Bilingual Education in Australia

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Contents

Introduction 348
Early Developments 349
  Bilingual Programs in Australian Schools 349
Major Contributions 350
  Postwar Migration 350
  Indigenous Bilingual Education 351
  The Development of Bilingual Programs for Migrants and Majority Speakers of English 353
  The Dismantling of Indigenous Bilingual Education 354
Work in Progress 355
  Continuity of Other Bilingual Programs 356
Problems and Difficulties 357
Future Directions 357
Cross-References 358
Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education 358
References 358

Abstract

The Australian experience of bilingual education is composed of three separate audiences: Indigenous groups and their languages, immigrant groups and their languages (both of these groups seeking language maintenance and intergenerational vitality), and mainstream English speakers seeking additive language study. All these interests share a common aim of lobbying for more serious and substantial language education programs, but differ significantly in

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© Springer International Publishing AG 2017

O. García et al. (eds.), *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, Encyclopedia of Language and Education, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-02258-1_22

the purposes and context of their promotion of bilingual education. This chapter provides an overview of historical, political, and educational influences on forms of bilingual education that have emerged, in the context of state and national language policy and practices, to meet the needs of Indigenous Australians, migrant communities, and Anglophones.

Keywords
Bilingual education • Australia • Indigenous languages • language rights • Language policy • Language maintenance

Introduction

During the past 40 years, deep transformations to the demographic and economic landscape of Australia have stimulated intense multilingual policy activity. Since the early 1970s, language policy has often functioned as a tool of national reconstruction, focusing on broad social aims at different times, for "multiculturalism," "Asia literacy," "globalization," "international economic competitiveness," or "Indigenous reconciliation" (see Lo Bianco and Slaughter 2009, 2016; Lo Bianco and Aliani 2013).

Despite inconsistent aims, changing priorities, and inadequate implementation, the overall result of this stream of ambitious and occasionally well-resourced policy making has been a multilingual practice through which teaching and examining occur in some 100 of Australia's 300 spoken languages (Clyne 2005), languages categorized as international, immigrant, or Indigenous. International languages historically were the prestige Europeans (French, Latin, and German) but today are Asian trade languages: Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, and Japanese, occasionally also Hindi and Korean. Although mostly promoted as though their speakers are foreigners, all are present within the Australian population. Such domestic multilingualism involves what are called "community languages" broadly equivalent to what others call "heritage languages." All have local speaker populations who typically advocate for intergenerational language retention, but by definition have linguistic settings outside of Australia, while Indigenous languages have been unique to the Australian continent for millennia.

The bulk of education programming involves teaching languages as a timetabled school subject, a practice reinforced from 2014 with the adoption of Australia's first national curriculum. The most persistent and sometimes dramatic question in bilingual education concerns Indigenous languages – specifically the role of traditional languages in how general education, English learning and literacy teaching for Indigenous Australians,[1] should be imparted.

[1]The term "Indigenous" refers to both Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.

This chapter provides an overview of historical, political, and educational influences on forms of bilingual education that have emerged, in the context of state and national language policy and practices, to meet the needs of Indigenous Australians (variously multilingual speakers of unique languages, dialects[2] such as Aboriginal English, creole languages such as Kriol and mixed languages such as Gurindji Kriol and Light Warlpiri (Meakins 2014)), migrant communities, and Anglophones.

Early Developments

Bilingual Programs in Australian Schools

With instructions from King George III to establish a British Colony, Captain Arthur Phillip and the "First Fleet" of 11 ships and 1,350 people landed at Botany Bay in January 1788 (Welsh 2004). The subsequent struggles to establish permanent settlement and expand colonization to incorporate the entire land mass of Australia involved massive dislocation of the Indigenous peoples, importation of large numbers of convict and then free settlers, and the creation of institutions and expansion of cities (Hughes 1996). By the 1860s, in addition to around 250 Indigenous languages,[3] a multitude of immigrant languages were present, with Irish, German, Chinese, Gaelic, Welsh, French, and Scandinavian languages and Italian predominating (Dixon 1989; Clyne 1991). As the century proceeded, gold and wool industries produced a booming economy and burgeoning population, but also stoked moves toward unification of the six self-governing British territories, culminating in a series of conventions and referenda during the 1890s and ultimately in 1901 political federation as the Commonwealth of Australia (Macintyre 2009).

