



## **Australian Education Union**

### **Submission**

#### **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

#### **Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Australian Education Union represents approximately 186,000 teachers and other education workers in the public early childhood primary, secondary, and TAFE sectors throughout Australia.

The Australian Education Union has a long standing commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

We recognise that the provision of quality public education is crucial to the well being of all communities, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) communities in regional and remote Australia.

It is a foundation principle of the AEU that the public education system in all states and territories of Australia must provide access for all children to quality, culturally appropriate pre-school, primary, secondary and post-school education in every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and strive for equitable outcomes for all Indigenous students.

Because meeting the education and training needs of Indigenous students is a high priority of our organisation and members, we appreciate the opportunity to present this submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities.

That notwithstanding, the AEU considers that the issues being considered by this Inquiry have been canvassed in other Inquiries. The importance of language learning in Indigenous communities, particularly the role of bilingualism in education and Indigenous languages in assisting student learning, has been validated by well established national and international research and documented in previous submissions to government inquiries.

Studies into bilingual programs in schools, whereby students in the early years of schooling are first taught literacy (reading and writing) in their first language, show the effectiveness of building on the knowledge that children come to school with. By combining this with providing a strong language foundation in English, by about Year 4 students are able to use their knowledge of English as well as understandings of literacy in their first language as a base to master English literacy.

For example, the *Global Monitoring Report on Education for All, 2010*, states:

*The degree of alignment between home and school language has a critical bearing on learning opportunities. Children who study in their mother tongue usually learn better and faster than children studying in second languages (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; Woldemikael, 2003). Pupils who start learning in their home language also perform better in tests taken in the official language of instruction later in their school careers (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008). The benefits extend beyond cognitive skills to enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem and classroom participation (Alidou et al., 2006).<sup>1</sup>*

This principle also underpins a suite of existing Indigenous education reform initiatives, as our submission will demonstrate.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report – Reaching the Marginalized*, p173. Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 2010

It is noteworthy from the outset that the Committee's own background information to this Inquiry states that many people referred to language as playing a significant role in the wellbeing of young Indigenous people during the Committee's previous inquiry into Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system. Language was identified as an important component of cultural connection, strengthened intergenerational relationships and community building.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Action Plan 2010-2014*, developed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) as part of the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG's) reform agenda to improve life outcomes for indigenous Australians, which was endorsed by COAG in May 2011, states:

*Schools and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These partnerships can establish a collective commitment to hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and foster learning environments that are culturally safe and supportive. Evidence shows that children who are expected to achieve at school and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed. A sense of cultural and linguistic identity, and the active recognition and validation of Indigenous cultures and languages by schools, is critical to student well being and success at school. There are strong links between well being and learning outcomes.<sup>2</sup>*

This statement effectively encapsulates the thrust of a number of the terms of reference of this current Inquiry. A child's ability to attend school and engage with learning is influenced by many factors internal and external to the school environment, and these factors must be addressed within the policy environment aimed at improving outcomes for Indigenous students.

It is clear from the research, and from the Government policy such as the Action Plan, that well-resourced, appropriately staffed bilingual education programs, where communities choose to support bilingual programs in local schools, are essential to achieve these objectives.

Bilingual education aims to:

- foster proficiency in school work through the use of Indigenous languages;
- develop literacy in English and Indigenous languages;
- develop competency in Mathematics;
- support and promote Indigenous languages and culture under the guidance of communities;
- develop a more positive self concept in each child through using the child's first (Indigenous language); and
- develop a better understanding of both cultures – that of Indigenous people themselves (and not only a particular community) and of non-Indigenous society.

In short, enabling Indigenous children to be strong in their own cultures and languages is necessary to ensure high mainstream educational outcomes, including fluency in Standard Australian English (SAE).

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<sup>2</sup> MCEEDYA, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Action Plan 2010-2014*, p12.  
[http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/resources/A10-0945\\_IEAP\\_web\\_version\\_final2.pdf](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/resources/A10-0945_IEAP_web_version_final2.pdf)  
Accessed Monday August 22, 2011

A necessary condition for schools to deliver the COAG targets (and to then go on to deliver equal educational outcomes) is the creation of a 'within-school culture' that acknowledges and values Indigenous culture and identity, and which makes Indigenous children feel safe, confident and valued in who they are. This requires the involvement of the Indigenous community in the process of establishing and maintaining such a school culture, and respect (at the very least) for Indigenous languages is vital to this process.

As the AEU stated in its submission to the draft Indigenous Education Action Plan 2010-2014:

*Indigenous educational outcomes will not improve to the levels that Indigenous Australians have a right to achieve as Australian citizens unless schools establish an environment or school culture that is seen to value Indigenous culture and Indigenous identity. It is incumbent on governments, education providers and schools to develop and maintain this within school culture, and it is essential for governments and education providers to provide the necessary guidance, support and resources to schools to help them work with Indigenous communities to bring this about.*<sup>3</sup>

For the Government not to recognise this would breach both the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and Articles 13 and 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nations, 2007), to which Australia is a signatory, concerning the rights of Indigenous children to learn and speak their languages.

*Article 13.1 Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures.*

*Article 14*

*1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.*

*2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.*

*3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.*<sup>4</sup>

Within the context of this Inquiry it is therefore relevant to reiterate our opposition to developments such as the Northern Territory Government's 2009 policy, *Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of each School Day* policy (NT DET, 2009). In the face of the national and international evidence supporting bilingualism in education, and existing Government policy, the AEU contends that the NT policy disregards decades of research; shows no respect for Indigenous languages and cultures; and works against the language and cultural rights expressed in the Declaration and written into Australian government policy.

