

In this case study, Trevor da Rocha investigates the factors that influence the language and literacy proficiency of learners at Grade 7 level in a Cape Flats school. Key factors identified in the study include the language policy of the school, the language awareness of the teachers, the teachers' interpretation of the school's language policy, and the role of language attitudes in gaining literacy proficiency.

Framed within a qualitative research paradigm, the researcher as participant-observer finds evidence of the ongoing shift from Afrikaans to English on the Cape Flats, and of the persistence of the stigma of Kaapse Afrikaans amongst its speakers.



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

What are the factors influencing the relationship between school language policy and the literacy proficiency of learners at Grade 7 level?

Trevor da Rocha



PRAESA Occasional Papers No. 31

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Acknowledgments

Our acknowledgements go to the Ford Foundation for financial support towards the publication of this paper, which is a slightly edited version of a minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Education: Applied Language and Literacy Studies, School of Education, University of Cape Town, 2009.

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Published by PRAESA

(Project for the Study of Alternative
Education in South Africa)

University of Cape Town

Private Bag Rondebosch 7701

Cape Town, South Africa

Tel: 021 650 4013/Fax: 021 650 3027

Email: edu-praes@uct.ac.za

Website: <http://www.praesa.org>

ISBN: 1-919948-48-1

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◆

Series Editor: Peter Plüddemann

◆

DTP conversion: Andy Thesen

Printing: Digi4print

◆

◆

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I express my deepest thanks and praise to God Almighty for constantly answering my prayers whenever I faltered and lost my way. God had the steering hand on this journey.

Thank you to the UCT School of Education staff, especially Nigel Bakker and Chris Breen, who inspired me to look through new lenses at my teaching and at myself as a teacher. Also, to all my colleagues, past and present, who allowed me to pick their collective brain power and experience, thank you. Your support for my arguments, as well as your criticism of them, helped clarify my own thoughts.

This dissertation would be incomplete without a special mention to the da Rocha, Doman and Erfort families, especially (my brother) Michael and his wife, Paulene. Thank you for drinking all the coffee with me when I was completely off-target. This dissertation is as much your sweat as mine.

Then I must thank my very large family, and especially my children Wayman, Levonne, Warren-John, and Leah. Thank you for understanding.

Finally, I am greatly indebted to Peter Plüddemann, who stepped in at the eleventh hour as supervisor to rescue my mad musings. Peter, thank you very much.

The last word must go to my wife, Vanessa, nothing else but thank you, boldly stated, will suffice.

Dedication

Firstly, I dedicate this dissertation to the glory of God.

Secondly, to all those who encouraged and prayed my fear into faith: my aunts and uncles, friends and family, colleagues and learners, my teachers and lecturers, my children, and especially my Uncle Rudi.

This dissertation is also for Michael, my fellow traveller.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to Vanessa, my wife, friend and critic.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Abbreviations and acronyms | 6 |
| Abstract | 7 |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 9 |
| 1.1 General introduction | 9 |
| 1.1.1 The period 1997–2001 | 10 |
| 1.1.2 The period from 2002 | 12 |
| 1.1.3 The literacy crisis since 2002 | 14 |
| 1.2 The research problem | 15 |
| 1.3 The research questions | 16 |
| 1.4 Rationale for the research | 16 |
| 1.5 Limitations of the research | 16 |
| 1.6 Overview of the research | 17 |
| Summary | 17 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review | 18 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 18 |
| 2.2 Language-in-Education Policy 1997 | 18 |
| 2.2.1 Language of learning and teaching models | 19 |
| 2.2.1.1 Mother tongue education: Definition and brief history in the South African context | 19 |
| 2.2.1.2 Benefits of mother tongue education | 22 |
| 2.2.2 Bilingual education | 23 |
| 2.2.2.1 BICS and CALP | 23 |
| 2.2.2.2 Additive bilingualism | 25 |
| 2.2.2.3 Subtractive bilingualism | 26 |
| 2.3 Language learning and proficiency | 27 |
| 2.3.1 The language of the community | 27 |
| 2.3.2 Language attitudes and motivation | 28 |
| 2.3.3 Language proficiency | 30 |
| 2.4 Literacy learning | 31 |
| 2.4.1 Early literacy foundation | 32 |
| 2.4.2 Constructs of literacy learning | 33 |
| 2.4.3 Mother tongue literacy from home | 34 |
| 2.4.4 Overcoming literacy barriers | 35 |
| Summary | 37 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology | 38 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 38 |
| 3.2 Research questions | 38 |
| 3.3 Objectives | 39 |
| 3.4 Research orientation | 39 |
| 3.5 The case study approach | 40 |
| 3.6 The participants | 41 |
| 3.6.1 The Learners | 41 |
| 3.6.2 The Teachers | 42 |
| 3.6.3 The researcher within the study | 42 |
| 3.6.3.1 Unpacking my history | 44 |
| 3.7 Research instruments | 46 |
| 3.7.1 The Questionnaires | 48 |
| 3.7.2 Field notes | 50 |
| 3.7.3 The Interviews | 50 |
| 3.8 Data collection | 50 |
| 3.9 Expected results | 52 |
| 3.10 Procedures of verification | 52 |
| Summary | 53 |
| Chapter 4: Presentation and Discussion of the Findings | 54 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 54 |
| 4.2 Language and literacy issues: the learners | 54 |
| 4.2.1 Language in the home | 56 |
| 4.2.2 Language in the classroom | 57 |
| 4.3 Voices from the classroom – oral language usage | 59 |
| 4.4 Language and literacy practices: the teachers | 62 |
| 4.4.1 Attitudinal resistance to Afrikaans | 65 |
| 4.4.1.1 Translation | 67 |
| 4.4.2 Language sensitivity in the classroom | 69 |
| Summary | 75 |
| Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications | 77 |
| 5.1 Conclusion | 78 |
| 5.2 Implications for the school | 82 |
| 5.3 Implications for the teachers | 84 |
| 5.4 Implications for further research | 84 |
| A final thought | 86 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Bibliography | 87 |
| Appendices | 91 |
| List of tables | |
| 1. Development of the school's language policy at a glance | 10 |
| 2. Number of learners by LoLT and home language | 13 |
| 3. Percentage of Gr. 6 learners achieving systemic literacy outcomes | 14 |
| 4. Timeline for data collection | 51 |
| 5. What language(s) do you use and know? (Appendix G) | 55 |
| 6. Reading lesson and discussion | 60 |
| 7. Grammar lesson | 60 |
| 8. Integrated Natural Science and English lesson | 61 |
| 9. Summary of pre-progression data required by WCED, 2007 (Appendix D) | 63 |
| 10. How do you use Afrikaans in your classroom (Appendix E) | 66 |
| 11. What do you consider your primary language(s)? (N = 15) | 70 |
| 12. What is your understanding of the term "sensitive"? (Appendix F) | 71 |

Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|----------|--|
| BICS | Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills |
| CEMIS | Central Education Management Information System |
| CALP | Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency |
| COED | Concise Oxford English Dictionary |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| FAL | first additional language |
| FP | foundation phase |
| HL | home language |
| InterSen | intermediate and senior phases |
| IP | intermediate phase |
| LoLT | language of learning and teaching |
| LiEP | Language-in-Education Policy |
| LitNum | literacy and numeracy |
| LTP | Language Transformation Plan |
| MTE | mother tongue education |
| PIRLS | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| PRAESA | Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa |
| SAL | second additional language |
| SPSLP | Socrates Primary School language policy |
| WCED | Western Cape Education Department |
| WCLP | Western Cape Language Policy |
| WCPG | Western Cape Provincial Government |

Abstract

The foundation for academic success in formal education is based on the language and literacy proficiency of the learner. In addition, the relationship between the home language and the language of learning and teaching at school also influences the level of success the learner attains.

This dissertation, a single case study, is an investigation into the factors that influence the language and literacy proficiency of learners at Grade 7 level. The following have been identified as key factors in this study: the language policy of the school, the language awareness of the teachers, the teachers' interpretation of the school's language policy, and the role of language attitudes in gaining literacy proficiency.

The research design was qualitative in nature and framed within an Interpretivist paradigm. My role as participant-observer allowed me easy access to the research participants, and to data using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, where necessary.

One finding of the study revealed evidence of the ongoing shift from Afrikaans to English in predominantly Afrikaans-speaking communities on the Cape Flats. In other words, the stigma of Afrikaans, and more specifically of Kaaps Afrikaans, as an under-valued language persists in the attitude of parents and, through them, the learners.

The dissertation concludes by highlighting the teaching strategy of code-switching and code-mixing to scaffold the teaching-learning process of learners not learning through their mother tongue, as an area for further research.

Opsomming

Die fondament van akademiese sukses is die taalbevoegdheid en geletterdheid van die leerder. Daarbenewens beïnvloed die verhouding tussen die huistaal en die skool se taal van leer en onderrig die vlak van sukses wat die leerder bereik.

Hierdie tesis, 'n enkel-gevallestudie, behels 'n ondersoek na die faktore wat die taalbevoegdheid en geletterdheid van Graad 7 leerders beïnvloed. Die volgende is deur hierdie studie as sleutelfaktore geïdentifiseer: die skool se taalbeleid, die taalbewussyn van die onderwysers, die onderwysers se interpretasie van die skool se taalbeleid, en die rol wat houdings jeens taal in die verwerf van geletterdheid speel.

Die navorsingsontwerp is uiteraard kwalitatief en vind binne die raamwerk van 'n interpretatiewe paradigma plaas. My rol as deelnemer-toeskouer het my sonder meer toegang tot die navorsingsdeelnemers verskaf, en die

insameling van data deur die gebruik van vraelyste en semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is sodoende vergemaklik.

'n Bevinding van dié stuk is die bewys van 'n voortdurende taalverskuiwing vanaf Afrikaans na Engels in van die gemeenskappe op die Kaapse Vlakte. Met ander woorde, die letsel van spesifiek Kaapse Afrikaans as 'n ondergewaardeerde taal bly vassit in die houdings van ouers en, deur hulle, van die leerders.

Die tesis sluit af deur kodewisseling – 'n onderrigstrategie wat gebruik word om die leerproses van leerders wat nie deur die medium van hul moedertaal geleer word nie, te staaf – as 'n bykomstige navorsingsonderwerp te identifiseer.

Isishwankathelo

Isiseko esisingise empumelelweni kwezemfundo ephakamileyo sisekelwe kubugcisa kulwimi nokufunda nokubhala komfundi. Ukwangeza, ubudlelane phakathi kolwimi lwasekhaya ndawonye nolwimi lokufunda nokufundisa esikolweni kuthi kube nefuthe kumgangatho wempumelelo athi umfundi aphumelele ngawo.

Le thisisi, elufundo olunye, luphando ngeizeka bani ezithi zibe nefuthe kubuchwephetsha kulwimi ukufunda nokubhala kubafundi abakwibanga lesixhenxe. Oku kulandelayo kuye kwafunyaniswa kungo noobangela abangundoqo kolufundo: umgaqo nkqubo wolwimi wesikolo, ukuqatshelwa kwelwimi ngootitshala, indlela ootitshala abawutolika ngayo umgaqo nkqubo wolwimi kwizikolo zabo, nenxaxheba ezijongwa ngayo iilwimi xa kufunyanwa ubuchwephetsha bokufunda nokubhala.

Indlela uphando oluqulunqwe ngayo *yiqualityative* ngokwendalo kwaye isekelwe kwingcinga ezitolikayo. Indima yam njengomthathi nxaxheba oqwalaselayo yenze kwalula ukudibana nabathathi nxaxheba, kwaye nokuqokelela ulwazi ndisebenzisa amaphhepha mibuzo ndawonye namadliwano ndlebe, apho kuyimfuneko.

Enye yezinto efunyaniswe loluphando ibonakalisa ubungqina bento eqhubekayo ekukutshintsha kusukwa kwisiBhulu kusiyiywa kwisiNgesi kwindawo apho isiBhulu ilelona lwimi luthethwa kwakhulu kwiCape Flats. Ngamanye amagama isiphako esibekwa kwisiBhulu, ingakumbi esibizwa ngokuba *yiKaaps Afrikaans*, nanje ngolwimi olungabonwa nje ngelinxabiso sisaqhubekaka kwiingcinga zabazali ze ezingcinga bazigqithisele kubafundi.

Lethisisi iqukumbela ngokuthi ibonise ngohlobo lokufundisa utshintsha tshintsha iilwimi kwaye uzixuba ukukefela indlela yokufunda kwabafundi abangafundiswa ngolwimi labo lwenkobe, ibonakalisa ukuba ingumba onokuthi kuphandwe ngawo ngokubanzi.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The context of this study is the language policy of Socrates Primary School and the impact the policy has on the language and literacy proficiency of Grade 7 learners at this historically deprived school on the Cape Flats. Following a general introduction wherein the development of the language policy of the school is discussed, the remainder of this chapter provides a broad outline of the research problem and my research questions within the language and literacy context of the school, the rationale for the research, the limitations of the research, and an overview in which the subsequent chapters of this dissertation are explained in greater detail.

1.1 General introduction

Socrates Primary School is situated on the Cape Flats and falls within the WCED's Central Metropole district. The school serves a number of communities in and around the Athlone area, but predominantly the poor and working class groups of Fairton¹, a historically "coloured" community. Parents send their children to Socrates because they themselves had been pupils there, as well as their parents before them. This sense of the school being part of the family tradition is a powerful force in the community. As a result, parents seldom challenge the school on educational issues and policies.

Like any school in South Africa, the history of Socrates is closely tied to the political environment of the country. With the change from repression to democracy, a new era in democratic schooling was unveiled based on the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) and the Language-in-Education Policy (DoE 1997) that ensured the right of every individual in South Africa to be taught in his or her language of choice. The following events relate to the development of the school's language policy from 1997

¹ The name of the community has been changed to protect its identity.

to 2002, in an attempt to comply with these new democratic regulations. These events will be looked at within the context of two periods the period 1997 to 2001, and the period from 2002. The first (1997–2001) indicates a period of language policy trial-and-error at Socrates, while the period (2002) indicates the official start of the current language policy.

Table 1 below gives a brief summary of how the school language policy evolved since the national Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP 1997) was legislated.

| Year | Approach | LoLT(s) |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1997–1999 | Parallel medium | Afrikaans and English |
| 2000–2001 | Dual medium | Afrikaans/English |
| 2002–Present | Single medium | English |

Table 1: Development of the school’s language policy at a glance

1.1.1 The period 1997–2001

In 1997, there were two media of instruction at the school, Afrikaans and English; there were also a small number of isiXhosa-speakers at the school. The parallel medium of instruction was considered the norm as the school has historically always catered for predominantly Afrikaans and English-speaking communities in the Athlone area. These parallel streams ran from Grades 1–7, and had equal status in that both were taught and assessed as home languages. They were given their full scope on the timetable, both as home languages (HLs) and as first additional languages (FALs). However, staff meetings, notices to parents, and school assemblies were mostly in English. IsiXhosa was used only amongst the learners.

After 1997, a change in perception at the school concerning the language policy took place. The LiEP and the Western Cape Language Policy (1998) influenced the school’s language policy in that isiXhosa was henceforth considered, but never introduced, as a second additional language or SAL (Mbatha and Plüddemann 2004; Vesely 2000). The isiXhosa-speaking learners commute to school from the neighbouring townships of Langa, Khayelitsha, Crossroads and Gugulethu, and have always predominantly enrolled in the English medium classes. The school did not have a language plan in place for isiXhosa-speaking learners before 1997. Although the

staff took a few lessons in isiXhosa, these were never put to use or sustained beyond the initial lessons. Afrikaans and English remained the status languages at the school and in the community.

However, after engaging with the LiEP and the WCLP, the school engaged a language facilitator for isiXhosa from the Xhosa Learning Academy (1998/99). This facilitator taught isiXhosa to all the grades, for one 30-minute period per week. The programme was structured on verbal/communicative competence in the SAL. The facilitator was a home-language (HL) speaker of isiXhosa who emphasised the Eastern Cape standard variety. She found great difficulty with the quality of isiXhosa, especially of the HL isiXhosa speakers at Socrates. The programme focused on the children. Very few teachers actively participated in acquiring the communicative isiXhosa skills. The programme later expanded to the facilitator becoming a teacher-aide, especially to the foundation phase (FP) teachers. This superficial maintenance programme eventually petered out when funds for the upkeep of the project dried up and the much-respected facilitator received a financially more secure employment opportunity elsewhere. Since then, no isiXhosa maintenance programme has been in operation at the school.

From 2000 to 2001, the school experimented with a dual-medium policy in the intermediate and senior phases. This policy was designed because of the restructuring taking place in education at the time. The school lost many of its more experienced staff during this period. To facilitate class sizes and accommodate the gaps left by these experienced teachers, the school opted for dual medium as one coping strategy was to opt for the dual medium approach. However, the programme was structured more on the basis of code switching and mixing (these terms will be given greater scope in Chapter 2, the Literature Review), than on a true dual medium model where both LoLTs (English and Afrikaans) are given equal time on the timetable, in the curriculum and the learning programmes (see Plüddemann et al., 2004(b):37). Teachers teach best in a language in which they are comfortable, and most teachers at Socrates taught through English. Moreover, dual-medium classes were structured unequally in that there was not a suitable mix of mother-tongue speakers in the class. The English-speaking learners remained in one class and the Afrikaans-speaking learners remained with their language peers. Only in exceptional cases were Afrikaans-speaking learners transferred to the English classes to justify the dual medium system. However, in the predominantly Afrikaans stream, the dual medium system saw teachers use

more English than Afrikaans. The school became English-dominant even though the dominant language variety of the community was the mixed code of Kaaps Afrikaans (see Jardine 2006; McCormick 2002).

