

# **Report on Bridging Course**

**Held at Ukarumpa 28th February – 4th March 2011**

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In Papua New Guinea the first three years of school use vernacular as the language of instruction. In the last semester of Elementary 2 they have oral/aural bridging into English. However in 2012 it is expected that “English as a Subject” will be introduced into Elementary 1. The language of instruction will be vernacular but they will learn English as the fourth subject in the curriculum.

Because of the political situation there is pressure to begin teaching in English from the beginning of Elementary Prep. However no materials have been provided so many teachers are floundering. When we realised how much interest there was in this topic we found funds to scholarship thirty Papua New Guineans to attend. Most of these were Elementary teachers, but several from the tertiary sector also attended. We were very pleased to have a member of the Education Department also as she was able to give us accurate information on policy and direction.

Each day we had a devotion and a testimony. During this time some staff and some members of the local community shared the importance of vernacular for both spiritual and educational reasons. Some of the participants were inspired as they saw what could be done.

## **Lessons presented**

The topics were chosen to give practical information about how to do bridging lessons and also to provide some professional development for the teachers.

The three principles of bridging that we shared were:

1. A firm foundation in vernacular is necessary for bridging to be successful
2. Follow the process – listen and speak, then read and write
3. From known to unknown – teach concepts in vernacular and then in English

They very much enjoyed the presentation on the history of the English language which explained why the spelling system is so difficult to master. They described it as eye-opening, interesting, informative. This helped them to understand “that there are only 26 letters in the alphabet but 45 phonemes

and 76 ways to spell them. Wow!" They were given a chart which showed the different phonemes corresponding to the letters of the alphabet.

The presentation on Multi-Lingual Education (MLE) was also an eye-opener as they realised that Papua New Guinea is not the only country that is struggling with a multiplicity of vernaculars and the political pressures to move to the language of wider communication (LWC). They worked in groups to study several countries. They are now able to defend the use of vernacular in schools as a way of maintaining the culture of the diverse groups. With more time the participants could themselves find similarities with the other countries.

Demonstrations were given of various types of lessons.

1. Listening and speaking. Using Indonesian as the language of instruction, the students learned to respond to commands (Total Physical Response), say simple sentences and sing songs. Through these activities they increased their vocabulary in the unknown language without the pressure of reading or writing. There should be about six months of this type of lesson until they can understand and say simple things in English and have some useful vocabulary. More ideas about talking could be included in a longer course.

2. Picture dictionary. This is a diglot or triglot book of cultural pictures, by domain. The students who know how to read in vernacular can read the names in vernacular and learn the English names. Whole lessons can be build around the pictures - simple sentences and vocabulary appropriate for that domain using the real objects and dramas. These books can be used from Prep and through Primary School with different types of lessons. If the students had worked on several pages each evening they could have left with a sample picture dictionary of their own.

3. Reading and writing. Each person compared their vernacular alphabet to the phonemes of English and made three lists:

- a) letters that were the same in vernacular and English,
- b) letters that were different in vernacular and English,
- c) letters and phonemes in English but not in vernacular.

The sounds different to English can be introduced by games and books that focus on each sound. Many of the same activities used when teaching vernacular can be adapted to use for bridging to English. Big Book stories translated from vernacular can be used so that the meaning of the story is evident as they learn the new words. The participants completed the three lists, but did not produce any lesson plans or materials.

Each day a staff member read an English children's book as an example of what fluent reading should be like. The participants also practised reading in English so that they will be good models of English when they teach. Texts were an interesting collection of various genre, and after individual practice, they read in small groups. Much more could have been done with this, but time did not allow it.

### **Evaluation**

In a future course, time should be allowed for them to plan, teach and evaluate lessons for the various stages of bridging. Without the time to actually produce materials for their own language, the participants have not struggled with the ideas themselves. It would take another week for them to make some lesson plans and materials for each level appropriate to their own language so that they can immediately begin teaching when they return home.

One of the benefits of having people from these various sectors of education was the cross-fertilization of ideas. However, in the future it would be more beneficial to have a course for only the teachers and invite other levels to attend for specific purposes. This way it could be much more practical. We could also design a course for the trainers of Elementary and Primary teachers which would be more theoretical.

This is not the first bridging course with SIL involvement, but it is the first one for a long time. Most of the staff are very familiar with training teachers of vernacular, but bridging is new to many of us. Before the next course we will be asking some teachers of English as a Second Language to provide us with some feedback and ideas, but from the evaluation forms it would seem that all of the participants have gained from attending this course.

This report is a compilation of comments made by all of the staff after the course. Without their willingness to participate this course could not have been so successful.

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### **Is English Pidgin?**

We take a word from another language,  
We pronounce it the way we like,  
We give it the meaning we want,  
And then we call it English.