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<sup>3</sup> AEU Submission to the *Draft Indigenous Education Action Plan 2010–2014*, March 2010 p7

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Adopted by the General Assembly of the UN, September 13, 2007. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>  
Accessed Monday August 21, 2011

We would also commend work undertaken by the AEU in early 2010 with Professor Mick Dodson, then the Pacific representative on the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which led to the following recommendation being carried unanimously by the UNPFII in April 2010:

*On the basis of information received at the ninth session, the Permanent Forum expresses its deep concern about the changes in policy on bilingual education in the Northern Territory, Australia. The Forum urges the Government of Australia to work with its State and territory education systems to develop models of bilingual, intercultural and multilingual education that are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>5</sup>*

A copy of Professor Dodson's presentation to the UN forum is attached as Appendix A.

It is within the above context that we present this submission to the Inquiry. We are happy to provide any further information to the Committee if required.

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<sup>5</sup> Reference [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E\\_2010\\_43\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E_2010_43_EN.pdf)

***Term of Reference One: The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages.***

As would be clear from our Introduction, it is unnecessary to go into detail about the benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages.

The media release announcing this Inquiry states:

*The role of Indigenous languages in Closing the Gap and improving outcomes for Indigenous communities is the subject of a new inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The inquiry will examine the benefits of giving recognition to Indigenous languages, and how Indigenous languages can be used in education to improve competency in English.<sup>6</sup>*

The AEU contends that this has already been well established and is in fact Government policy.

*The Importance of Indigenous Languages in Improving Educational Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students and Young People*

The COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement is recognition by governments at all levels that Indigenous children often experience significant disadvantage.

The significance of language to improving attendance, retention and literacy and numeracy rates for Indigenous students has been recognised in numerous recent initiatives around improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students which have been brought together in the ATSIEAP to close the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students, including:

- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
  - Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians
  - National Indigenous Reform Agreement
  - National Education Agreement
  - Early Childhood Education National Partnership
  - Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership
  - Remote Service Delivery National Partnership
  - Smarter Schools – Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership
  - Smarter Schools – Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership
  - Smarter Schools – Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership
  - Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership.
- Closing the Gap targets and national Partnerships

*[E]fforts to improve attendance, retention and the literacy and numeracy rates governments must ensure that Indigenous Australians have the right to speak and maintain their languages, knowledges and values and that they have access to an education that provides recognition and affirmation of the cultural knowledge, language and values that Indigenous peoples bring.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Language learning in Indigenous communities. Media Release July 8, 2011

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/languages/media/media01.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> AEU Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Remote and Regional Indigenous Communities May 2009

*Indigenous Languages – A National Approach. The Importance of Australia's Indigenous Languages*

In September 2009 Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin, and [then] Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the Hon Peter Garrett, detailed the Government's commitment to a new national approach to preserving Indigenous languages and supporting Indigenous Australians to connect with their language, culture and country.

*Recognising the importance of language and culture is also an essential part of resetting our relationship with Indigenous Australians and working more effectively together.*<sup>8</sup>

The policy document they released, *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach. The Importance of Australia's Indigenous Languages*, noted that the most recent report on Indigenous languages in Australia, the National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) Report 2005, found that "the situation of Australia's Indigenous languages is grave and requires urgent action. Of the 145 indigenous languages still spoken in Australia, 110 are critically endangered".<sup>9</sup>

The Ministers committed the Government to addressing the serious problem of language loss in Indigenous communities and called for coordinated action among the bodies involved in support of Indigenous languages, including government, language organisations and educational and research institutions, in order that Indigenous languages "will live for future generations".

They cited reports and consultation over many decades, including the NILS report and feedback through the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Program, as the source for the approach they outlined.

In August 2009 (on the International Day of the World's Indigenous People) Macklin and Garrett announced the National Indigenous Languages Policy. Sadly, while one of the key areas of the policy is supporting the teaching of indigenous languages in Australian schools it seems that efforts to maintain Indigenous languages under this policy do not include bilingual or Two Way education.

The key objectives of the new National Indigenous Languages Policy as stated by the Ministers:

1. *National Attention: To bring national attention to Indigenous languages – the oldest surviving languages in the world; and the pressures they face.*

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<sup>8</sup> Macklin, Media Release

<sup>9</sup> The Hon Jenny Macklin MP and The Hon Peter Garrett MP, *Indigenous languages - a national approach. The importance of Australia's Indigenous languages*, September 14, 2009  
NILS 2005: *languages under threat are only spoken by small groups of people, mostly over 40 years old, and are at risk of being lost.*

In 2008, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language was spoken as the main language at home by 11% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over. In remote areas, however, 42% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language at home and 31% spoke some words of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language. (ABS, 2009)

The trend was similar for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged between 4 and 14. In 2008 33% of Indigenous children in remote areas spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their main language at home compared to the national figure of 8%. Another 30% of Indigenous children living in remote areas spoke some words of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language. (ABS, 2009)

2. *Critically Endangered Languages: Reinforce use of critically endangered Indigenous languages that are being only partly spoken to help prevent decline in use and to maintain or extend their common, everyday use as much as possible.*
3. *Working with Languages to Close the Gap: In areas where Indigenous languages are being spoken fully and passed on, making sure that government recognises and works with these languages in its agenda to Close the Gap.*
4. *Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture: To restore the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages to the extent that the current language environment allows.*
5. *Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools: To support and maintain the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools.*

A suite of initiatives to achieve these objectives was identified, including:

- Increased funding and better targeting of support for Indigenous languages as part of a broader national focus on Indigenous culture and the overall well-being of Indigenous communities generally through *Closing the Gap*, given the centrality of language to strong Indigenous culture, and the broader social benefits of functional and resilient families and communities.
- Supporting Indigenous language programs in schools, noting that the Government's *Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools – A Way Forward* report revealed that between 2006 and 2007 over 16,000 Indigenous students and 13,000 non-Indigenous students located in 260 Australian schools were involved in Indigenous language programs, covering over 80 different Indigenous languages.
- Supporting Indigenous languages and literacy and numeracy development given the Government's commitment to languages education and recognition of the important role that Indigenous language learning plays in some schools, particularly bilingual schools; noting in particular that the Government is providing \$56.4 million over four years to provide extra assistance to schools to enable them to expand intensive literacy and numeracy approaches that have been successful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide professional development support to assist teachers to prepare Individual Learning Plans for Indigenous students.
- Ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are written into the National Curriculum to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and respect the language and culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

In short, the benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages is not an open question – its benefits have a large evidence-base, provide the rationale for the embedding of first language learning in national and state/territory government policies and is at the heart of the nationally agreed reform agenda for improvement of Indigenous education outcomes.