The status of Afrikaans was adversely affected by the growing dominance of English at Socrates. In a matter of months in 2000, Afrikaans as a language of learning and teaching and as the first language of many learners was relegated to the status of first additional language. As English gained dominance at the school, there was little resistance offered when the dual-medium programme evolved into an English-only programme once the last group of Afrikaans home-language speakers passed Grade 7 in 2001. As a result, in 2002, an English-only programme was officially accepted as the new and as yet unchanged language policy of the school. English became the sole language of learning and teaching (LoLT), while Afrikaans was reduced to the level of a subject on the timetable.

1.1.2 The period from 2002

The governing body of Socrates endorsed and took ownership of the English-oriented policy in 2002. This can be inferred from a statement such as the following: “English is, however, the medium of instruction preferred by the majority of the parent body of the school” (SPSLP 2002:2.2). However, and contrary to the above quote, the language policy does not find sustenance from the community and exists only at school, as it suits the language profile of the teachers more than that of the community. In addition, this language policy, like the Language-in-Education Policy (1997) and the Western Cape Language Policy (1998), does not explicitly indicate how it will go about introducing English as LoLT, or what pedagogical methods will be used to give life to the policy.

A cursory glance at the school’s language policy indicates that some engagement with the Language-in-Education Policy of 1997 transpired. There is an attempt at addressing key issues and principles such as the language rights of the individual: “[W]hile everyone has the right to education in the language of their choice, the practicality of such choices for the school must be considered” (SPSLP 2002:1.1). It also embraces the principle of diversity: “Language will not be used as a tool of discrimination based on race at this school” (ibid. 1.2), and “our vision is to embrace the concept of multilingualism at our school” (ibid. 2.1). However, there is an inherent contradiction in the language policy. While it states that it is non-discriminatory (ibid. 1.2), it has a hidden language-intolerant agenda

that states, “A prospective Grade 4 learner who cannot speak English will rather be referred to another school” (ibid. 2.5). This same language intolerance is hidden in “... teachers will strive to be sensitive” (ibid. 2.6). This contradiction will be given scope in Chapter 4 (Findings) of this dissertation.

At Socrates, the current language policy has been implemented in such a way that for approximately five hours every day the language of the home is not validated, used or explored in the classroom. The variety of English often heard in the home environment, is quite different from the standard language learners are expected to be able to control at school. A language profile of the learners at Socrates (Table 2) indicates the number of mother tongue speakers at school in 2005.

| Number of learners | English as LoLT | English home language | Afrikaans home language | Xhosa home language | Other home languages |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 521 (100%) | 521 (100%) | 235 (45%) | 194 (37%) | 87 (17%) | 5 (1%) |

(Source: CEMIS 2005)

Table 2: number of learners by LoLT and home language

In 2005, the proportion of mother tongue (MT) English speakers was 45%, meaning that 55% of the learners’ home languages were not represented by the LoLT. The statistics also shows that 37% of the learners’ MT (Afrikaans) was represented as a subject only, while 18% did not have their MT represented by the school’s language policy, whether as LoLT or as subject. Nevertheless, this statistics taken from the CEMIS records of the school is flawed. When parents enrol their children at school, they complete the registration form whereon they state the learners’ home and additional languages. The high status of English, as well as the predominantly English orientation of the school, leads the parents to declare the home language as English, even where this may not be the case. This overwhelming response from parents represents a distortion of the school community’s language profile.

The Grade 1 learner enters the constructed environment (the formal classroom) in a language that is not entirely alien, but does not lend itself to

the cognitive and academic development that is necessary for academic success. This language mismatch affects the learners' chances of being successful in externally-imposed tests and exams; since 2002, this external academic success has been determined by the WCED's systemic literacy assessment.

1.1.3 The literacy crisis since 2002

In order to improve service delivery to schools, the WCED has since 2002 tested the literacy and numeracy levels of the Grades 3 and 6 learners at all public schools in the province. For the purpose of this study, I concentrated only on the school's literacy results, particularly on Grade 6. The language of the systemic assessment is the same as the school's LoLT, which is English. Table 3 sums up the literacy results of the Grade 6 learners at Socrates since 2003.

| Year | % of Gr. 6 learners achieving at grade level |
|------|--|
| 2003 | 42.5% |
| 2005 | 35% |
| 2007 | 50% |

(Source: WCED Systemic Literacy results, Grade 6, 2003–2007)

Table 3: Percentage of Grade 6 learners achieving systemic literacy outcomes

After the first series of tests were written and the scores tabulated and disseminated, Socrates fell short of its vision to “progressively lead all learners to reaching the required language proficiency”, as stated in the school's new language policy. The initial scores of 2002 and 2003 although disappointing were to set the baselines for the school's future literacy strategies in Grade 3 and Grade 6 respectively.

Table 3 shows that the literacy results are unacceptably low. The learners experience the greatest difficulty with the comprehension of stories, passages, and the instructions at the required grade levels in the language of learning and teaching (English), which for too many learners is not their MT or primary language (see Table 2). The learners also find difficulty with the interpretation and the writing of texts. This will be explored in Chapter 4 when I introduce transcripts of the children's oral and written work. As much as 65% of the Grade 6 learners in 2005 failed to grasp

or comprehend the stories and passages read. The learners struggle with comprehension questions based on mind maps, texts and extended passages, as well as with expressive writing. The learners also cannot answer the questions in standard grammatical English. That is, a staggering percentage of learners in 2005 experienced some form of learning barrier with regard to language readiness. These concepts are not neutral and are given greater scope in Chapters 2 and 4.

By 2007, the literacy results of Socrates indicate that the language policy has not led to the envisioned social and academic development of learners. By 2007, 50% of the learners in Grade 6 were still unable to attain the expected language proficiency implied but never clearly stated in the school's language policy, thereby affecting the literacy profile of Socrates. There is, therefore, a language acquisition and learning imbalance at the school. This imbalance occurs because the principle of using the home language as a foundation for learning, and of acquiring an additional language, is not adhered to. In addition, Afrikaans is taught at FAL and not at HL level as might have been expected, given the predominance of Afrikaans in the community. The test scores are, therefore, a direct reflection of the school language policy and the quality of teacher proficiency in delivering the curriculum and learning programmes through this language policy.

1.2 The research problem

My consciousness is awakened on a Monday morning in 2005; I am watching the laughing, shouting, talking, faces from my classroom window. The voices that reach me, in Afrikaans, English, and isiXhosa, are representative of Cape Town. Observing this multilingual and multicultural body of children, the switching and mixing of Afrikaans and English forms a code that seems to dominate (see McCormick 2002; Stone 2002). But, within minutes, when I start with the first lesson of the day, many of these animated voices will suddenly fall silent. This frustration of “having learners who are eloquent in their home languages, but otherwise ‘silenced’ when having to speak, read or write English” (Adams 2003:1), led me to question, firstly, my own language and literacy practices as a classroom practitioner, and secondly, the language and literacy practices of the school as an institution. In addition, the low literacy level, more evident since the WCED introduced its benchmark literacy and numeracy systemic assessment protocol in 2002, has become the main academic concern at the school. This concern became the driving force behind this dissertation.

1.3 The research questions

In the previous section, I outlined the motivation for this study: the low literacy level of learners at Socrates; in other words, the lack of academic achievement by learners at the school. My initial focus therefore centred on the factors that influenced this low literacy level. An extensive literature review (see Chapter 2) helped me narrow my focus and enabled me to formulate the following main research question:

What is the relationship between the school's language policy and the literacy performance of learners at Grade 7 level?

The following sub-questions were derived from this main question:

- What role does the language awareness of the teacher play in the literacy proficiency of the learner?
- How do the teachers at school interpret the school language policy?
- What role is played by the language attitudes (of learners and teachers) in literacy proficiency at the school?

1.4 Rationale for the research

Staffroom conversations as well as the Grade 1 baseline testing suggests that many learners enter Grade 1 less prepared than in previous years. This lack of academic ability has a cumulative effect in the sense that by the time the learner reaches Grades 6 and 7, the Grades that I teach, a number of barriers preventing academic success become more evident. The rationale proffered for this poor performance has been the limitations created by the socio-economic conditions of the learner. In order to debunk the generalised assumption that all academic problems and barriers exist because of the learners' socio-economic background, I explore the two interweaving factors, namely the language policy of the school and its realization in the classroom.

1.5 Limitations of the research

For the purpose of this dissertation I will not foreground the isiXhosa mother tongue speakers and those learners with the descriptor "Other language" in Table 2, because at present only English and Afrikaans are active languages in the school curriculum. This, however, is not to suggest that isiXhosa and other languages do not have a place at school. The heterogeneous nature of the broader school community and of the learners within

the classroom identifies the school as a multilingual institution. My focus is therefore limited to the two languages used within the immediate school community, English and Afrikaans.

1.6 Overview of the research

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 2 explores the literature relevant to mother tongue literacy and bilingual education in relation to language and literacy learning. I pay attention to the South African Language-in-Education Policy (1997) and the different language of learning and teaching (LoLT) models it proposes. I especially focus on mother tongue education and additive bilingualism. This chapter also discusses the literature on literacy acquisition and proficiency, especially the theories of David Rose. Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodologies used to realise my research questions, and argue that this study should allow for the researcher's voice to be heard strongly. I explain why I opted for a qualitative approach framed within an Interpretivist paradigm. I also give a detailed explanation of the research instruments I used to gather the data, the participants, and my role as participant-observer within the study. I conclude the chapter by briefly outlining the results I expect. Chapter 4 discusses the data generated in response to the research questions and elicited through the research methods. I will make meaning of this data using the readings discussed in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 5 draws together the threads, and spells out the possible implications for my school, Socrates and for further research.

Summary

Fairton is a community in flux. Like many communities on the Cape Flats, parents identify with "Kaaps Afrikaans" as their language, but believe in the socio-economic currency of English as a language for a better future. For this reason, they enrol their children in English classes in the hope that this will realise their children's brighter future. However, stressing Standard English in all communication with parents and learners entails that the cultural richness of the home language (Kaaps Afrikaans) is placed under pressure and marginalised by the school. The result is that merely by enrolling at Socrates, many learners are at a disadvantage and therefore conditioned to underachieving at school.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Given the fact that the majority of learners are not being taught in their mother tongue, teachers will strive to be sensitive in their choices of learning material and teaching methods used and progressively lead all learners to reaching the required language proficiency. (SPSLP 2002:2.6)

The above extract taken from the language policy of Socrates serves as motivation for this study, which falls within the field of additional language and literacy learning. The literature on mother tongue education (MTE), bilingualism, and the literacy development of learners, especially of learners who are not learning through their mother tongue will therefore be explored and will be given greater scope under the following headings: language in education policy of 1997, language learning and proficiency, literacy learning.

2.2 Language-in-Education Policy 1997

Language in South Africa has always been a contested issue, more so under Apartheid when the indigenous languages were disempowered. Afrikaans and English were developed into high status languages: languages of knowledge, politics, economics, and social mobility. Language was used as a divisive tool under Apartheid. The aim of the LiEP (1997) was to redress the “tensions, contradictions and sensitivities, underpinned by racial and linguistic discrimination” (DoE 1997, par. A.2), of the apartheid past. The goal was that all individuals and learners in South Africa be equally validated irrespective of language or race. The policy clearly states that its aim is to promote “communication across the barriers of colour, language and region, while at the same time creating an environment in which respect for languages other than one’s own would be encouraged” (ibid. par. A.4). My

understanding of the LiEP is that now, in a democratic society, every individual could be empowered in a language of his or her choice, within the parameters of the 11 official languages. This empowerment can be achieved through education. For this reason any of the official languages of South Africa can be used as a language of learning and teaching. The policy is, however, not prescriptive; it does not explicitly indicate how it will go about introducing the language(s) of learning and teaching or what pedagogical methodologies will be used to give life to the policy. However, it does suggest either a home language approach with learning additional languages as subjects, or an approach based on a dual medium system (ibid. par. 4.1.5).

In light of this, I will now take a closer look at three issues that stem from the LiEP: the language of learning and teaching, bilingual education, and lastly, mother tongue education.

2.2.1 Language of learning and teaching models

2.2.1.1 *Mother tongue education: Definition and brief history in the South African context*

The concept of mother tongue in South Africa is a volatile and politicised matter: firstly, because of South Africa’s racially oppressive past that devalued the mother tongues of the indigenous people; secondly, the strong “negative socio-political meaning of Afrikaans in many communities” because of its apartheid legacy as the language of the oppressor, and thirdly, the dominance of English over the emergent official languages post 1996 (Alexander 2000; Webb 2002; Giliomee 2003). These concerns are particularly evident in the field of education, with special reference to mother tongue education. Heugh (2000:24–25) writes that the notorious Bantu Education Act (Act 47 of 1953) inadvertently produced positive academic results, which the apartheid state did not anticipate: yet, the parents still felt that education based on the mother tongue was detrimental to their children’s social and academic opportunities (see Webb 2002:10). Although “a child’s education is best begun in a language the child already has some competence in, preferably the mother tongue” (Bamgbose 2000:3), the educationally sound benefits of learning and teaching in the mother tongue were outweighed, in the post-apartheid era, by the racially inherited attitudes of the past. .

The mother tongue can be defined as a person’s first or native language (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th Ed. Rev.). A further search on the Internet yielded the following definitions: it is the language that you learn

from your parents when you are a baby; it is the language on which one's sociolinguistic identity is based; it is the first language learnt at home in childhood and still understood later in life; it is the language which a person talks best and which is usually used for communication in the family; it is the language one first learnt to speak. The United Nations definition of mother tongue is that it is the "language usually spoken in the individual's home in his early childhood, although not necessarily used by him at present" (Lieberson 1969:291, quoted in Romaine 1995:19). Romaine (1995) also reports that this definition of the mother tongue (first or native language) is not necessarily accurate. She quotes Malherbe (1969:45) who notes that in South Africa it is possible for white infants to learn the native language of their isiZulu-speaking nannies (primary care-givers) before they learn either English or Afrikaans. To define the mother tongue therefore is not an easy task. It is possible to argue that the mother tongue can be considered the language one knows best, is most comfortable using, and which forms the basis of one's identity. But Romaine (1995:22) writes that an individual's mother tongue may change over the course of his or her life experiences. For this reason, I find Alexander's definition of the mother tongue much more functional. He writes,

In order not to complicate matters too much "mother tongue" should in certain contexts be taken to mean "the language of the immediate community" or any other language with which the learner is very familiar. The Council of Europe (CoE) seems to accept the definition of mother tongue as referring to "a child's principal language (or one of his/her principal languages) at the time of his/her first contact with the official education system, i.e., at the age of four or five." (Alexander 2006:4)

Language forms the foundation on which learning and teaching is based. Through language all subjects in the curriculum finds meaning. In addition, progression and promotion through the system are based on how efficiently and proficiently language is learned. The new requirements (RSA Government Gazette 2007) raise the measure of efficiency to 50%; this must be attained in the LoLT or the home language (L1 or MT) in order to be successful at school.

The Unesco report of 1953 concerning mother tongue and the language of learning and teaching focuses attention on the fundamental importance of the mother tongue as LoLT. The report recommends, "that the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible. In particular, pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the

mother tongue, because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in the mother tongue will make the break between home and the school as small as possible" (Unesco 1953:47-8 in Bamgbose 2000:76). But in the South African context, mother tongue education for black learners became stigmatised as inferior, while coloured learners had a choice between Afrikaans and English (see Webb 2002:183).

There are many barriers to a learner achieving academic success at school, pre-eminently the socio-economic background. However, the overriding barrier to academic success according to Bamgbose (2000) and Webb (2002) is the disjuncture between the learner's MT and the school's LoLT. Bamgbose (2000:12) speaks of "language exclusion" where the school "ignores the language that the child brings to school", while Webb (2002:197) reports on the "strong prejudice against the use of a vernacular language in education". Bamgbose, however, goes further when he writes about the discrepancies that occur within the classroom. He says that contrary to the official policy of the school, many teachers use whichever language or language strategies necessary for their learners to understand the content of their subjects, even if this necessitates the use of the vernacular or any other communal language (Bamgbose 2000:82).

However, the problem as Webb (2002:198) states it, "is to convince learners, parents, teachers and school governing bodies" to accept that mother tongue education (be it the indigenous languages, Afrikaans or English) is the best choice that can be made for the learner's success at school. The choice of English as language of learning and teaching (as opposed to an indigenous language or Afrikaans) must be challenged; and the myth that "using English as LoLT automatically leads to improved English language proficiency" (Webb 2002:186) must also be debunked. The fact that English is a gatekeeper to all higher socio-political, economic and educational domains (Webb 2002; Alexander 2004), and therefore has great value in the South African context, cannot be denied. It is for these reasons that parents opt for English as the LoLT from as early as the inception year (Grade 1), even as Bamgbose (2000:94) says, "their children do not know the language before they go to school".

