

**NATIONAL UNION OF  
GREEK AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS  
(NUGAS)**

**POLICY**

**ETHNIC LANGUAGE**

**Aα Bβ Γγ...**

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## **A. SOME INTRODUCTORY POINTS**

1. Australian institutions are a stronghold of Anglo-Saxonism, and societal structures protect themselves from the new multi-cultural reality by avoiding any hint of real power and decision-making being given to members of non-Anglo-Saxon groups. Positive programmes must be initiated in schools to assist in acceptance of multiculturalism.
2. Language - learning opportunities for those who wish to learn a second language. All children must be offered the chance to learn a second language, and be encouraged to study cultures of the families now forming part of the Australian community.
3. For the children of non-English-speaking parents we ask the right, the opportunity and the incentives to maintain and develop the mother tongue.
4. Adolescent arrivals require a difference programme: bilingual education, in the sense of phase in / phase-out language programmes. The greatest needs are bilingual teachers and suitable learning materials.
5. Government assistance for ethnic schools should be introduced as a transitional step until the functions fulfilled by such schools can be taken over by the government school system.

## **B. FIRST LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

1. People can be more productive members of society if they are competent in their own first language in addition to English. Australians of Anglo-Saxon origin should also play a more worthwhile role in society if they knew one or more of the ethnic languages - which in this pluralist society are in fact community languages.
2. A non-Anglo-Saxon child entering an Australian school is in danger of losing his own self-esteem, when faced with staff, programmes, languages and structures which do not reflect his own identity. If he is 'successful', therefore he will tend to reject the heritage of his origins, drift away from his family and exacerbate the generation gap.
3. To provide the opportunity for people to become competent bilinguals, to:
  - a) serve the community through translation and interpreting;
  - b) to assist the well-being of families, individuals and communities;
  - c) to participate in the cultural heritage of the mother country (since cultural identity and richness cannot be divorced from language);
  - d) to enrich the Australian society.

The productive Australian should be aiming to be at least bilingual, whether or not his first language is English.

4. a) Pre- school education: In child-minding centres, crèches, pre-school centres and play groups, children can profit from exposure to a number of languages, and can easily cope with them. They can develop valuable language awareness in this way. And bilingual teachers and parents speaking the child's

first language should be made very welcome. This would involve parents in what is going on, and give them confidence.

b) When a child enters primary school, attention should be given to his level of competence in his first language. It may well be that he is ready to begin a pre-reading programme in his first language, but totally unprepared for such activities in English. And attempts to force him into English-language reading programmes might seriously retard his whole language competence. What we suggest is that such a child should be offered the chance to achieve literacy in his own language, while he is learning English at his own level. This implies the provision of trained staff and suitable facilities and equipment.

c) In secondary schools, many children now are missing a great deal of their education because it is in English. Such children should be able to continue their education in their own language while they are learning English. And in addition, the community languages of Australia should be more equitably reflected in the range of languages used in secondary schools.

## **C. SOME GENERAL PROBLEMS**

### **1. Attitudes**

- a) **Teachers:** In-service and pre-service training for teachers should emphasise recognition of the fact that we are a plural community. Teachers should study the cultural and social patterns of the Australian population in the twentieth century.

It is necessary for teachers to be able to recognise the true nature of children, and be able to judge the real competence of children. Many teachers concentrate mainly on language competence of students, overlooking their real understanding and insights. This is recognised as discriminatory by migrant students. They begin to feel that their ideas are of little worth.

Bilingual teachers must be encouraged to participate in the whole school programme, not confine themselves just to language teaching.

- b) **Schools:** School administrations should be encouraged to develop school philosophy, organisation and curriculum to suit the children and families they serve. Getting to know the parents would be a good start and the collection of suitable resources, the employment of perceptive staff members and school involvement in local activities are all steps toward development of positive attitudes to the school's community.

### **2. Schools**

- a) There should be incentives for bilingual people who are already teaching in government or private schools to enter schools with significant migrant populations.
- b) There should be financial assistance and coaching support for migrant students to become teachers, especially teachers of their own language and culture.

- c) There should be expanded Diploma of Education courses in Australia for overseas graduates, which include a high component of English language instruction, and which carry a realistic living allowance.
- d) Overseas qualifications should be far more thoroughly researched, and realistic credits offered by Australian training and registration bodies.
- e) There should be bridging courses offered for teachers trained and qualified in other countries, stressing Australian trends in education and including adequate training in the English language. Bridging courses should also be offered to teachers currently working in ethnic schools in Australia, including some whose qualifications do not yet meet acceptable standards for Australian schools.
- f) There should be recruitment of teachers from countries of migrant origin, especially where teacher surpluses exist.
- g) There should be exchange programmes for teachers with countries of migrant origin which could include intensive language courses for those Australian teachers visiting the other country.
- h) There should be a realistic career structure offered to overseas trained bilingual teachers already in the community and for people with non-teaching tertiary qualifications who show themselves able to assist as bilingual teacher-aides. Part-time study leave should be made available to such people so that in time they can achieve similar status and remuneration to locally trained teachers.