The AEU commends the Federal Government's efforts to maintain and revive Indigenous languages but respectfully urges the Committee to advocate for:

- a greater focus on the language rights of communities whose first language is not English;
- greater acceptance of the evidence showing the educational benefits of bilingual education;
- a meaningful funding and resource commitment to support the genuine implementation of the policy.

***Term of Reference Two: The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture.***

As we have already argued, existing national and state/territory policies and commitments already embody the contribution of Indigenous languages to strengthening Indigenous identity and culture and its role in supporting improved educational and life outcomes – good health, learning at school, participating in their community, being safe and happy – for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

*COAG's Closing the Gap: Targets and Building Blocks*

The COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement is recognition by governments at all levels that Indigenous children often experience significant disadvantage. It is for this reason that several of the six targets to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage focus on children.

While acknowledging that the *Closing the Gap* targets and building blocks for getting the best outcomes for ATSI children and young people requires understanding of all the factors that influence their lives as they grow up, including family, community, culture, use and effectiveness of services, and recognising that they are all linked and none can be advanced in isolation, it is also important to acknowledge the importance of the education-specific targets and building blocks.

Education-specific targets:

- To ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities within five years
- To halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade
- To halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020

Education-specific building blocks:

- Early Childhood
- Schooling

In his Foreword to *Footprints in Time*, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) undertaken by the Australian Government's Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the LSIC Committee Chair, Professor Mick Dodson wrote:

*Every child deserves a chance at happiness and the opportunity to realise their potential for a fulfilling and useful life. We all know that children need more than just a roof over their heads – love, understanding and encouragement are just as important.*

*Footprints in Time, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, looks at the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and the ways their culture keeps them strong and healthy. We know that how people feel about themselves, whether they feel valued and respected has a whole lot to do with how they handle problems.*

*Our kids have to see that they are stronger and smarter than this society has so far given them credit for. We need to help them cultivate an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity that is strong and smart. We all need to recognise that children's sense of themselves as Aboriginal people – who they are and where they come from – is of both practical and spiritual value. In bestowing identity we also bestow dignity.*

*There are plenty of examples of Indigenous success; we just have to recognise it and replicate it. We have to see evidence of success as points of light all around us and join them up to create a universe of opportunity for our children. These results from the first wave of Footprints in Time data provide more points of light. I hope you find them useful.*<sup>10</sup>

The 'Culture and Identity' section of the report is particularly pertinent to this Inquiry. It notes that when asked what it is about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture that will help their children grow up stronger, many parents identified "family strength and connectedness as being important, as well as the sense of belonging that they have to their community, culture and the land". They also attested to "the significance of knowing who they were and where they came from, knowledge about their culture and their history, and a sense of pride and respect for their cultural identity, their elders and their family".<sup>11</sup>

Countless authoritative reports and submissions support this, including:

*Intergovernmental Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities June 2006:*

*A strong and vibrant culture is essential for the wellbeing of Indigenous people. Funding has supported the maintenance of Indigenous languages and records that help locals identify with their community and reinforce the importance of their language to Indigenous youth.*<sup>12</sup>

Kimberley Language Resource Centre submission for the proposed National Indigenous Representative Body 2008:

*What are the issues in the Kimberley?*

- 1. Ongoing decimation of languages and therefore access to traditional knowledge.*
- 2. The subsequent effect of this loss on people's sense of themselves giving rise to questions about the validity of their personal vision for their future.*
- 3. Loss of identity in young children through loss of their heritage language.*
- 4. Deep sadness in elders and parents that languages and cultural knowledge are not embedded in education practices.*
- 5. Lack of consultation and functioning partnerships around ways to collaborate in change processes from the ground up.*
- 6. A continuing model of separating Language from Family and Community in early childhood care, the education system, Natural Resource Management and most research disciplines.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Finding our feet - First findings from Footprints in Time 2009*

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/families/lpic/finding\\_our\\_feet/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/families/lpic/finding_our_feet/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> p16

<sup>12</sup> Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs Annual Report 2006–2007.

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/annualreports/Documents/sgaria\\_2006\\_07/page7.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/annualreports/Documents/sgaria_2006_07/page7.htm)

Accessed Monday August 21, 2011

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/progserv/leadership/nat\\_congress\\_au\\_first\\_peoples/Documents/rep\\_body\\_submissions/ps93.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/progserv/leadership/nat_congress_au_first_peoples/Documents/rep_body_submissions/ps93.htm)

**Term of Reference Three: The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education.**

Within the well established body of evidence from national and international research showing that Indigenous languages assist in student learning, there is ample evidence on the benefits for children's education in the early years.