It is generally assumed that the mother tongue is the language the learner knows best and certainly well enough to start formal schooling in. However, Webb (2002:186-7) points out that many learners immersed in an English-only medium school do not have the necessary language proficiency to cope with this language change so early in their schooling. Many learners are able

to communicate reasonably well through English, but they lack the “higher order cognitive” language skills so necessary for academic success. There is widespread agreement in the local and African research community that the mother tongue is the ideal vehicle to enhance cognitive development, and should therefore be used as the main language of learning and teaching from Grade 1 – see Webb 2002; Bamgbose 2002, 2000; Alexander 2000; Braam 2004; Heugh 2002, 2000; De Klerk 1996; Mahlalela and Heugh 2002; Macdonald 1990; Mbatha and Plüddemann 2004; Plüddemann et al. 2004a, 2000; Benson 2008; Obanya 2004. Where the MT is the medium through which education is mediated for the learner, it stands to reason that learning becomes accessible to the learner. In the next section I will explore in greater detail the recommendations of the LiEP (1997 par. 4.1.5) with regard to an additive approach to bilingualism, as well as its opposite subtractive bilingualism. In this section the work of especially Cummins (2000, 1996) and Baker (2001) will be placed in the foreground.

2.2.1.2 *Benefits of mother tongue education*

Research shows that mother tongue education enjoys strong support from academics both nationally and internationally (Webb 2002; Braam 2004; Heugh 2005; Alexander 2005; Romaine 1995; Bamgbose 2000). A child learning in and through the mother tongue is more likely to succeed academically than a child whose language of learning and teaching is not the mother tongue. Also, when a child’s LoLT is not the mother tongue, the cognitive skills necessary for learning in or through a second language is either poorly developed or not developed when there is no sustainable and active maintenance of the mother tongue or first language (Romaine 1995; Ellis 2008). The transfer of knowledge and skills from the mother tongue to the additional (target) language is therefore inadequate for academic success (Cummins 2000).

The central advantage to using the mother tongue as the language of learning and teaching is the ability to understand and make meaning across the curriculum, as well as the improved ability to learn a second language. In addition, Brock-Utne and Alidou (2005:19 in ADEA et al. 2005) say that a strong literacy foundation in the mother tongue leads to a less stressful transfer of cognitive academic skills, even when learning in a language other than the mother tongue in the higher grades. Added support for the transfer of knowledge and skills (from mother tongue to the additional languages) comes from Wolff (2005) and especially Heugh (2005:79) who gives a more detailed

definition of transfer. Heugh explains transfer as having its roots in the work of Cummins (1984). The learner must know how the first language works, especially knowledge of the process skills of reading and writing, before the transfer of these cognitive processes to the second language is made possible.

Transfer from the L1 to the L2 is not possible until the L1 is sufficiently well established and the L2 is sufficiently well known. Jim Cummins and other psycholinguists believe that transference is only possible once there is a firm foundation of academic and cognitive development in the L1. Transfer is made possible in additive bilingual programmes because the L1 is kept present as the primary medium and language from which the knowledge and skills can be transferred. (Heugh 2005:79)

The argument of successful transfer rests on the premise that the learner has a strong foundation in the mother tongue. In other words, a high level of mother tongue language and literacy proficiency must be maintained and constantly stimulated while learning in the additional language. It implies that if there is not enough linguistic input from the home environment, exposure to the second language can have a detrimental effect on the literacy development of both languages of the learner (Romaine 1995:117–18).

2.2.2 Bilingual education

The national language policy document implies that many South African children are bilingual or multilingual. For Baker (2001), a bilingual person is someone who is proficiently skilled in using two languages. In the South African context, it is presumed that that learner has a defined mother tongue and at least a second language wherein the learner is communicatively competent when starting school (DoE 1997 Preamble par. 4; Braam 2004). This, however, does not exclude the possibility of the learner being monolingual when starting school. As stated in the previous section, the LiEP does not prescribe which language approach to follow; it does, however, strongly promote an additive bilingual approach in a dual medium system, or a mother tongue approach with an additional language as a subject (DoE 1997, par. 4.1.5).

2.2.2.1 *BICS and CALP*

In bilingual education, a central goal of the system is for the learner to attain a high degree of proficiency in both languages. However, in order for an additive bilingual approach to work, the mother tongue or home language of the learner must be developed to a high cognitive academic (classroom

language) proficiency level, as opposed to a high communicative (play-ground language) level (Gibbons 1991 in Cummins 1996:56–7). According to Cummins BICS is clearly distinguishable from CALP. BICS are informal, communication-oriented and cognitively less demanding in the teaching and learning process, whereas CALP takes much longer to develop. A learner with CALP has the ability to think critically and independently, a key prerequisite for academic success. Cummins (1996) cautions against using the second language for learning and teaching, when the learner shows only a rudimentary ability in BICS.

Cummins explains how CALP can be supported and encouraged through the teaching-learning process. He says that CALP can only be developed if the learner is constantly challenged cognitively while still receiving support (see Wood 1998) to complete the necessary tasks. The teacher's teaching philosophy greatly influences whether the learner will achieve adequate CALP and BICS proficiency in the target language. The teacher, who ignores or devalues the learner's prior knowledge and experiences, which in many cases is constructed in the non-standard variety of the language, is limiting that learner's cognitive development. Cummins (1996:60) says that it is crucial to acknowledge the learner's prior experiences "in making academic input in the target language comprehensible". The onus is therefore on the teacher to create the challenging language environment that develops the cognitive academic language proficiency of the learner.

The factors that influence language proficiency or the lack of language proficiency cannot be attributed only to the learner's inability to master the target language. Both Cummins (1996) and Heugh (2005) allude to the role that teachers and schools play in how proficiently learners acquire language, especially English (a high status language). They advocate that a strong "conceptual foundation" is necessary in the learner's first language (mother tongue/home language) in order to gain maximum benefit from a bilingual programme. It is, therefore, not only the learners who should be language ready when starting school, but also the teachers. Language readiness, however, is a loaded term.

Educators need to know how African L1 children (*or any other mother tongue child*) who brings a different "highly developed language" from that of the teacher to school, one that is often as good as invisible, fare with literacy learning in a language they do not know well [my italics added]. (Bloch 2000:4)

Cummins adds,

Lack of English fluency may be a secondary contributor to children's academic difficulty but the fundamental causal factors of both success and failure lie in what is communicated to children by their interactions with educators ... Underachievement is not caused primarily by lack of fluency in English. Underachievement is the result of particular kinds of interactions in school that lead culturally diverse students to mentally withdraw from academic effort because they are not encouraged and stimulated enough at school. (Cummins 1996:64–65)

2.2.2.2 Additive bilingualism

The claim that "younger children are better language learners than older children" is refuted by Cummins (1996) when he writes about the long-term benefits of additive bilingual education wherein the L1 is used to support the L2 when it is used as a LoLT. Cummins writes that, "bilingual children exhibit a greater sensitivity to linguistic meanings and may be more flexible in their thinking than are monolingual children", that if bilingual education is correctly implemented, bilingual children attain high levels of fluency and literacy in two languages, and that bilingual children's "explicit knowledge about the structure and functions of language itself" seems greater than that of monolinguals (Cummins 1996:103–6).

According to Cummins 1996, Baker 2001, Sharp 1973, Skutnabb-Kangas 1981 and other advocates of bilingual education, an additive bilingual approach is one in which a second language is added to the learners' store of languages without any loss of competence in the first language. This is also what the LiEP supports when it states:

Whichever route is followed, the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s). Hence, the Department's position that an additive approach to bilingualism is to be seen as the normal orientation of our language-in-education policy (DoE 1997 par. 4.1.5).

In this approach both languages (i.e. the home language and the additional language) are supported, developed and validated to the full in and outside of school.

Heugh (2005) advocates an additive bilingual programme wherein the mother tongue serves as the primary medium of instruction for at least the first eight years of schooling, and thereafter an additional language is introduced as a medium of instruction, preferably in a dual medium programme.

The ideal, however, is a mother tongue education system throughout the learner's education. In an additive bilingual model the additional language as medium of instruction does not replace the mother tongue (Heugh 2005). Wolff (2005) says that a language policy that favours the mother tongue greatly improves the learner's chances of academic and cognitive success. The aim of an additive bilingual approach is that the learners will be proficient in both languages.

2.2.2.3 *Subtractive bilingualism*

In contrast to an additive bilingual approach is the subtractive bilingual approach. In subtractive bilingualism, also referred to as submersion models, the second language is taught/learned at the expense of the home language. Romaine (1995:246) says that, "In submersion programs a second language gradually undermines proficiency in the first. This has been called subtractive or disruptive bilingualism on the grounds that the development of the child's first language has been disrupted and is incomplete". The long term effect of subtractive bilingualism is that the learner will eventually regress in both languages, and even worse, will lose his or her home language' cognitive/academic proficiency skills (Cummins 1996; Baker 2001). A subtractive approach to learning through an additional language especially from Grade 1 or as early as the pre-primary class, devalues the learners' mother tongue and in the process creates a barrier whereby proficiency in, especially, literacy cannot be achieved.

A subtractive bilingual model is based on the principle of replacing the learners' first language as a LoLT with the target language. Cummins in Baker (2001) asserts that learners are able to perform maximally where an additional language is the LoLT, provided the first language of the learner is maintained and developed alongside the additional language. He goes further by saying that the academic competence of the learner depends on achieving cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in the first language. When the learner is immersed in a straight-for-target language programme (as at Socrates), the CALP is under-developed and the transfer of cognitive skills from the first language to the additional language leads to under-performance. The direct consequence of this is that the learners' language proficiency, in a sense, does not develop beyond the basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) level.

The mother tongue in a subtractive model is initially used as a medium of instruction but is soon replaced with the target language, which is predomi-

nantly English in the South African context (Alexander 2000). There are a number of subtractive language models (early exit from Grade 3; late exit from Grade 5 or 6; or straight-for-the-target language from Grade 1), all with different implementation strategies. The common characteristic of subtractive bilingual models or approaches, however, is the eventual replacement of the mother tongue of the learner with the target language. Heugh says that the research, both local and international clearly "shows policy makers that subtractive (straight for L2/ILWC) and early transition programmes do not facilitate successful results" (2005:65–66). That is, that early immersion in a second language (L2) or an international language of wider communication (ILWC) is detrimental to the cognitive growth of the learner.

2.3 Language learning and proficiency

In 1998, the WCPG bestowed official status on the principal languages of the province. These languages, in order of mother tongue speakers, are Afrikaans (55,3%), isiXhosa (23,7%), and English (19,3%). Afrikaans, however, as reported in Webb (2002:74), "is not a homogenous language, and several non-standard varieties exist, such as Cape Afrikaans, Orange River Afrikaans and the Afrikaans of millions of second-language speakers" (Roberge 1995 in Webb 2002; Van Rensburg 1998 in Webb 2002). Webb (2002:210–211) goes further by saying that the standardization of Afrikaans has led to "language-internal conflict", in that standard Afrikaans became so differentiated from the vernacular, especially Kaaps Afrikaans as spoken by the coloured working class communities of the Western Cape that the vernacular speakers became stigmatised and powerless users of the language. In addition, Giliomee (2003), Alexander (1989) and the author Zoë Wicomb (2000) comment on the anglicisation of coloured children, and in a sense the gradual demise of Afrikaans. They say that while the parents maintain their Afrikaans for family gatherings, conversations with neighbours (see Jardine 2006), and each other, they are increasingly inclined to educate and raise their children in the English language because of its promise of upward socio-economic mobility and the broadening of global and educational opportunities.

2.3.1 The language of the community

The ensuing language conflict between home and school deepens the covert stigmatization that learners experience at school. Jardine (2006:20) gives an anecdotal account of her 73-year-old uncle, remembering the interaction

between Afrikaans and English during his schooling. From the anecdote, the racial, economic and educational overtones of language proficiency are evident, especially the validation of English and stigmatization of Afrikaans. This attitude, especially towards English, is succinctly summarised by Alexander (2000) when he comments on the desire for global access to English, and yet, at the same time not being able to access the power of English.

2.3.2 Language attitudes and motivation

It is clear that language attitudes affect language learning. Baker (1992) distinguishes between three components of attitudes, the cognitive, affective and readiness for action parts. He explains the cognitive component as the “thoughts and beliefs people have about language”. In the South African context, for example, thoughts about Afrikaans, as the language of the oppressor during apartheid, led to a negative attitude towards the Afrikaans language by those who were oppressed. The affective component concerns feelings towards the language. Baker (1992:12) says that these feelings may be based on a passion for a language, for example a desire to learn French because it is a romantic and beautiful language. The third component “concerns a readiness for action”. If we take the first example of the parents who have a negative attitude towards Afrikaans, these parents’ plan of action for their children would be to enrol them at English medium schools because of their resistance to Afrikaans. These components, however, are not independent of each other. They interact to inform our attitudes towards language and learning; Baker (1992) goes further to say that these attitudes can be covert or overt. The overt attitudes are readily visible. The attitude towards language and learning, for example, are positive, negative or neutral. The covert attitudes are not as easily detected. The covert attitudes are often reflected in how the language is used by the learners, for example, the use of a particular term that only has meaning to the users, such as the term “ragga” at school. This is a gangster term for becoming angry. The children often use this word to describe the teachers’ behaviour and attitude, and it is used to keep their teachers out of their conversation and also on the outside of their world.

Attitudes are also closely related to motivation for learning a language (Baker 1992, 2001). He adds that we are led by two types of motivation to learning languages: we learn language for a particular purpose, and because we are intrinsically motivated to learn a language. We learn languages for a particular purpose primarily relates to socio-economic benefits to ourselves.

This motivation type is called instrumental motivation. Baker sums up research which suggests that this type of motivation to learn a language leads to high levels of proficiency in the target language. We are also motivated to learn languages because of our emotional attachment to a language. This type of motivation, integrative motivation, has deep emotional value and resonance with us. For example, the learner who wishes to make new friends with children from another language group, or pen friends who wish to learn each other’s languages. Although Baker (1992) says that language attitudes are mostly covert, they are not impossible to plan for because they are manifested in the learners’, parents’ and teachers’ behaviour, and in their interaction with and through the language.

More important, though, is the intrinsic motivation for learning in and through one’s own language. Duquette (1999) writes, “When the home language is used in school, there is the possibility that a child’s sense of identity, self-esteem and self-concept will be enhanced” (in Baker 2001:12). It is therefore clear that once the child’s own language is validated by the school, motivation and attitude towards learning are greatly enhanced. It is therefore also important that one becomes aware of the attitude learners and parents have towards languages because this will impact on what language policies to implement at school. Baker (1992:12) says it succinctly: “[A]ttitude is a predisposing factor affecting the outcomes of education”. If we do not take cognizance of the attitudes of our learners, then any policy implemented will fail because we are not taking into consideration the motivation and attitude of those whom the policy is supposedly intended to benefit.

This language attitude still prevails: English is better (see Alexander 2000), and those who speak it are supposedly better and more intelligent than other language users. Even more damaging now, is that the learners perceive their language as devalued and “kombuis” by the teacher, and in turn the teacher is identified and stigmatised by learners as being “sturfie” (English-speaking, middle-class and snobbish,), especially insofar as standard, “suiwer” Afrikaans is concerned. The children do not consider the Afrikaans the teachers use as the Afrikaans that they can identify with. Teachers are perceived as “outsiders” or “sturfies” because they do not speak “slang” (Stone 2002:381). There is therefore a serious mismatch between the language of the home and the language of learning and teaching at Socrates.

Obanya (2004) lists the following practical conditions wherein a language can be successfully and proficiently acquired in a formal (school)

setting: he says that the classroom activities, teaching-learning materials as well as the language of the community must be the language of the school, the teachers, the materials used in and outside of the class, and most importantly, the language of the classroom. Obanya further summarises the advantages of using the home language as medium of instruction when he says “that it is more likely to inculcate the higher order comprehension and communication skills that are evidence of deep learning” (Obanya, 2004:11). The dilemma, nonetheless, is that the non-standard variety of Kaaps Afrikaans has no credibility, and is not even considered as a language of learning and teaching. This is unlike the views of Webb (2002) and Jardine 2008, who advocate the use of the vernacular as a language of learning and teaching.

2.3.3 Language proficiency

Language proficiency is a contested and value-laden term. Proficiency is measured by those who hold the socio-economic, political, educational, and cultural power in a community and society (Webb 2002; Bamgbose 2000; Cummins 1996).

Cummins (1996:51–2) writes that there are two overriding misunderstandings in regard to language proficiency. The first is based on the child’s ability to use the standard form of the language to think logically. Children who therefore use a non-standard variety of English in the South African context such as Kaaps-English (De Klerk 1996) or even Kaaps Afrikaans as opposed to standard Afrikaans (Webb 2002; Mesthrie 2002) must be “handicapped educationally and less capable of logical thinking” (Cummins 1996:51–2). This misconception is based on the child’s cognitive development.

The second misconception is based on the learner’s mastery of the spoken aspect of the language and that this spoken skill equals native-like control of the language. As Cummins (1996:52) states, “[C]onversational skills are interpreted as a valid index of overall proficiency in the language.” If Kaaps Afrikaans-speaking parents use mostly English when talking to their children at home, that learner is enrolled at school as an English mother tongue speaker.

