

PUBLIC FORUM

THURSDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2010

Indigenous languages in education

Do current policies match our needs?

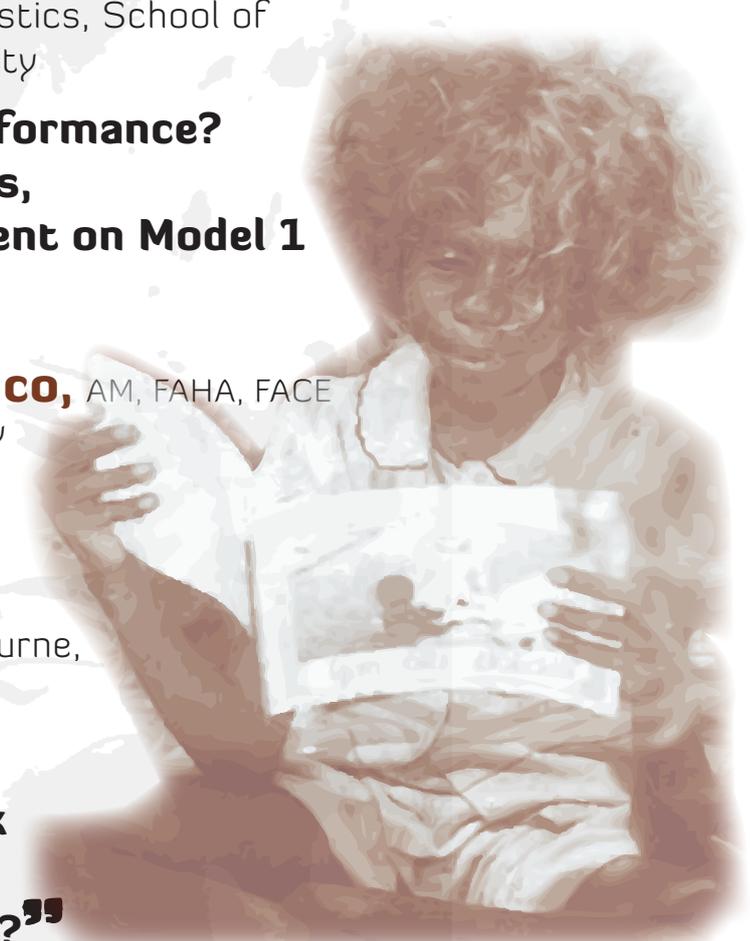
Speakers:

- 1 **Dr Brian Devlin**, JP, FACE, Associate Professor, Bilingual Education & Applied Linguistics, School of Education, Charles Darwin University

“Evidence? Achievement? Performance?
Official data from My Schools,
Government and NT Parliament on Model 1
(Step) bilingual programs”

- 2 **Professor Joseph Lo Bianco**, AM, FAHA, FACE
Professor of Language and Literacy
Education Associate Dean (Global
Engagement) President, Australian
Academy of the Humanities
Melbourne Graduate School of
Education, The University of Melbourne,

“Rights? Closing the gap?
Culture? Data?
What can break the deadlock
on an Indigenous national
language policy for Australia?”



7:30pm, Thursday, 9 September 2010
Mal Nairn Auditorium,
Charles Darwin University,
Casuarina Campus

Contact: Phil Glasgow, 8931-3133

Co-sponsors:

- 1 Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL)
- 2 Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, NT branch (ATESOL NT)
- 3 Uniting Church in Australia, Northern Synod, Darwin
- 4 Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of the Northern Territory, Darwin
- 5 Top End Linguistics Circle (TELC)

**“Evidence? Achievement? Performance?
Official data from My Schools,
Government and NT Parliament on Model 1 (Step) bilingual programs”**

Dr Brian Devlin, JP, FACE,

Associate Professor, Bilingual Education & Applied Linguistics,
School of Education, Charles Darwin University

The Commonwealth Government established bilingual programs in some remote NT Schools in the mid 1970s. By 1980 bilingual education policy encompassed eight official aims, one of which was to teach vernacular literacy in addition to the important goals of promoting English language and numeracy skills. Model 1 programs incorporated reading and writing in Aboriginal languages; Model 2 programs did not.

Since self government, NT Education authorities have, on several occasions, compared the performance of schools with bilingual programs against similar ‘non-bilingual’ ones. In 1980 the first attempt to do this, known as the accreditation exercise, produced publicly accessible, comparative information which did not justify any change of policy away from bilingual education. In 1998 the CLP Government then tried to phase out bilingual programs and cited three reasons for doing so, including the claim, based on data which were not released, that students in bilingual programs were performing more poorly.

In November 2008 the Henderson Government tabled in parliament a data document which purported to

demonstrate the inferior performance of NT students at schools with bilingual programs. The document was offered, a month after the event, as justification for the announcement on October 14, 2008 that ‘Step’ bilingual programs would be discontinued. However, the sample chosen for comparison was invalid and half of the comparative data analysis was withheld. Fortunately, the MYSCHOOLS website now allows an independent check on some of the claims in that Nov ‘08 document. What this re-analysis suggests is that, in order to make its case against Model 1 (‘Step’) bilingual programs, the document’s authors had engaged in statistical ‘sleight of hand’. In the interests of promoting a more transparent and accountable approach to policy formulation, this paper challenges such methods and explains why the evidence supporting policy decisions not only needs to be reliable and valid; it also needs to be made more accessible and explicit. A new policy needs to be developed. To that end a possible way forward is suggested; one that includes important stakeholders and takes account of the relevant evidence.

**“Rights? Closing the gap? Culture? Data?
What can break the deadlock on an Indigenous national language
policy for Australia?”**

Joseph Lo Bianco, AM, FAHA, FACE

Professor of Language and Literacy Education, Associate Dean (Global Engagement)
President, Australian Academy of the Humanities
Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne

In different parts of the world Indigenous people have made greater language rights gains than we have achieved in Australia. In this talk I will be asking the question of why Australia has been so tardy, piecemeal, and reluctant in conceding language rights to Indigenous people. I will reflect on the discourses of language rights that have found traction in some countries, of educational and occupational equality, discussed today as “Closing the Gap”, and pondering why and where equivalent discourses have made headway in other countries.

I will also look at some cases where a commitment to a distinctive and unique cultural heritage has been able to open doors and when it has not. Finally I will also reflect on research and data, i.e. the role of academic scholarship in policy making. Each circumstance is unique of course and Australian policy making will have to find its independent pathway to securing rights for Indigenous languages and their speakers, but there is a great deal we can learn by reflecting on past successes and current struggles in different settings around the world.

Contact: Phil Glasgow, 8931-3133