*ECE is a highly effective investment in maximising a child's potential for educational and social development throughout her or his life and that this is particularly so for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.*<sup>14</sup>

*Early Years Learning Framework and the Indigenous Early Years Implementation Guide for the Early Years Framework*

Most recently the Productivity Commission's draft research report on the Early Childhood Development Workforce, released on 30 June 2011 made a number of key points concerning Early Childhood Development [ECD] for Indigenous children which can be summarised as follows:

- Disadvantaged children stand to gain the most from quality ECD services, and reducing the gaps in outcomes means quality ECD services for Indigenous children will need to be a priority for governments.
- Other government reforms in the EC area have the potential to exacerbate the gap between the quality of mainstream EC services and those for Indigenous children unless innovative solutions are adopted, including the need for cultural competency training which is important for the effective delivery of ECEC services for Indigenous children.<sup>15</sup>

The Productivity Commission report cites important research attesting to the importance of ECE for disadvantaged children, and in particular for Indigenous children:

*Children experiencing disadvantage stand to gain the most from quality ECD services, which can help them develop the social and cognitive skills necessary for achievement at school and in later life (Heckman 2006) (chapter 3). But even where quality early childhood is offered, culturally appropriate programs for Indigenous children are required to positively affect their attendance and readiness for school (Fordham and Schwab 2007).*<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that these understandings underpin the commitments in the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood and the Closing the Gap National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development to provide access to ECE for all Indigenous 4-year olds by 2013, including those in remote communities.

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Walker, K. (2004). *For All Our Children. National Preschool Education Inquiry Report*. Australian Education Union. Pp. 18-19. <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Ec/ecfullreport.pdf>; OECD, (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background*. Vol. 2, pp. 95-98.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.pc.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/110517/17-early-childhood-chapter14.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/110517/17-early-childhood-chapter14.pdf) p259  
Accessed Monday August 21, 2011

<sup>16</sup> p260

On the question of the importance of culturally appropriate ECE programs for Indigenous children and the development of high levels of cultural competency in ECEC services, the Productivity Commission cites research which demonstrates the critical need for services which:

*... respond respectfully and effectively to people of diverse backgrounds in a manner that recognises, affirms and values those individuals ... to ensure engagement with Indigenous families and to enhance child wellbeing and development (Trigwell 2000; SNAICC 2009)<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> p280

**Term of Reference Four: Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second Language.**

The current Indigenous language situation in Australia is complex. The Queensland Studies Authority's *Indigenous Languages policy* statement and implementation plan provides a particularly useful overview of this complexity. It opens with an acknowledgement that the language diversity of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples has changed and active use of Indigenous languages within many communities has declined. Further, that a variety of new languages, including dialects and creoles, are now spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students throughout urban and rural Australia. The document then goes on to articulate the principles that underpin learning about and the teaching of Australian Indigenous languages in Queensland schools:

*The policy aims to support the personal and cultural identities of young Indigenous students and enhance their life chances and educational successes. It also aims to promote appreciation and understanding of Australian Indigenous languages among all Queensland students by providing curriculum options for schools in the teaching of Australian Indigenous languages.*<sup>18</sup>

As have previously indicated, the international research on bilingual education provides clear evidence that children learn best in their first language, particularly in the early years of school, until they get stronger in their second language.

The benefits of proficiency in SAE are not in question. What the AEU and others question is the lack of meaningful strategy at Government level which enacts what the evidence clearly shows – that bilingual and multilingual education produce a range of educational and social benefits.

Research in 2009 by Simpson, Caffery and P McConvell on bilingual education over many years has shown that *young children learn best when taught through their mother tongue. The research has also shown that there are positive effects on children's cognitive development if they are encouraged to become strong bilinguals.* They note also that policy-makers seem to fail to recognise that *children who are monolingual in a language other than English need explicit teaching of the English language, by trained English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, before they can learn through English as the medium of instruction.*<sup>19</sup>

Children who are first educated at school in their own language have a capacity for learning English when introduced at around the age of eight years which is significantly better than for those children who were not taught in their own language and who are expected to learn English at school entry.

This is supported by a literature review conducted by NT DET in 2010 which demonstrated that *by the middle and high school years the bilingually schooled students reach the same levels of achievement as those schooled all in English and over time outperform the monolingual-schooled students.* Bilingual education is not only beneficial to students' education. Bilingual education is valued by local communities because it ensures the survival of languages and *because it provides an*

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<sup>18</sup> QSA, *Indigenous languages*, Policy Statement. April 2008

[http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/approach/indigenous\\_languages\\_pol\\_08.pdf](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/approach/indigenous_languages_pol_08.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Jane Simpson, Jo Caffery, and Patrick McConvell AIATSIS Discussion Paper Number 24

<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/docs/dp/DP24.pdf>

*honoured place for Indigenous languages in the curriculum and an honoured place for Indigenous teachers.*<sup>20</sup>

The teaching and maintenance of Indigenous languages in schools is essential to maintain culture. It shows that schools acknowledge and respect the value of the child's language and culture, and thus the child's Indigenous identity. On all these points the teaching of Indigenous languages will increase the chances that COAG targets will be met.

This requires a level of action that goes beyond 'recognising' the importance of language teaching and 'acknowledging' the degree to which Indigenous languages being spoken today are in real danger of dying out, as articulated in the *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach. The Importance of Australia's Indigenous Languages* to well-funded and resourced implementation of the measures that have been shown to work from the existing numerous studies and reports.

The clear and obvious implication, which has been reiterated throughout this submission, and is embedded in existing government policies, programs and reform agendas, is that rather than acting as a barrier to the learning of the learning of English, bilingual programs actually strengthen it.

In its response to the draft IEAP the AEU recommended that:

- As part of a National Strategy for Indigenous Languages MCEECDYA will develop an Indigenous Languages in Schools Action Plan to be part of IEAP. Education providers in each state and territory are to work with the Federal governments to increase the teaching of Indigenous languages across Australia's schools. The many Aboriginal Englishes and Creoles spoken by Indigenous Australians must be recognised as spoken languages. English must be taught as a second language utilising ESL principles and techniques to do so.
- The teaching of language should be embedded in pre-compulsory education (eg preschool) as well as in schools.
- MCEECDYA negotiate and support the teaching of language in at least 20 Northern Territory schools and negotiate for the removal of the requirement that English be the language of instruction in all Northern Territory schools for the first 4 hours of the school day.
- MCEECDYA recognise that the most appropriate approach to be used by schools in the teaching of English to Indigenous children is to teach English as a second language.
- MCEECDYA initiate discussions with all universities involved with teacher education to ensure that the ESL approach to teaching English to Indigenous students is included in pre-service training. This will be incorporated into teacher registration requirements in all jurisdictions.