In a 1984 study Cummins found that after analysing more than 400 teacher referral forms and psychological assessments of learners, that these “children’s English communicative skills appeared considerably better developed than their academic language skills” (Cummins 1996:53). Based

on this communicative ability, the bilingual learner who is having difficulty progressing adequately “must either have deficient cognitive abilities or be poorly motivated” (ibid. 55). The root cause of the bilingual child’s underachievement is placed at the learner’s door, and is not seen as a direct reflection of the school’s policies and practices.

Yet children are not empty vessels when they start formal schooling. As Heugh (2005:77) says, “Children come into a school proficient in at least one and often several languages used in the immediate community. They have learnt to use these languages for effective communication in mainly informal contexts”. That is, their language ability or language repertoire is dependent on two factors: one, the informal context of the usage, and two, it is predominantly oral (this is akin to Cummins’ concept of BICS). However, in the formal schooling environment, she says that the following is expected: that the school will develop home language; that the learner will develop critical thinking skills by engaging with a challenging curriculum; and that language forms the foundation of the learner’s cognitive and academic development (ibid. 72). However, just as Cummins (1996) cautioned against the perception of the learners’ learning ability as soon as basic communicative skills are acquired in the target language, Wood (1998:42) says that learners’ learning abilities are often misinterpreted as “learning in school is different from learning on the streets because it serves different purposes and is embedded in different activities and practices”. And similarly to showing adequate basic interpersonal skills, it is accepted that the learner has the ability to transfer the “street learning” skills to “school learning”, and it is assumed that the learner has the necessary skills to succeed academically. It was in the light of insights such as these that Cummins (1996:57) distinguished between the “conversational and academic aspects of language proficiency”, between BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) and CALP (cognitive/academic language proficiency).

2.4 Literacy learning

Central to all schooling is the creation of competent readers and writers.

Educationally, literacy is the key to the rest of the curriculum. Virtually all schooling, after the first year or two, assumes pupil literacy. This is particularly so to the extent that children are expected to work independently of teachers, for that requires them to read worksheets, written directions, reference materials, and so on. Many schools are anxious to establish this pattern of pupil learning from the earliest possible stage – which means establishing

literacy as soon as possible after school entry. The corollary is that children who find reading and writing difficult are disadvantaged in all areas of the curriculum. (Hannon 1995 quoted in Bloch 2000:4)

The thread that runs throughout this dissertation is the issue of literacy, and what is meant by “proficiently acquired”. My working definition of literacy is that it is the ability to write, read and speak one’s language in a meaningful, comprehensible and contextual way. A deeper definition of literacy, however, is that it is more than just the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic), as determined by formal schooling. Literacy acquisition is a socio-cultural and contextually constructed activity; it is enhanced but not entirely dependent on a print-rich environment (Bloch 2005, 2000; Wolff 2000; Pretorius and Machet 2004). In addition, Pretorius and Machet (2004:57) say “Literacy cannot be accomplished in a void”; the learner who learns to read and write but is not simultaneously introduced to the power and authenticity of his or her own words (written or oral) does not realise that reading has more meaning than print that appears on pages, in books or in tests; that is, the ability to read does not in itself make someone literate.

2.4.1 Early literacy foundation

Early childhood development research (Bloch 2005, 2000; Wolff 2000) into literacy learning clearly shows the benefits of the learner becoming an authentic author and reader in the mother tongue. Furthermore literacy learning is enhanced if it takes place within the contexts of the learner’s world view. During the foundation and intermediate years of schooling, learning through the home language holds significant advantages for the learner (Cummins 2000; Heugh 2005); however, for many children, the language of learning and teaching is not the mother tongue, which means that literacy learning happens in the second or third language. In this subtractive bilingual approach (see below), the learner does not own the literacy process because it is not framed in the learner’s own experiences, but contextualised in the language of the school. That is, literacy acquisition at school happens in isolation of the learner’s experiences (see earlier section on language proficiency, this chapter). Also, the status of literacy at home and in the community at large leaves the learner disempowered: that is, reading and writing does not feature very highly on the learner’s hierarchy of needs.

The results of the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Howie et al. 2007) must be understood in the following context.

Firstly, many homes are literature poor, and secondly, many learners’ initial literacy is gained in the second or even third language. A summary of the PIRLS (2006) report indicates that “around 80% of South Africa’s Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners have attained not even the most basic reading literacy” (ibid.). In response to these damning reports of the literacy levels of learners, especially of those in public schools, the WCED (2006) developed its Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The document identifies a number of factors that contribute to the low literacy levels of the learners. The first of these is the lack of ownership of and the alienating experiences towards the literacy process from the home, school and community at large. The document aims to address these shortcomings through a Constructivist approach to learning and teaching. This approach is based on the assumption that explicit teaching of phonics will take place nested in a “whole language” approach in which the making of meaning is stressed. In a constructivist approach, both reading and writing are considered critical co-components of development (WCED 2006:17).

2.4.2 Constructs of literacy learning

The importance of an integrative approach, underscored by meaning-making, is therefore stressed (WCED 2006). The whole language approach allows the learners to engage with language and literacy in either a social or individual context. In the individual constructivist approach to learning, the learner gains knowledge and thereby literacy through interaction with and in the environment. The social constructivist approach, however, states that learning and literacy occurs in a social context. The learner constructs knowledge through collective interaction with other children and more mature members of the community (e.g. teachers, able peers) who are engaged in similar knowledge constructions (Wood 1998:47). Vygotsky, the Russian psychologist (who advocated a social constructivist approach), introduced the term “zone of proximal development” (Wood 1998) to the learning theory and through this the concept of scaffolding that plays a vital role in how children learn. Through the process of scaffolding, the learner is guided by “knowledgeable others” (for example teachers), to construct new knowledge. Knowledge is perceived as a fluid and contextualised entity. It is thus constructed by learners who are actively engaged in thinking about their “life, culture and work in increasingly complex ways” (WCED 2006:7). This knowledge is socially constructed and therefore dependent on the language ability of the learners. Language therefore becomes the “meaning system

that embodies the conceptual frameworks within which new knowledge is grown and learning takes place” (ibid. 8). In an academic sense (the learning and teaching process), the term “scaffolding” therefore, refers to the support that a teacher, parent, or more capable peer can give learners so that they can work at a higher level than is possible on their own (ibid. 8). Cummins (1996) supports the concept of scaffolding in that he also perceives the learner as an “active agent” in the learning process.

2.4.3 Mother tongue literacy from home

The learner who acquires literacy in the mother tongue (learning to read and write) has a greater chance of being successful academically and becoming literate in an additional language (WCED 2007). The foundation of the mother tongue reading skills (reading = decoding and comprehension) transfers more easily to the additional language if the core concepts and skills are developed in the mother tongue. Research by Heugh (2005) finds that learners who learn through an additional language without the necessary maintenance programme for the mother tongue seem to perform on par with their grade cohort for the first three years of formal schooling. However, in Grade 4, the volume and cognitive level of academic output expected of the learner increases dramatically. The combination of the increased academic output and learning through a second or even a third language leads to the learner slowly regressing and falling behind the age and grade cohorts who are learning language and literacy through the mother tongue. Her research (see also Cummins 1996; Baker 2001; Webb 2002; Bamgbose 2002, 2000) shows that in order for all learners to gain maximum benefit from school, the transition between home and school language variety and literacy experiences must be as stress free and minimal as possible.

Academic success at school is greatly influenced by the learner’s earlier socialization to reading at home. According to Rose (2004:4) children are prepared to be “successful, average and unsuccessful” at school. The foundation of these categories can be traced to the reading habits at home between the parents and the learner. Rose (2004) uses the work of Bernstein (1999) to support his argument that reading-time spent in homes where reading is the norm, instead of the exception, prepares the learner to either achieve or underachieve at school. Bernstein (1999) argues that the time spent reading in a high-literate home, before the learner enters school, compared with the insufficient preparation of the learner in a low or non-reading home,

amounts to a difference of approximately 1000 hours in literacy preparation before formal schooling. The importance of literacy development from home is further emphasised by Rose, who avers that the learner’s reading proficiency is based on experiences of reading at home:

... junior primary teaching evaluates children on reading orientations they have acquired in the home, upper primary practices evaluate them on independent reading skills acquired in junior primary, and so on. Those learners who have acquired skills in each preceding stage are continually affirmed as “able” in the next stage, while those learners who have not acquired the skills are evaluated as “unable”. (Rose 2004:4–5)

2.4.4 Overcoming literacy barriers

Reading at school forms the bedrock upon which learning rests. If the learner has not mastered the skill of reading, and hence does not become an independent reader by Grade 3, she will not be able to use reading as a source of learning and knowledge construction, and will be unable to demonstrate this learning in written tasks. However, the barriers to learning, as a result of inefficient acquisition of literacy skills, need not be permanent (ibid. 4–5). According to him, the “Skills in learning from reading are rarely taught explicitly in upper primary or secondary school; rather successful learners acquire them tacitly over years or practicing reading and writing the overt curriculum content in class and homework” (ibid. 4–5). He adds that literacy skills can be acquired at any stage of the curriculum provided they are explicitly taught.

Successful learners at school are those who “continually recognise, predict and recall writing patterns of meaning whereas the inexperienced readers cannot recognise patterns they are unfamiliar with, and so cannot read with comprehension” (ibid. 9). It is, however, possible to overcome these reading and writing barriers experienced by the learners. Rose identifies six strategies whereby the learner’s reading-writing skills may be enhanced. These strategies are: 1. preparing before reading; 2. detailed reading; 3. preparing for writing; 4. joint reconstruction; 5. individual reconstruction; and 6. independent writing. The teacher scaffolds this process until the learner eventually constructs his or her independent stories.

Rose’s strategies, while not written for an additive bilingual context, are nevertheless useful to the bilingual classroom insofar as reading and writing are perceived as two parts of the literate whole by bilinguals as well. Scaffolding, in the form of home language or mother tongue maintenance, is a useful strategy when addressing learning barriers at school. The first,

third and fourth strategies, above, can be usefully scaffolded in the mother tongue of the learner. With practice and explicit guidance (Cummins 1996) the learner then tackles the fifth and sixth strategies in the target language of the school. The learner uses the mother tongue as the base from which to gain literacy in the target language (see Heugh 2005 for discussion of transfer of literacy skills). The work of Jardine (2008) complements these strategies of Rose. Jardine (2008) uses journal writing as a means to elevate the mother tongue of learners in her study of Xhosa-speaking learners at a historically “coloured” school on the Cape Flats. Through exploration of journal writing, the acquisition of the target language (English) is scaffolded and made less threatening to the learners.

In the South African context, English is perceived as the only language whereby life chances may be improved: The ease with which this dominance is accepted indicates the corresponding struggle necessary to heighten our sensitivities and awaken our critical language consciousness (Alexander 2000). Parents are often ignorant of the educational process, as well as being unaware of the issues surrounding language development (Bamgbose cited by Wolff 2005). Therefore, the choices parents make are not progressive or even educationally sound, even as they think they are promoting their children’s chances of academic success. A sense of critical language awareness is necessary or else the indigenous languages and mother tongues will eventually be so undermined that they will not be viable as media of instruction. This, however, does not mean that the bilingual education models should be implemented and adopted without caution (see for example Braam 2004, who cautions against adopting language policies without consultation). Young (1999:27 in Heugh 2000) cautions against the over-eager adoption of an additive bilingual model; and, similarly to Cummins (1996), warns against the lack of teacher proficiency in the target language, especially when implementing the additive bilingual approach suggested by the LiEP of 1997.

Alexander, an ardent supporter and agent of the mother tongue based bilingual education camp, emphasises the psychological and political hold English has on our consciousness, and that it might take many years for a sustainable mother tongue education system to be a workable reality in our schools (2000). He outlines the necessary conditions if English, as an additional language, is to be the medium of instruction. They are:

- Teachers’ language proficiency in the target language.

- Teachers’ competence as a language teacher with an understanding of problems of learning in a second language and how to overcome these.
- Exposure to the target language outside of the classroom.

Under these conditions, Alexander suggests, a bilingual education model is achievable and sustainable. The goal of the model however, must be explicit: learners who are equally proficient in two languages without loss or diminished ability in cognitive development of the mother tongue.

Summary

This chapter has sought to cover the literature that informs my dissertation. It has drawn attention to the South African LiEP (DoE 1997), and the language of learning and teaching models it proposes: specifically mother tongue education and dual-medium education as forms of additive bilingual education, and how these two can be married to form the bases of mother tongue-based bilingual education, as espoused by Alexander. I have highlighted the fact that to define the mother tongue is a complex issue, and that the concept of mother tongue education is a highly politicised matter in the new South Africa.

This chapter has also referred to the literature on language and literacy learning. The literature says that learning, in particular literacy learning is best achieved in the language that the learner knows best when starting formal education. This study focuses on a small disadvantaged school on the Cape Flats with Kaaps Afrikaans as the predominant language in the community. I show how attitudes and motivation to learning a language influence proficiency in that particular language, and influence it negatively if the language as a subject or LoLT is devalued in the community.

Finally, I have highlighted the literature on literacy learning. I have drawn attention to the PIRLS Report (Howie et al. 2007), which states that as much as 80% of South African Grades 4 and 5 learners face a literacy barrier. I have also discussed the various strategies of how these barriers can be overcome, especially using the theories of Rose and the concept of scaffolding within a social constructivist approach (WCED 2006).

The concepts discussed here inform the rest of the dissertation, especially Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I foreground the qualitative approach I used to investigate and make meaning of the growing frustrations I faced at my school. This is framed by a case study methodology that is a combination of ethnographic and action research approaches. I use the research questions to direct attention to the language policy, and how this is embodied in the language and literacy practices of the teachers at my school. I then explain in detail which instruments were used to collect my data. This chapter therefore aims to give a clear account of my research design and methodology as I sought to find answers to my research questions. However, to understand the self-generated data that I collected (see Chapter 4), it is necessary to frame this in the broader context of the externally generated data of the systemic assessment results of the school between 2002 and 2007.

3.2 Research questions

Main question

What is the relationship between the school language policy and the literacy proficiency of learners at Grade 7 level?

Secondary questions

- What role does the language awareness of the teacher play in the literacy proficiency of the learner?
- How do the teachers interpret the school's language policy?

3.3 Objectives

Initially, this study stemmed from my search to discover to what extent my practice was contributing to the low literacy results of the children that I teach. However, as the study developed, my focus shifted to how I could raise awareness and create a forum in which the school's language policy and the teachers' role in implementing this policy, could be addressed and reappraised.

3.4 Research orientation

The paradigm on which this study is based is the Interpretivist paradigm as defined by Burton and Bartlett (2005). They say that the individual's social world is created as the individual "interprets and responds to events" in society; in other words, the interactions of the individual shape his or her social world. In the Interpretivist paradigm, all individuals become "participants or actors in social situations". The school is one such social situation where "[p]upils, the classroom teacher, other teachers at the school, parents, all have a view of what goes on and act according to how they interpret events" (2005:22). In the broadest sense, then, this study is a combination of action and ethnographic research, under the umbrella of the qualitative research approach (see Fraenkel and Wallen 1993). McCarty (1997) writes that teacher-researchers, through this process of research, are transformed, as they perceive their roles as "change agents" in their communities as more critical. So too, do I perceive myself growing in critical, conscious awareness of the barriers faced by the learners and teachers at Socrates. I believe that as a teacher-researcher, I have the ability and the social responsibility to challenge my own assumptions and that of others in our school community. Through the process of self-reflection and creating whole-school awareness (action-ethnographic research), I placed myself as a teacher-researcher in the role of "change agent" at my school.

The Interpretivist paradigm allowed me to raise the concern of social justice. My objective was to raise critical awareness and open conversations at my school concerning our language policy. In a sense, I was seeking "social justice" for those learners who were disadvantaged by the current school language policy. McCarty (1997) says that teacher research is

... research as social transaction. It can become research as social justice. Through its process and products, teacher research encourages us not only to challenge an unjust system, but to examine, confront, and transform the root causes of these injustices.

The methods I selected were influenced by my role as teacher at the school, and therefore, participant-observer of the events as they unfolded. The primary means of collecting data was by using questionnaires. In order to gain greater clarity on problematical issues, or where teachers wanted to qualify their interpretation of the questionnaires, I followed up with interviews. These interviews predominantly followed a conversational, semi-structured style with my colleagues and learners, in that the research was conducted on a flexible basis. In some cases, the interviews raised more questions, which were dealt with in further conversations with the teachers, or as new questionnaires.

As I actively sought out the opinions of others by opening dialogue with my colleagues and the learners, my action research evolved to include the rest of the staff as co-participants in my study. Plüddemann (1999) and Jardine (2008) say that participatory action research accentuates the need for collaboration with others. Jardine (2008:30) adds that action research is a collaborative process that is informed by “the views and needs of all participants in the study”. I will now turn to describe the participants in the study.

3.5 The case study approach

As stated earlier, I positioned my study in the Interpretivist paradigm, which holds the individual at the core of the research process and posits the truth of human experience, behaviour and action as perceived through the eyes of the subjective individual. It is within this “instance of action” that I can justify my study as a case study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison aver, “The single instance is of a bounded system, for example a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community” (2007:181). Flanagan (1980) says the school is a unique being in that it has its own culture, ethos and identity. Case studies are ideally suited to “investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007) of the singularity of the school environment.

