

Multilingual Schooling in Papua New Guinea: A Sharp tool easily blunted.

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Introduction

In the current climate of wide discussion on the merits of the current multilingual program Papua New Guinea has adopted, it is timely to analyse what has been achieved so far, and to identify some issues that may place strain on the policy during the life of the current Education Plan 2005 – 2014. In this presentation, I will focus on language issues that impact on my task as Long Term Adviser, Vernacular Literacy. I start with an overview of the language situation in Papua New Guinea. I will then proceed to an analysis of some of the findings of the recent CRIP Impact Study Draft 7th 6-monthly Report and relate them to first- and second-language pedagogy research. Finally I will mention some issues directly relevant to the implementation of the Language Policy in schools in Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is very diverse linguistically. Currently, there are thought to be more than 850 languages with numerous dialects. Some of the languages have few speakers, while the larger languages have upwards of 200,000 speakers. Approximately one-quarter of the languages are members of the Austronesian family of languages, while three-quarters are members of the Papuan, or non-Austronesian family of languages. The Austronesian languages are mostly located in coastal, near coastal and island areas. The Papuan languages are spread over the mainland valleys, high mountain ranges and plateaux of the interior. As well as these two large groups of languages, Papua New Guinea is home to Tok Pisin, an English-based lingua franca, and Hiri Motu, a Motu-based lingua franca. At Independence, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu gained recognition as National languages, and English as the official language. The National Constitution enshrined the right of individuals to literacy in their vernacular, the national lingua franca (Tok Pisin or Hiri Motu) and/or English, in effect a multilingual language and literacy policy. At that time English was, *de facto*, the language of instruction in schools.

Historical setting of the reforms

Up until the late 1950's, Church Missions had provided schooling for Papua New Guineans. In most cases that schooling had been in the vernacular language of the area where the Mission was located, or from a nearby area. Assuming control of education, the Colonial Government offered subsidies dependent on the use of English in all grades. The English-only policy was enforced by withdrawal of subsidies from non-compliant non-government organisations.

During the decade of the '60's, Papua New Guinea continued to be subject to a centralised, top-down system of formal education under the Australian colonial government. The philosophy of education focused on western values and used the education system and English as strategies aimed toward building Papua New Guinea into a politically independent nation. Up to that time, vernacular languages were considered to be unsuitable for formal education because of supposed deficiencies for expressing complex intellectual ideas. The result was a westernising education system tending to alienate students from their culture rather than strengthening their appreciation of and participation in it (Litteral 2001; Matane 1986)

During the decade of the '70's, the language-in-education policy was hotly debated throughout the country. In 1973, the first draft of the National Education Plan called for a return to schooling in the vernacular, yet when the Plan was finally adopted in 1976, the National Executive Council cancelled all plans for vernacular languages as mediums of instruction and reaffirmed the Government's English-only policy. Following Independence, decentralisation to provincial governments provided a political environment for change and a window of opportunity for Provinces, whose populations

elected for vernacular schooling. Throughout this decade, the University of Papua New Guinea and non-government organisations including SIL, were strongly advocating the use of vernaculars in schooling.

In the decade of the '80's, a number of Provincial governments set up village schools using their vernacular languages in the early years of schooling. These vernacular classrooms were outside the centralised formal education system. By the end of the decade of the 80's, the village self-help schools (known as Viles Tok Ples Priskuls also Tok Ples Prep Skuls) were widespread throughout the country. The movement for initial vernacular literacy in school had become a "*grassroots fire which...spread all over the country*" (SIL 1995:25). By the end of 1993, Tok Ples Skuls were operating in 220 languages with 48,000+ students and 3000 Tok Ples teachers – an "*obvious success story*" (Ahai and Bopp 1995).

Partly as a response to the enthusiasm for vernacular languages generated in the Tok Ples Priskuls and partly as a response to increasing community opinion, as evidenced in the Matane Report, a national programme addressing the need and demand for vernacular literacy was established, a Language and Literacy Section was created within the Curriculum Development Division, a National Literacy Committee was formed, which then formulated a National Language and Literacy Policy encouraging the use of vernacular languages in early schooling, the maintenance of vernacular language and literacy in the formal education system and a transfer to English, Tok Pisin or Hiri Motu (Ahai and Bopp, 1995), all of which confirmed the movement away from English as the sole medium of instruction in the formal education system.

