Coming to Terms with Diversity:
Educational Responses to Linguistic Plurality in Australia
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Introduction

Australia's isolation as an island continent made it, for upwards of 40,000 years, an extraordinarily favourable environment for the development of a unique and diverse Indigenous language ecology. In more recent times, it was described by Professor Michael Clyne (1985) as a "meeting place of languages." Ironically, it is known today to many as one of the places where the linguistic inheritance of the past has been most rapidly lost (Lo Bianco 1999) and by far the greatest part of its investment in language is to support one variety of one language: Standard Australian English.

With the coming of the English language to Australia in 1788 linguistic plurality became, for the first time, a problematic issue. Intermittently since then Australians have resorted to a succession of policy initiatives to deal in one way or another with the discomforting fact that not everybody uses English.

For years, the effectiveness of the domination exercised by the English speaking majority, combined with the remoteness and isolation of the continent meant that the neglect of other languages went largely unrecognized. The Australia into which I was born seemed to be, in the perception of most of its inhabitants, a monolingual country. My family and my friends in the early years were nearly all monolingual. I did find a French word book and dictionary among my father's books, but the language was never used. In these years it was unexceptional for the word "home" to be used to refer to the United Kingdom, and Australians, always great travellers during their long service leave, rarely headed for destinations other than those where their English language could serve them well. I began my schooling in state schools in the mid forties. It was unthinkable that languages might be included in primary education (they were too academic for primary children to be able to learn), but when I entered high school, in one class out of eight (selected on the basis of academic merit) in the second year (that is, the year one turned 14) one might have a chance to take French. It was around this time I remember that increasing numbers of native speakers of other languages were starting to appear among my classmates: Greeks, Italians, Germans, Dutch. It was still only the early fifties but Australia was in a process of change.

I proceeded from junior to senior high school, and the school I was now in taught *two* languages: French and German. However, it was in vain that I pleaded with the school authorities to let me drop one of my weaker subjects and take a second language. The rule 'one language, one science' meant either French and Physics or German and Chemistry.

Time passed. I went to university and trained as a French teacher. At this stage, universities did not teach languages from beginner level, so my repertoire of languages other than English remained one. I became a teacher of French and general subjects in a high school. Time passed and I was interested in promotion, but I reached another impasse. The only promotional position for language teachers was Senior Master of Languages, and I had only one language.By this time, universities were offering languages to beginners, so I went back

to university and started learning German. At this point I was lost to the school system. I took a position in a teachers' college, and have remained in higher education ever since. Shortly after this, (it was now the mid-sixties) I was selected to go interstate to learn another language which, it had now been decided, was relevant to the education system: Indonesian. Suddenly, it seems the initiative had come from the state education system, and not myself, to extend my knowledge of languages: Australia was really changing.

Now as I look back, I can see that the various impacts on my early life were part of the process of the movement of Australia from a self-perception as homogeneous to a self-perception as increasingly diverse. The movement is still going on, and sometimes it seems to ebb and flow. What I would like to do here is to document that flow, moving from the point of view of the individual to that of the observer of wider policy making, and then to select a few themes for slightly closer attention.

Brian Bullivant, writing in 1995, discussed what he called the "evolution of pluralist ideologies and language programs" in Australia. He identified four stages in this evolution:

1. *Assimilation and Anglo-conformism*
2. *Utopian and pragmatic multiculturalism*
3. *Pluralism in crisis*
4. *Neo-multiculturalism.*

I feel obliged, in the light of developments since Bullivant was writing, to add a fifth stage: *The challenge of Anglo-centric literacy*, which seems to me to characterize the predominant emphasis of the present time, although this, like all the other labels, would be a generalization which would not be fully sustainable.

I'd like to use these headings as a frame for my survey of policies, though my focus will be limited to the implications of these successive influences for education. (It should be noted that the responsibility for education is not unified in Australia. State governments are responsible for school education, though they may receive special purpose grants from the Federal Government. The Federal Government has direct responsibility for higher education. Where state issues are involved, my focus will be on Western Australia).

