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Multilingual learning in and out of school in remote indigenous Australia

Since the 1970s, many Indigenous Australians have been advocating for recognition and inclusion of their languages, language backgrounds, cultures and identities in school settings, to revitalise and maintain language and cultural knowledge and to take an active role in the education of their children. The contexts for languages in schools are diverse. Bilingual education programmes in Indigenous languages and English began during a period of enormous education innovation and engagement, though most were relatively short lived. Across the country in urban, rural and remote settings, 'part-time' programmes have operated, while others have emerged as components of community language revitalisation projects. In separate states and territories, policies and curricula have been formulated. Now a national curriculum for Australian languages is under development with the potential for expansion of languages teaching. In remote parts of Australia Indigenous students have complex and dynamic language repertoires and the potential for multilingual learning is striking.

This symposium brings together educators, practitioners, researchers and academics working in remote Indigenous Australia to explore some of the latest developments in policy, practice and projects fostering multilingual education, language maintenance and linguistic diversity.

The Aboriginal Child Language Acquisition project has gathered child language data from settings across Australia. It draws implications related to best practice and policy responses to the diverse set of English language learners. One important response to the multilingual context in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia was the Bilingual Education Programme. Established in 1973 with eight core goals spanning English and first language literacy, conceptual development, language maintenance and community development, the programme ran in some 26 schools before its closure in 2008. A small set of NT schools continue to teach in and through students' first language, despite ever-increasing pressures associated with national benchmarking programmes. National testing results were given as grounds for closure of the programme in 2008; however, appraisal of the academic outcomes, along with the wider goals of the programme, provides a window for reflection on past and current education policy and practice. In the Warlpiri schools in Central Australia for example, with the help of new technologies, the Warlpiri curriculum and associated teaching resources are being consolidated and made more accessible, promoting the continuation of a Warlpiri–English programme.

New and innovative ways to teach, learn and promote language and cultural knowledge have emerged. The Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages, for instance, is providing electronic access to Indigenous text materials created in the Bilingual Education Programme and other sites. We also look outside of schools, where communities and various partners are working in innovative ways to support multilingual teaching and learning beyond the narrow education policy space. Such multilingual affordances emerge in collaborations on Caring for Country, arts-based and technology projects. Overall, digital technologies play an increasingly important role in language maintenance and education.

Group: *Bilingual/immersion education, Sector: Primary*

Symposium Papers

Vaughan, Jill (University of Melbourne, j.vaughan@unimelb.edu.au)

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Codes and classrooms in four Aboriginal communities

In Aboriginal Australia, children typically enter school with a wide range of linguistic codes and are usually expected to adjust to the Standard Australian, English-dominant environment of the classroom. This paper presents insights from four Aboriginal communities in Central and Northern Australia – communities which represent diverse language ecologies and which exemplify the sociolinguistic variation that typifies Aboriginal Australia. We first consider the linguistic codes that children in each of these communities use at home, and how these 'pattern' onto expected code-use in the classroom. We further discuss the effect of children's linguistic repertoires on their ability to participate effectively in the classroom, and the key issues faced by children in each community during and beyond this transition. This research provides a clearer picture of the ways in which the child's linguistic repertoire (which may include acrolectal/basilectal creoles, mixed languages, traditional languages) impacts on language behaviour and integration in the school environment.

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Oldfield, Nancy (Yuendumu School, Nancy.Oldfield@ntschoools.net)

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Gibson, Fiona (Warlpiri Education and Training Trust)

Warlpiri educators from the four Warlpiri schools

Teaching our culture – the Warlpiri theme cycle

For over 30 years, Warlpiri educators, elders and community members in four Central Australian Schools have been developing a Warlpiri curriculum, or theme cycle, as part of the Bilingual Programme. The curriculum cycle is divided into 12 themes, important areas of Warlpiri culture and knowledge. It is a three-year cycle, and as the cycle goes round, children learn about each theme at their level and then return to the same theme after three years to further develop their knowledge. In 2013 we created the electronic database 'Warlpiri Pina-jarrinjaku', designed around the Warlpiri curriculum cycle. Here, teaching materials, over 600 objects (books and songs in Warlpiri, handbooks, units of works and lessons) are safe kept, shared and updated across the four remote schools, Yuendumu, Willowra, Nyirripi and Lajamanu. Keeping our resources safe and having a strong curriculum with the new database is important for our programme.

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Northern Territory bilingual education program – evaluation criteria, evidence & legacy

The Northern Territory Bilingual Education Programme began in 1973 and sparked a period of remarkable creativity, educational engagement and innovation. The programme set out a long and ambitious list of goals, which increasingly came to be shaped by the Indigenous practitioners and leaders in schools. The goals included language, literacy and numeracy outcomes, conceptual learning, language and cultural maintenance, community development and Indigenous leadership. In 2008 the Northern Territory government drew on national literacy and numeracy testing results to declare the programme a failure and to justify withdrawing support. Yet there were a number of systemic problems with its evidence and appraisal. Analysis of the evidence of academic outcomes, as well as recognition of the broader criteria in line with the programme goals, provides insight into the complexities, achievements, and future for the Bilingual Programme.

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New life for indigenous language materials

Thousands of resources in dozens of Australian Indigenous languages are finding new digital life online through the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages (www.cdu.edu.au/laal). Many of these resources were developed in bilingual school programmes in remote schools across the Northern Territory over several decades, and more materials continue to be added from other communities and languages. The affordances of such a wealth of written and illustrated texts in these endangered languages are still emerging, as opportunities are created for teachers, students and researchers to engage with authentic texts. The potential for revitalisation of language and language materials in the communities of origin is an important outcome, especially as students begin to produce e-books, sound files and animations of their ancestral stories. The texts also have value more widely, in fields such as linguistics, anthropology, corpus analysis, multimedia and education.

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Multilingual affordances in remote Australian communities

Many schools in remote Indigenous communities have had, or continue to operate, Bilingual Education programmes and Indigenous Language and Culture programmes; however, collaborations with partners outside of schools are providing new affordances for multilingual teaching and learning. The burgeoning domains of digital technology, cultural and land management embrace and enhance local knowledge in remote contexts and programmes in these areas are linking with schools. Here educators and community members, through collaborations, are finding and occupying spaces that allow innovative language and cultural teaching and learning practices. To provide a

framework to explore these dynamics and recent developments, such as the pending introduction of the national curriculum for Australian languages, the paper casts an ethnographic lens on education policy and practice and examines impacts and the local responses.