Meanwhile, it was becoming increasingly clear that the education system in place at that time was unable to meet the nation's social, cultural and economic needs. Further, it was inordinately expensive with costs rising dramatically beyond what the country could sustain. There was a high dropout rate, and the academic standards being reached were unsatisfactory. In order to address these issues, an educational reform process was begun.

The Matane Report (1986) is quoted as being the birth of the education reforms (NDOE 2002). Under its impetus and that of the Education Sector Review (1990), the education system was to be radically restructured. One concern of the Committee responsible for the 1986 Report was the loss of relevance of education for the majority of students, and the lack of early childhood education opportunities. The members argued strongly for the development of the early childhood sector and importantly, for the language of instruction to be the language spoken by the child. This meant that instruction would be in any one of the country's community languages or a lingua franca. This was, and remains, a daunting challenge, but it was underpinned by a strong maintenance approach to PNG cultures and the cultural ways of doing things. The Sector Review indicated that to continue into the future in the way education was going would be unlikely to have a significant effect and would be prohibitively expensive. Thus, an integrated package of strategies was developed which radically changed the education system in its structure and curriculum and which established a lower cost base at each level of education.

Since then, much has been accomplished through policies devised

- to reform and restructure the formal system as it then existed
- to increase the use of Vernacular as the language of instruction in the early years of schooling, and
- to expand educational access and opportunity for students, with particular reference to Grades 7 and 11.

These initiatives were not introduced chronologically; different provinces, districts and schools took up varying aspects of the reform depending on the resources available to them at the time. Their successful implementation is and has been contingent on factors both foreseen and unforeseen during the process of implementation. The national diversity celebrated as one of the country's greatest assets, has ensured that little could be taken for granted in the reform process in such a complex social, geographical, political and linguistic context. Some issues compromising the success of the reform may relate to the timing of introduction of some of the innovations, the follow-on effects for staffing and funding, and the availability of essential materials such as syllabus documents and teaching resources to support implementation. I mention these events because of their effect on the anticipated positive outcomes of the implementation of Vernacular languages in schooling.

In relation to language of instruction, the finally-approved change in language policy was linked to the National Goals enshrined in the Constitution, particularly the goal of integral human development. To achieve that goal, education was to be directed toward socialisation, participation, liberation and equality through input from different agents such as home, church, school and community. Instruction was to commence in community languages as a resource for developing an active and mature commitment toward their communities. The purpose for use of vernacular languages was to establish strong cultural bonding between children and their community (Waiko 2003). Thus, students could more effectively participate in the life of their communities and meet the needs of the nation for self-reliant, co-operative, progressive and problem-solving citizens in whichever sphere of national life they chose. The need that some students would have for a language of wider communication was recognised through bilingual schooling that commenced from Grade 3 onwards.

Although the official policy was that vernacular languages were to be used as a medium of instruction, it is sometimes unclear in official documents and discussions about language in schooling, what is meant by Vernacular.

- Is it the 'first' language that children learn to speak? In a multilingual society such as PNG, it may not always be clear which is the first language, since children in bi- or multilingual homes may acquire two languages simultaneously.
- Is it the 'home' language? In some cases there will be more than one language spoken at home, as mentioned above.
- Is it a language spoken by the students and the teacher – in which case it could be a lingua franca, which may or may not be the 'first' language of the student.
- Is Tok Pisin or Hiri Motu the home language/first language/ community language/vernacular of the children? In that case, it will be the language of instruction.
- Are there unforeseen implications for academic learning and bridging to English?
- Is it 'a language the children understand'?

What are the effects of these different language situations for the supposed academic and cultural-bonding advantages discussed in the research literature? Most of the research literature on societal tri- or multilingualism describes situations in the developed countries, and opportunities abound for research originating in multilingual societies such as Papua New Guinea. The recently-completed Curriculum Standards Monitoring Test provides a foundation for detailed research into the effects of the use of vernacular language as medium of instruction in schools across the country. As well, the seventh CRIP Impact Study 6-monthly report, also recently-completed, has findings that are instructive in a discussion of the supposed cognitive/ academic advantages of students commencing schooling in a home language/first language/ community language/ Vernacular language and 'bridging' to English in Grade 3. It is not possible to be more precise in terminology because the distinctions were not made in the study. However, if we assume the ideal position which is that the

students were being schooled in the language of the home by a teacher who was fluent in that language, we can arrive at some tentative conclusions from the findings.

