

## **Bilingual Education and Current Implications for Literacy**

### **Preamble**

There are currently 20 formal Bilingual programs of which 18 are operating. There is one school that has requested to start a formal program. The differences between the programs are extensive. School populations range from 38 to 424. There are schools with Aboriginal Principals and schools where no Aboriginal staff members have completed Stage 1 of RATE. There are schools working with one Aboriginal language and others working with about 15. We have schools with sophisticated print workshops (Literacy Centres) and those for whom technology equals the old trusty MacPlus and the photocopier. All the schools are at different stages of development and there is no typical school. Having said there are no typical schools, I do believe that there are similar issues that most schools experience as they develop and grow. These issues also will be relevant to non-Bilingual schools.

### **1. Developments Up To 1993**

- The Aboriginalisation of decision-making processes for a number of school communities.
- Exploration in and development of new areas of pedagogy for teaching.
- The development of Aboriginal curriculum initiatives for the teaching and maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture.
- Expansion of many programs from bilingual programs to multilingual programs.
- Rapid growth in the number of qualified Aboriginal teachers in many schools not just those with Bilingual programs.
- New moderated Appraisal/Accreditation Process that actively involves the school, the community and senior officers of the Department.
- New models of Bilingual Education operating (see attachment )
- Major shifts of emphasis regarding literacy in Aboriginal languages.
- The achievement of equivalent or better results than the 'average' in PAP testing.(see attachment 2)
- Rapid growth of interest in Aboriginal Language and Cultural maintenance programs in 'non-bilingual' schools. (Related to Aboriginalisation).

## 2. Current Significant Issues That Schools Need to Consider

- It would appear that in **some** schools, student outcomes in Western Mathematics and English have declined. This is a **personal** impression I gained from observations of programs undertaking the Appraisal/Accreditation Process. It was difficult to verify this because most schools have not implemented long term assessment and evaluation strategies. NB: **Let me stress at the same time, there are positive developments taking place in programs that are significant.**
- In some programs there are significant changes in the uses of and the teaching of literacy in Aboriginal languages.
- There are also issues from the 80's that are still issues now eg attendance and inexperienced new staff.

## 3. Some Possible Reasons To Explain How These Issues Have Developed:

### 3.1 Personal and Professional Language Skills of Teachers.

- The issue regarding non-Aboriginal teachers receiving training in how to use ESL methodology continues. The difference now is that Aboriginal teachers need to be included. Many Aboriginal teachers need to have access to Inservice(school-based and system-wide) to support them in the teaching of English.
- In a number of classes, students aren't being provided with language models and learning activities in English (L2) needed to meet the requirements of the curriculum. Why?
  - i) In classes where there was once a two teacher team providing expertise and models in Aboriginal languages(L1) and L2, there is often now only one teacher trying to do both. In classes with good attendance this makes it a hard task. **Warning:** *Just adding an extra teacher won't solve the problem. You need a teacher or teachers w ho can ensure both languages are well supported.*
  - ii) Regardless of what Model is said to exist, many teachers will mainly use their first language as the main language of instruction. (This is not always negative, for example, difficulties experienced in L2 can be explained through the student's L1.)

- iii) Some Aboriginal teachers have been left to cope alone as Bilingual teachers of more than one language. These teachers need support in planning and implementing programs. This will require schools to develop strategies to deal with this issue. Some of you have developed some interesting strategies, so how can your ideas be shared?
- iv) A number of Aboriginal teachers require continuing personal development of their own vernacular literacy skills.

