

24 September 2009

The Hon Paul Raymond Henderson MLA
Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Minister for Education and Training

Dear Sir,

As the research referred to in the attached Grimes report indicates (*Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows*. AuSIL, 2009), we, the undersigned, believe that the current policies and practices of the Northern Territory government relating to language-in-education issues for speakers of indigenous heritage languages, are:

- not in the best interests of the people of the Northern Territory;
- not supported by the research;
- not going to result in improved performance in speaking, reading, or writing *either* standard English *or* indigenous heritage languages;
- not going to help mainstream educators understand how to be more effective in teaching their indigenous students who are not native speakers of standard English;
- not informed by what is considered to be ‘best practice’ in the growing fields of multi-lingual education (MLE), creoles in education, language documentation, and other fields directly related to the issue;
- not informed by the rights of indigenous peoples, of which Australia is a signatory;
- not going to achieve positive outcomes in education;
- continuing to ignore repeated recommendations to the NT government by informed experts over many years.

We further believe the research shows that the current policies and practices of the NT government have the very real potential for:

- contributing to *higher* dropout and repetition rates, so undermining the goal of achieving education for all;
- contributing to *lower* levels of competency in literacy and numeracy;
- contributing to a sense of lower self-worth, inadequacy, marginalisation, and ultimately increased anti-social behaviour;
- contributing to *lower* levels of competency in standard English, thus working *against* the NT government's stated goals of helping indigenous students improve their English;
- contributing to the continuation of non-productive practices by mainstream teachers of students for whom standard English is not the primary language spoken at home.

Therefore we believe that:

- significant change to policies and practices relating to language-in-education issues in the Northern Territory is both necessary and urgent;
- such policy changes must be informed by recent research, and must be formulated through meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, such as leaders of indigenous communities, non-government organisations, and multi-lingual education (MLE) experts who have consistently voiced their support for well designed and well implemented MLE programs in the NT;

- such policy changes must be informed by Articles 13 and 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Australia is a signatory.
- the changes must not only be at the policy level, but provision must also be made for ongoing training and orientation of teachers and school administrators regarding the multilingual make-up of the NT, and what is now considered ‘best practice’ in multilingual education (MLE) circles for teachers of students for whom standard English is not the primary language spoken at home.
- provision must be made for sustained financial support for the development and implementation of well designed multi-lingual education programs in the NT, to turn around the poor performance and non-productive practices found in too many schools and classrooms in the NT.

We further believe that:

- the expertise needed to make informed and constructive changes in the NT is available locally and nationally, not requiring the need to go further afield.

We note that several of the signatories below have written letters, made submissions, organised public forums on indigenous languages in education, or sought audiences with the Chief Minister, the Minister for Education, and the CEO of Education on this issue, and have felt their concerns were dismissed without reasonable justification and without producing the evidence to support the position of the NT government.

Therefore we, the undersigned, are speaking with one voice.

Sincerely,

(signed—actual signatures attached as an appendix)

1. Neil Broad, Director, Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, Inc., Alice Springs
2. Rev. Wendell Flentje, Moderator, Uniting Church in Australia, Northern Synod, Darwin
3. Rev. Gregory Edwin Thompson, Bishop, Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of the Northern Territory, Darwin
4. Priscilla Collins, CEO, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, Darwin
5. Associate Prof. Brian Devlin, EdD. Bilingual Education & Applied Linguistics, School of Education, Charles Darwin University, Darwin
6. Dr. Paul Black, PhD. Convener, Top End Linguistics Circle, and School of Education, Charles Darwin University, Darwin
7. Jeanie Bell, MA. Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics, Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, Batchelor
8. Prof. Nicholas Evans, PhD. Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra
9. (Adjunct) Prof. Jeff Siegel, PhD. School of Behavioural, Cognitive and Social Sciences, University of New England, Armidale
10. Dr. Diana Eades, PhD. School of Behavioural, Cognitive and Social Sciences, University of New England, Armidale
11. Peter Jones, M.Ed. General Secretary of the Uniting Church in Australia, Northern Synod, Darwin
12. (Adjunct) Prof. Charles E. Grimes, PhD. Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, Australian National University; and Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, Inc., Darwin
13. Dr Marilyn McLellan, PhD. Indigenous Languages in Education specialist, Darwin
14. Nancy Devlin, M.Ed. Coordinator, Children's Services and Education Support, School of Education, Charles Darwin University, Darwin
15. Associate Prof. Jane Simpson, PhD. Dept. of Linguistics, University of Sydney

16. Dr. Josephine Caffery, PhD. Learning and Teaching Centre, ACU National (Australian Catholic University)
17. Rev. Dr. Joy Sandefur, PhD. Diocesan Resource Officer, Anglican Diocese of the Northern Territory, Darwin
18. Rev. Dr. Steven J. Etherington, PhD. Indigenous Advisor, Anglican Diocese of the Northern Territory, Darwin.
19. Rev. Dr. Lee Levett-Olson, PhD. Principal, Nungalinga College, Darwin
20. Kathryn McMahon, (PhD candidate in Education). President, Northern Territory branch of the Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ATESOL)

CC:

Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister of Australia
Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, Minister for Social Inclusion
Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth
Hon Peter Garrett AM MP, Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts
Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, Leader of the Opposition, Canberra
Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Shadow Minister for Education
Hon Tony Abbott MP, Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Hon Warren Snowdon MP
Hon Trish Crossin MP
Hon Nigel Scullion MP
Hon Damian Hale MP
Mr Terry Mills MLA, Leader of the Opposition in the Northern Territory
Hon Jane Lesley Agaard MLA
Ms Alison Anderson MLA
Mr Ross Oscar Charles Bohlin MLA
Dr. Christopher Bruce Burns MLA
Ms Jodeen Carney MLA
Mr Peter Glen Chandler MLA
Mr Matthew Escott Conlan MLA
Mr Johan Wessel Elferink MLA
Mr Adam Graham Giles MLA
Mr Michael Patrick Francis Gunner MLA
Mr Karl Rio Hampton MLA
Hon Daniel Robert Knight MLA
Hon Delia Phoebe Lawrie MLA
Hon Gerald Francis McCarthy MLA
Hon Malarndirri Barbara Anne McCarthy MLA
Ms Kezia Dorcas Tibisay Purick MLA
Ms Marion Rose Scrymgour MLA
Mr Peter Donald Styles MLA
Mr David William Tollner MLA
Hon Konstantine Vatskalis MLA
Ms Lynne Michele Walker MLA
Mr Willem Rudolf Westra van Holthe MLA
Mr Gerry Wood MLA

(Signatures attached next pages)