Reform Status	Students	Language of instruction	P3	P5	P7
Reform Status 1(a)	entered Grade 1 w/o attending Elementary	English	2 ½ yrs teaching in E; tested in E?	4 ½ yrs teaching in E Performed better in math & language than attendees at E – Reform status 2 & 3?	6 ½ yrs teaching in E
Reform Status 1(b)	Entered Grade 1 after attending 1 or 2 yrs EL. Not incl in sample				
Reform Status 2	Entered Elementary school before Reform materials available	Vernacular or Tok Pisin	6 mths teaching in English – tested in E?	2 ½ yrs teaching in E	4 ½ yrs teaching in E; Performed better, on average, in both maths and lang. than sts who entered Gr 1 w/o attending elementary education
Reform Status 3	Entered Elementary school when or since reform materials available				

In the section on *Student learning outcomes in numeracy and literacy*, and using an agreed classification of cohort classes roughly the same as the wording in Columns 1 and 2 of the Table above, the analysts compared the performances of P5 and P7 students by Reform Status 1 and 2.

The results show that, in P5, students who entered Grade 1 without attending elementary education performed better, on average, in both mathematics and language than those who started in elementary schools before the reform curriculum material was available. By contrast, in P7, those who started in elementary schools before the reform curriculum material was available performed better, on average, in both mathematics and language than those who entered Grade 1 without attending elementary education.

The authors of the study suggest that these “paradoxical” findings may be attributed to “the additional year of elementary education (being) beneficial to both literacy and numeracy. In the longer term, but this is not apparent in the shorter term”. I suggest that we take a closer look at these “paradoxical” findings. They may, in fact, turn out to be not quite so paradoxical after all, when compared with the results from research into the learning of two languages in the formal schooling context.

Two factors are to be taken into account. The first is the notion that ‘a first language strongly developed results in strong second language learning’ (Cummins 1984). In PNG, where one of the goals of schooling is that students should achieve high levels of competence in English, learning in and through the vernacular has positive consequences. It makes very good sense for students to begin their schooling in a language they understand and in which they can interact with each other and the teacher. Further, cognitive processes fostering intellectual growth, such as comprehension, use of abstractions, analysis, synthesis and evaluation that assist a student to make progress academically are more readily accessible when the students are working in their first language. Studies of learners in other places around the world show that if children’s first language is well developed at the time they begin learning a second language, they will achieve greater academic success in both the first and the second language than if they had learned in and through the second language only. These success stories can also be found in PNG in initial reports of the Tok Ples Priskuls established during the ‘80’s in a number of Provinces in the North Solomons (now ABG), Enga and Southern Highlands.

A brief summary of research carried out with Finnish-speaking children whose parents immigrated to Sweden is also instructive. When the children entered Swedish schools,

- the children who had already spent several years in the school system in Finland, then started school in Sweden with Swedish as the language of instruction, developed high levels of competence in *both* Finnish and Swedish.
- those children who were only just at the start of their schooling at the time their families migrated to Sweden, and therefore had had only one or two years of schooling in their first language Finnish, did not perform as outstandingly as the older children.
- The children who struggled the most, and whose competence was poor in *both* Finnish and Swedish languages, were those who migrated to Sweden either before they had started school in Finland, or right at the beginning of their school career. That is, they had not developed the abstract language use valued in classrooms, nor had they become literate, in their home language. Thus they had no strong foundation for learning in a second language. This research led the Swedish school authorities to set up schooling in the Finnish language in Swedish schools until the third grade, when Swedish became the major language of instruction. By sixth grade, children’s

performance in this program in both Finnish and Swedish were almost at the same level as that of Swedish-speaking children in Sweden, and as that of Finnish-speaking children in Finland.

From this evidence, we could say that if we want children to develop a high level of competence in a second language, one way to assist this is to make sure their first language is strongly developed first, and to allow time for the beneficial effects of learning in a first language to be manifested in the academic progress of the students.

