

TERRITORY GOVERNMENT BANS BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR MOST OF THE SCHOOL DAY

A decision by the Territory's Education Minister Marion Scrymgour to force bilingual schools to teach English for the first four hours of each day goes against her department's Indigenous education strategic plan.

Ms Scrymgour has said the ban is needed to place a greater emphasis on improving children's literacy in English.

"As we move forward with transforming indigenous education we will ensure that schools in the bush have structured language and culture programs which help young Territorians to develop an understanding of their unique heritage," Ms Scrymgour said.

"However, this cannot be at the cost of children becoming literate and numerate in English. That's why I've stipulated the first four hours must be taught in English in our schools each day."

This action goes against the Education Department's own Indigenous education strategic plan for 2006 - 2009.

That plan states - "Evidence and experience

suggest that Indigenous students can and do achieve at the same level as other students where: teaching programs are relevant to the life of the students and are inclusive of Indigenous languages and culture."

Under the heading, "Action areas and priorities revitalise the bilingual approach", the department's strategic plan states - "There are 11 programs in Territory Government schools that use a bilingual model."

The bilingual programs are effective overseas and give an indication of positive results in the Territory. DEET will strengthen the bilingual program and improve its effectiveness and sustainability to deliver outcomes.

"It is expected that these actions will result in increased numbers of Indigenous students achieving lit-

eracy and numeracy benchmarks," the plan adds.

Under the section headed, "Priority 3: Indigenous languages and culture programs", the plan says, "DEET believes introducing a greater focus on Indigenous languages and culture programs in NT schools will improve indigenous student outcomes by: increasing the level of engagement of Indigenous people in schools promoting improved attendance through the provision of culturally relevant teaching programs...."

It would seem the Minister disagrees.

Northern Territory Schools with bilingual education programs

Areyonga School, Lajamanu CEC, Maningrida CEC, Milingimbi CEC, Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku, Willowra School, Yirrkala CEC, Yuendumu CEC, Numbulwar.

Tom Calma says:

"I am bothered by the fact that this policy will only really affect bilingual schools and yet there is no evidence to say that bilingual schools do worse than non-Bilingual schools.

In fact there is evidence that bilingual students do better in English reading literacies than 'English' schools in their regions. And the English schools offer education in English for all of the hours of the school day.

So let's put that one to bed. Bilingual education does not kill off English literacy. And Bilingual education has the added benefit of developing literacies in the first language - meaning that children are learning literacies in both their first Indigenous language(s) and in English."

Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and national Race Discrimination Commissioner in the annual Eric Johnston lecture titled, 'A human rights agenda for the Northern Territory'.

Exhibition bears fruit of language and culture in education

Despite the Northern Territory Government's ideological opposition to Aboriginal languages within its education system, a recent multi media exhibition by Alyawarr and Anmatyerr women clearly demonstrates their overriding desire for an education that respects and includes both local language and culture and Western culture in the system.

Indigenous Research Fellow, Charles Darwin University, Josie Douglas said the exhibition came about from a group of women at Utopia who requested support from Batchelor Institute to document knowledge about bush medicines in order to pass it on to younger generations

This *Intem-antey anem* - these things will always be exhibition is the result of Alyawarr and Anmatyerr women identifying education outcomes that are important to them and an organisation, Batchelor Institute, having the flexibility, goodwill and

dedicated staff to make it happen. Too often, remote education initiatives that are important to local people are crippled by a failure of imagination at the bureaucratic level," Douglas said.

"Part of the process included Alyawarr and Anmatyerr people getting practice at presenting knowledge in different ways, to different audiences, as part of an inter-generational team"

The group presented at the World's Indigenous Peoples Education Conference in Melbourne recently.

Above: CDU Research Fellow Josie Douglas; above and below right: the group was composed of young and older women who had all been heavily involved in the project