I endeavoured to position the school and its language policy as a unique instance of reality, while at the same time allowing the school to speak for itself about itself. In this process, I also became a participant-observer-agent of the events as they unfolded at my school. The main question of this dissertation also lends itself to the case study approach. The purpose of the study was to investigate in detail the relationship between the language policy of the school and the literacy proficiency of the learn-

ers at Grade 7 level. Because of the narrowness of the case study, I do not attempt to generalise, only to present as lucidly as possible the influence the language policy has on the understanding of literacy at the school. The instruments I used for collecting data also favour the case study method and allow for the process of triangulation: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes and to a limited degree, document analysis. The research instruments and triangulation will be given greater scope later in this chapter.

3.6 The participants

My research initially involved the entire school population, but as my knowledge grew of the problem at my school, I refined my sample to include the following participants: the learners, the teachers, and the researcher within the study.

3.6.1 The Learners

The learners who participated in this study were those who were in direct contact with me as their teacher. Many of the observations both in and outside of class came from the Grade 7 group of 2007. They were the last class to start Grade 1 (2001) in the dual medium model. They also did not do the systemic literacy and numeracy assessments while at the school. I hypothesised that this is one reason why this group were more assertively Afrikaans speaking than the Grade 6 class of 2007, who started their schooling in 2002 with the current subtractive school language policy with English as sole LoLT.

I focused more specifically on the Grade 6 class group of 2007. This class was the first to start their schooling using the school’s current language policy. For the written extracts, I specifically targeted this Grade 6 class as they were also the class who were externally assessed by the WCED in 2007 and earlier in 2004 (Grade 3). From the Grade 6 class group of 80 learners, I selected five learners to reflect the different levels of their writing skills (see section 3.7.1 on Questionnaires for an in-depth explanation of the selection criteria). The inferences I make about their writing skills can be generalised to their reading skills, which also explains my personal concept of literacy (see Chapter 2). A limitation of the dissertation is that I do not explore the teachers’ concept of literacy in detail.

At every occasion, I made it known to the learners that they are co-participants in my study of the language practices at our school and in the

classroom. However, many of the observations of the learners also occurred informally. I listened and watched as the learners interacted with one another, with teachers, and/or their parents throughout the day. I started a field journal wherein I recorded these informal observations. I also jotted down conversations I had with the learners, during reflection sessions at intervals or at the end of the teaching day.

3.6.2 The Teachers

The teachers became co-participants in my study as the language policy document dictated that I include them as a factor in the literacy achievement of the learners. This was necessitated by the central role that teachers play in the learners' language acquisition, as well as the key feature of their language proficiency in implementing and practicing a language policy. At the time of the study, there were 16 educators working at the school. A summary of the teachers' language profile is given in Chapter 4. Of the 16 teachers, 10 teachers have been at the school since the implementation of the 2002 language policy. There was therefore a core of teachers from whom I could draw the necessary background data concerning the school language policy.

The observations of the teachers' classroom interactions, however, were predominantly by invitation. Many of these incidents were fleeting, as the teachers mostly wanted me to observe how certain children were coping in class after the teachers' initial struggles to engage the learner. Alternatively, the teacher wanted to show a new strategy implemented in class. The nature of our school however, meant that these invitations were rare as not all teachers felt comfortable with me sitting in the classrooms for an extended period. In order to allay the fears of the teachers, I made it clear from the outset that these visits were by invitation only. I wanted the teachers to feel in control of their environment, to ensure that they behaved naturally. At Socrates, the domain of the classroom is still a contested area, in that teachers are not keen to share their space without negotiation.

3.6.3 The researcher within the study

At the time of this undertaking, I was teaching Grade 6, and was directly involved in the structure of the unfolding events at school and in the classroom. In this section, I therefore, want to present how pre-teaching experiences and assumptions grounded my teaching, my practice as a language teacher, and eventually my role as co-participant in this study. As this is an

introspective look at the influences and experiences affecting my practice, I acknowledge the inherent bias in, and note the self-preservation of my voice in this study (see Ball 2003).

Adams (2003) writes that the internal validity of the study may be compromised as the "researcher's judgement may be affected by their close involvement in the group." The possibility of a "narrowed view of the unfolding events", however, should not be a deterrent or a silencing mechanism to the voices of the participants or of myself as the participant-observer. Bruner (cited in Thomas 1995) also highlights the inherent prejudices when writing a subjective narrative. He says that there is a "mysterious and (essentially subjective) distrust of all forms of subjectivity." He adds that,

what people might say about themselves, their actions and motives and about other people, was not to be regarded as trustworthy evidence; at least, not in comparison with direct observation of behaviour or accurate measurement. (Thomas 1995:1)

However, my voice should be heard even if it is from a single perspective (see Jardine 2008). At the outset of this chapter, I say that I was seeking "social justice" for those learners who were being disadvantaged by the current school language policy. It is for this reason that I feel that it is important to situate my own voice in this study. As an Interpretivist, I see myself as a change agent influencing my environment, as it has a bearing on my development. In promoting the voice of others (colleagues, parents and learners), I allowed my voice to intertwine with theirs as the events unfolded at my school.

As a teacher researcher, I faced certain dilemmas. As a participant-observer at my workplace and in my own class, I was faced with the dilemma of giving an objective account of my observations while at the same time maintaining an analytical perspective. As participant observer, I thus also became the observed and therefore had to unpack myself in terms of my teaching strategies, my beliefs and my motives (see Adams 2003).

The researcher in a qualitative study, especially as a participant-observer, becomes in essence the "primary instrument of data collection and analysis" because as Lichtman (2006) says, "All information is filtered through the researcher's eyes and ears. It is influenced by his or her experience, knowledge, skill, and background (ibid. 2006:12)." In essence, the study comes to life through my voice; hence my rationale as to why my voice should be heard in this dissertation. I will now reflect on my autobiography in order to "unpack" myself as a complete participant in this study.

3.6.3.1 Unpacking my history

I received my primary and secondary schooling through Afrikaans as the language of learning and teaching, my mother tongue being Afrikaans. English was taught as a subject at second-language level. Outside of school, however, I was immersed in an English-speaking community: my friends and neighbours were all English speaking; I joined a sports club that was English dominant; my father wrote our chores in English; religion was English (Roman Catholic), and music was American or British oriented. As a means of expressing myself, I started writing poetry in English, by default, as the medium of expression.

After twelve years of Afrikaans instruction, I entered tertiary study with a complete switch to English medium. At university, I opted to major in English, and as such elected to do all my courses in English. It was at this time, that my awareness of language, language proficiency and language consciousness and attitudes became heightened. I was amazed at the talkers in class. The fact that I knew the arguments but was afraid to speak (using English in public) weighed heavy on my consciousness (see Jardine 2006). I realised my own limited knowledge of the structure of English; even so, I decided to be an English teacher. This I decided despite awareness that even speaking, reading and writing English better than my mother tongue (Afrikaans), at the time, did not make me a native speaker of the language. English was a constant obstacle in my mind.

My experiences and assumptions of what it means to be a teacher, especially a teacher of language and literacy, influenced greatly my attitude towards English (see Ball 2003). Therefore, the knowledge that I am in truth a second language user of English, and that my grammar was not at a mother tongue proficient level, made me unwilling to venture into the English classroom. However, once in the classroom, I projected my own identity onto the children. That is, I perceived all learners to be eager, excited and challenging learners. I presumed that all learners already had the fundamental comprehensive process skills of reading and writing. I did not prepare myself to teach these core skills, because I assumed that all children were natural learners. I assumed that all learners could express themselves adequately through the English medium with proper teaching and practice. It was my belief that all languages (that is English and Afrikaans) had equal status in my learning, even if speaking English held greater value than speaking Afrikaans. De Klerk (1995) recounts her conversations with teachers as they discuss the hegemony of English. She quotes one teacher as

saying that whenever pupils were needed to represent the school, this duty mostly befell the English-speaking pupils. Teachers surreptitiously promoted an attitude of “English as superior”. This hidden agenda was never far from the surface; hence my internalization that English was of greater value than Afrikaans. In addition, I thought that in a bilingual system English was the second language and Afrikaans my first language. (At Socrates, however, the opposite applies.)

I adhered to an individualised learning style. I assumed that learners would be able to find their voices through reading and writing, as often as possible via their own stories and thoughts. My perception of teaching and learning was set in modernism in that I was the master of my domain. I saw myself as the centre of the learning-teaching experience, within my classroom. As this image of the omniscient teacher was a deeply rooted assumption, I concentrated on the content of subjects that I could best explain or grasp. The result of this was that huge holes appeared in the learning programmes my class had to follow. In the English learning programme, many pieces of the grammar and reading curriculum were missing because I was “uncomfortable” teaching these pieces. My excuse for not being held accountable was that in Grade 6, the learner should be able to read and write independently. That is, these skills should have been taught in the foundation phase. My response to teaching was based more on an emotive experience than on a scientific, reflective experience.

It was in this fragmented manner that I approached language and literacy acquisition. My learning programme was based on the principle that if I dressed myself in an English suit that I would become an English teacher. However, as the literacy levels remained low, and the learners’ language proficiency did not improve, I started challenging my assumptions and beliefs about teaching, language teaching and language acquisition in particular. I focused my attention on what I perceived as a barrier to becoming a better teacher: the incongruence of the language policy of the school on the one hand, and the means whereby I led my learners to the “required language proficiency” as stated in the language policy of the school, on the other. My concern was how to address the language policy of the school with the goal of reversing the low literacy levels attained by learners since 2002, and more particularly my Grade 6 learners.

“Unpacking myself” therefore was crucial to the undertaking of this study (see Lichtman 2006). At every point during the data collection process, the question and challenge to my subjectivity and objectivity was raised. I therefore

consciously kept my voice hidden in the conversations, debates and discussions whenever the language policy of the school was problematised. However, my stance that the language policy of the school had to be revised, rewritten and democratised was made clear right at the outset of the study. Adams (2003) cites Hammersley and Atkins (1983:71) who “caution against explicitly informing the respondents about the purpose of the research as such information could influence the behaviour of the respondents and, in doing so nullify the findings (Adams 2003). However, I still felt that my voice should be heard as well as that of my colleagues at Socrates. Through my investigation, I hoped to raise awareness as to why the school language policy had to be revisited with greater consciousness and with more voices debating the issue.

I find the writing of Lichtman apposite to why my voice should be heard. Her writing “urges” me to “disclose” who I am, especially to myself. More intensely, she adds that the researcher “cannot and should not take the position that she wants to remain objective” (2006:206). As the researcher, all that is presented, interpreted and analysed has my voice, thoughts and emotions integral to the research. Finally, Lichtman (2006) goes on to say that as a conscious, reflexive agent in the research process, it is necessary to speak with one’s own voice as a justification for the data and the data collection processes used. She says, “We need to include ourselves in our research texts in visible ways in order for the reader to discern our interpretations” (ibid. 207–208), and to join as well as open new conversations with others in the field. My voice allows me an active contribution to the growing conversation on language and literacy acquisition in primary schools.

3.7 Research instruments

I used several data collection instruments during the course of this study. In order to address the limitations of my study, I triangulated my data in the following way. Triangulation is defined as “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (Cohen et al. 2007:141). By using multiple sources of data, “more credibility” is brought to bear on the study. This will ensure that the research process is made “more objective and less subjective” (Lichtman 2006). Triangulation takes many forms. The data are collected using two or more collection instruments, such as “documents and interviews; observations and documents; documents, observations, and interviews” (Picciano 2004:35).

However, triangulation is not without criticism. Lichtman (2006) especially questions the objective view of qualitative research, when particularly

in qualitative research, the subjectivity of the participant-observer researcher (the embedded researcher) is always at the forefront of the study. In addition, Cohen et al. 2007 say that triangulation is a technique which, although widely accepted in principle, is practiced by only a minority of researchers. The argument against triangulation is also that qualitative research is by nature interactionist, emergent, fluid and unique; and that triangulation violates these principles. The aim of triangulation is to ensure that objectivity can be brought to the study; however, Fielding and Fielding (1986), Patton (1980) and Denzin (1997) (all appear in Cohen et al. 2007) argue that using multiple sources of data does not always equal increased validity or consistency of the findings.

Despite these criticisms of triangulation, I used this method to satisfy my own need for internal validity. The triangulation method that I favoured was, document, questionnaire, observation, and or interview, although not necessarily in this order. The selection of which instruments to use was informed by the literature review (see Chapter 2). From these readings, a line of inquiry emerged, that was realised with questionnaires and interviews. The primary data collection instrument was the questionnaire completed by the teachers at Socrates. All the questionnaires were constructed in English, as this is the language of learning and teaching at the school. Throughout the study, no teacher requested that the questionnaires be made available in Afrikaans or isiXhosa. The secondary instruments I used were the semi-structured, conversational style interview, and the covert observations of teacher and learner behaviour.

I wanted to ensure that teachers actually lived, as well as gave voice to, the responses on their questionnaires. I wanted to minimise and overcome the teachers’ perception that my investigation and the questionnaires were just another attempt to bog them down with mindless paper-work, while they are already burdened by the administrative responsibilities of the curriculum. It was my opinion that through triangulation, I could get teachers to see that my research was as much theirs as it is mine. Finally, through this method, I wanted to show my colleagues at Socrates that I valued their engagement with me; that is, by using their written responses as stimuli for further on-site conversations and observations, and importantly allow the teachers to claim ownership of the issues under investigation.

I will now describe the research instruments in more detail (see Appendices for complete questionnaires).

3.7.1 The Questionnaires

Questionnaire A: After attending a Language Transformation Plan workshop in 2007², I used the content and context of the accompanying booklet to formulate the questionnaire. The motivation for doing this was to elicit a more comprehensive language and literacy profile of the teachers. This data would enable me to understand the teachers' attitudes towards language and literacy proficiency, and most importantly to establish to what extent teachers have knowledge of the school language policy and current language of learning and teaching debates. The teachers could remain anonymous when answering the questionnaire (Appendix A).

Questionnaire B: This questionnaire flowed from a staff meeting in which I had to inform the staff of the progress of my investigation into the school's language policy, and my report from the meeting I had with the school's governing body to discuss the merits and demerits of the existing school language policy. After conducting a workshop with the staff about the merits of a mother tongue based bilingual education policy, the following questionnaire emerged from our discussion. I decided to target the Grades R to 5 teachers, for three reasons. Firstly, any future school language policy would have to be implemented from Grade 1 upwards; that is, the new school language policy would have to be introduced in a staggered manner. Secondly, I decided to target the Grades R to 5 teachers because they were not engaged in subject teaching, (unlike the Grades 6 and 7 teachers), and the teachers also, in my opinion, could monitor the development of a changed language policy much better than the Grades 6 and 7 teachers. The third reason was to empower the Grades R to 5 teachers as, in many cases, the school language policy is discussed and decided upon by the senior teachers and those teaching in the Grades 6 and 7 classes. This questionnaire investigated how teachers use the current school language policy in the classroom with regard to English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. Xhosa was optional because it was not used as an official school language. The school language policy however states that where possible it would strive to introduce Xhosa at a communicative level. The procedure with this questionnaire was similar to the previous one, as I engaged with the teachers on a one-on-one basis. They had to answer the question while we had an informal discussion about the context and content of their answer (Appendix B).

2. Workshop at Sea Point High School, hosted by PRAESA and WCED, 2007.

Questionnaire C: This questionnaire focused attention more specifically on Paragraph 2.6 of the school language policy, from which I problematise the term "sensitive". As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) indicate, in a qualitative research approach one's focus may emerge as new knowledge and understanding of the problem arise and become clear. I started focusing on the school language policy and the effects on the academic success of the learners. Again, as in the previous questionnaires, teachers were asked to give their name and Grade so that they could clarify their responses, if necessary, in an interview. The interview would follow a semi-structured style. I wanted to know how one teacher per Grade perceived the term "sensitive" within the context of implementing the school's language policy. My selection criteria were teachers who had been teaching at the school for at least ten years, on the one hand, and those teaching for fewer than ten years, i.e. those who started at the school after the existing policy was adopted, on the other. Four teachers fell into the former category and five teachers into the latter. This questionnaire aimed to focus the teachers' attention directly on their own understanding and knowledge of the language policy (Appendix C).

Written Task 1: learners were asked to complete this written task as part of an activity for my language lessons. The reason for this was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to ensure that all the learners understand the question I asked, and secondly, if I allowed the learners to take the task home, they might not complete it or it might not be returned, as homework tasks are not diligently completed by the learners. This was the first creative writing task given to the Grade 7 learners for the term (2008), and it was not meant for assessment. The learners were informed that they were participating in my study to investigate their language usage at school and at home. The reason I chose this group was that they took the Grade 6 systemic assessment in 2007. The learners could respond to the topic freely. From the class of 80 learners, I selected six learners based on the following criteria:

1. Home language: learners whose mother tongue is predominantly English, learners whose mother tongue is predominantly Afrikaans, and those learners who acknowledge that Afrikaans and English are used in roughly equal measure in their homes. I specifically did not add labels to the language, for example standard or non-standard, as I thought that this would create uncertainty and anxiety amongst the learners. These data are sourced from the school's CEMIS records (see Ch. 1).
2. Language ability in school's LoLT: these learners' academic ability based on their proficiency in the school's LoLT included 2 top achievers

(80–100%, John and Madeleine), 2 average achievers (60–79%, Rudi and Angela), 1 moderate achiever (40–50%, Monica), and 1 struggling learner (0–39%, Paul). These ability groups were a fair representation of the groups across the grade. The final criterion used was the shared characteristics with the rest of the class group such as age and gender, other than their language ability and mother tongue preferences (Appendix D).