As well, bilingual children have a language asset: having learned a first language first, they know what language is and what it can do. They perceive language as arbitrary in ways that monolingual speakers cannot. Thus they can be analytical about tasks involving learning the second language. Besides having this language asset, concept formation is easier, and they have greater mental flexibility. *Academically, they out-perform in many cases their age mates who are schooled in the second language from the beginning of schooling.* This seems to be the result that the Impact Study is describing for the P7 students.

The second factor concerns the length of time required for effective ‘bridging’ from the first language to the second. In the days when I taught English as a second language to immigrant children in Sydney’s Western Suburbs, there was a tacit understanding among teachers that if a student was a competent speaker of a language, there was no reason why he or she should not be able to cope with the academic tasks of the classroom. What does it mean to say that a student is proficient in a language? Some teachers thought that competent conversational interaction with other students and teachers indicated an underlying ability to engage successfully in classroom tasks relying heavily on language competence such as reading, comprehending, analysing and synthesising print materials. Clearly, if we suggest students need to be proficient in a first language before beginning intensive instruction in a second language, we need to define what we mean by ‘language proficiency’.

The language research literature for both first- and second-language speakers suggests that there are two dimensions to language proficiency. First there is conversational, or surface, fluency which is the ability to interact in peer-appropriate ways in everyday face-to-face situations. Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and paralinguistic features such as body language for example, can be assessed to see if meaning was conveyed. Then there is what has been termed cognitive/academic language proficiency.

One researcher has conceptualised language proficiency as the ability to master both context-embedded and context-reduced language (Cummins 1984). Context-embedded language refers primarily to face-to-face exchanges where participants negotiate meaning, and what is said is supported by various paralinguistic and situational cues with the likelihood of immediate feedback when the message is not understood. Context-reduced language relies primarily or even exclusively on linguistic cues to meaning. This is particularly true of print, where the meaning resides wholly in the text and the reader has to reconstruct meaning from world experience and knowledge, and previous practice with the same kinds of text. Thus, successful interpretation of the message rests almost solely on ability to process the language of the written text. Since a considerable amount of classroom practices centre on literacy, it is important to understand the different demands classroom tasks make on students learning language. And if this is true for first-language speakers, how much more relevant is it to second-language learners?

Another researcher, talking about first-language learners, suggests that “ability to manipulate the language necessary for school learning is a matter of *knowing how to do it*: how to go about constructing the various patterns of discourse in which different kinds of knowledge, information and ideas are expressed, or realised” (Christie 1985).

That is, if we want students to achieve mastery of the various kinds of school learning, we have to provide opportunities for them to learn and practise the language necessary for the tasks set for them in school. This is of particular relevance in a discussion of why children should begin their schooling in the first language first. Students need to learn to recognise and use the kinds of language on which school tasks are based, before being expected to negotiate meaning in a language they may not know very well.

In discussing the comparison of achievements of Tok Pisin and Vernacular speakers, the authors of the Impact study comment that the assessment in October/ November 2005 would enable an examination to be made as to whether this group subsequently caught up, that is, whether they had had a temporary setback in Grade 3 or whether their disadvantage was maintained in Grade 4. In response, I review some of the research literature concerning the length of time it takes for students to become competent in a second language after the development of proficiency in their home language.

How long should it take students to be able to negotiate meaning in the new language? A study conducted in Canada in the early 80’s showed that immigrant students arriving after age six took between six and seven years to approach grade norms in English academic skills. This can be restated to say that second-language learners may take up to seven years to catch up with their first-language-English peers, and this in a situation where English is the language of the wider community. Thus, when reviewing the Impact study report, we could suggest that 2 1/2 years of schooling in English may not be sufficient for the beneficial effects of schooling in the home language to be fully realised, particularly since the classroom is the only source of English for many students in our schools. As the Swedish study demonstrates, a later start could mean a stronger finish, and the positive effects for Papua New Guinean students learning English may not become apparent until the later years of Primary schooling.

