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CORRECTIONS

This is a **PROOF ISSUE**. Suggested corrections for the Official Hansard and Bound Volumes should be lodged in writing with the Director, Chambers, Department of Parliamentary Services **as soon as possible but not later than:**

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

PROOF

On the next page, it goes to 'Forced Migration, Hot-spots of Global Change, Bangladesh'. There is a picture of three women up to the top of their shoulders in water. The woman at the front has a floating metal vessel in front of her. Obviously they are appealing to the photographer and whoever is behind the photographer for some form of sustenance in a neighbourhood where, if you are going to stay there, you will be up to your shoulders in water because of the flood. It says this about Bangladesh:

Low-lying Bangladesh foretells the future of climate refugees. Because roughly half of the country lies less than ten meters (33 ft) above sea level, it has been flooded more frequently as glacial melt in the Himalaya has risen. Tropical cyclone activity is also likely to rise in the near future, swelling the Padma (Ganges), Jamuna (Brahmaputra), and Meghna Rivers, which all lie within the country's borders. Climate refugees already account for more than a third of recent migrants to Dhaka, the capital. Nearly 80 per cent of the nation's legal disputes are over land erosion triggered by storms.

I watched on television just the other night as people hastily pulled down their corrugated iron shelters in Bangladesh as the banks collapsed on a river and eroded 100 metres across the fields upon which the people depended, to swallow their houses. The people hastily collapsed their houses to at least take away the building materials.

We are in a world that is in very great human-induced trouble. Population is part of that. When I came onto the planet, in 1944, there were 2.5 billion people. There are now 6.8 billion people, a tripling almost. By mid-century, when youngsters now will be in their middle age, it is projected there will be nine billion to 11 billion people—more likely 11 billion if you read this *National Geographic* special, which is currently on the bookshelves. Add this to that. At the front of the book it says:

Together we consume 1.4 Earths' worth of resources per year.

In other words, we are burrowing away at the bounty which we need to survive. We will need 3.1 more planets if we are all to survive by mid-century on the average British level of consumption, which is below ours. That cannot happen, and we have to have the wit and wisdom to find a way to share better, to work with each other, to reduce consumption and to reduce population growth. I hope the Prime Minister has got a lot of thinking occurring on that, because Australia is charged with being a leader, not at the back, when it comes to dealing with the issue of how we human beings are going to live peaceably with the planet instead of off it.

Bilingual Education

Senator CROSSIN (Northern Territory) (1.27 pm)—I rise today to talk about a topic which is of great importance to many of my constituents. It relates to the education field and has been quite controversial of late

in the Northern Territory. It is bilingual education. Bilingual education broadly means teaching most subjects in school through two different languages. I had the privilege of teaching in a bilingual school at Yirrkala for five years in the early eighties, so I come to this debate with some knowledge and experience.

Bilingual education emanates from the fact that, in order for a child to be able to competently learn how to operate in another language, they are best off learning how to read and write in their native language—that is, to assess that you read from left to right and from top to bottom and that words on a page relate to a picture. Children best pick up these skills when the language they are speaking relates to the words on the page and when the people around them teaching also speak in their own language. So there is actually some educational theory behind why bilingual education has proven to be a success, and it is about getting children ready to read and to write and to use those skills as they translate to other subjects.

Dr Brian Devlin is an eminent academic in the Northern Territory, an experienced bilingual teacher-linguist and a former principal. He is now, of course, an associate professor at Charles Darwin University. In a paper presented to the AIATSIS research symposium in June this year he said that this goes much deeper than just education and learning skills, that for most remote Aboriginal people bilingual education is 'a tool for survival in a fast-changing, often-confusing world'. Bilingual education in Australia and the Northern Territory has, over the years, only received intermittent support. It has always been a controversial aspect of the education debate.

Bilingual programs for Indigenous students began in the early 1970s, with the support of the then federal government. But in December 1998 the former CLP government of the Northern Territory announced a decision to remove bilingual funding for the then 21 schools on the bilingual program and switch that funding to English as a second language programs. That was quite a change to the way in which programs were to be treated and funded. This was not actually implemented; what happened was a move to 'two-way education', which still allowed for bilingual programs. It is a catchphrase, I guess, for a way in which you communicate to Indigenous parents that the education in the school is happening two ways or both ways: in their own language and in English.