Assimilation and Anglo-conformism

Bullivant sees this stage as covering the period prior to 1973, that is prior to the coming to power of the Whitlam Labor government which suddenly put multiculturalism on the agenda. It includes the period 1945-1969, described by Lo Bianco (1990) as "laissez-faire", a period when there was no government intervention to support either the systematic development of mother tongues other than English or the teaching of ESL to children, although the increasing presence of non-English speaking immigrants led to the introduction of the Adult Migrant Education Program in 1948, whereby, albeit with assimilationist intentions, Adult migrants were guaranteed English access.

Dennis Ager (2001) in his recently published book on *Motivation in Language Planning and Language Policy*, has traced multilingualism and language policy in Australia right back to the time of the first European settlement in 1788. Not only was it a multilingual Australia that the British came to (with perhaps 250 or more distinct languages being spoken by the Indigenous people) but there was an infusion of languages other than English into Australia even among the members of the first fleet. Arthur Phillip himself, the first

Governor of New South Wales, came from a bilingual German and English background (Ager 2001:96).

For more than a century after the founding of the first colony, despite the obvious dominance of English, other languages, except for Aboriginal languages, had a recognized place in colonial life. Indeed, Ager (2001:96) reports that there were by the year 1900 at least 100 bilingual schools operating in the country. The early years of the 20th century were, however, to see an increasingly Anglo-centric attitude. From the time of the first World War, German was banned, place-names were changed and English-only attitudes began to prevail. This was to affect my own family. Although I cannot remember meeting him, I had a German grandfather on my father's side, but it was not his name but that of his Scottish wife that was to be passed on to his descendants. After the second World War, by which time I was at school, languages other than English had no place in primary schools though they existed as an academic option for elite students at secondary level. However, the society was changing and schools would slowly change with it. Ager has pointed out,

> "… It took the second World War before the fear of population decline, added to fear of Japan and compounded by the pressing need for manpower to reconstruct the country and enable industrial growth, led to a deliberate search for immigrants. A mass immigration policy was inevitable. … Equally inevitably immigration could not come solely from Britain. Immigrants would be 'displaced persons', refugees at first from northern Europe but thereafter from eastern and southern Europe." (Ager 2001:97)

So I found myself in the 1950s learning languages at school alongside European immigrants some of whom had French as their third language. The growing presence of people like this in Australian society, and their assumptions about education and languages, would help to bring about a new language awareness in Australia.

There were still, however, limits to the Australian tolerance of linguistic and cultural diversity. As Ager (2001:97) notes, "Immigration from Asia or the Pacific was not so much discouraged as actively prevented. The White Australia policy, supported by all the political parties and by public opinion, lasted until 1966." The White Australia policy did, then, change by the mid-sixties, and so, though painfully slowly, did the status of Aboriginal people and their languages. Indigenous languages had been outside the educational system (except in certain non-Government missions), as were, indeed most Indigenous people. In 1967 there was a referendum to enable the Australian constitution to be changed so that the federal government might legislate on behalf of Aborigines. The Australian population voted 10-1 in favour of this change and federal initiatives started to increase the educational opportunities for Aboriginal students, but still on the basis of assimilationist principles, where education took little or no account of existing Aboriginal knowledge. As the 1960s came to an end, there was a growing groundswell of concern for the language rights of non-English speakers and, through the Australian Linguistic Society (formed in 1967 under the name "Linguistic Society of Australia") there was the first of a growing number of academic fora to lend support to such community concerns.