I now review briefly the findings concerning the impact of the language used on literacy and numeracy outcomes as reported in the Impact Study. The study’s authors compared the use of Vernacular with the use of Tok Pisin, and their findings are instructive. No differentiation is made in the study between Tok Pisin as home language and Tok Pisin as a second language, which in a finer-grained longer study might prove to be significant but in this case need not deter us. In the impact study, students with a 100% vernacular experience in E1 in 2002 on average, performed less well by the time they were tested in P3 in both maths and language in 2004 than students who had over 80% Tok Pisin background. (I could not find an explanation of this percentage in the study). In maths, the difference in academic performance between users of each language was not statistically significant, but in language it was. The authors of the study suggest that this could be accounted for, at least in part, by the possible lack of bridging of students from E2 to English in P3. This is entirely reasonable. Further, background information about their bridging classes would assist in gauging

- a) how well the *teachers* of the classes they moved into in P3 could speak, read and write the Vernacular the students were speaking. There is a common assumption that if someone speaks a language, then that person can also read and write in that language without direct instruction. This is clearly not the case. As well, in some grade 3 classes, teachers and students do not even share a common language, so

little if any support for the first language is available as the students move into an English-only language environment. Thus their experience is that of ‘submersion’ education – little if any support is available as they learn to ‘swim’ in this new language environment. They are basically ‘thrown in at the deep end’ and left to work out for themselves how to survive.

- b) how well the teachers understood the model from which they were to plan for the integration of learning in two languages across the curriculum;
- c) how much information they had available on Outcomes-based education, what materials they had and strategies they knew about or even their knowledge of how to plan for two languages in use in one classroom, to assist in ‘bridging’ these students from the home language to the language of wider communication.

It is possible that the teachers themselves were struggling with a heavy cognitive load while making positive efforts to adapt their teaching and live up to expectations.

On the other hand, while sharing some of these same problems, teachers of students who graduated from Elementary where they had spent their prior three years of schooling in speaking, reading, writing and becoming numerate in Tok Pisin, had less of a load to carry. This is because Tok Pisin is widely used in contexts where there is no common language, and my guess is that the teacher used Tok Pisin to get things done and as the medium of instruction, that is, for the teaching of content, as the students moved on to English. So it didn’t matter if the P3 teacher could not speak the Vernacular – Tok Pisin was available for conveying intended meaning. This meant that there was no breakdown in understanding of what was expected, or of the concepts to be developed as students learned English, since the teachers could explain and encourage students to take part in classroom discussions, giving and exchanging information and generally developing the ability to become literate and numerate more successfully than their Vernacular-speaking peers. Even if the P3 teacher of the students who had been schooled for three years in Vernacular, used Tok Pisin for instructional language with these students, the fact remained that the Tok Pisin students maintained continuity of language use as they moved into English. Furthermore, they were both literate and numerate already in Tok Pisin.

When we consider the numeracy results, we find some of the same factors facilitating student learning. The Tok Pisin number system is base 10, the vocabulary is largely English-based and the students have already been learning numeracy for three years at Elementary. Once again there is little discontinuity between their Elementary learning and their P3 learning. On the other hand, Elementary teachers who have worked with mathematical concepts of space, measurement and number in Vernacular, are likely to find their students disadvantaged when they move to an English-only environment where these concepts are much harder to explain in a language in which they have no fluency.

The Impact Study has findings as well, on results which compare the P3 cohort of 2002 with that of 2004. Interestingly, the study indicated that in Grade 3, ‘rural students who had started in elementary schools when or since the reform curriculum materials was introduced and available, performed better on average in both maths and language than rural students of mixed reform status’.

Yet urban students who had started in elementary schools when or since the reform curriculum material was introduced and available performed less well on average in both maths and language than urban students of mixed reform status. This is more difficult to explain, since urban schools have in the main opted for Tok Pisin or English instruction, even in elementary classes since before the reform and up to the present. A closer examination of the specific

language of instruction may allow us to explain these findings more clearly. On the other hand, it may reflect the difficulties teachers are experiencing in managing so much change in their workplace. If that is so, how much more significant are the effects of change in the rural areas with far fewer resources to call on?

However, the findings indicate that

“the main conclusion that can be drawn from these new comparisons is that, although urban students remain advantaged relative to rural students, the Reform appears to have been contributing to a reduction in the disadvantage of the rural students, particularly in language. This is consistent with some of the objectives of the National Education Plan and is likely to contribute to reducing some of the rural/urban inequities” (p. 58).