In August 2005 the minister for education at the time in the Northern Territory Labor government announced that bilingual education would be revitalised, but only at 15 chosen schools. Then last October we had another change, unfortunately. This change caused much controversy. It was a move to have all schools teach the first four hours of each day in English. This affects particularly the nine remaining schools running

a bilingual program and has caused considerable confusion and anger. A couple of weeks ago the decision was the topic of a *Four Corners* episode on the ABC. As a result of the outcry, the education minister has decided that 2009 could be seen as a transition year towards the new arrangement but that, from January 2010, all community schools in the Northern Territory will have the first four hours taught in English.

I provide commentary on this debate today because I do not agree with this decision. Some 38 per cent of students in the Northern Territory are Indigenous, with the majority of these living in remote communities, and have English as a second language at best. Coming to a school where non-Indigenous ways are dominant and English is the main language is a huge change for many young Indigenous students. It is hard for them to fit into mainstream education and schooling.

Language and culture go hand in hand. Language reflects culture and world view. The use of Aboriginal language in schools helps to reassure Indigenous students that their culture and their language is valued, and makes school a bit more of a welcoming place. Most students would speak no English at home in Indigenous communities, particularly where there has been a bilingual school. They use the local languages, as many of these communities have more than one of course, or they use Aboriginal English—which is quite different from the standard form of English. In fact, the Northern Territory is probably unique in this country for the strength of the Aboriginal languages that it has—not all are surviving well, even in the Territory, but many still are and are in regular use.

The basis for this decision of the current minister has been questioned. He says that outcomes on NAPLAN for literacy and numeracy in the NT are not good—and they are not—and show the Northern Territory lagging behind other jurisdictions, especially for many Indigenous students. The Northern Territory government wants, as we all do, to close the gap and see Indigenous students achieving the same as other students, as we all do. We all want the best possible outcomes for our young people.

The bilingual programs were introduced initially on the premise that they would improve literacy. The Northern Territory government claims that the ongoing gap shown by the national benchmark tests shows that this has not happened, and even with the additional resources under bilingual programs these students have not, the Northern Territory government claims, improved their performance on these tests. It therefore says that bilingual education is simply not working and emphasis has to go on the dominant language: English. However, it further says that this does not mean that it no longer supports culture and Indigenous languages.

There is a body of evidence that says that the Northern Territory government is wrong and that learning in

one's home language to start with is beneficial. Commissioner Tom Calma has also stated this different view. In a public speech in Darwin back in mid November 2008—the Eric Johnston lecture on 17 November—he said it was a fallacy that bilingual education 'killed off English literacy'. He went on to say that there is 'no evidence that bilingual schools do worse than non-bilingual schools'. The Principal of Areyonga School, who was educated in the bilingual system and has taught in it for 16 years, said that the 'two-way schools', in her experience, performed marginally better in English. Most kids in communities such as Areyonga speak only Pitjantjatjara before going to school. So to enter school where the first four hours each day are in English will be extremely hard—it will be hard for those children to understand and to fit in.

There are several sound platforms advocating for the continuation of bilingual education. Firstly, it is good educational practice to teach young children in their own language while they are acquiring English. It helps them to engage with education in all areas. In 2005 the Northern Territory education department themselves found that when they looked at remote Indigenous schools and compared English results with remote non-Indigenous schools the former did slightly better. Secondly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child says at article 29.1 that education should be aimed at the development of respect for the parents, their cultural identity and their language. So to severely limit bilingual education would appear to be in breach of this article. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also has a clause, article 14.1, which says that Indigenous people have the right to establish and control their own education system, including education in their own language. The Rudd government has expressed support for this declaration. Thirdly, bilingual education helps in the maintenance of Indigenous languages. Bilingual education also helps to encourage community involvement, and if parents and community understand and accept the importance of education, over which they feel they have some control, then surely involvement of the kids through better attendance will happen.

Perhaps one might ask: are the results we are seeing in the NAPLAN test not a result of bilingual education but a result of non-attendance or a result of parents not understanding what education is about? Or is it because in the Northern Territory schools are staffed on attendance and not on enrolment; or is it because in the Northern Territory very little consideration is given to teaching Aboriginal kids in those schools as kids with English as a second language?