3.7.2 Field notes

Hammersley and Atkins (1983) in Cohen et al. (2007:171) say that field notes are one of five main methods of collecting “naturalistic” data. According to Cohen et al. (2007:407) field notes are a valuable tool in qualitative research in that they also serve to clarify the researcher’s own position in the research process. They add that these notes create a “running record” of the research, from the initial motivation to the final analysis and interpretation. For my purposes, however, this method, although not foregrounded as the primary collection instrument, supplemented the data obtained from the questionnaires and my observations of lessons. These notes consisted of reconstructions of the conversations and observations. The interactions with the learners, especially the reporting of their oral engagements (see oral examples in Chapter 4) are typical of how I used field notes to record and describe my observations. In the end, I used field notes to re-orientate myself whenever I had to revisit the data.

3.7.3 The Interviews

I chose to do the interviews on a semi-structured, conversational basis because the topic, language policy under review, was constantly under discussion at school. Cohen et al. 2007 warn against informing the participants of the exact nature of the study. In this case and in the present climate of language and literacy debate (see Howie et al. 2007; RSA Gazette 2008), it was inevitable that the topic would surface whenever the language policy of the school and the learners’ literacy levels came up for discussion. Therefore, in order to keep the conversation alive, the teachers were encouraged to talk as freely as possible whenever the opportunity arose.

3.8 Data collection

At the start of the third term of 2005, I asked permission from the principal to base my dissertation on the school, within the broad field

of investigating the school language policy, and its role as gatekeeper to academic success. I was given permission by the principal and the governing body with the proviso that I address the existing school language policy and then draft a more democratic policy based on the mother tongue approach. At a staff meeting, my intentions were made clear to the staff, who agreed to become co-participants in my study. The teachers and learners were constantly made aware of their right as voluntary participants in this study.

I followed a data collection system in which I gathered data from existing documents (existing school language policy, DoE 1997; WCED 2002 Report, and other readings), and work-shopped these with the staff. From these workshops, which took the form of staff meetings, phase meetings, learning area meetings, and grade meetings, I constructed the questionnaires. However, some questionnaires were constructed based on the knowledge I gained from attending workshops and seminars, because of my role as “the language teacher” at school.

There was a substantial time difference between the introduction of the first questionnaire and the second questionnaire. The reason for this was that during this period I was reviewing much of the literature in the field. I was also constructing and deconstructing my topic as I gained new knowledge. The second questionnaire focused my research topic more concretely.

The following time line indicates when, where and how the data for the study were collected. The questionnaires were all formulated in English, as the language of administration and of learning and teaching is English:

| When | Where and How |
|--------------|--|
| 2007.03.08 | Issuing 15 questionnaires to teachers. 15 teachers return the completed questionnaire. (Appendix A) |
| 2008.02.26 | The creative writing test is given to 80 Grade 7 learners; five of the pieces were kept for analysis. (Appendix D) |
| 2008.03.05 | The questionnaire was issued to 11 teachers. One teacher was absent and ten responded to the questionnaire. (Appendix B) |
| 2008. 05. 05 | This questionnaire was issued to nine teachers, all of whom completed the questionnaire. (Appendix C) |

Table 4: Timeline for data collection

3.9 Expected results

I expected to find the following results to emerge from my investigation:

- That the learners' academic success depends greatly on the teachers' language profile, language proficiency, and knowledge of the school's language policy, and not so much (as is commonly assumed) on their home environment and background.
- I also expected to find a link between the teachers' knowledge and interpretation of the current language debate and their awareness of the dis/empowering nature of the school language policy.
- Finally, I expected to find a robust, growing debate about how the school can overcome the barriers to academic success, especially concerning learners' literacy and language acquisition.

3.10 Procedures of verification

My position as active co-participant in the study was a double-edged sword: On the one hand, my engagement with our school's language policy changed from passive to active engagement (I became a site-based expert, a term I coined for myself). On the other hand, I became a possible threat to the voices of my colleagues, in that now I was considered an expert and therefore the authoritative voice in our conversations. This dilemma was overcome to the best of my ability by simply allowing the teachers to voice their frustration or support without my voice casting an overt judgment on their knowledge or classroom practices. The semi-structured interviews served as a platform for stating my point of view while allowing the teachers to argue theirs.

At every opportunity, I allowed the relevant literature to guide my argument. The questionnaires and informal conversational style of interviews, observations, and my field notes served to create an environment wherein I could check and restructure my thoughts if necessary. The data I collected were constantly verified by personal interaction with the teachers at school. I purposefully did not complete any of the questionnaires I issued to the teachers, as I thought that this might serve as a barrier to their spontaneity. At the outset of this study when the principal introduced my intention to investigate the school's language policy, I made it clear to my colleagues that they were doing so voluntarily.

Summary

This chapter has discussed how the case study of Socrates Primary School's language policy is situated in a qualitative research methodology, and further framed within an Interpretivist paradigm. By unpacking my own history, I have placed myself, the teacher-researcher, as a participant-observer within the study. In this chapter, I have also described the instruments I used for gathering the data that would address my research questions – the questionnaires, interviews and observations, and showed how these flowed into and from each other. I also provided a time line that shows when, where and how I issued the questionnaires to the participants in my study. I concluded the chapter by projecting some of the findings. These findings and expectations will be given greater scope in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

4.1 Introduction

For the purpose of this study I collected data from the teachers, and the Grade 7 class 2008, who participated in the literacy systemic assessment in 2004 (Gr. 3 = 45%) and again in 2007 (Gr. 6 = 50%). The percentages achieved by the 2008 class are based on the number of learners achieving the minimum requirements of literacy proficiency at their respective grade levels. The minimum requirement is set at 50%. An added significance of the 2008 group is that they were the first class to start their formal schooling in the English-only model at the school.

This chapter contains a detailed description and discussion of the data collected, and is organised into three sections: language and literacy practices focusing on the learners; language and literacy practices focusing on the teachers; and language and literacy as a whole school practice.

4.2 Language and literacy issues: the learners

The data from the systemic results for 2006 and 2004 suggest that our learners struggle with comprehension, creative writing, and extended reading tasks. The data that I collected will show that our learners in Grade 7 are still finding these tasks difficult, which means that they have not yet gained proficiency in the target language, which is English. There has been an improvement in the learners' oral participation in class. This confidence, however, is not matched by learners' writing, which is characterised by oral language structures, Afrikaans language structures, and poor English lexicogrammatical structures. The English written work consists of simple sentence

constructions. In short, there is a gulf between the oral and writing-reading ability of the learners (see Jardine 2008; Cummins 1996).

The following written task is taken from the Grade 7 class of 2008. The learners had to write on how they use language in the home and in the classroom. The only criterion was that the learner explore as fully as possible how he or she engages with language. The six samples below are indicative of the class' writing ability, as well as the themes running through the responses. I have reproduced the learners' written work unedited.

| Written Language Exercise | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Rudi | I speak English to my mommy and daddy. The home language in Qtown is Afrikaans They spoke afrikaans . they caed not spaek English. Now they just speak English to me. they speak afrikaans to each other. I only speak afrikaans to my ancle. |
| Monica | I use english in class: I talk Afrikans at home with my fiends. and sometimes english and I talk with my mommy and daddy Afrikans. and with my brother I talk english. and with my sister I talk Afrikans. And I talk with the teachers english. And I read english And Afrikans. With my family I talk Afrikans. And I speak english with my small cuzins. And with my bigger cuzins. I speak Afrikans. And my grandparents I speak afrikans. |
| Paul | I ma a English speek i specer eglish it home. And Afreaaks what frieands and bowt longuage what my dog. I speek botut longuge in moest of the paces. |
| Angela | I use english in class. I talk Afrians with my friends and with my daddy, mommy. I talk english with the teacher's at school. I talk Afrians the most. I speek Afrians with my brothers. I speek engish with my small cazens. And I speek Afrians with my bigger cazens. I talk Afrians with my granparents. I speek Afrians most of the time. I speek Afrians with the community. If I write I write in english |
| Madeleine | My language is enlgish. I speak and write in enlgish – my gran speaks Afrikaans with me. My mom speak english with me. When my friends talk in Afrikaan then I try to speak Afrikaans. When I get afrikaans at school I must ask the Sir to explain in english. I mostly write in English. |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| John | <p>I talk Afrikaans for a home languages. I talk Engerlish to my father and Afrikaans to my mother. I normally talk Afrikaans at home but at school I talk Engerlish. My frends at home never herd me talk Afrikaans befor. Most of the teachers at our school talk Engerlish in fact ther is only one teacher that teach Afrikaans.</p> |
|-------------|--|

Table 5: What language(s) do you use and know? (Appendix D)

Two main themes emerge. The first is language in the home, which can be subdivided into language with parents, language with other members of the family, and language with the community at large, respectively. The second is language in the classroom, subdivided into language of learning and teaching, language interaction with teachers, language interaction with peers, language of writing, and language of reading. Overall, the data show the predominance of Afrikaans usage in the learners' environment as compared with English, the language of learning and teaching.

4.2.1 Language in the home

From the data, there seems to be an even split between Afrikaans (Monica, Angela and John) and English (Rudi, Paul and Madeleine) being used in the home by learners. The same can be said of the language the learners use with their parents, although John reportedly uses both languages when communicating with his parents. He uses Afrikaans with his mother and English with his father. However, the learners become more selective when speaking to specific members of their families. For example, Rudi, Monica, Angela and Madeleine speak Afrikaans to their grandparents, uncles and aunts, as well as to their older cousins. To the younger cousins the preference is English. Afrikaans is also the language most often used by Monica, Paul, Angela and sometimes Madeleine when interacting with their friends. John is the only learner who uses predominantly English when communicating with his friends.

The learners' language usage is in keeping with a reported language shift to English in the Afrikaans communities (Alexander 2000; McCormick 2002; de Klerk 1996). The household of Rudi most clearly shows this shift from Afrikaans to English. However, from the language interaction of Monica and Angela with their younger cousins, it is also clear that language shift is taking place in these families. When speaking to their parents, the

learners use Kaaps Afrikaans or Kaaps English (de Klerk 1996). This also accounts for the home language being given as English when the parents enrol their children at school. The sense is that there is not a great deal of language awareness in the community. The attitude towards language in the community is therefore ambivalent; that is, Afrikaans is devalued despite being the home language, and English is seen as prestigious because it is the language of economic opportunity.

All the respondents, except Paul who speaks Afrikaans to his friends only, wrote that Afrikaans plays a major role in their communication with their families. In essence, it is through Afrikaans that they orient themselves. John, however, has a peculiar relationship with language. He writes that Afrikaans is his home language but that his friends at home have almost never heard him use Afrikaans. After further investigation (personal interview), he informed me that all the children in his street and community are English speaking. His best friend at home is at an English-medium school, and they always converse in English because his friend cannot speak Afrikaans. In a sense, John is living in a bilingual home. He has a good grasp of the communicative aspect of both languages and features in the top ten learners of his current class group. Reading and writing does not feature prominently in the responses of the learners. Madeline and Angela say that they use English when writing at home. They do not say which language they prefer to read. Monica, however, does not mention writing, but she is the only learner that reads both Afrikaans and English books. From these responses it is possible to infer that literacy engagement, that is reading and writing, is not an activity voluntarily engaged in at home.

4.2.2 Language in the classroom

All the learners wrote that English is the language that is used at school in the classroom and by the teachers. Madeleine writes that she constantly asks the Afrikaans teacher to explain the Afrikaans lesson to her in English. John realises that there is only one Afrikaans-speaking teacher at school. None of the learners is advocating that Afrikaans be taught as their first/home language subject. They all prefer to write and read in English, entrenching the English ethos at school (see Bamgbose 2002 and 2000; Webb 2002; de Klerk 1996).

It is clear that the learners are capable of expressing themselves orally but they are not always able to communicate their message in

the written form (see Cummins 1996). Their writing shows that learners have great difficulty with sentence structure, comprehension, and cohesion (see for example the absence of discourse markers and spelling errors). The above samples of writing are indicative of the 80 learners in this class group. The learners who claim that English is their mother tongue produce sentences and creative pieces similar to that of Paul, Madeleine, and John. However, John has a different background to that of his classmates. He is the only learner in this class group whose language of learning and teaching was Afrikaans in the Foundation Phase before he transferred from an Afrikaans-medium school in Grade 4. The Afrikaans mother tongue speakers will produce writing pieces similar to that of Angela and Monica. The group, to which Paul belongs, also claims English as their home language. This sample group with the exception of John started their schooling with the Straight-for-English (subtractive bilingualism) language of learning and teaching approach. Of all the learners in this sample, it is Paul, and the group that he represents that is of most concern to me. His writing seems to be a language other than Afrikaans or English. It is also difficult to determine what writing system he follows – is it oral, or phonetic? Paul has the least chance of being academically successful. From Monica and Angela's written examples, it is possible that a well-structured home language (Afrikaans) maintenance plan would greatly improve their chances of academic success. Rudi, John and Madeleine are the learners most likely to succeed academically without the necessary maintenance programmes required by their peers. Rose's (2004:4) argument that children are prepared to be "successful, average, and unsuccessful" at school seems pertinent here. He says, however, that these categories need not be permanent. His notion of scaffolding (three levels of meaning, Rose 2004) suggests that with the correct guidance (and maintenance plan), all learners are able to become successful at school.

It is evident that the learners also struggle with sentence sequencing and proof reading skills. These skills, however, are not explicitly taught to the learners. Although the transcripts offered here are original works (unedited), it is normal practice at the school, and in this class, that the learners do not produce drafts of their creative writing pieces. The learners will correct spelling mistakes and sentence structure errors, but they will not rewrite their pieces to enhance style, register or language use. Writing is considered a school activity, and is not engaged with as a learning activity at home.

However, those who do write at home mostly copy songs or poems from magazines and newspapers aimed at teenagers.

Although the language of communication with friends and family is predominantly Afrikaans, at school, four of the learners report that they interact only through English with their teachers. Monica, for example, states that, "**I use english in class.**" Angela displays this same pride at her English proficiency. She is also immersed in an Afrikaans community, but she says, "**I talk english with the teacher's at school.**" In addition, she further says, that when she writes she prefers to write in English. Angela clearly shows a greater affinity for English than Afrikaans. However, Madeleine says it with a far greater conviction that clearly defines her attitude towards learning Afrikaans: "**When I get afrikaans at school I must ask the Sir to explain in English.**" John then adds that he has noticed that most teachers are English speaking at school and that there is only one Afrikaans speaking teacher at school that teaches Afrikaans. From the above extracts, it is evident that English is still a language of power and prestige, and that many learners strive to gain access to the language of the classroom, and the teacher. The mismatch between home and school is further entrenched by this behaviour of the learners.

4.3 Voices from the classroom – oral language usage

The use of code switching and code mixing allows the learner an entry into the classroom discussion. Many learners grasp the concepts being taught, but lack the vocabulary or writing skills to express themselves at a standard home language level. At the school, the level of proficiency has not been clearly identified as an attainable goal. Therefore, to the group who did not attain the necessary benchmark result of 50%, there are a limited number of options available. They can remain outside of the lesson because of the language barrier and become silent, or respond with the characteristic shrug of the shoulders while saying, "I dinno" or "Ek wietjie" (I don't know).

The alternative is that they can participate in the lesson by mixing their languages, as the following oral examples indicate. I have transcribed the following examples, recorded in Tables 5, 6 and 7, exactly and as accurately as possible from the learners' interactions. These comments were recorded as the learners and teacher was interacting. They have been taken from my field notes. The translation into English for Tables 9, 10 and 11 is given in brackets and is also italicised.

I: What do you think happened next, Keighley?
 Keighley: Hulle het opin die stairs gehartloep, Menee.
(They ran up the stairs, Sir)
 I: Right, but why do you think they ran up the stairs?
 Keighley: Hulle het gedink dat die hond die baby dood gemaak het.
(They thought that the dog had killed the baby)
 I: Why do you say that, Keighley?
 Keighley: Daa was bloed om sy mon, Menee.
(There was blood round his mouth, Sir)

Table 6: Reading lesson and discussion

This lesson took place during the daily 30 minutes reading period at school (WCED 2001). I was discussing a graded reader that was being read by a group of Grade 7 learners. In order to get the learners to participate I encourage them to answer in the language in which they felt most comfortable. Keighley constantly used Afrikaans even when prompted to use English. At first, I thought that she was consciously refusing to answer the questions in English until I realised that she was the only learner in the group engaging freely when I asked questions. I realised then that had the lesson's criteria been different, for example were the learner only to respond in English to my questions, Keighley would have been at a serious disadvantage, yet from her responses, it is evident that she comprehends the story. She unfortunately did not have enough English language skills to answer comfortably and confidently in the language of learning and teaching.