In the light of this minimal evidence available so far, the indications are that the program is working despite the considerable infrastructural, administrative, language and resources issues still to be resolved. But, what else have we gained?

What have we gained?

- Over 400 languages now have orthographies and are being used as the medium of instruction in Elementary schools throughout the country. These languages represent the biggest language groups, and cover between 80 - 90% of the population.
- This is not to overlook the importance of the remaining 400-plus languages representing the smaller language communities. These languages are most in need of support yet least likely in a cost-benefit analysis to receive it. Says Osahito, “the key measure of a language’s viability is considered not so much the number of people who speak it as the extent to which children are learning it as their native tongue. Once the process of native-language learning stops, the chain of transmission is broken”.

Why bother with preserving vernacular languages at all? The strongest argument is in the interactive relationship between language, culture and the environment. The ‘environment’ includes not just the natural world but the space humans occupy alongside of others, that is, the human society they have constructed along with the worlds of thought nourished in the collective mind: religion, law, artistic creativity, science. Every time a language is lost, a whole encyclopaedia of natural knowledge dies, too. One researcher (Osahito 2004) has suggested that the loss or reduction in linguistic and cultural diversity may eventually cause a decline in the intellectual variety of humankind. This is an extreme position, but one to which we could pay some attention.

An associated question concerns written Vernacular. Why should students become literate in their community languages? After all, there are limited resources for the readers/writers outside of the classroom for them to continue to utilise their hard-won literacy skills. Why not just continue to use them in the oral mode, since PNG has been a collective of oral societies for millennia?

We are familiar with research that indicates a transfer of skills and knowledge from a first language to a second language. Besides this educational advantage, I suggest that spoken languages benefit from being written : they become more permanent, less ephemeral; they accrue a certain prestige from being written down; they can become the means of language creativity – a volume of materials for a local readership. This is one of the results of having a written script. It is yet to happen on a large scale in PNG, but without a written script, it is not

likely to happen. Thus there is a need for all of the remaining languages to have orthographies, word lists, grammars to maintain and promote their longevity.

Another gain is in the perceived relevance of schooling to the students and their communities. In this new educational climate, there is anecdotal evidence that children talk to their parents outside of school hours about their learning experiences. Inside the classroom, children are able to talk to each other and to the teacher in the pursuit of learning. Further, parents are able to understand and appreciate what their children are learning and to take an active part in their schooling if they so wish. The cultural bonding goal of schooling in the Vernacular is being achieved in some settings.

In fiscal terms, the education system has the advantage of having a lower cost of schooling for more students in school – buildings, teacher training, and production of materials are all more cost-effective in elementary schools. Furthermore, elementary schooling has provided employment for up to 4,000 Grade 10 school leavers who otherwise would have been unemployed, and who are now proficient in Vernacular literacy.

There are now new syllabus documents reflecting Papua New Guinea lifestyles, written for Papua New Guinean students and teachers by PNG curriculum officers and teachers. Further, the syllabus introduces the expectation that students will learn to use effectively a wide variety of texts, both oral and written; in English and Vernacular to meet the academic requirements of learning in the upper school grades.

Issues

There are, of course, issues that will require commitment and perseverance to ensure the program continues to benefit students in schools across the country. I confine myself here basically to language matters, since these are the issues that most concern me.

These are the language issues at Elementary level.

- What does the Language Policy tell us about language use in Elementary schools?
- How should a balanced decision be made concerning what language to use in a school setting, and
- Does the Language Policy promote choices which contradict the National policy on language use?
- How well do teachers understand the need to create a wider variety of text types for production of Big Books? and closely related,
- How can School Boards be encouraged to allocate sufficient funds each term/year to enable teachers to continue to produce Big Books and other resources essential to their teaching?

There are the Tok Pisin issues at both Elementary and Lower Primary level. Even though Tok Pisin is used very widely in the system, few materials are available to teachers. Few schools have the Dictionary and Grammar of Tok Pisin, with the result that different sociolectal speakers spell the language idiosyncratically. Is this a problem? If it continues, will there one day come a time when materials produced in one part of the country cannot be used elsewhere?