Utopianism and Pragmatic Multiculturalism

The Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Government was a colourful Spanish Australian, Al Grassby, known for his eye-catching suits and garish ties. Indeed, at the opening of parliament on the 28th February 1973 he appeared in a purple suit and lace cuffs

(The Age, 9th May 2001). Grassby became a passionate advocate of multilingualism and multiculturalism. He stressed that the languages that had been brought to Australia were a national resource and he lent his support to professional associations supporting the teaching of languages. The idea of language rights was taken up within migrant communities and Ethnic Communities Councils became powerful lobby groups. Migrant services improved. From 1973 there was a government-sponsored Telephone Interpreter Service and from 1978 a Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) to provide for the needs of ethnic groups in radio and television. There was a new emphasis on the teaching of languages, including migrant languages, in universities and in schools. As Uldo Ozolins (1993:135) has noted, the Schools Commission – the main educational advisory body to the federal government – produced a report in 1975 which stressed the multicultural rather than assimilationist basis of education:

> "(1) Migrant children must receive 'a full range of educational experience and not merely instruction in English'
>
> (2) issues of language and cultural diversity were not of concern to migrant children alone, and the 'multicultural reality of Australian society' should be reflected in school curricula, staffing and organization."

There was still strong resistance to the idea that anyone could be educated by medium of a language other than English. Reporting on his recollections of this time the Minister for Education in the Whitlam Government, Kim Beazley, senior, noted his discovery "that the State of Western Australia had a law that if any people conducted a school in a language other than English they would be fined thousands of dollars for EVERY DAY they did it" (Beazley 1999:5). Visiting Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory, Beazley noted a marked difference between the responsiveness of the students in a mission school where they were being taught in their own language and the government schools, where they were not. He therefore proposed that the Government legislate that Aboriginal students in Northern Territory Schools (over which the federal government had direct jurisdiction) should be able to be taught in their own languages where their parents so desired. Thus came into existence the Northern Territory Bilingual Education program, which, within two years, was operating in 22 different Aboriginal languages (Beazley 1999:5). This program operated until 1999 when the Northern Territory Government closed it down, despite widespread protests from Aboriginal and academic communities. We shall return to this matter later.

In 1977 the Liberal Prime Minister who had succeeded Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, established under Frank Galbally, a retired lawyer (not, as incorrectly reported by Ager (2001:98), a government minister), a Committee of Inquiry into Post-Arrival Services for Migrants. The Galbally Report, published in numerous languages in 1978 ushered in what Bullivant calls "pragmatic multiculturalism" and provided a dramatic boost to the teaching of what were now called "community languages" at all levels. "Less commonly taught community languages" (such as Vietnamese, Portuguese, Macedonian, Hungarian and many others), under Government sponsorship, started to be taught in universities on the assumption that they would enable appropriate recognition to be given to the prior knowledge of migrant students, and also strengthen multiculturalism by extending the knowledge of community languages among Anglo Australians. There were also short courses established for professionals, especially medical personnel, to help them in

communicating with their non-English speaking clients. With moves to professionalize interpreting services, diploma and degree courses in interpreting and translating in a wide range of languages started to proliferate in tertiary institutions.

The teaching of community languages in schools was encouraged in the interests of social harmony (Lo Bianco 1990) and the range of languages in the school system increased. A further significant boost was on the way. The combined efforts of ethnic communities and professional associations led to the Australian Senate setting up in 1983 a committee to "inquire and report upon: *the development and implementation of a co-ordinated language policy for Australia*" (Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, 1984:x). The committee consulted widely, receiving many hundreds of submissions, both oral and written, from individuals and groups across Australia. The report which it produced was of historic significance, in terms of its comprehensiveness and provided a model which was influential beyond Australia. It had 117 recommendations in 14 groups, covering not only language teaching but language services, Aboriginal language maintenance, libraries, adult illiteracy and many other areas. With respect to language teaching, it recognized the unique place of English and the need to teach it well as a first and second language. With respect to languages other than English it gave support to bilingual education, primary and secondary school language programs and tertiary programs, in all of which areas it recommended expansion. It also recommended further investigation of adult literacy needs and extended efforts in the maintenance and teaching of Aboriginal languages.