We urge the Committee to give further consideration to these recommendations in the context of this Inquiry.

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<sup>20</sup> NT DET, *Literacy for Both Worlds*. Retrieved December 2010 from NT DET:  
[http://www.det.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/628/LiteracyForBothWorldsPolicy.pdf](http://www.det.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/628/LiteracyForBothWorldsPolicy.pdf)

***Term of Reference Five: The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities.***

As we have already stated in the previous section, we are not questioning the necessity and benefits of proficiency in SAE. Throughout our submission we have attested to the benefits of language competency, and as previously argued consider that the best way of ensuring English language competency is through the approaches outlined above.

We support the approach outlined in the QSA April 2008 Indigenous Languages policy which is underpinned by an understanding that English language competency is best served by an understanding by all Australians of the language diversity of Australia's Indigenous peoples, and an acknowledgement and genuine embedding in policies and practices of the fact that:

- Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people speak a diversity of languages and dialects other than Standard Australian English.
- many Australian Indigenous language speakers are multilingual.
- many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have an Indigenous language or dialect as their first, second or third language.
- Australian Indigenous languages are intrinsically linked to the identities, cultures, social values and world views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups and communities.
- speakers of Australian Indigenous languages, including students, have distinct ways of describing the world.
- Australian Indigenous languages have complex grammars and rich vocabularies.
- understanding the language backgrounds of Indigenous students is a critical factor in the successful learning of Standard Australian English.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> QSA, opcit.

**Term of Reference Six: Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services.**

The Language Services policies of state/territory governments attest to the importance of quality Indigenous language interpreting and translating services in order to ensure that those who speak languages other than English have equal access to government programs, services and information.<sup>22</sup>

This is particularly relevant to alleviating the language barriers faced by many Indigenous people with obvious implications for the effectiveness of education programs. The Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) makes this clear:

*More than Aboriginal 100 languages and dialects are spoken in the Territory, and many Indigenous Territorians speak English as their third or fourth language. To effectively communicate in remote communities in the Territory you should use an interpreter or translator. Employing an interpreter ensures your message is delivered accurately in a culturally appropriate manner, and is clearly understood. ... Services include:*

- *face-to-face interpreting and translating*
- *workshops on cross-cultural awareness and working with interpreters and translators*
- *advice on preparing text for translation into Aboriginal languages.*<sup>23</sup>

In Western Australia, under the aegis of the Western Australian Language Services Policy 2008, the Department of Indigenous Affairs is developing a Western Australian Aboriginal Languages Policy. The government recognises that although a majority of Indigenous people communicate fluently in English, there are some, particularly in remote areas of Western Australia, for whom English is their second, third or fourth language.

Key features of the policy include:

- the maintenance and revival of traditional Aboriginal languages; and
- English literacy development for Aboriginal children and adults and provision of interpreting and translating services.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear from evidence though, as acknowledged by the media release announcing this Inquiry, that Indigenous language interpreting and translating services are inadequate, particularly in remote communities.

This is totally inconsistent with the aims and approaches of the national Indigenous Languages policy, and the stated policies of state and territory governments, and there is an urgent need for this deficiency to be remedied.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example NT [http://www.dlgh.nt.gov.au/interpreting/language\\_services\\_policy](http://www.dlgh.nt.gov.au/interpreting/language_services_policy); WA Western Australian Language Services Policy 2008; Qld

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.dlghs.nt.gov.au/ais>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/en/About-DIA/Policies/Languages/>

**Term of Reference Seven: The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages.**

The research report, *Gaps in Australia's Indigenous Language Policy: Dismantling bilingual education in the Northern Territory*, identifies the need for a clear recognition of the differing needs of Indigenous children from different language backgrounds rather than a focus on just one type of student.<sup>25</sup>

This would appear to be a vital understanding in considerations of the effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages.

Jane Simpson, one of the authors of the research report, notes that:

*There's a radical difference in curricula and materials needed for monolingual children who speak traditional Indigenous languages [**language maintenance**] from those who are learning them as a second language [**language revival and revitalisation**].*

She questions just how much work has been undertaken in Australia concerning language revival and revitalization and the appropriate curricula and materials and school programs for enriching the language development of first language learners.<sup>26</sup>

The Report itself demonstrates that at least four different types of language background need to be distinguished:

1. Schools where the children come to school monolingual in a traditional Indigenous language.
2. Schools where the children come to school monolingual in an English-based creole language.
3. Schools where the children come to school bilingual in an English-based creole language and a traditional Indigenous language.
4. Schools where the children come to school monolingual in English or a non-standard variety of English.

The Report notes that existing programs tend to mostly address the needs of students in category 4.

The research highlights that children in the first three categories require special support in the early years of school, and that:

- while these children may be cognitively and academically advanced, teachers will be unable to assess the children's skills unless they speak the children's first language;
- these children will be severely handicapped at school if they are unable to understand the language of the classroom; and
- since language is fundamental to culture, a 'culturally inclusive curriculum' for these children must include their home language.

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<sup>25</sup> Jane Simpson, Jo Caffery, and Patrick McConvell AIATSIS Discussion Paper Number 24  
<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/docs/dp/DP24.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Jane Simpson, [Call for submissions- National Indigenous Education Action Plan](#), 21 January, 2010

The authors recommend that all states with children in categories 1, 2 and 3 (primarily the NT, WA, SA and Qld) need to have in place sound English-as-a-second-language curricula, teaching methods and trained teachers to work with these children.

Without them:

- children monolingual in another language will not learn standard English effectively;
- children monolingual in another language will have a slower start on learning other subjects;
- children, Indigenous teachers and communities will be alienated from schools; and
- children will see their traditional languages as having no value, and will switch to speaking a creole, thus hastening the decline of traditional languages.