Nineteenth-century society consisted of Indigenous communities, immigrant settlers and convicts, and native-born Europeans, mostly of British or Irish origin, but also from Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. However, in this context of rapid settlement and institution creation, an absence of overt language policy permitted broadly tolerating practices, at least for non-Indigenous groups. Demographic diversity was expressed in various forms of bilingual education from the 1850s, with programs mostly designed for individual ethnic or religious groups, some of which attracted large enrolments from children of English-speaking

[2]In Australia, the use of dialect for Aboriginal English is non-pejorative and widely used. The term English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) has replaced the term English as a second language (ESL) in the Australian curriculum.

[3]Many Indigenous languages did not survive the colonization of Australia. Languages that are not used in everyday communication are considered to be "sleeping" by Indigenous Australians. While linguistically, languages can be categorized as "extinct" and "dormant," these categorizations are challenged by that of another – "reawakening," as demonstrated by L2 speakers of Daungwurrung and Kaurna. (see http://www.ethnologue.com/country/AU/status; also based on reviewer comments).

families, so that by 1900, over 100 bilingual schools (French, German, Hebrew, and Gaelic) operated throughout the colonies (Clyne 1991).

Despite the immense diversity of Aboriginal languages and their linked education systems which together encompass “a broad range of practical, spiritual and cultural skills” (Barry 2008, p. 241), colonial administration repudiated any understanding of the ancient Indigenous presence in Australia as a unique human civilization. Instead, all education was premised on the overriding aim of “civilizing” the Indigenous populations “by inculcating Christian habits and the wider values of Europeans” (Beresford 2012, p. 83). While missionaries also embraced this “civilizing” mission, their more specific aim was inculcating Christian faith, and although vernaculars were sometimes utilized in the complex trajectories between colonizers and colonized (see, e.g., Mills 1982; Barry 2008; van Toorn 2006), there is little evidence of any formal Indigenous language bilingual education during the nineteenth or the early twentieth centuries.

Population control dominated early Federation politics, with adoption of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (White Australia Policy), progressively compounded by rivalry and war between Britain and Germany. Empire loyalty among many Australians and active participation in battlefields in France and Turkey, however, stoked independence-minded nationalism even as it provoked enactment of legislation in several states to curtail German bilingual education, effectively ending the previous tolerant approach toward ethnic and linguistic difference. Promotion of English monolingualism, modeled on Southern British norms, continued uninterrupted until the 1947 postwar immigration program which injected a vast new settler population drawn from non-English sources. By that stage, however, xenophobia allied to patriotism which resulted in closure of bilingual schools and a decisive shift against linguistic pluralism (Clyne 1991).

Major Contributions

Postwar Migration

Under Prime Minister Ben Chifley and Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell, in 1947, the Commonwealth government commenced a vast population growth scheme under the slogan “populate or perish.” The aim was to increase the population by one percent annually from immigration, with 9/10 of new arrivals to be British. The one percent target remained until 1972, reduced by the Whitlam government, which also removed national origin discrimination, thereby ending the White Australia Policy. By the late 1990s, the scheme generated over 6.5 million new permanent settlers. Between 1953 and the late 1960s, southern Europeans exceeded British arrivals, financial favoritism after 1968 restored the British primacy until the mid-1980s when Vietnamese or Indo-Chinese arrivals became the largest national origin, and since 1983, English-speaking arrivals have been significantly below Asian immigration (ABS 2013; Price 1998).

Considerable pressure was applied to European migrants to discard their cultures and languages and rapidly assimilate (Clyne 1991), but activist second-generation European Australians were ultimately catalysts in the expansion and development of multilingual services and education policy (Ozolins 1993), transforming the wider national context of bilingual education. Under their pressure and leadership, bilingual programs reemerged in the education landscape during the early 1970s.

Indigenous Bilingual Education

Indigenous bilingual education required a separate struggle around citizenship rights and recognition, civil activism by both urban and rural Indigenous people and their supporters around fundamental rights such as land rights, wage parity, and access to government financial services, as well as demands to remain connected to their languages and culture (Maynard 2007). In education, Indigenous children had endured decades of extreme assimilationism, taught to read and write exclusively in English under curricula that provided little acknowledgment of their cultural backgrounds. Claims for incorporation of Indigenous vernaculars informally in early grades to improve learning effectiveness were usually repudiated with arguments that improved learning outcomes required rigorous application of English-only teaching (Mills 1982; Harris and Devlin 1997).