Initiatives in language teaching were further extended through support from Multicultural Education Advisory Committees (MEACs) attached to the Education Departments in each state. In Western Australia I was called upon to chair a group commissioned by the local MEAC to carry out the state's first "comprehensive and systematic study of the teaching of languages other than English at primary level" . The report which resulted from this investigation (Jenkins 1986) noted that there were already language programs in 42% of the State's primary schools, embracing 38 different languages, but many of the programs were operating after school hours or during the weekends, or were staffed by itinerant teachers from secondary schools. It was clear that 75% of parents surveyed, and 95% of bilingual parents, considered that languages other than English should be a part of a general primary education, the preferred languages being Italian, French, Japanese and German.

In 1986 the Minister for Education in Western Australia, Bob Pearce, commissioned a Ministerial Working Party to produce a language policy for the schools K-12 throughout the State, and again I (together with Susan Kaldor) was called upon the Chair the committee. Similar bodies were commissioned in other states. The Western Australian committee produced its report in 1988 (Kaldor and Malcolm 1988), with 92 recommendations for the improvement and extension of language teaching in primary, secondary and ethnic schools. There were also 14 recommendations relating to the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools. The report eventually led to the development by the Education Department of a 10 year Strategic Plan for the teaching of Languages Other than English, with a view to ensuring they are available to all students. The Strategic plan was based on a fourfold rationale for languages in the school curriculum: educational, cultural, vocational/economic and personal (Ministry of Education, Western Australia 1990).

In the meantime, the federal Minister for Education, Susan Ryan, in responding to the Report of the Senate Standing Committee, had commissioned Joseph Lo Bianco to write a fully explicit and costed language policy on the basis of that report for her to present to Parliament. Thus, the Australian National Policy on Languages came into existence, on the basis of Lo Bianco's report (Lo Bianco 1987), in 1987.

Lo Bianco had set four broad social goals for languages in education: equality (social justice), economics (foreign trade and vocations), enrichment (cultural and intellectual) and external (Australia's role in the region and the world), and he had provided a simple, but wide-ranging policy framework for language in education:

> English for all
> A Language Other Than English for All
> Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

The policy incorporated expansion of the ESL program and a two-year campaign to improve adult literacy. (See further Lo Bianco 1987, 1990). In addition to its educational provisions, it made comprehensive provision for equitable language services affecting non-English speakers and the hearing impaired in all areas of public life.

The National Policy on Languages was fully funded for three years up to 1991, including the funding of the National Language Institute of Australia which was to be a focus and coordinating centre for research. At last, it seemed, Australia had come to terms in a serious way with its linguistic diversity. As Moore (2000:27) puts it,

> "In the Australian context, these aspirations were thoroughly pluralist. They proposed that the multiplicity of languages in Australia offered unique opportunities to develop a dynamic society. Although English was acknowledged as the indisputable language of public life and was therefore seen as an important linguistic resource, it was framed as one language among many others."

But the ebb and flow in Australia's recognition of its plural identity was to continue.

Pluralism in Crisis

Although we did not know it then, the decade of the 80s marked the high point in the development of a community-supported policy on broad-based language education. Economic and social circumstances were to change and there was to be a backlash against the expending of public resources on the support of multicultural ideals. One of the sources of dissent came from within the academic community, where Geoffrey Blainey, a Professor of History from Melbourne University, publicly attacked immigration and multiculturalism. Seven areas of criticism of the multicultural multicultural policies which the Government had adopted have been summarised by Ozolins (1993, chapter 6):

1. Multiculturalism was seen as promoted by the Left in an attempt to exacerbate social divisions for their own ends.
2. Multiculturalism was seen as an attempt at social engineering which went against the wishes of the Anglo majority and the ethnic population as well.
3. Multiculturalism would entrench ethnic differences.
4. Multiculturalism was only created to win ethnic votes.
5. Community language teaching in schools was regressive.
6. Multiculturalism was a 'growth industry'.

7. Favouring Asian immigration would destroy Australia's cultural distinctiveness and could cause racial stress.

Already, before the end of the 80s, despite the funding of the National Policy on Languages, support for other programs which had dated back to the Galbally Report was drying up.