It may seem self evident, but you cannot teach children to read effectively if they don't understand the language of the reading materials.

***Term of Reference Eight: The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.***

As our submission has made clear, there appears to be a significant disjuncture between policy statements and actual practice.

As the AEU argued in its response to the draft Indigenous Education Action Plan:

*A long term intergenerational, aspirational plan [for the achievement of acceptable educational outcomes] informed by a belief in the importance of setting high expectations for future generations of Indigenous students is required.<sup>27</sup>*

This requires more than commitments in speeches and policy documents.

The sustainability principle from the National Indigenous Reform Agreement which requires that *programs and services are directed and resources over an adequate period of time to meet COAG targets* would be an effective way of ensuring that targets and programs will be acted upon and funded.

In order to ensure that programs are appropriately funded and targeted, much has been made in recent years of the need for annual reporting based on quality data against a full range of meaningful indicators concerning progress towards each of COAG targets.

While we are supportive in general of this approach we trust the Committee realises that annual reporting and quality data do not in and of themselves produce the desired outcomes.

A 2009 speech by Productivity Commission Chair Gary Banks, *Are we overcoming Indigenous disadvantage?*, is instructive in this regard. Banks was addressing the then recent release of the latest edition of the Productivity Commission's biennial report, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators*,<sup>28</sup> (OID). The OID was initiated in 2002 by COAG "to inform Australian governments about whether policy programs and interventions are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people"<sup>29</sup>.

Banks went to some length to describe "the ongoing wide gulf between the circumstances of Indigenous and other Australians, documented in page after page of the Report ... and the limited progress we have made in bridging it."<sup>30</sup>

*It is now seven years since governments made a commitment to work together in new ways to tackle the root causes of disadvantage. In an important break with the past, in 2002 they agreed to commission a 'regular report' to monitor national outcomes in a significant way – and thereby hold themselves accountable. My expectation when presenting the first OID report in 2003, was that many of the disparities evident at that time would have begun to narrow by*

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<sup>27</sup> AEU, opcit.

<sup>28</sup> *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, released 2 July 2009. Previous editions were published in 2003, 2005 and 2007.

<sup>29</sup> PC website

<sup>30</sup> Gary Banks, *Are we overcoming Indigenous disadvantage?*, p2. Speech presented as the third lecture in Reconciliation Australia's 'Closing the Gap Conversations' Series, National Library, Canberra, July 7 2009.

<http://www.pc.gov.au/speeches/cs20090707-overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage>

Accessed Monday August 21, 2011

*now. Six years, and three reports later, that has been clearly achieved for only about 20 per cent of the indicators. In 10 per cent of them things have actually got worse.*<sup>31</sup>

The Report was designed to focus on the areas that ‘really matter’ to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. It was structured around a strategic framework of outcome indicators, and an acknowledgement of the multiple dimensions and multiple causes of disadvantage, many of which interact with each other. For example, the Report said, educational outcomes for Indigenous children depend not only on the effectiveness of available schooling services, but also on students’ health, and, importantly, the circumstances of their homes and communities.

The 2009 Report showed that of the four higher level indicators relating to educational performance or participation, the only discernable improvement was in Year 12 attainment, which rose by 5 percentage points between 2001 and 2006, but was still well below rates for other students. Banks commented that “given the importance of education, it is particularly concerning that there has been no improvement in learning outcomes at school, with performance for Indigenous students dropping sharply in successive class years relative to other students.”<sup>32</sup>

The Overview of the 2009 Key Indicators report on progress made towards the COAG targets shows that there has been negligible change in Indigenous students’ performance over the past ten years, and no closing of the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ performances in the key areas of reading, writing and numeracy. A lower proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students in all year levels achieved NAPLAN minimum standards in reading, writing and numeracy in 2008.<sup>33</sup>

- There were generally no significant changes in Indigenous year 3, 5 and 7 students’ performance against the national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy between 1999 (2001 for year 7 students) and 2007 (figures 4.4.2, 4.4.4 and 4.4.6).
- A substantially lower proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students in all year levels achieved the national minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy in 2008 (figures 4.4.1, 4.4.3, 4.4.5 and 4.4.7).
- Indigenous students’ learning outcomes declined, and the gap between Indigenous students and all students increased, as remoteness increased (figure 4.4.9).
- As Indigenous students progressed through school, the proportion who achieved the national benchmarks decreased for reading (from year 3 to year 5) and numeracy (from year 3 to year 5, and year 5 to year 7) (figure 4.4.8).
- Participation rates in national tests are lower for Indigenous students than for all students, and the gap increases as year levels increase (tables 4A.4.11; 23; 35; 47).<sup>34</sup>

It further noted that the improvement in Year 12 attainment noted by Banks was less significant than it might appear in terms of the stated goal of ‘Closing the Gap’:

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> p5

<sup>33</sup> SCRGSP, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2009*, p6  
<http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2009>

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

*... the proportion of Indigenous 19 year olds who had completed year 12 or equivalent increased from 31 to 36 per cent between 2001 and 2006, However, the non-Indigenous rate increased from 68 to 74 per cent, leaving the gap unchanged.<sup>35</sup>*

Similarly, the 2006 National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) identified gaps in attendance, literacy and numeracy skills, with a major concern being that low achievement in the early years of schooling results in poor achievement and participation in secondary and further education. Further, that these conditions persist despite initiatives that have been introduced by national and state/territory governments in the last 20 years to improve participation in, and outcomes from, education among Indigenous students.

The continuing gap in educational achievements between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers surely indicates that past and current practices are not fully effective in bridging this gap. And yet again the Report emphasised the importance of improved educational outcomes to overcoming many aspects of disadvantage.