I have talked long and proudly of a significantly high achiever in Yirrkala in North-East Arnhem Land by the name of Yananyumul Mununggurr. She is now the CEO of Laynhapuy Homelands Association. You

do not become a CEO unless you are competent in English, literacy and numeracy and in your own language. Yananyumul is a product of bilingual education. And why is that? It is because she went to school every day of her life. It is because she attended 200 days a year for 15 years of her life, and despite the fact, and probably because of the fact, that she was in bilingual education, she has achieved so extremely well. So I question whether or not it is bilingual education that gives us the poor NAPLAN results or whether there are other factors. There are many academics who are experienced in this field that posed the same question in the last 12 months.

Children learn better if they understand the language spoken in school. This is a straightforward observation borne out by a study after study. Charles Grimes, in the introduction to his book, *Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows*:

Even learning a second language is facilitated by starting with a language the children already know.

Grimes goes on to say that it is about time for the Northern Territory government to show some courage and take a fresh look and a more informed approach to education in Indigenous communities, and to pursue a better understanding of the role of language. Dr Brian Devlin, in a paper presented to the AIATSIS Research Symposium, says that educators and parents in the Northern Territory have amply demonstrated that bilingual education programs in remote schools have value for them. Despite this the Northern Territory government has ceased to endorse bilingual education in the Northern Territory, as of next year. Dr Devlin says the Northern Territory government:

... does not accept that there is any merit in using both the vernacular and English as languages of instruction in order to build proficiency in both.

He goes on to say he sees the change announced by the Northern Territory government as marking a shift from 'bilingual education' from 1972 to 1998, to 'two way learning' from 1999 to 2005, to 'structured language and culture programs', which will now only be conducted in the afternoon. This, he says, is a sidelining or marginalising of the idea that first language proficiency can be a strong platform for achievement in a target language, which in this case is English. This, he points out, brings about a degree of conflict between the teachers 'bible'—the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework, which says that children develop knowledge through their first language—and the new directive that instruction shall be only in English for the first four hours a day. The decision by the Northern Territory government means that it has distanced itself from Indigenous people, who have loudly stated their different viewpoint and valuation of bilingual education.

It is my belief the Northern Territory government hides behind the national curriculum. It is my view that

the national curriculum states developmental stages and our learning outcomes at each stage and what we want to see is a nationally consistent outcome by the time the child reaches year 12. My view is that how that child gets there is best determined by the school, by the community and by the education system. If they get there at the end of year 12, proficient in English, having got there through bilingual education, well, well and good.

As indicated earlier there is ample evidence as to the effectiveness of bilingual education both within the Northern Territory and internationally. I do not want to dwell on this is for very long but I think you just need to go to examples in Canada and America to see what I am talking about. A Northern Territory education report in 2005, at page xii, said that a number of studies provide evidence for the premise that bilingual education programs achieve higher outcomes than non-bilingual programs in similar settings. Dr Devlin himself identifies four sources of empirical evidence which showed superior achievement under bilingual programs—including a Northern Territory DEET Multilevel Assessment Program report for 1996-97 and a Northern Territory DEET accreditation report for several schools using the bilingual program. Dr Devlin says that all these reports showed that students in bilingual programs are generally attaining better literacy and numeracy scores than their peers in non-bilingual schools.

So how did the Northern Territory come to make the decision and announcement that they did? They did so, according to Dr Devlin by the use of wrong information that meant that apples were not being compared with apples. They included a Catholic school which was a secondary school only, and the criteria required that the schools have primary programs. They included a community education centre which also did not have a bilingual program. The government did not include all the existing bilingual schools in their survey, so how could it have been truly representative? So the samples of schools used on which to base the decision to have all instruction for the first four hours a day in English is, I believe, seriously flawed. There is clear evidence that good bilingual programs can achieve results. Aboriginal people have made it amply clear that they value and want bilingual education.

Afghanistan

Senator TROOD (Queensland) (1.43 pm)—As is so often the case in the war in Afghanistan, we are again at another point of decision, one of immense importance to the country's future. As many analysts have noted, the political and military situation in Afghanistan is far from encouraging. Internally, among the many entrenched problems that plague the country, we can count a system of governance that is discredited, dysfunctional and lacking in legitimacy. We can count