In 1972 a radical move by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam saw the introduction of bilingual teaching for Indigenous children in the Northern Territory; from 1973, five schools introduced bilingual education, expanding quickly so that by 1981, half of enrolled Indigenous primary aged children were receiving bilingual teaching in one of 13 languages, with smaller numbers in other states (Mills 1982). Even these early innovations were accompanied by vacillation and cautions from state and national officials about the overriding primacy of English literacy, hesitancy which has regularly impeded full implementation of bilingual education. After achieving self-government in 1978, the Northern Territory modified the educational and linguistic aims of the bilingual programs it inherited to stress their exclusively transitional role as a bridge to English-mediated learning, distancing language maintenance from the core purposes of the programs. The "step" approach it adopted involved instrumental use of vernacular literacy in the early years, accompanied by oral English support and full introduction of English literacy by Year 4, but regular modifications continually shifted the focus to English (Simpson et al. 2009; Devlin 2011; McKay 2011).

Bilingual programs were destabilized by inadequate program costing, high non-Indigenous staff turnover (up to 100 % annually) and regular absenteeism among Indigenous support workers, who were critical for the success of team teaching. A shortage of trained Indigenous teachers, slow orthographic development and literature production, absent agreement on terminology, and irregular attendance by students also impacted bilingual programs negatively, compounded by high family mobility; endemic poverty; health problems, especially ear and hearing illnesses; and even community violence (Simpson, et al. 2009).

With increasing national focus on English literacy as a priority for educational intervention from the late 1990s and ongoing negative discourse around bilingual education from some political corners, in 1998, the Northern Territory government attempted to abolish bilingual programs. In response to vocal opposition and petitioning, a report was commissioned into program "viability." The report, *Learning Lessons*, showed strong community support for their continuation and demands for appropriate teacher training in bilingual methodologies. The report also proposed modification to the contested concept of "bilingual education," suggesting its replacement with "two-way learning" (Simpson et al. 2009). The Northern Territory government adopted two-way learning, but no other recommendations. Though broadly similar to the preceding bilingual programs, two-way programs, according to Simpson et al. (2009), were essentially watered-down versions of bilingual programming.[4]

Most Indigenous children enter education as speakers of creoles such as Kriol, mixed languages such as Gurindji Kriol and Light Warlpiri (Meakins 2014) or dialects such as Aboriginal English and therefore are learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). Few Indigenous children in remote contexts have extended exposure to Standard Australian English (SAE) or full knowledge of a traditional language, and yet many teachers lack training in appropriate EAL/D methodology (Simpson et al. 2009). This deficiency in how English is taught, and how complex multilingual/multi-dialectalism is understood, impacts on effectiveness of bilingual approaches. Along with the introduction of two-way programs, support for English as a second-language/dialect services was disastrously decreased, so that bilingual education was prepared for eventual closure.

Even when recognition of Indigenous rights was achieved through litigation or referenda, it was hampered by administration and implementation. The most significant was the foundational case for native title, the 1992 Mabo v Queensland ruling, a landmark decision of the High Court. The Mabo decision recognized that a state of unextinguished native land title survives British colonial claims to the entire Australian continent, based on rejection of the doctrine of terra nullius – that the land belonged to no one when the British arrived. Native title preexisted British occupation, and its continuity is now established through cultural connection to land, often through continuous use of Indigenous language, culture, and law.

Erosion of programs can occur even under supportive policy, via language prejudice entrenching an elevated status of Standard English over traditional languages (Truscott and Malcolm 2010), practices which serve as invisible language policy privileging monolingualism or ranking some bilingualisms above others, or misunderstanding of language sequencing, and integration of cognitive functioning across languages, which are key premises on which bilingual education is based. Sociolinguistic complexity compounds the delivery of bilingual education when the latter is assumed to involve discrete languages, evident in the failure of curricula, and

[4]It should be noted that two-way learning has been adopted and valued differently in Western Australia (Truscott 2016; Sharifian et al. 2012).

assessment to recognize that many Indigenous students are English as a second-language/dialect learners.

