

Deadly ways to learn project, 2000. *Deadly ways to learn*. Two books and two videos. Deadly Ways to Learn Consortium, East Perth. ISBN 0 7307 39147, SCIS No. 1005894.

Koenigsberg, Patricia, Glenys Collard, 2002. *Ways of being, ways of talk*. Book and four videos . Department of Education, Western Australia. ISBN 0 7707 3998 8.

Cheedy, Ned, Jane Cheedy, 2001. *Olive python dreaming*. Roeburne Primary School, Roeburne, WA. ISBN 1-877049-00-3.

Reviewed by Gerhard Leitner, Berlin

Aboriginal school education is a widely discussed issue and needs no special treatment to introduce the three books under review here. But I will add that in terms of language three approaches have been in use, *viz.* (various methods of) bilingual teaching with an indigenous language and mAusE, (various methods of) contrastive or bidialectal teaching involving Aboriginal English (AborE) and mAusE, and a clear shift to the sole use of (standard) mainstream Australian English (mAusE) – sometimes mixed with a recognition of the language background of students. The use of any of these primary types depends, of course, on the region in which Aboriginal students go to school. In areas where Aboriginal languages are no longer usable as vehicles of communication, a bilingual approach is not viable. What can be done is a kind of heritage and other, minor programs. Bidialectal teaching is used in areas where Aboriginal students speak AborE as their first or sole dialect of English. While these approaches differ in many ways, they all agree that mAusE is the language or variety to be acquired to enable students to fully participate in mainstream Australians.

AborE is a very different ethnic dialect of mAusE in terms of pronunciation, lexis, grammar, semantics and rules of communication. It incorporates speech patterns of indigenous languages even in areas where the latter are not, or no longer, used. Given the extent of differences from mAusE, indigenous Australians may suffer gross disadvantage as both teachers and children may be unable to explain the sources of the problems. Add to that the general climate of mis-understanding, it is clear that Aboriginal education is marred with problems. A number of methods have been developed or adapted to the situation such as remedial teaching, contrastive analysis, error analysis, etc., with little success. The third type of approach mentioned above amounts to a radical step, i.e. to discourage the use of the home language(s) –indigenous or AborE or – altogether and to request a sudden and complete shift to mAusE from day one. That policy is often attributed to policies of suppression but it can be found as considered solutions by Aboriginal educators themselves. The Aboriginal Independent Community Schools, for instance, has developed a teaching methodology called *scaffolding*, that works on that principle.

The books under review pursue different approaches. The first two focus on a bi-dialectal approach with the use of AborE, the third one includes an indigenous language. The first two and the videos have been produced for the English at schools in Western Australia with a high proportion of indigenous students. They derive from the research done by and under the guidance of Ian Malcolm at Edith-Cowan-University (Perth), whose aim it was to project due recognition of the differences between mAusE and AborE and to translate the insights gained into appropriate teaching methods. A closely related objective is that learning should not be directed only at the acquisition of what is necessary in mainstream society (one-way

teaching) but what is necessary in Aboriginal contexts (two-way teaching). A bi-dialectal and two-way learning approach, thus, provide the basis of these resource materials. They have been developed and tested by joint non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal research teams, were funded and published in conjunction with the Education Department of Western Australia, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, and others. The materials are used widely in teacher-in-service training around the state and collaboration is on-going with other states.

Deadly ways to learn uses the AborE word *deadly* for 'cool, great, etc.' that aims to reflect on past and current practices, to propagate the basic concepts, and to provide ample illustrations and actual materials for use in classrooms. It includes a methodological booklet entitled *Deadly ideas* which contains a broad, practical survey of teaching issues such as "teaching about language", "teaching through language" and "teaching language", etc. Since programs must respond to the state's curriculum frameworks (see reviews below), an appendix shows how *Deadly ways to learn* does that. The second booklet *Deadly yarns* contains reports by teachers and others who have used the concept and/or report on particular issues like the relationship of AborE with Aboriginal culture. Two videos, *Deadly teaching* and *Talking deadly*, have video clips from classroom teaching and additional discussion points. The materials are highly motivating and engage teachers easily in reflective debate.

Ways of being, ways of talk was done in collaboration with ABC TV and is intended to "provide viewers with vital information on Aboriginal English and its use within the wider community and to debunk the myth that Aboriginal English is a deficient way of speaking. They will assist in providing a better understanding of how Aboriginal English and Australian English differ, on the basis of their differing histories and associated underlying conceptualisations" (booklet, p 7). The first part of the booklet contains information tied to the video clips, the second one has background on a number of themes, such as the change of the communicative ecology from one based on indigenous to one based on introduced sources, moving into between the two worlds, etc. Again, it brings home easily how different AborE is from mAusE and what needs to be done to overcome intercultural miscommunication and to include both sides in fruitful interaction.

Olive python dreaming, a small booklet produced by Aboriginal children, resulted from a Year 5 and 6 project about the olive python story by Ned Cheedy. It is essentially a picture book whose text is in in Yindjibarndi, a language taught at Roeburne, AborE and mAusE. On that contrastive basis it is easy and fascinating to make students and readers alike aware of the differences between these codes that can all be mastered by Aboriginal students. Being the result of action, it shows what can be done with stories, songs and other cultural texts to involve students and to produce something of interest to a much wider audience. It easily creates awareness and respect for different ways of speaking.

The books and videos provide a rich source of background, application and a discussion of learning issues of Aboriginal students as a part of the mainstream system. They do, by implication, inform that system of the internal diversity of its students. All books are highly relevant for Australianists and especially for those with a background in education and minority groups.