### **3. Minority Languages**

It often happens that there will be only a small number of children speaking a particular language in a particular school. In this sense many schools have 'minority languages'. In this situation, we advocate:

- a) Regional and / or local resources centres offering materials, consultants to work with schools on curriculum and school organisation (see VSTA Policy), and teachers who can visit schools in the area to run groups and classes of the children in their particular ethnic group. This last service is most important. It is our experience that children in previously unconsidered minority groups in schools can grow quickly in self-esteem and dignity when such a visiting teacher begins to work with them e.g. the Arab children at Collingwood High School who now meet every Monday morning with Mr. Sohman Abada.
- b) Close contacts between these area centres and the local ethnic schools, and sharing of resources, including translators, interpreters, consultants and teacher-aides. This seems to us to be a particularly valuable step for all parties concerned and could form a very valuable avenue of involvement of parents in school activities, regional activities, and the whole area of decision-making. Parents are generally much closer to ethnic schools than they are to government schools.

#### **4. Positive Reinforcement**

There has been for some time a lack of knowledge in decision-making bodies of steps forward that are being made into the teaching of migrant languages in schools. There are many programmes under way which need support and encouragement of various kinds not forthcoming from state and national bodies. What is received instead is often the promise of “research” or “pilot study” of programmes like the ones already struggling along. Therefore, while we support the existence of well-run research projects, we feel very strongly that the time is long past when we can afford to ignore the voices of ordinary parents and teachers. Future research and pilot programmes must run concurrently with real assistance to on going programmes, and government standing committees must begin to act upon research findings that are already in existence, by launching widespread programmes of linguistic and cultural education in schools all over the country.

National programmes that have been undertaken so far have shown themselves to be based on ignorance of the people they are intended for, however well meaning. The Oxford Graded Readers and “Situational English” are two glaring examples of money spent without consultation or feedback.

We need central study centres in capital cities that will develop learning materials in community languages, assist schools experimenting with the use of such materials, and co-ordinate the work of those schools which are leading the way in multi-cultural education. In this regard, the work of the Ecumenical Centre Clearing House on Migrant Issues is already of great value in Melbourne.

Such centres would be invaluable to schools developing programmes and curriculum changes to suit the real needs of the school community. Initial resources are limited in individual regions, so we recognise the need to concentrate research and development functions for greatest effect and success.

#### **5. Parents**

The alienation of parents from schools is a national phenomenon of scandalous proportions, and the key factor is often the dominance of the English language over all communication, and the assumption that a child is ineligible for a good education until he has fully mastered the subtleties of the English language. This implies inferior status of the ethnic people, particularly the parents, many of whom feel they will never reach full native competence in English.

Positive assistance must be given to schools to break down the bafflers between home and school. Teachers must be given an allocation of time for home visiting. Bilingual teachers must be trained and appointed, bilingual teacher-aides and “language assistants” recruited immediately in large numbers, and accommodation and programmes must be arranged so that parents will feel able to spend time at the school during the day.

Resource centres could assume a role in providing additional communication services for parents, including such things as regular local education based publications in community languages and local or regional cultural and social activities for ethnic groups.

## **D. RESOURCES**

1. We need teams of teachers in the first instance from both the mother country and Australia to begin preparation and selection of resource material for schools and centres. These materials should be prepared both for first-language maintenance activities and for general school use by bilingual children.
2. General libraries, school libraries and audiovisual resource units should be assisted in developing their stocks of materials relevant to languages and cultures of migrant families.
3. The schools themselves, teachers and children alike, should be encouraged to participate in activities surrounding the preparation of learning materials.
4. Pending adequate stocks of carefully prepared learning materials (which will not be for some years whatever happens), there should be an urgent programme of buying from countries of migrant origin. These books, or excerpts from them, could be used to good effect now by the teachers attempting bilingual programmes, and their criticisms of such texts could assist the teams of people preparing the new texts in Australia.
5. Radio: The enthusiasm for and obvious success of radio in ethnic languages in Melbourne Access Radio could well be extended to day-time hours for school (and parent) contributions, including first-language maintenance and learning, reinforcement of personal identity in children, and second language learning. Similar programmes are advocated for television.
6. Mobile library units: During the next period of acute shortage of materials, mobile library units should be set up to offer some service to schools and other organisations, including municipal libraries. The staffs of these units would also be able to keep librarians and teachers informed on sources of new materials, developments in the production of new locally written materials and related matters.