Beyond the Northern Territory, other states have introduced and supported Indigenous languages teaching, occasionally in bilingual mode, especially the largest states, New South Wales and Victoria, and in the national curriculum, an Indigenous languages framework is a major achievement. Despite these efforts, Indigenous language programs remain fragile and vulnerable within any education jurisdiction (McKay 2011).

The Development of Bilingual Programs for Migrants and Majority Speakers of English

Alongside Indigenous activism for bilingual education rights, a parallel and much larger activity on behalf of bilingual schooling was a direct consequence of the settlement/citizenship basis of postwar migration. The sheer number of new arrivals led to the society-changing movements of multicultural, non-assimilationist policies that have since shaped general language policy. With thousands of migrant children from non-English backgrounds entering schools, education planners turned from "foreign" language teaching to responding to the urgent need to maximize immigrant children's general education, English, and first or home language knowledge. The general educational presence of foreign language teaching was affected by these moves, though such programs of cultural enrichment and development of linguistic skills for monolingual English-speaking students remained.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, numerous forms of bilingual education were developed, although significant regional differences became evident.[5] A number of transitional programs, where students begin schooling in their home language, transferring to English-medium schooling close to the middle primary years, were introduced in Catholic schools in South Australia (Italian), New South Wales (Greek and Macedonian), and Victoria (Italian, Croatian, and Maltese). Several Greek programs were also initially set up in Victorian government schools (Mills 1982), later expanding to include Auslan (Australian Sign Language), Chinese (Mandarin), Macedonian, and Vietnamese. However, many were intended to support English acquisition, rather than valuing and developing the emerging bilingualism of students. Other groups set up community-owned "independent" schools, some with religion as an integral part of their mission, including Greek Orthodox and Jewish schools with partial, full, or late bilingual immersion streams (Mills 1982).

These innovations were challenged by many of the same factors impacting on Indigenous bilingual programs. The mobility of migrant communities decreased speaker concentration and threatened program viability. Parental desire for early demonstrations of English proficiency created pressure for rapid transition out of home languages, limiting the time to develop mother tongue literacy and numeracy.

[5]See Mills (1982) for a full overview of language programs and models at this time.

Staff turnover was also high as many teachers were themselves members of mobile migrant communities or were native speakers experiencing difficulty in gaining locally accepted training and accreditation (Gibbons 1997; Mills 1982).

By contrast, mainstream bilingual programs introduced with the promise of enhanced academic attainment and "prestige" bilingualism expanded in government schools, often with assistance from foreign governments. Examples include French primary schools in Victoria, New South Wales, and the Australian Capital Territory and a German program at Bayswater South in Victoria (Mills 1982). In the 1990s, several bilingual programs were established through a Victorian government initiative on bilingual schooling, in Japanese, French, and Indonesian. By the late 1990s, there were over 100 such programs nationally, of various forms, the majority in Melbourne (Gibbons 1997). An enduring outcome of such experimentation is a strong practice of academic engagement with bilingual education and close interaction with schools in program design and evaluation, curriculum innovation, and documentation of students' linguistic and cognitive development, on writing, literacy, and CLIL (e.g., de Courcy and Smilevska 2012; Fernandez 1992; McKay and DEETYA 1997; Molyneux et al. 2015; Smala 2013).

The Dismantling of Indigenous Bilingual Education

By 2008, the Northern Territory bilingual education (two-way) programs were under full existential threat, this time due to statistical demonstrations of English literacy difficulties among Indigenous learners and their mistaken attribution to bilingual teaching and claims that English literacy was being sidelined in favor of Indigenous languages (Devlin 2011; Simpson et al. 2009). In 2007, Australia's first national literacy and numeracy tests were conducted with students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) is a norm-referenced test of English literacy and numeracy, whose results confirmed "that Indigenous children in remote schools were not achieving acceptable standards of literacy in English and numeracy" (Simpson et al. 2009, p. 27). In a detailed analysis of NAPLAN, Wigglesworth, Simpson, and Loakes (2011) allege that the test is culturally biased: its norm-referenced basis underrepresents minority language learners, so that Indigenous children are unlikely to be familiar with many test terms and constructs, concluding that NAPLAN is "linguistically and culturally unsuitable for Indigenous children" (p. 340; see also Simpson et al. 2009). Extensive criticism of NAPLAN, with its benchmarking against linguistic and cultural norms alien to learners speaking either a traditional language or EAL/D, has had little discernible impact on policy makers or administrators. Compounding questions of cultural appropriateness was the demonstrated misinterpretation of the 2008 results (see Devlin 2011), but the political backlash against bilingual education was swift.