In 1987 a new Labor government came to power and set in place a Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). The minister in charge of this department, John Dawkins, took advantage of the period of review of the National Policy on Languages to institute certain so called "extensions" to it, which in fact demonstrated a retreat from the policy's recognition of pluralism. It seems clear that Dawkins saw the emphasis on languages and multiculturalism as somewhat partisan and was seeking an area of language-related need which might command wider support within the electorate. He produced a Green Paper for public discussion on the topic "The Language of Australia" in which he argued for a move to an "Australian Language and Literacy Policy" as the successor to the Australian Policy on Languages. The foregrounding of literacy, which meant literacy in standard English, and the removal of the plural from "Languages" did not go unnoticed. There was a strong reaction of protest from supporters of multiculturalism. Ozolins (1993:252) remarks that the document "probably marks the nadir of Australian language policy in recent years." According to Moore (2000:47), the discussion paper "generated unprecdented opposition, including 340 submissions written over 3 months, 2 of which were the Christmas/summer break. No submission favouring the ALLP was ever identified (Clyne 1991)."

The Green Paper re-emerged in 1991 as the White Paper, with many changes in response to the submissons which had been received. However, the shift from "Languages" to "Language and Literacy" remained and the emphasis of new Government funding since that time has continued to be strongly in the direction of standard English literacy.

One of the foremost critics of the Dawkins initiatives has been Helen Moore, formerly a lecturer at La Trobe University and now a research scholar at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. In a recent paper she has quoted from John Dawkins' speech in which he launched the Australian Language and Literacy Policy as the successor to the National Policy on Languages and attempted to show how it was supplanting pluralism with Anglo-centrism. The section of the speech quoted by Moore reads as follows:

> "This policy brings together a number of strands of policy which have been separately administered, separately put together in the past and now this is our attempt to try and make a coherent whole out of these various strands of policy and various programs. And the starting point is that Australia is a nation of many cultures but Australia has but one national language, that being Australian English. Despite the fact that that's a fairly uncontroversial statement, it remains the case that many Australians do not read and write English very well and many Australians do not even speak it. And that has, of course, enormous implications for those individuals in terms of their ability to participate in the education and training system and, perhaps as much as anything, their ability to participate in the wider life of the nation including its democratic institutions. (Dawkins 1991:1)" (Moore 2000:31).

Here is Moore's analysis of the contrasts between Dawkins' ALLP and Lo Bianco's NLP:

Perspective	NPL	ALLP
Expressed in title	*National Policy on Languages.* Uses pluralist 'languages'.	*Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy.* Strengthens nationalistic theme; displaces pluralist 'languages' by ambiguous 'language' (either English or language in general).
Language goals	Committed to broad, pluralist goals; developed from a consensus-building process among diverse groups	Claims to make separate 'policy strands' 'a coherent whole'; nominates priorities as literacy, assessment, and designated 'foreign' languages; aims for ministerial and bureaucratic control.
Language and culture	Treats languages and cultures as irretrievably interlinked	Contrasts Australia's 'one national language' with its 'many cultures, thus separating language from culture, and erasing the many languages associated with the 'many cultures.'
Language speakers	Proposes all Australians as knowers and learners of languages, distinguishing the paths by which different languages (and associated literacies) are developed.	Frames the main issue as lack of English; groups those who 'do not read and write English very well' with those 'who do not even speak it', thus conflating English literacy with second language development, and erasing literacies in other languages. Frames all language other than English as 'foreign', i.e. separate from and alien to 'Australians'.
Importance of different languages	Articulates multiple values for languages; focuses on the potential of languages as 'resources' in a number of ways.	Foregrounds English and Asian languages; ties English literacy to education, training and employment; views not 'speaking' English as a threat to democracy; ties Asian languages to trade. Generalizes and obscures the role of different languages by mythologizing the instrumental value of some (but not specifying what is included as 'Asian'), obliterating others and demonizing the consequences of lack of English.