**These are or will become major issues for all school programs not just those with formal Bilingual programs.**

### **3.2 Vernacular Literacy**

A change of emphasis is taking place in how literacy is being taught, how it is used and the types of literacy material that are being produced. There are a number of major issues that will need to be explored in this area. Skills that were once available for children to use when they were introduced to English may no longer be available because of these changes. If communities are happy with these changes then schools may need to modify their English programs

The following is a simple example of where changes need to be discussed. In a number of classes observed, the strategy of group negotiated texts does not require that all students be involved in providing input into the production of the text. Follow up activities that require all students to do individualised writing are often not implemented. There also seemed to be little individual reading taking place. This could mean that skills that students once brought from their first language when such strategies were in place may no longer be available to be transferred to learning in English. Is this an example of the development of a different strategy or is it an example of some teachers who really aren't sure of how "shared book/negotiating writing" strategies really work?

There are real changes taking place that are significant but teachers and programs need "critical friends" to help them reflect on and improve their practices.

### **3.3 Decline in School based inservice**

It is now more difficult for a number of schools to offer school based inservice. The main reasons:

- i) Smaller staff numbers. As schools employ more Aboriginal staff the total number of staff decreases. Often the most skilled Aboriginal staff and non-Aboriginal staff find themselves having to spend more time on administration and less on curriculum, assessment and staff development. Most Mentoring positions have focused on administrative skills development. There were obvious needs to be met in that area also.
- ii) Decrease in specialist advisory staff.

### **4. What can be done to address these issues?**

- i) Aboriginal people are considering the future directions they want to explore regarding Aboriginal language and culture. Aboriginal staff and communities need time and guidance to examine what outcomes will result and how such changes might effect expectations for learning English. Schools, with assistance, should develop projects to monitor changes and developments. Some CEC have used AEP funds to help them with curriculum/teaching projects.

The following questions are difficult but need to be considered:

- What will be the literacy outcomes for students given some of the current curriculum changes in teaching Aboriginal languages?
  - How might these outcomes affect literacy outcomes in English?
  - Will we need to change our strategies in teaching English?
  - Will we need to change our Bilingual model to meet community expectations?
  - How can this information be shared with other schools?
- ii) Schools need to review their Bilingual Models and be more exact in describing what is actually taking place in classrooms. It is no use saying that your school or a particular class is using, for example, a 50/50 Model if it that is not really happening.

- iii) If there are staff who need to develop greater personal and professional skills to assist students to develop cognitively and academically in L1 and L2 then School management will need to:
  - a. Develop new models for team teaching/group planning within their schools.
  - b. Provide school based staff development for teaching Western Mathematics and English Literacy (or vernacular literacy if needed).
  - c. Discuss frankly with school councils issues regarding what levels of Aboriginal and specialist non-Aboriginal staff should be employed in the community's Aboriginalisation plan.
  - d) RCPs and individual schools, with the assistance of their Superintendents, should consider inservice priorities and develop proposals to go to Human Resource Development, Advisory Services at CASU and Operations South. The inservices could be designed for either System, Regional, Cluster and/or school based delivery.
  
- iv) Short and long term programming along with student assessment seems to be suffering in a number of schools. Long term evaluations such as the keeping of samples of children's writing and reading often isn't happening. In some Bilingual Appraisals, schools have not been able to present short term or long term student evaluations to the appraisal team. (Some individual teachers were maintaining records but there was no consistency throughout.) This means the team has had to rely only on PAP results to determine how students were progressing. PAP results shouldn't be used as the sole indicator of 'progress' and there are other important areas that having nothing to do with the PAP results.

Principals need to ensure that short and long term assessments and evaluations take place. This will help schools and teachers examine their strengths and weaknesses and help schools reflect on and address the issues of literacy development, the effectiveness of the school's Bilingual Model and staff development needs.

**Conclusion**

There are impressive developments taking place in many of the schools. To do justice to them I would need to write another story. In fact there are many of you here who could detail the developments much better than I could. You and your school communities make them happen. This paper was not meant to be all doom and gloom.

This paper highlights three major personal concerns. They are:

1. Literacy (and oracy) outcomes for students in English
- 2.. The need for short and long term assessment and evaluation strategies to be implemented by schools;
3. The major inservice needs for teachers in remote area schools.

Paul Bubb

PEO Aboriginal Languages/Bilingual Education

21 April 1993