Immediately following release of the 2008 results, a new draft policy for Northern Territory schools was issued. The *First Four Hours* policy mandated English only during the first four hours of the school day, widely interpreted as the final closure for Northern Territory Indigenous bilingual education. The Northern Territory

government subsequently claimed that the policy continues bilingual learning because it permits vernacular communication in morning classes as required. However, Devlin (2011) argues that the bilingual programs have well-structured systematic bilingual input, supported by an involved community, professional staff, and purpose-designed materials, and the ad hoc use of vernaculars does not constitute bilingual learning.

Work in Progress

In 2012, a national report was released into how Indigenous languages could help close the education achievement gap for Indigenous Australians.[6] *Our Land Our Languages* (House of Representatives 2012) provided a comprehensive overview of the state of Australia's Indigenous languages. Important recommendations included development of a national implementation plan in line with United Nations obligations on rights for Indigenous populations, as well as proposing important work in mandatory first-language use in assessment at early childhood level, adequately resourced and continuous full bilingual programs, and an alternative assessment to NAPLAN to accommodate dialect, culture, and language differences.

Unfortunately none of the report's recommendations have been implemented. Prior to this a *National Indigenous Languages Policy* commenting on the important role that Indigenous bilingual education plays in some schools was issued (Australian Government 2009), but since the Northern Territory's *First Four Hours* policy, it is now difficult to determine how many biliteracy or bilingual programs remain in operation. Some kind of pragmatic bilingualism in government and nongovernment schools is in evidence nationwide, and some government support continues to be provided for transitional bilingual programs[7] (G. Dickson, September 4, 2014, "personal communication"). However, the emphasis is firmly on English-medium curriculum delivery and downgrading of Indigenous languages in delivering any serious academic content continues.

A further review of Indigenous education was released in 2014, *A Share in the Future* (Wilson 2014). This report represents yet another examination into Northern Territory Indigenous education by policy makers with little input from bilingual education specialists. Despite consultation, including numerous passionate arguments on behalf of continuation of bilingual education from local communities, the report concludes that education of Indigenous children and the entire curriculum be delivered exclusively in English, with teaching of literacy in the vernacular only where "feasible." Significant budget cuts have accompanied the downgrading of bilingual teaching, especially the reduction of the Northern Territory Indigenous

[6]See https://www.coag.gov.au/closing_the_gap_in_indigenous_disadvantage for an overview of the closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage program.

[7]For example, the Northern Territory Education Minister's visit in August 2014 to Shepherdson College to celebrate 40 years of bilingual education at the school: https://www.facebook.com/PeterChandlerMLA/photos/a.386004441525050.1073741826.133717516753745/559368827521943/?type=1.

Languages Support (ILS) scheme, from $11.1 million to $9.5 million, a program which finances community-based activities for maintenance and transmission of Indigenous languages (Nordlinger and Singer 2014).

Support for teaching Indigenous languages in non-bilingual delivery modes remains vibrant; however, particularly as many Northern Territory schools have never been able to offer bilingual programs (Truscott 2016). Indigenous languages and cultures are taught in 60 Northern Territory government schools – programs of first-language maintenance, language renewal, second-language learning, and language awareness (House of Representatives 2012, Cap./Chap. 3).

Beyond the Northern Territory, in Western Australia, 16 Indigenous languages are taught in government schools; ten Indigenous languages are taught in 42 schools in South Australia, and Indigenous languages are studied in Queensland (both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages), New South Wales, and Victoria. Unlike the vicissitudes that have damaged bilingual programs, these "second" language teaching schemes represent substantial, long-term investments, dedicated to reclaiming and perpetuating the languages of Indigenous Australians.