*Participation in year 12 and entry into higher education [preconditions of achieving other COAG targets] rely on strong literacy and numeracy skills. School leavers who lack these skills face poor employment prospects. There are also links between education, income and health.<sup>36</sup>*

Neither does annual reporting and quality data on participation, retention and outcomes address issues concerning access to education which continue to be an issue for many Aboriginal communities in remote and some regional area, and particularly for access to secondary education.

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research has investigated this issue and discovered:

- *There were 21 discrete communities of 500 or more persons where there was no Year 12 secondary school within 25 kms. For 19 of these communities there was no Year 12 secondary school within 50 kms; and*
- *there were nine discrete communities of 500 or more persons where there was no Year 10 secondary school within 25 kms. For eight of these communities there was no Year 10 secondary school within 50kms.<sup>37</sup>*

At State and Territory level the AEU's 2007 *Education is the Key* Report estimated that as many as 2,000 students of compulsory age in the Northern Territory alone are not enrolled in a school at all. For substantial numbers, secondary schooling is simply unavailable - that is, it is not provided in many areas of the Northern Territory, Northern Queensland and Western Australia. *Education is the Key* estimated that up to 5,000 students under the age of 18 in the Northern Territory had no access to secondary or vocational education services<sup>38</sup>. Further, Community Education Centres in many remote communities provide only the most basic primary education, with limited tuition support for secondary students to study by correspondence.

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

<sup>36</sup> p16

<sup>37</sup> Fordham (2007), Preliminary analyses of access to education and discrete Indigenous communities in Australia, 2006, p.2

<sup>38</sup> AEU, *Education is the Key*. Report 2007, p19

Commitments to deliver effective Indigenous languages programs by Federal and State/Territory governments ring rather hollow in the face of such a situation, and programs such as the Northern Territory's *Compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day* program, to which we have previously referred.

A 2010 UNESCO report into good practices and lessons learned from an international review of mother tongue-based bi/multilingual education initiatives identified that success in implementing effective, sustainable, and evolving bilingual education programs in the early years of education *resulted from the intersection of many of these elements, including government policy, political will, language activism, parent demand, community involvement, teacher training, resource development, and cultural pride.*<sup>39</sup>

We would urge the Committee to give due heed to the importance of all these factors in its considerations of:

- the contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture;
- the potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education and measures to improve English competency and education outcomes in Indigenous communities;
- the effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages; and
- the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.

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<sup>39</sup> Enhancing learning of children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years. Prepared by Jessica Ball, M.P.H., Ph.D. University of Victoria For: UNESCO, 2010 2010/ED/BAS/ECCE/PI/1; p43

## **APPENDIX 1: Presentation by Professor Michael Dodson to the Ninth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

19 – 30 April 2010

UN Headquarters, New York City NY.

### Item 3

Special Theme: Indigenous peoples' development with culture and identity – education for bilingualism and multilingualism in an Indigenous Australian context.

Presentation by Michael Dodson, Member of the Forum, 20 April 2010.

Education is a critical underpinning of this special theme. In particular, the right to education in the mother tongue is fundamental to the maintenance and growth of culture and identity and cultural and linguistic diversity. Para 39 of the report of the international expert group meeting provides an excellent framework for the exploration of the role that education plays to facilitate development with culture and identity.

The issue of bilingual learning in Indigenous languages is not only of vital interest to this theme but also very relevant in my country at the moment in debate on education policy.

Support for Indigenous languages continues to be contested at all levels of the political sphere – locally, nationally and internationally.<sup>40</sup> This is in spite of overwhelming international evidence on the importance and efficacy of mother tongue instruction in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous children.<sup>41</sup> In many cases, rather than being an education-based discussion, the focus of the debate is political, social and technical. Unfortunately it is these concepts, rather than pedagogical imperatives, that are driving the development, application and implementation of education policy on matters pertaining to the teaching of Indigenous languages, including choices of the language of instruction, choices of curriculum and structures of schooling.<sup>42</sup>

We know in this debate there are many contested issues and further complications arise from the somewhat problematic and fluid nature of definitions relating to language and literacy teaching and acquisition.

Mr Chairman; The UNESCO position paper *Education in a multilingual world* 'aims to clarify some of the key concepts and issues that surround the debate and presents in a simplified and synthetic form the many declarations and recommendations that have made reference to the issues of languages and education'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ouane, A (ed) (2003) *Towards a Multilingual Culture of Education*, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg, Germany from [http://www.paklife.net/nfer\\_library/Reports/4-75.pdf](http://www.paklife.net/nfer_library/Reports/4-75.pdf) (accessed 07.04.10)

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO (2010) *EFA Global Monitoring Report – Reaching the Marginalized* Oxford University Press, United Kingdom (p. 149); Cummins (undated) *Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why Is It Important for Education?* University of Toronto, from <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/mother.htm> (accessed 24.03.10)

<sup>42</sup> Ball, J (2010) *Enhancing learning of children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years*, UNESCO from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001869/186961e.pdf> (accessed 24.03.10)

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO (2003) *Education in a multilingual world – UNESCO Education Position Paper* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf> (accessed 24.03.10) (p. 7)

The document provides an overview of the key concepts of multilingual education; synthesises the international instruments, including UNESCO conventions; and finally, presents a set of principles and guidelines which clarifies UNESCO's position and makes it more accessible.<sup>44</sup>

According to UNESCO, in 2003, there were some twenty international articles, recommendations and declarations which related directly to the rights of minority groups to access and use freely their own languages, and to mother tongue learning and bilingual and multilingual education.<sup>45</sup> The UNESCO Position Paper synthesised the relevant international instruments to arrive at three principles with which many are familiar.

The UNESCO paper was produced prior to the General Assembly adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and does not include the related articles in the Declaration. (Nor I note other international instruments produced since then.) Articles 13 and 14 of the Declaration specifically relate to the rights of Indigenous peoples and our languages; and the right to access education provided in Indigenous languages.