Moore argues that the shift from the so-called extension of the National Policy on Languages to become the Australian Language and Literacy policy has actually resulted in a succession of retrogressive policy implementations. To quote her again,

"The ALLP's main function was to eliminate the inclusiveness of the NPL by prioritizing 'literacy', assessment and 'foreign' languages. The actual (p. 33) document provides an interesting example of an explicitly designated language policy that is largely inexplicit about the actual policy developments that followed its release. These included cuts to immigration quotas; course fees for intending immigrants tested as having less than 'survival' English; a radical change in the basis for funding adult ESL programs; the near-elimination of child and adult ESL education as a policy, funding and curriculum category through its conflation with literacy…, cuts in school ESL programs due to States/Territories' diverting funds to off-set

their overall reduced federal grants…; and a decline in work on Aboriginal languages…" (Moore 2000:32).

"…the NPL named linguistic and cultural diversity as a social good that policy-making would develop towards cultural, economic, social justice and foreign policy goals. The NPL ran headlong into political processes that constructed plurality as a problem." (Moore 2000:41).

Neo-Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism remains a bipartisan policy of the Federal Government, but it is multiculturalism within the constraints of economic downturn. For Moore (2000:44) the shift represents a move in the direction of "corporate managerialist processes and economic rationalist policies [in which] DEET [the Department of Employment, Education and Training] [has] renamed its realities in terms of 'accountablility' and training in 'competencies.'" Bullivant puts another position, arguing that "utopian" multiculturalism promised more than it could deliver. Multicultural education in schools did not, as it promised, reduce prejudice and discrimination. Community language programs in higher education did not attract customers from either the ethnic or the monolingual Australian community and they ceased to be offered. The promise of empowerment of ethnic communities though having their languages in higher education was not realized. As Bullivant (1995:180) put it, empowerment will not come from "outmoded egalitarian cliches that are dysfunctional for economic improvement." Translating and interpreting programs in higher education vastly exceeded what the demand from the client communities could support and were progressively phased out. Demand for community languages at school level declined in favour of languages, like Japanese, which were perceived to be of more potential economic and vocational relevance.

In the 90s a further threat to the multicultural ideal came with the emergence of Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party. With the entry of Pauline Hanson to the Australian Senate in 1996, according to Michael Clyne (1998:10), "a type of discourse sometimes associated with the country pub or with certain Sydney talkback announcers entered the more general public domain." Rather than the language of *inclusion*, which characterizes multiculturalism, Hanson, according to Clyne, depended on the language of *exclusion*, with such comments as:

"…this is an English-speaking country" (Clyne 1998:3)
[with reference to refugees] "if their situation has changed, we must look at
locating themselves back in their own countries" (Clyne 1998:3)
[with reference to Aborigines] "…Aboriginality allows them to claim a share of the booty of the native title scam as well as various other publicly funded perks
not available to other Australians" (Clyne 1998:3, quoted from *The Age*, 4th June 1998).

The "One Nation" ideal, as I see it, offers an apparent unity at the expense of Australia's reality. It presents an approach to nationalism based on conformity to one group rather than representativeness of all, an approach to communication based on recognition of one language rather than achievement of cross-linguistic understanding and acceptance, an approach to immigration based on exclusion of difference rather than acceptance of an international role in harbouring refugees from injustice, an approach to Indigenous people which stops short at equal treatment rather than equity.

Despite her enormous appeal to the media, the Australian electorate voted Hanson and her party's Senate representatives out of office. She still represents a segment of the population, but some of the key provisions of multiculturalism are still in place, including Language Australia (the renamed National Language Institute of Australia), the recognition in all states of Languages Other than English as one of the eight key learning areas in schools, and significant initiatives in the area of Aboriginal language maintenance. Language teaching has, indeed, experienced something of a revolution it its recognition as a key curriculum area, and its guidance by outcome statements, profiles and pointers developed for all school levels in all states on the basis of national and cross-sectoral cooperation.