- When will teachers at both Elementary and Lower Primary level have the opportunity to learn to read and write fluently and efficiently in Tok Pisin? Primary teachers particularly require inservicing. Should an elective in Tok Pisin be introduced in preservice training?
- What will the promotion of Tok Pisin mean in terms of language transfer and shift? Already, many communities are choosing Tok Pisin as the language of instruction in

Elementary grades. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage; an advantage because a corpus of print material already exists and is likely to continue to be produced; a disadvantage because the more Tok Pisin blossoms, the fewer Vernacular languages may be used. The loss of human knowledge and experience of the environment as these are expressed in and through Vernaculars may well be hastened. What does that imply for the maintenance of a plurality of cultures, and the goal of cultural bonding?

The most vexing issues in Lower Primary classes concern bridging: programming in two languages in such a way that the first language continues to be developed as the students are being assisted to become proficient in the second language. Now teachers need to recognise the necessity for students to actively engage in their own learning through talking to each other and the teacher about the tasks they are engaged in. For Lower Primary teachers in each of the Grades 3, 4 and 5, responsibility moved from planning to use just one language in the classroom, planning generally from print materials and following a program with emphasis on blackboard work, to more complex planning. Now they have to recognise and plan for a stronger emphasis on oral as well as literate tasks conducted in the Vernacular the students used in the elementary grades. This is to be integrated with oral and literate tasks in English, and incorporating the content of other subject areas, while following a bridging model that is sometimes poorly understood by the teachers entrusted with its implementation.

Compounding their uncertainties about bridging, is the fact that many have not learned in and through their own first language and therefore are not literate in the language of the students graduating from the elementary schools. Often they are shamed by their inability to display higher levels of literacy than the students they teach. Which begs the question, how are they to promote students' ongoing development of the first language? The need for teachers to be highly skilled literates in both (all?) the classroom languages cannot be overlooked if the academic progress of the students is to be effectively charted.

What of the bridging teachers who receive students from several language backgrounds and experience into their classrooms? What strategies can they utilise to develop the confidence that they are meeting the needs of all their students in relation to ongoing language development? Is the strategy of bridging through the use of Tok Pisin as the language of instruction as well as for getting done the routine tasks of the classroom, to be recommended? What factors do teachers need to be aware of, effectively to bridge students from this third (often oral) language? Is multigrade teaching an option for the bridging teachers, and can they get specialised help with implementing multigrades in their schools?

Do the bridging teachers need specialised training in teaching English as a second language? If so, is it possible for them to complete an inservice Certificate or such like, that prepares them for all the complexities of the bridging process?

Next, what assistance is available to the bridging teachers in particular so that they can learn strategies for assessing the oral and written languages they are teaching? What guidance is there for understanding how to increase the complexity of tasks set for their students, and to measure their progress? Do they need benchmarks linked to grade levels and if so, how will these be developed?

Further, the effort to inform communities about the effects of the reform and in particular the advantages of schooling in the vernacular, should be accelerated. Sometimes educated parents, too, are not fully informed about the advantages of commencing in a language the students

already are competent – the “less equals more” argument that students learn English better in less time if they commence in their first language.

Finally, we cannot overlook the need for teachers of Grades in the upper school – Gr 6 – 8 and Secondary to receive in-service training in how to enrich their English teaching and to develop strategies for teaching language in and through the content of the subject areas.

Similarly, there is the need to recognise that students working in English in PNG classrooms will almost always be second-language learners of English. The Canadian findings concerning the time it takes for immigrants in an *immersion* situation to catch up with their monolingual classmates has a message for teachers here. Only a small proportion of English learners in Papua New Guinea, mostly in the urban areas of the bigger cities, are in an English *immersion* situation – most are in communities where English is a foreign language. This factor has to be weighed up carefully in syllabus design and in recommending teaching and learning approaches for students in upper grades.

Conclusion

In this paper I have related some of the research on language of instruction to results emerging from the most recent Impact Study in order to demonstrate that educational gains, however small, are identifiable after a decade of radical change to the system of education. This change has included re-engineering the structure of schooling, reconceptualising languages of instruction, redesigning the syllabus and retraining thousands of teachers to meet the expectations of the new system. As the flow-on effects of all of this change stabilise, it should be possible in the future more accurately to establish the credible claims that are made for the academic advantages of multilingual education and the advantages to the nation of cultural bonding, and not lead us to ‘throw the baby out with the bath-water’.

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