Keighley: Wat moen os doen?
(What must we do?)
 Levonne: Os moennie opposites in vul.
(We must fill in the opposites)
 Wayman: Wat is antonyms?
(What are antonyms?)
 Levonne: Antonyms issie opposites.
(Antonyms are the opposites)

Table 7: Grammar lesson

This interaction between three Grade 7 learners took place after I had given my class a grammar exercise. They had to identify and underline the antonyms in ten sentences. The exercise was not given as an assessment piece, and the instruction was that they could assist each other. The learners' interaction occurred entirely in Afrikaans. Of the three learners, Levonne is most at ease during the English lessons. She often responds in English while Wayman and Keighley use Afrikaans. Levonne therefore constantly uses the vernacular (Kaaps Afrikaans) to explain the activities to her friends. This behaviour happens in many other groups in the classroom. The learners use the vernacular to explain the lessons to each other. When questioned about this behaviour, the learners responded that they prefer the English grammar terms and concepts to be explained to them in Afrikaans (albeit in non-standard Afrikaans).

Joshua: Sir, can we look anywhere for this information?
 Levonne: Menee, kan ons oek die skool se internet gebruik?
(Sir, can we also use the school's Internet?)
 Jessie: Menee, moen it lank wies?
(Sir, must it be long?)

Table 8: Integrated Natural Science and English lesson

This interaction occurred after the Grade 7 learners were given an integrated English–Natural Science task. As the LoLT is English, all learning areas are taught in English at the school except for Afrikaans as a subject. From the learners' responses, it is evident that Afrikaans dominates the classroom discussions. I seldom respond to the learners in the vernacular even though I encourage them to use whichever language they are comfortable with. From this example it is also evident that Afrikaans usage permeates the curriculum. The learners use Afrikaans to make sense of their learning and the teaching process.

This strategy allows them to assist each other. The code mixing and code switching teaching style is used as a safety net for those learners not confident enough to express themselves in the LoLT. I found the same during an observation of an Afrikaans lesson where the learners would rather respond in English or in a mixed code. The Afrikaans language teacher also engaged in the practice of explaining the Afrikaans concepts in English to the learners. As such, it is a common practice at school that languages are switched and even mixed to facilitate the teaching–learning process. This is completely different to what is claimed to be practiced (see Bamgbose 2000). The reality is that code switching and code mixing are far more com-

mon than translation. With translation, one would assume that the terms or concepts will be explained in the learners' mother tongue in a standardised form. However, teachers used the vernacular to facilitate the teaching-learning process (Bamgbose 2002 and 2000).

From the examples above the following trends can be highlighted. In this particular class, the teacher seldom uses Afrikaans to facilitate the learners' understanding even though the teacher allows the learners to use Afrikaans. During assessment activities, especially during written tasks, learners are not encouraged to use Afrikaans. This practice, the use of code switching as well as the lack of encouragement for the use of Afrikaans, is questioned by the other staff members, as the teacher is seen to disadvantage the learners, unlike in other classes where the practice of assisting the learners orally with their tasks is considered as giving them a second opportunity and also seen as being sensitive to the learners' needs.

There is clearly a point of disjuncture at the required proficiency levels of reading and writing (see Rose 2004; Jardine 2008 in regard to the breakdown in the acquisition of literacy skills of reading-writing; influence comprehension and cognition). The children think mostly in Afrikaans (their inner voice), then translate their thoughts into English before answering in class. They do the same when reading, which leads to an interrupted reading-comprehension-writing continuum. The learner comes to school thinking that he or she cannot talk or write "properly" and will therefore not respond or participate freely in the lessons (see Webb 2002; de Klerk 1996).

4.4 Language and literacy practices: the teachers

At Socrates, the teachers' observation of the children's language and literacy proficiency is often erroneously based on mistaking "linguistic failures (i.e. language problems) for academic failures (i.e. real inability to learn)" (Obanya 2004:10). The teachers often confuse these two failures by misdiagnosing the barriers to academic success. At the end of every school year, a panel of experts from the WCED, which comprises the circuit manager, the school psychologist, a social worker, a remedial teacher, and a curriculum advisor visit the school. They discuss those learners who are in need of more time in the grade (the potential failures). The first step in this process, however, is that the panel instructs the school to identify learners who are in danger of academic failure by May/June (the pre-progression meeting)

within the particular school year. I have summarised the teachers' reports on the barriers they identified to learning in 2007, in the table below. The highlighted sections indicate my emphasis on the identification of language as a barrier to learning. The table is also informative in that it shows who is ready to progress and under which condition:

| May 2007 | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Grade 1 (5 learners) | The barriers faced by Grade 1 learners are recorded as an inability to cope, to concentrate, and to communicate. Only two learners were identified as possibly having a language barrier based on the mother tongue. |
| Grade 2 (12 learners) | The barrier in the Grade 2 classes was identified as the learners inability to know single sounds and then to blend these sounds into 3-letter words. These learners also could not identify their consonants. |
| Grade 3 (3 learners) | Learners in Grade 3 struggle with their writing and reading , especially following written instructions. |
| Grade 4 (8 learners) | Reading, spelling, and writing are the central barriers experienced in Grade 4. In addition, the low concentration levels of the learners lead to behavioural problems. |
| Grade 5 (8 learners) | The learners' reading ability was identified as the major barrier to academic success. |
| Grade 6 (10 learners) | The learners in Grade 6 have a reading/comprehension barrier. The home language of only 3 candidates identified as possible failures in the Grade was offered as a reason for their barrier to learning: one learner is Afrikaans speaking, and the other two are Xhosa speaking. |
| Grade 7 (4 learners) | The barrier in the Grade 7 classes was identified as a lack of reading comprehension . Of the four candidates identified for More-time-needed, two were at an emergent reading level, while the other two struggled to identify words. Only one learner was identified as not being an English mother tongue speaker. |

Table 9: Summary of pre-progression data required by WCED, 2007 (Appendix E)

In 2007 there were 50 candidates who were marked for more time needed in their respective grades. At face value, it is difficult to link these academic barriers to the language policy of the school, because in the FP only 2 learners were explicitly identified as experiencing barriers to learning based on their mother tongue. There is an implied link to language as a barrier from the rest of the learners in this phase. But if the Grade 2 numbers are reliable and consistent, the learners are now manifesting the lack of language foundation so necessary for later success at school.

Teachers often say that the learners do not know their single sounds, and by extrapolation, are unable to construct simple words. This barrier presents itself explicitly in Grades 3 and 4, where the main barriers identified are that the learners struggle with writing and reading. It is at this crucial threshold stage (see McDonald 1990) that the learners start experiencing and displaying lack of language proficiency in the target language. The learners in Grade 4 have difficulty spelling, which is a residual effect of not being able to recognise sound and letter patterns. In addition, the learners' difficulty in writing skills can be attributed to the learners not being authentic writers, as suggested by Bloch (2005, 2000) and Wolff (2000), who extend the concept to being an authentic reader, as these two skills are interdependent.

The theme that dominates the InterSen phase is that of reading comprehension as a barrier, and by extension the learners' writing ability. From the data, the following examples clearly highlight this: Grade 4, "**Reading, spelling, and writing are the central barriers**"; Grade 5, "The learners' **reading ability** was identified as the major barrier to academic success"; Grade 6, "The learners in Grade 6 have a **reading/comprehension barrier**"; and Grade 7, "The barrier in the Grade 7 classes was identified as a **lack of reading comprehension**". It is also possible to infer from the data that there is a cumulative effect, and by Grade 6, many more learners are identified as having reading comprehension as a barrier. This is also in keeping with the PIRLS (2006) and the WCED systemic results since 2002 that found our intermediate phase learners are performing below their grade level in all grades. Similarly, Heugh 2005 and Cummins (2000, 1996) found that learners who are taught in an additional language without a mother tongue maintenance programme manifest greater academic stagnation in Grades 5 and 6. From this we can deduce that the straight for English policy of the school does affect the academic success of learners. The evidence for this assertion is that by Grade 6, 46 learners are in danger of failing based on their lack of proficiency in the target language.

Rose (2004) says that reading and the ability to comprehend are the greatest determinants of academic success in formal schooling. The fact that almost 10% of the school's population are experiencing academic barriers based on reading, points to the learners not being ready to learn through the target language. However, as Bloch argues (2000:4), teachers are often the ones who are not ready to accommodate the learners' prior knowledge and language ability, because it is not culturally or socially compatible with that of the teacher. Also, is language readiness dependent on competence in a standardised version of the language of learning and teaching? If so, then all Grade 1 learners at Socrates start their formal schooling at a disadvantage, because teachers and parents lack a detailed understanding and knowledge of language-related issues, and insist on language programmes based on the learner's rudimentary grasp of the target language (see Wolff 2005; Cummins 1996).

4.4.1 Attitudinal resistance to Afrikaans

In response to the low literacy levels and the internal assessment achieved by the learners, in 2006 Socrates re-evaluated the necessity of having mother tongue education from Grade 1. Although the drive from the teachers to teach Afrikaans as a LoLT, either in a parallel stream or as a dual medium approach (as suggested by the LiEP), is strong, the teachers are experiencing resistance from the learners and parents. In the higher classes, Grades 6 and 7, numerous complaints from the learners characterise their resistance to Afrikaans-usage as a standard variety, such as "Menee, os praat dannie soe nie" (Sir, we don't speak like that), "Menee, ek kennie die woorre ni." (Sir, I don't know these words), and "Menee, wat is daai in engels?" (Sir, what is that in English?) when they engage in the Afrikaans class.

This resistance to Afrikaans (as a subject) is surprising considering the learners' low proficiency in English, and their communal language identification with Kaaps Afrikaans. Instead of using the language of the community as a scaffold, Afrikaans is taught merely as the first additional language as decided by the school language policy, effectively confirming its lower status in the school. From the research (Baker 2001, 1992) we learn that without investigating the attitudes of the learners and parents, any LoLT policy implemented at school will fail because there is no motivation from the target population to do so. In addition, Duquette 1972 (in Baker 1992) says that if the learner experiences a sense of being undervalued, she or he will also not be motivated to learn in a language of the school. The following examples taken from a questionnaire the Grades R to five teachers completed, will illustrate how Afrikaans is used in these early foundational years.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Grade R teacher | Most of the learners prefer English although I do speak in Afrikaans to those learners whose home language is Afrikaans. The Xhosa learners are slowly learning to understand English/Afrikaans but I ask a learner to translate. |
| Grade 1a | I speak Afrikaans to my learners. The response is quite good. |
| Grade 1b | My language of teaching is English. I translate in Xhosa what I can. Other Xhosa lrs will help by asking weaker Xhosa lrs in Xhosa. I also speak Afrikaans to my Afrikaans speaking learners as well. |
| Grade 2a | I speak to all the learners in English when I teach or introduce a lesson. I then translate what I was saying to them in Xhosa for the Xhosa speaking learners. When doing Days or Months of yr, I do all 3 languages. I also have a multilingual method of teaching. |
| Grade 2b | I teach in English. Sometimes I let a Xhosa learner translate certain words to those Xhosa learners – does not understand. |
| Grade 3a | Teach in English – and sometimes translate in Afrikaans. Certain words/phrases Xhosa learners will explain in their mother tongue also introduce songs in 3 languages e.g. rhymes, body parts to make learning easier. |
| Grade 3b | I teach in English but also translate in Afrikaans. Xhosa learners respond to English & find Afr. diff. We have one lesson per week set aside for an Afr. period & even then I have to switch over to English again. |
| Grade 4a | I teach in English. Find most learners speak Afrikaans at home. Lrns are not using proper English. Teach Afrikaans during Afrikaans lessons. Get a Xhosa lrn to translate + work with weaker Xhosa lrn. |
| Grade 4b | I teach in English. I have to explain in Afrikaans at times – content subjects. I have one Xhosa speaking learner whom another learner have to interpret to most of the times. |
| Grade 5a | Teach in English. Sometimes translate into Afr. Get Xhosa speaking lnr to interpret if I can't. |
| Grade 5b | No response. |

Table 10: How do you use Afrikaans in your classroom?
(Appendix B)

The comments from the teachers are very guarded. There is an inherent tension in their responses in that they are aware of my position with regard to language usage in the classroom and my investigation of the school's language policy. This may have clouded some of the respondents' viewpoints in an attempt to align their views to mine. Nevertheless, many issues arise from the teachers' comments on how they use Afrikaans in their classroom. At this point of my investigation, I did not qualify the term Afrikaans. However, I assumed that the teachers would use standard Afrikaans as much as possible, and would engage the learners in Kaaps Afrikaans, (or the teachers' term, the vernacular) only as a last resort. As reported in Bamgbose 2002; Webb 2002; de Klerk 1996, teachers will use whatever methods are necessary to get their learners to understand the concepts, be it the vernacular, code-switching or code mixing. By means of the following themes, I will now discuss in greater detail the teachers' responses to my question of how they use Afrikaans in the classroom. The themes are translation and the issue of Afrikaans as a subject.

4.4.1.1 Translation

The main theme running through the data collected from the teachers is the concept of translation. Translation in this sense is used as a scaffolding strategy by the teachers. All the respondents say that they engage in translation if their learners are having difficulty in understanding the teaching concepts. This is similar to what Bamgbose (2000) found when he writes that any good teacher will use whatever means available to get the learners to grasp the concepts. Bamgbose reports that teachers often used the vernacular or local language to scaffold their learners' understanding of the teaching-learning process. Translation as it is used by the teachers is the expression of a concept in another language. For example, if a learner does not understand a concept in English, the teacher will use standard Afrikaans to explain it to the learner. I have identified three sub-themes in how the teacher uses translation.

Firstly, and especially in the early foundation phase years (Grades 1 to 2), teachers engage in translation into isiXhosa more often than translation into Afrikaans. For the purpose of this dissertation, and a recognised limitation of it, I do not analyse this phenomenon in great depth as my focus is on Afrikaans as the language of translation. Teachers also use other isiXhosa learners in the grade to translate the concepts for those isiXhosa-speakers who are experiencing difficulty with the target language. This practice is

problematic because it is based on the assumption that the Grade 1, 2 or 3 learner have a high-enough level of proficiency in the LoLT to transfer the teaching concepts into the mother tongue, and then to explain these to another learner. The teachers have a barely functional proficiency in isiXhosa; how sure are they that their message is being relayed accurately?

Secondly, from Grade 3 onwards, scaffolding (translation) occurs mostly through Afrikaans. The common response from teachers in Grades 3 to 4 is that they teach in English but translate into Afrikaans. The teachers do not refer to these incidents as moments of code switching, or code mixing. The respondents uniformly referred to this practice as translation. They also see this practice as a means of scaffolding that is helping the learner to come to a greater understanding of the curriculum. Code mixing and switching have negative connotations, in that the perception among teachers is that this scaffold entrenches the use of the non-standard variety of the language (for example Kaaps Afrikaans) in the classroom. The argument from the teachers is that the learners' vocabulary does not really develop when using Kaaps Afrikaans.

The third theme that I identified is the status of Afrikaans as a language subject at the school. According to the LiEP 1997, by Grade 3 the learners are introduced to an additional language as a subject. At Socrates, as stated earlier, this language is Afrikaans. It is also for this grade level that the amount of translation into Afrikaans increases; that is, the English lesson/concept is sometimes translated into Afrikaans. However, translation also occurs from Afrikaans to English. For example, the Grade 3b teacher alludes to the practice of "translation" from Afrikaans into English, "even then I have to switch over to English again". This is not an isolated practice; for example, Madeleine writes that, "When I get Afrikaans at school I must ask the Sir to explain in English". In addition, John's comment is also pertinent as to how Afrikaans is perceived at school. He observes that there is only one Afrikaans-speaking teacher at school. This also suggests that teachers and learners covertly do not attach much value to Afrikaans (see Baker 2001, 1992). In a sense then, the overt practice of translation can be presented as scaffolding the language barrier, but covertly, translation can also further entrench the lower status of Afrikaans as both teacher and learner find it necessary to explain Afrikaans terms in English, rather than in Afrikaans. Kilfoil and van der Walt (1997) and Baker (1992) write that learners lose interest in learning if they perceive that their language is undervalued. This argument can be applied to Socrates in that the negative

attitude to Afrikaans at the school is similar to the characteristics of those who have negative attitudes to languages as described by Baker (1992). Added to this is the effect of the hegemony of English on the school community and teachers. To break free of the belief that English is a liberating language that will uplift the speaker socially and economically is difficult because this belief is deeply entrenched in the psychology of the community (see Benson 2008; Alexander 2000).

However, in those instances where code switching occurs, there is no policy that can regulate the practice and discussion of it. It is a covert policy practiced behind closed doors. From the teachers' comments, a strong defeatist attitude also emerges, in that many teachers' responses suggest that they are unable to assist the learners to overcome the prevailing language barriers. The teachers' helplessness also adds to the language policy remaining unchallenged.

4.4.2 Language sensitivity in the classroom

The academic proficiency of the learners is determined by their reading-writing ability in the medium of instruction, which is English. At my school and especially in my classroom, the assessment activities to determine the language proficiency of the learners are based on a mixture of old and new teaching-learning materials. Many of these books are not suitable for the learners as they are either outdated or above or below the learners' ability. As a compromise, I tend to use the older textbooks more often than the latest textbooks. In addition, this combination is presented at a language level that is neither home nor first additional language, but rather at an indeterminate level between the two. As the learning outcomes for the two language levels (home and first additional) are very different, it is difficult to determine the language proficiency of the learners in this programme. Because the school has not clearly indicated the "required language proficiency" to be obtained, the school language policy has been left to the teachers to interpret, implement and practice as "sensitively" as they see fit. The use of the non-standard variety of the LoLT and possible use of the vernacular is implied by Paragraph 2.6 of the school's language policy that acknowledges that the majority of the learners are not English mother tongue speakers. Teachers are therefore to be sensitive in their choice of teaching-learning materials used in the classroom.