Still, though, the rhetoric on multiculturalism has been muted and public spokespersons seem to have the spectre of Pauline Hanson haunting them when they talk about pluralism, often needing to qualify it by talking about native Australian values at the same time. Lo Bianco, in referring to this tendency in the 1997 report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council, described it as "a curious struggle to specify shared values, in assuaging a nagging nativism in the electorate" (Lo Bianco 1998:6).

Late in 2001, with a federal election looming, immigration emerged as a key issue. The Howard Government had been taking an increasingly hard line against the refugees who had been arriving in Australia principally from the Middle East and Afghanistan by way of Indonesia, with the help of people smugglers. A boatload of such persons was rescued by the Norwegian ship Tampa and the Howard Government refused to allow them to be landed on Australian territory, earning thereby a good deal of international opprobrium but at the same time the sympathy of many Australian voters.

Howard's Liberal Government was duly re-elected, but since that time it has been apparent that a significant proportion of the Australian community was aggrieved at the unwelcoming attitude the majority of the population, and the major political parties, had been taking to the plight of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers, forced to wait in inhospitable parts of the country for indefinite periods while their claims were being checked, resorted repeatedly to hunger strikes and violent protests. At the time of writing the public demonstrations against the mandatory detention of such person have been growing in number and intensity. It is clear that Australians remain divided on the issue of what kind of people should be admitted to their shores, and on what terms.

The Challenge of Anglo-centric Literacy

The change which has taken place since the period when multiculturalism was generally in favour is described by Bullivant (1995:179) as a move from individual empowerment to macroempowerment, in response to the recognized need to lift the performance of Australia in a highly competitive global environment. Standard English, and standard English literacy, the putative endpoints of education for the real world, have taken the whole focus, too often to the exclusion of a recognition of the importance of the linguistic starting points which different learners bring to the educational experience. Literacy expert Brian Cambourne (1997) has argued bitterly that the "literacy crisis" which the former Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, the Hon. David Kemp, talked about in Parliament in support of his policies is a "con".

So saying, I must add that there is always room for action to improve literacy in Australia, and much good work is going on. Adult literacy had long been neglected and has been

brought in from the margins (Plimer 1993:8). And there are many exciting new developments in approaches to literacy, including recognition of community literacies, biliteracy (Lotherington 1998), critical literacy (Lohrey 1998) and new approaches to intervention (e.g. Meiers 2000), as well as the multiliteracies pedagogy of the New London Group (New London Group 1996).

Indigenous Issues

Finally, I would like to return to a couple of issues with respect to Indigenous education.

The situation of Indigenous languages in Australia represents one of the most blameworthy aspects of the European occupation. Lo Bianco (1999) has estimated that over 40,000 years of Aboriginal occupation of Australia it took, perhaps the first 8,000 years for 250 distinctive languages to develop. These were maintained over the successive 32,000 years, then, within 200 years of European settlement, all but 20 of them ceased to be strong enough to be passed on to future generations.

Alongside some of the multicultural developments I have referred to there have also been some initiatives at bringing Indigenous languages more fully into the education system. One noteworthy initiative, called the Australian Indigenous Languages Framework, took place within the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia. This program was aimed at the final two years of secondary school and had two components: an Australian Languages Component, which gave students a general picture of Indigenous languages in Australia, how they are used and how they relate to their speakers, and a Target Language(s) Component which provided instruction in a specific language or languages, relevant to the region of the school. (See further Amery 1993).

Because of the parlous state of Indigenous languages in Australia, the Target Language program has had to be provided in six different program types:

1. Second language (for speakers with no prior knowledge).
2. First language maintenance (for first language speakers).
3. Language revitalization (for languages now spoken only by a few older people).
4. Language renewal (for languages no longer spoken 'right through').
5. Language reclamation (for languages where there is little remaining linguistic heritage)
6. Language awareness (where language loss has been severe and documentation is poor).

This programme with attractive resources is available to learners across Australia.