Continuity of Other Bilingual Programs

The overall number of bilingual programs across Australia has decreased significantly since 2000. Many survivors have extended histories and are well grounded in local and international research. In Victoria, 12 government schools provide either transitional (1–3 years) or full (7 year) bilingual programs, either by cohort streams or by the whole school. An independent German bilingual school, Deutsche Schule and kindergarten, utilizes German and Australian curricula in Victoria, while other programs include Italian, French, and Mandarin in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Since 2010, four government primary schools in New South Wales have been offering bilingual programs within their schools, where subject content is taught through Korean, Japanese, Chinese, or Indonesian for 5–7 h a week. Reflecting long-term policy trends prioritizing Asian languages, the New South Wales Education Minister argued that with Asia on Australia's doorstep, "the program was vital to the state's future economic and social prosperity" ("Primary schools to. . ." 2010).

In Queensland, bilingual programs are offered in 12 schools, most in government secondary schools, such as late-onset immersion programs in Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish, in which a cohort of students receives half their schooling through the languages for a 3-year period. Smala et al. (2012, p. 374) argue that parents identify bilingual programs as "positional goods in the global competition for good jobs" and that schools are using immersion programs as "markers of distinction in the school market." This demand is not limited to formal schooling. Across Australia, bilingual childcare centers operate in 16 languages, with access to seven more through family-based day care and official playgroups for preprimary school children in 45 languages (Nejad 2014).

Problems and Difficulties

The primary obstacle for all bilingual education has been an overridingly monolingual construction of education success. The practical outcome for both Indigenous and immigrant children has been a deleterious ranking of different kinds of bilingualism, effectively discounting social and cognitive value of bilingualism according to the social standing of the language paired with English. A systemic attitudinal and ideological problem derives from folk notions of sociolinguistics which work to represent Indigenous and immigrant children as laboring under the deficit of not knowing English, while other pathways toward bilingualism construct learners as acquirers of valued additional knowledge. These differential judgements were poignantly noted by Tom Calma, in his role as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice commissioner:

> It was somewhat of a cruel irony for me to read last week that NSW schools are to offer bilingual education in Asian languages. Yes, the NSW government is funding a four-year $2.25 million program starting in 2010. The NSW Education Minister Verity Firth was reported as saying the program was vital to the state's future economic and social prosperity and the language lessons would start in kindergarten. These policy inconsistencies and hypocrisies are extremely disheartening for Aboriginal people. Unfortunately we are all too familiar with promises that are not kept – and governments seem to think they can get away with it. (Calma 2009, np)

Acquisition of instrumentally useful languages, regularly promoted in the media with trade and commercial associations, is validated by public discourse, receives encouragement and public acclamation, and enjoys supportive policies. For Indigenous and most immigrant children, the home language maintenance basis of bilingual education is rarely socially validated, instead being judged as a kind of remediation of disadvantage. This divergence of esteem produces policy inconsistency between disparity of treatment of Indigenous and immigrant bilingual programs and the affirmative policy making offered to majority bilingual programs.

The national social transformations that have stimulated language policy over the past 40 years have failed to generate consistent application of a nationwide appreciation of languages as cognitive, social, and cultural resources, in addition to their economic and utilitarian applications. An additional point of difficulty is lack of differentiation between learning and language learning. Policy makers and some teacher educators conflate spoken language with literacy learning, failing to account for key aspects of second-language acquisition, including syntax, vocabulary, pragmatics, and sociocultural understanding, such as cultural conceptualizations (Truscott 2016).

Future Directions

An imperative of future development is to harmonize the work of professional academic researchers, with the demand and needs of parents and communities, professional educators, and policy makers. In the lead up to the adoption of the

NPL in 1987, a coalition of professional and community groups, spanning all language interests, met regularly and managed to harmonize their disparate claims into a consolidated log of demands. The turbulent bilingual education story recounted here indicates that much more integration between research, teaching, and language policy making, along these same lines, is needed to bring about the often proclaimed policy aim of national bilingualism. The different pathways implicated in the goal of universal bilingualism must be integrated into a continuum of language education opportunities and delivered by well-designed, enduring, and well-taught bilingual education initiatives. The foundational task is a comprehensive and effective policy, linked to credible implementation, and designed with both equitable language principles and language enrichment as dual aims.

Cross-References

► Language Rights and Bilingual Education
► Sociopolitical Issues in Bilingual Education

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G. Wigglesworth: Task and Performance Based Assessment. In Volume:Language Testing and Assessment

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