Article 3, forms the basis of the theme we are discussing and applies to the issue of first-language and subsequent bi and multilingual learning. The interconnectedness between the concepts of development and education are inescapable. The Interagency Support Group's reflection paper on the special theme "development with culture and identity" demonstrates that:

*In this context, the use of a particular language as the language of instruction in a classroom conveys to the learner both a practical and symbolic sense of supremacy. It suggests that the language of instruction is the language of status and the vernacular or the language of transaction, is inferior.*<sup>46</sup>

Of particular concern here Mr Chairman are the recent changes to bilingual education in the Northern Territory of Australia. Dominant development paradigms in the context of education mean that education is increasingly seen through an economic lens. Human Capital Theory which correlates investments in education with economic growth<sup>47</sup> is posited as 'an appropriate basis for analysis of education policy.'<sup>48</sup>

Within the Human Capital Theory model, there are two views – the narrow view, where the acquisition of knowledge and skills can be measured against higher earnings, and the broad view, where learning is a valuable process in itself, even if it does not contribute to higher earnings.<sup>49</sup> This paradigm applied to the model at the micro level, where education is seen in terms of the individual's economic productivity leads to the prevailing policy response – a focus on that which can be measured – privileging the narrow view over the broad view.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO (2003) *Education in a multilingual world – UNESCO Education Position Paper* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf> (accessed 24.03.10) (p14)

<sup>47</sup> Olaniyan, D.A and Okemakinde, T (2008) *Human Capital Theory: Implications for Economic Development* in European Journal of Scientific Research, Eurojournals Publishing from [www.eurojournals.com/ejsr\\_24\\_2\\_01.pdf](http://www.eurojournals.com/ejsr_24_2_01.pdf) (accessed 08.04.10)

<sup>48</sup> Quiggin, J. (1999) *Human Capital Theory and Education Policy in Australia*, *Australian Economic Review* 32(2), pp 130 – 144. From [www.uq.edu.au/economics/.../HumanCapitalAustER99.html](http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/.../HumanCapitalAustER99.html) (Accessed 08.04.10)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

At the macro level, the application of the Human Capital Theory model leads to a focus on the measurement of the social and private rates of return on education. Examples of social returns in the macro application of the model include health and well-being outcomes and the development of greater social capital. However, as these rates of return are difficult to measure, governments often default to the micro level measurements – the private rates of return vis-à-vis educational attainment and earnings.

The application of this theory to the education sphere has typically seen measurements constructed in the form of standardized tests, delivered in the language of instruction. In my country this means that Aboriginal children, many of whom do not speak Standard Australian English, are being tested in a language they do not understand. This results in lower average standardized test scores for Aboriginal children across Australia. As in other parts of the world, there is a direct correlation between remoteness and lesser results, with those living in the remotest parts of the country achieving the lowest results of all.

As mentioned, the focus of the debate on bilingual learning in Australia has become political, rather than pedagogical, with the political imperative now being to improve the results of Aboriginal children in the standardized tests, delivered in English.

There is no doubt (or argument against the fact) that Aboriginal students in Australia should become proficient in English as the language of transaction. However, recent policy developments are based on political imperatives driven by the short-term need to improve standardized test scores, regardless of the preponderance of evidence that well-resourced bilingual and multilingual education programs improve educational outcomes. Furthermore, the evidence shows that “having the official language of instruction as a home language significantly lowers the risk of having fewer than four years in education at age 17 to 22.”<sup>50</sup>

Another concerning consequence is the impact that these decisions will have on the on the extinguishment of Aboriginal languages in Australia. The 2009 UNESCO Atlas of World Languages in Danger of Disappearing states that in Australia, 108 languages are in various degrees of danger.<sup>51</sup>

Numerous academics have commented on the ‘naivety’ and ‘unintelligence’ of developing ‘a state or national literacy policy...on the basis of a debate of test scores and methods without an understanding of the changing places and contexts where people are using literacy for their and their communities’ own cultural interests and capital gains.’<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the Interagency Support Group’s report to this Forum challenges all mechanisms of the UN and all states is to develop and implement, with appropriate resourcing, effective means of doing so.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid (p. 159)

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00206>

<sup>52</sup> Luke, A (2001) *How to Make Literacy Policy Differently: Generational Change, Professionalisation, and Literate Futures - Opening plenary address delivered at the Joint National AATE/ALEA Conference, Hobart, Tasmania* from <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/standards/english/english/teachers/discussion/luke> (accessed 24.03.10); see also Cummins, J. (undated) *Bilingual Children’s Mother Tongue: Why Is It Important for Education?* University of Toronto from <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/mother.htm> (accessed 24.03.10)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Forum recommends UNESCO, CBD and other relevant agencies convene an expert meeting, in conjunction with the Permanent Forum consisting of intercultural and educational experts and UN agencies to explore themes and concepts related to bilingual and multilingual education in the context of teaching in mother tongue Indigenous languages.
2. The Forum notes that in order to facilitate the high level meeting on Indigenous language instruction, there is a need for country-specific situation analyses. The Forum invites UNESCO to conduct this analysis, given the agency's experience and expertise in the area. The Forum also invites UNESCO to transmit such situation analyses to the Forum. This analysis should identify the legislative and/or policy frameworks that states employ to facilitate successful models of bilingual learning, multicultural and multilingual learning and mother tongue education and identify the barriers to implementation of these frameworks.
3. The Forum recommends that the United Nations system, the World Bank Group, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank & other multilateral development banks formulate policies to ensure that Indigenous education projects which are financed take in to account the use, protection and intercultural preservation of Indigenous languages through supporting bilingual and multilingual education in Indigenous languages. The International Monetary Fund should respect the rights of Indigenous peoples recognized in International Law.
4. On the basis of information received at this session, the Forum expresses its deep concern at the changes in policy on bilingual education in the Northern Territory, Australia. The Forum urges the Australian Government to work with its state and territory education systems to develop models of bilingual and multilingual education which are consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.