In the light of the enormous effort that is involved in seeking to reverse language shift, one might have thought that every existing program that had the potential to support Indigenous language maintenance might be welcomed and strengthened. However in the Northern Territory this has not been the case. The enlightened decision to enable Aboriginal children to be educated by medium of their own languages, if their parents so desired, which I referred to earlier, which had been put in place by the Federal Government in 1973, was reversed on the authority of the Northern Territory Government in 1999. The reason given for this decision was, that it would help the students achieve equality with other Australians in standard English. Sadly, as Lo Bianco has ruefully pointed out (1999:6), those responsible for implementing a National Language and Literacy Policy of which an important plank is the maintenance of Indigenous languages, have acted according to "a perverse notion of equality that is premised on schooling making children forget what they

know, become alienated from their families and backgrounds and …achieve less than they might."

Just as there has been a backlash against multicultural policies there has been an increasingly vocal opposition in Australia to policies based on a recognition of the value of Indigenous cultural traditions. This came to a head in 2001 through the publication of articles in major capital city newspapers referring to the ideas of a former Sydney University anthropologist, Roger Sandall, who had published a book entlitled *The Culture Cult*, in which it is argued that the "cult" of undiscriminating and unbalanced endorsement of Aboriginal cultural traditions on the part of non-Aboriginal Australian policy makers has worked against Aboriginal people and locked them into unrealistic expectations with respect to their education and their opportunities for future advancement. A vigorous exchange of letters by e-mail on this topic arose among members of the Australian Linguistic Society. In one, Nick Thieberger, quoted an extract from Sandall's writing which he saw as "intended to provoke":

> "If your traditional way of life has no alphabet, no writing, no books, and no libraries, and yet you are continually told that you have a culture that is rich, complex and sophisticated, how can you realistically see your place in the scheme of things?" (Thieberger 2001).

Other contributors to the debate have cited examples of major linguistic projects intended to support Aboriginal language maintenance, carried out under the direction of non-Aboriginal linguists, which Aboriginal people themselves saw as of little relevance to them. There have also been references to the apparently ambiguous results of bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory and of the frustration of Aboriginal people that, with or without bilingual education, their children have not been achieving the standard of English literacy that they will require for the world in which they will need to survive.

While some have seen Sandall's views as "incredibly damagaging" (Bishop 2001), "[un]measured" (Thieberger 2001) and as telling us "more about the author than anything else" (Thieberger 2001), the general view seems to be that the opening up of this area for debate is better than the maintenance of what Sandall has called "the mandatory silence imposed by the Culture Cult" (Thieberger 2001).

The key issue, as I see it, is that it is for Aboriginal people to decide the relevance of their culture to the modern world, and that it is the responsibility of non-Aboriginal people to ensure that all other options are made realistically available to them.

Education, when it is administered to Indigenous people on a paternalistic, white-man-knows-best basis, is always fatally flawed, because the white man does not know from the inside the cultural inheritance of the Indigenous people or its value.

It is this principle that has lain behind the work that my colleagues and I at Edith Cowan University have been doing in Aboriginal English and bidialectal education over a number of years, always with Indigenous and non-Indigenous investigators working side by side, learning from one another. As we have worked together in the long term we have become increasingly convinced that neither culture is dispensable for Aboriginal people, even those in the most urbanised settings, and that the first step towards acceptance of what a new culture can offer is the assurance that one's existing culture is being recognized and not contested. Dr Martin Nakata (1999:3), an Indigenous academic and Director of the Aboriginal Research Institute in the University of South Australia, wrote recently of

Indigenous Australians: "we are not 'Other'. We are at the centre of our own lives and our own history, and we need to give primacy to that position." I would like to make this my last word. Until mainstream Australians will afford their Indigenous fellows, along with all those who differ from the mainstream, the right to *be*, without being "other", there will be no resolution to the problems which lie in the way of their implementation of the literacy policies they have set themselves.

Acknowledgment

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