support to schools on a needs basis.
- 4.8 The Two Way Learning Program needs to be improved, especially at the system level. While in principle Two Way Learning schools have to meet the requirements of a review in order to maintain their program status and funding, to date schools have not had their accreditation withdrawn simply because of an inability to meet the Two Way Learning review process. In addition, the support that is being provided to the Two Way Learning schools by the Two Way Learning support team can differ across regions, and is not well aligned to the needs of schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Indigenous Languages and Culture in the NT Education Context*

- 1.1 Support a greater focus on Indigenous languages and culture programs in NT schools in order to:
 - (a) improve Indigenous student education outcomes, preserve cultural identities and promote cultural diversity through culturally appropriate and relevant learning, and the maintenance and revitalisation of Indigenous languages and culture,
 - (b) improve awareness and promote understandings between communities by providing Indigenous languages and culture programs for non-Indigenous students, and
 - (c) increase the level of engagement of Indigenous communities with their schools and increase opportunities and pathways for Indigenous employment in education.
- 1.2 Include Indigenous languages and culture in the terms of reference of the forthcoming NTCF review to examine the adequacy of current curriculum offerings to provide the framework for focused and consistent programs relating to NT and Australian Indigenous peoples.

2. *Policy, Guidelines, Monitoring and Reporting*

- 2.1 Develop a revised *NT Indigenous Languages and Culture Policy* in consultation with education providers and key stakeholders. The revised policy should provide a clear definition of Indigenous languages and culture in relation to programs appropriate for schools and relevance to the Indigenous peoples of the NT, ensure the provision of Indigenous languages and/or culture programs in all NT schools and build on current NTCF policy. On completion, the draft policy is to be presented for endorsement to the NTBOS.
- 2.2 Introduce a new *NT Indigenous Languages and Culture Policy* to be rolled out in 2007, with full implementation for all DEET schools in 2008.
- 2.3 Develop guidelines for schools that assist them to implement Indigenous languages and culture programs. Guidelines should contain examples of contemporary, local, best practice programs for a range of contexts and include resources to help schools develop effective team teaching practices and develop quality programs.
- 2.4 Update DEET schools' reporting requirements to ensure they are compliant with policy. Schools to report implementation actions of the *NT Indigenous Languages and Culture Policy* in their School Annual Reports, as of 2008, including: information about Indigenous languages and culture programs, teaching methodologies, community involvement and control, assessment strategies, and parent, student and teacher perception information.
- 2.5 Indigenous languages programs are to be designed and implemented in consultation with the local Indigenous community.
- 2.6 Develop and implement a strategy for communicating and promoting the revised policy, guidelines and reporting requirements to schools.

3. *Resourcing Indigenous Languages and Culture in the NT*

- 3.1 Increase the funds directed to DEET school-based Indigenous languages and culture programs and initiatives with a significant funding pool from core funds – to supplement IESIP funds that are tagged for this purpose – in order to increase funds available for Indigenous languages and culture programs and to make funds available for non-Indigenous students.
- 3.2 Develop guidelines for eligibility and targeting of funds that are available for Indigenous languages and culture programs.
- 3.3 Develop a funding distribution model that allows for the:
 - (a) greatest amount of collaboration possible between schools,
 - (b) transparency of funds distribution and provides information about programs that are funded, and
 - (c) targeting of resources to areas of greatest need in consideration of the range of resources that are available.
- 3.4 Conduct a range of activities to foster the sharing of great ideas and encourage excellence by:
 - (a) sharing presentations from principals and teaching staff of Indigenous languages and culture programs and initiatives being implemented in schools, along with evidence of outcomes, by each of the clusters at Indigenous Education Portfolio Principals meetings, and ensure that this information is available for educators and school communities throughout the NT,
 - (b) publishing a list and description of Indigenous languages and culture projects that are being developed in DEET schools on the DEET schools' intranet, and
 - (c) celebrating schools' achievements to foster best practice delivery models.
- 3.5 Investigate appropriate courses, career pathways and funding options for non-Indigenous and Indigenous teachers, and teacher support officers, to up-skill in the delivery of Indigenous languages and culture programs. Include relevant courses on the priority list for approved student status.
- 3.6 At the end of the current IESIP funding period in 2008, provide NT Government funds to ensure that the three positions in Curriculum Services will be ongoing in order to support schools to implement the *NT Indigenous Languages and Culture Policy and Guidelines* through the following activities:
 - (a) curriculum support for schools in the implementation of the Indigenous Languages and Culture component of the NTCF,
 - (b) strategic coordination of all Indigenous language and culture projects,
 - (c) annual publication of Indigenous language and culture projects and contact information for schools,
 - (d) facilitation and delivery of professional learning in curriculum planning, design, development, delivery and assessment, and
 - (e) management of Indigenous languages and culture materials on *Explore NT*.

4. *Two Way Learning and Bilingual Education Programs in the NT*

- 4.1 The Ministerial Statement, 24 August 2005, made clear the intention of the government to put 'bilingual education back on the agenda'. In line with government policy it is recommended to rename the Two Way Learning Program the Bilingual Education Program and require that the Bilingual Education Program models adopted by schools be either the step bilingual model, or the 50/50 bilingual model – with schools and communities to have the discretion to adopt their preferred model.
- 4.2 Mainstream the program into Curriculum Services Branch and give it the status of other major literacy initiatives undertaken by DEET.
- 4.3 In order to maintain the current number of Two Way Learning schools as a minimum, commit ongoing funds for the Two Way Learning Program to current levels, in real terms, to:
 - (a) maintain provision for eleven DEET funded Two Way Learning programs (there are an existing eleven programs currently operating at ten schools),
 - (b) develop a criteria that can be used as part of a process for the selection of new schools into the program, subject to the availability of funds, based on evidence of:
 - availability of local resources required to implement a bilingual approach,
 - community support for the program, and
 - (c) redistribute funds to new schools in the event that an existing Two Way Learning school has accreditation withdrawn, or voluntarily withdraws, from the program.
- 4.4 Investigate a range of models to provide teaching and learning resources and professional learning support to Two Way Learning schools including alternative ways to meet the functions and outputs of the literature production centres.
- 4.5 Prioritise bilingual education to be the focus of a rigorous research program to investigate variable factors that impact on bilingual program success including: pedagogy, resource levels, and whole-of-school, system-supported approach. Use evidence from the research to make investment decisions for the future of bilingual education in the NT. Research should aim to create a greater level of understanding, across the system, of effective bilingual methodologies and the process of implementing the bilingual program successfully.
- 4.6 Define pathways and target incentive programs for the training of Indigenous vernacular speakers to increase the numbers of teachers – particularly in communities with Two Way Learning schools.
- 4.7 Collect data on the professional support needs of the teaching staff in Two Way Learning schools and address these needs through the activities of the Two Way Learning support team. Include consideration to provide a comprehensive induction program for principals, teachers and assistant teachers.
- 4.8 Develop an online program handbook that includes the following: definitions, rationale, policy and guidelines of endorsed bilingual models; rationale for the implementation of the bilingual approach (to improve students' English literacy outcomes), definitions of principals' and teachers' roles specific to the requirements of the bilingual program, and, requirements for

schools to report to parents.

- 4.9 Redesign the accreditation process so processes are streamlined to have maximum impact for school improvement, but where possible, minimum administrative requirements for schools.
- 4.10 Analysed achievement data for students in Two Way Learning schools to be reported to DEET Executive on an annual basis.