In my opinion, being sensitive also depends on the teacher's own language profile. The following table is a summary of the teachers' language profile at Socrates. In order to determine to what extent teachers are sensi-

tive to language other than their own language(s), I asked them to state their primary language(s) in preferential order. The table below captures the data for this question.

| Language (predominant language in brackets if bilingual or trilingual) | Number of respondents |
|--|-----------------------|
| English | 8 |
| Afrikaans | 1 |
| Afrikaans and English (Afrikaans) | 3 |
| English and Afrikaans (English) | 2 |
| isiXhosa | 0 |
| isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans (isiXhosa) | 1 |
| Total | 15 |

Table 11: What do you consider your primary language(s)?
(N = 15) (Appendix A)

Fifteen teachers responded in writing to the question, “What do you consider your primary language(s)?” Eight teachers reported English (Eng.) as their primary language; one indicated Afrikaans (Afr.); three reported Afrikaans and English, with a preference for Afrikaans; two reported English and Afrikaans, with English the more often used; and one reported having three primary languages, with isiXhosa as the main one. This teacher, a mother tongue isiXhosa-speaker, would define herself as multilingual.

From the above data, 10 teachers favour English as their primary language, 4 teachers said that Afrikaans is their primary language, and 1 teacher is isiXhosa mother tongue proficient. English, therefore, heavily defines the language profile of the staff, a fact which should greatly benefit the English-mainly language policy of the school.

However, the term “sensitive” is problematic at Socrates in that there is no context in which to place this word. The questions that arise are: to what extent are teachers uniformly sensitive to the learners needs? How does the school define the term “sensitive”? Do all the teachers at the school perceive this term in the same way? The following table illustrates what teachers (one per Grade) understand by “sensitive” in relation to language use. Nine teachers responded to the question.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Grade R | I only have 6 Xhosa learners. Two of these learners easily translate from their mother tongue to the learners what is required especially during story, music or movement ring. I try not to let them use too much of their mother tongue but at times they cannot express their feelings so I do allow it, and the learners will translate to me. |
| Grade 1 | Parents have placed their children in an English Medium School because they want their kids to be taught in English, despite the fact that they are Afrikaans or Xhosa speaking at home. Educators need to be sensitive when addressing learners, so as to make sure that they understand what is expected of them. When learners mix English and Afrikaans, than I would simply correct the sentence by giving the correct English word. |
| Grade 2 | When you teach a child in a language that is not his mother tongue, you have to change certain strategies. Instructions must be clear (explicit.) You will use more simple words instead of complex or difficult words. |
| Grade 3 | Never downplay the importance of the learners’ mother tongue. Learners must feel free to express themselves in class. Learners will read simple passages in English to develop their confidence in Language usage |
| Grade 4 | At the end of the day you have to assess the children at one level so if the child don’t understand the work he/she will not be successful and we don’t want that. |
| Grade 5 | Sensitive to me means; Teachers should choose appropriate material suitable for all learners. Sensitive also being aware of the needs of all learners. |
| Grade 6 | By the term “sensitive” as used in the passage above I understand that teachers will take into consideration the different language groups and select teaching material n such a way so that all learners can participate and understand. No learner must feel excluded and must be able to participate. |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Grade 7 | In order for learners to have a better understanding, I would have to explain all difficult words from either the worksheet or textbook. As far as learning material goes, selection purposes are taken on the grounds at which level the learners find themselves (in my case all textbooks are standard) and therefore we as teachers have to communicate in terms that the learners will understand. |
| Principal | One would hope that educators would exercise caution when selecting learning material and using teaching methods which would not disadvantage any group of learners. The selection of the afore-mentioned material and teaching techniques applied, should take into account cultural background and religious beliefs to the extent that the learner does not feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about his/her mother tongue or be made to feel that this/her mother tongue is valued less than other languages. |

Table 12: What is your understanding of the term “sensitive”?
(Appendix C)

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (COED) 11th Edition, defines sensitive as “having or showing a quick and delicate appreciation of the feelings of another”. In the context of the school language policy, “sensitive” has political, psychological and educational overtones. Politically, the term aims to appreciate the democratic and constitutionally granted language rights of the learner, psychologically it aims to draw our attention to the uniqueness of the learner’s identity and self-esteem, and educationally the term suggests a sense of inclusion and tolerance. The overall impression therefore created by the inclusion of this term in the school’s language policy is that the school has learners’ language identity at the centre of the teaching-learning process.

Three clear attitudes emerge from the data: intolerance, ambivalence, and affirmation. The attitude of intolerance can be inferred from comments such as,

- “I try not to let them use too much of their mother tongue but at times they cannot express their feelings.”
- “When learners mix English and Afrikaans, than I would simply correct the sentence by giving the correct English word.”
- “At the end of the day you have to assess the children at one level.”

The learners’ language is thus under-valued and devalued. Research by Baker 1992 indicates that if a learner perceives the teachers to have a negative attitude towards his or her language, that this attitude is greatly detrimental to the language learning of the learner. However, there is a sense that the teachers perceive their actions to have a positive effect on the learners’ learning, in the sense that greater exposure to the target language will lead to greater proficiency later. With hindsight though, the barriers experienced by the learners at Socrates are predominantly language based and therefore the notion that learners should be immersed in the target language from as early as possible, (Grade R or Grade 1) is not practicable.

The ambivalent attitude displayed by a group of teachers towards the term “sensitive” in relation to implementing language policy in the classroom can be inferred from such comments as the following:

- “You will use more simple words instead of complex or difficult words”
- “Teachers should choose appropriate material suitable for all learners”
- “I would have to explain all difficult words from either the worksheet or textbook”.

At the outset their comments are positive but on closer inspection, they are far too cautious and tend to undervalue the learners’ language. They are neutral (see Baker 1992) rather than decisive and passionate in their attitudes towards their learners’ language.

The principal’s response is also curious in that it is primarily stated from a manager’s point of view. I expected the principal to be more aware and more critical of the school’s existing language policy. The tone is not prescriptive. It is clear, however, that the principal holds the teachers accountable for their actions and attitudes towards language learning and teaching. I also found that there was no instrument in place to measure whether the teachers are applying the school’s language policy in a sensitive manner.

The last group, those teachers with a positive attitude and who affirm the learners’ home language, can be contrasted overtly with the rest of the staff. They are clearly advocates for mother tongue education. Their stance contradicts the comments from the foundation phase teachers as well as the ambivalence of the InterSen teachers. One possible reason for this positive approach to mother tongue in the Grade 3 class is that Afrikaans is introduced as a subject (see Table 9); this educator is one of the few teachers

with Afrikaans as the preferred mother tongue (see Table 10). The mother tongue is constantly emphasised. By teachers using their learners' mother tongue, or even simply having a positive attitude towards it, learners are motivated and eager to learn. And it is possible to envisage these learners as having a positive sense of self-worth (Baker 1992). The following positive words from the teachers resonate with the spirit implied by the term "sensitive" in the school language policy:

- "Never downplay the importance of the learners' mother tongue. Learners must feel free to express themselves in class. Learners will read simple passages in English to develop their confidence in Language usage"
- "No learner must feel excluded and must be able to participate."

Yet it remains unclear what the use of the word "sensitive" will accomplish if the teachers do not have a shared understanding of it. The assumption that "sensitive" will solve learners' language problems and barriers is far-fetched, simply because every teacher has his or her own interpretation of this concept. It is also clear that before the language policy of the school can be thoroughly dissected and rewritten; the terminology surrounding language acquisition and language learning must first be clearly understood by all teachers and parents at the school. Without this key process, an uninformed policy will once again be introduced at my school. The vagueness of "in terms the learner will understand" adds to the confusion. Will these terms be explained in the learners' mother tongue? Will code switching or code mixing or the vernacular be used to make concepts clear to the learner? It is assumed that the teacher will first explain the terms and learning concepts in a simpler form of the target language of learning and teaching; "You will use more simple words instead of complex or difficult words" (Grade 2 teacher). Thereafter, the teacher will attempt code switching before finally using the vernacular to clarify and concretise the concepts for the learner. The Grade 2 teacher says it succinctly, "When you teach a child in a language that is not his mother tongue, you have to change certain strategies. Instructions must be clear (explicit.)" This is because children tend to think in the language with which they are familiar, and they tend to use the language patterns of the familiar language when writing in the target language. Just as the school language policy is unique to the school, so too is every learner in the classroom unique to the learning-teaching situation. For this reason alone, teachers need to be sensitive

when dealing with learners learning through a language that is not their first or even second language.

The issue of language as a barrier to academic success is constantly given as a rationale by teachers for most learners' poor academic performance. This has taken on an element of inevitability. Every year, the LoLT (English) is identified as the greatest barrier to the learners' academic success. Yet since 2002 every start to the new academic school year has seen the existing language policy in place and at times even defended. In addition, and even more disturbingly, the scaffolding and maintenance structures at my school are not uniformly practiced. Thus in order for the learner to achieve the required language proficiency as hinted at in the school's language policy, a diluted version of English home language has been implemented. This watered-down version, a mixture of home and first additional languages, does not lend itself to critical thinking. It is evident that the learners are most at ease when they are the generators of classroom discussion in the language they are most comfortable. Often this language is Kaaps Afrikaans. When the learners correct each other, highlight a concept, or endeavour to explain the work to a friend, this is done mostly through Kaaps Afrikaans (see oral evidence). It is therefore self-evident that the learners should be allowed to use the vernacular (be it Kaaps Afrikaans or English) alongside the standard variety of the language of learning and teaching to make sense of the teaching-learning process. There are numerous benefits to allowing the learner to use the vernacular; for example, the learner gains self-confidence and feels validated in the teaching-learning interaction, and there is an overall improvement in participation across the curriculum by the learner. Finally, there is a sense of growing critical language awareness as the learner becomes aware of the differences between his or her own usage of the language and the standard variety of the language.

Summary

In summary, the issues arising from the data are the following.

Firstly, the mismatch between home language and school language: when the learner starts school, it is expected that the learner has some basic proficiency in the LoLT. The learner, however, faces a double barrier to learning in that in most cases (55% of the student population) the LoLT is not the mother tongue of the learner, and where the LoLT is the mother tongue, it is not the standard variety of the language.

Secondly, attitudinal factors from home and from school: learners come

to school using a language that is educationally devalued and yet considered to form the core of their identity. This language forms the foundation of communication within the family and peer relations. However, there is a great aversion to using the standard form of the language as either LoLT or as a subject at school.

Thirdly, the various interpretations of the school language policy invariably lead to various implementation strategies within the classroom setting. At Socrates, there is a general idea of what the goals of the language policy are, and how these can be achieved. However, because the policy is vague as to how these goals should be met, teachers have interpreted key concepts of the language policy based on their own language and literacy backgrounds. There is therefore not a unified interpretation of the school's language policy at Socrates.

Finally, taking all these issues into consideration, it is difficult to separate any of them out as more important than the others. I therefore come to this conclusion that as these issues are intimately interwoven they, together, form the crux of the problem at Socrates.

In the concluding chapter, I briefly discuss the implications of the findings for Socrates, and possible areas for further study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

At Socrates, as well as in South Africa, the growth of submersion language policies has added to the resultant drop in literacy levels. Although initial schooling in the home language is encouraged by the LiEP (DoE 1997), school governing bodies have a choice and can opt for a “straight for English” policy. Because English is regarded as the language of status, opportunity and education, the misperception often persists among parents that primary schools that offer “straight for English” will provide a better education for their children. The learners are suddenly faced with a different language variety to which they are accustomed. There is no gradual introduction to the target language, nor is the home language (if not English) given adequate space for continual development under the teacher's guidance. The result is that the school is putting many learners at a disadvantage in the foundation phase where learning to read and the consolidation of the learning principles are of fundamental importance. This disadvantage has a cumulative effect that worsens as the learners “progress” through the education system, in that literacy levels in the IP and SP remain very low (see Howie et al. 2007).

The CEMIS records of Socrates indicate that the language of the home and community is predominantly Afrikaans; however, this is not “suiwer” or standard Afrikaans. At Socrates and at home, contrary to the stated language preference by the parents that English is the home language, the mixed Afrikaans and English code (Kaaps [Cape] Afrikaans) appears to be the dominant variety. The learners come to school having spent their formative years acquiring this language variety. When they enter school, they come up against the standardised forms of both English and Afrikaans. The learners' non-standard English and Afrikaans immediately set them apart, and simply using their everyday language variety

handicaps them when formal learning demands are placed upon them. Therefore, many children start school already at a disadvantage because of the lack of a primary standardised language at home (see Webb 2002:30 for the educational consequences experienced by learners from “coloured working class families”).

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss to what extent the data resonate with the aim of my research, which was to discover the nature of the relationship between the school’s language policy and the literacy proficiency of learners at Grade 7 level. In addition, and in support of this central aim, I also wanted to establish the role played by teachers’ language awareness of learners’ literacy proficiency, how the language policy of the school is interpreted by the teachers, and the role played by learners’ and teachers’ language attitudes in regard to the literacy levels at the school. I also discuss the implications of the findings, especially for further research opportunities.

5.1 Conclusion

This study, a case study grounded in the Interpretivist paradigm, is set within the broader framework of the qualitative research approach. The study, therefore, has certain limitations, one of which is the limited scope for generalisation. For this reason the implications will be spelled out mainly with regard to the school itself. It is possible to extrapolate these findings to schools with a similar language context, although this would have to be determined empirically.

As stated above, the dissertation set out to discover the relationship between the school’s language policy and the literacy ability of learners at Grade 7 level. In order to investigate this relationship, I used two key sub-questions to focus my research. I wanted to establish, firstly the role played by the language proficiency and language awareness of the teachers in the literacy proficiency and performance of the learners, and secondly, how teachers interpret the school’s language policy. A central issue that emerges from the data is the role played by the language attitudes of teachers and learners in the literacy proficiency of this grade group.

I collected data primarily from two sources: the learners and the teachers. The learners’ daily activities provided me with opportunities for collecting my data. One of their written tasks performed in class served as data for this study. The oral data were collected in two ways: firstly, by direct engagement with the learners during their lessons; and secondly, by observing the

learners’ interactions amongst each other as they made sense of the tasks. The data from the learners are contextualised through their engagement with written and oral language interaction in class. The written and oral data frame the learners’ language profile as Kaaps Afrikaans-dominant, which is in keeping with the language of the community. However, as the study unfolded, my research objectives broadened to include a focus on language awareness at the school, and the teachers’ role in implementing the school’s language policy.

Broadly summarised, the findings show that there is a correlation between the language policy of Socrates and the literacy proficiency of learners at Grade 7 level. The WCED’s systemic results of 2007 (Gr. 6 = 50%) suggest that only 50% of the learners in Grade 7 (2008) will be achieving the literacy outcomes set out for their grade. As it stands, this is only a conjecture as the Grade 7 class groups do not form part of the WCED’s systemic assessment protocol. However, if one considers that the school’s language policy is framed in a subtractive approach with a straight-for-target language model, the chances are that the learners’ language (including literacy) development will continue to suffer, as argued by Heugh (2005) and Cummins (1996) in different contexts.

The data from the Grade 7s written work also clearly reflects the continued language shift taking place in “coloured” communities (see Alexander 2000). The learners report that while they speak Kaaps Afrikaans to the older members of their families, they are inclined to speak English to their younger cousins. Within this community, therefore, English is growing in stature and prestige, socially and economically. What my investigation also crystallised was the overtly negative language attitudes towards Afrikaans (both as subject and as language of learning and teaching) that exist at the school among the learners. I argue that the learners’ attitude stems from the parental attitude towards Afrikaans, as it is the parent who insists that the child’s language is English when he or she is enrolled at school. Learners tend to expect to have even their Afrikaans lessons explained to them in English. Despite this, the learners predominantly use Afrikaans, albeit the non-standard variety, to make sense of, and explain the curriculum to each other – for example, using Kaaps Afrikaans to explain concepts to each other that were taught in English, or answering in Kaaps Afrikaans when questions are posed in English. The written data collected from the learners show that they are conscious of language usage in the home, but this is at a superficial level

because with one or two exceptions they have not yet attached any awareness of power to language.

The data collected from the teachers centred on the teachers' language profile, their knowledge of the school's language policy and key concepts therein, their engagement with Afrikaans, their own attitude towards the learners' language profile, and finally the lack of reading instruction in the InterSen phase. Underlining this data is the teachers' language competence as determined by their language endorsement qualifications. For example, a teacher might score a big "E" (capital E), and a small "a" (lower case a) to indicate their proficiency and competence in the English and Afrikaans languages. A capital letter endorsement indicates that the teacher is able to understand, communicate and teach the language at a mother tongue language level, while a lower case letter indicates the teacher is able to understand, communicate and teach this language at a first additional language level. At Socrates, many of the teachers indicated that they are qualified to teach English and Afrikaans at a mother tongue language level, yet these skills are not used maximally to enhance the teaching learning process.

During the data gathering phase of my study, the staff complement at Socrates remained stable, which meant that the teachers' language profile remained unchanged. The pro-English ethos therefore also remained unchanged: staff meetings, daily and weekly assemblies, and notices to parents continued in English. As a result, any engagement with Afrikaans was minimal and limited to the Afrikaans lessons. There has since, however, been a shift in consciousness amongst the teachers concerning Afrikaans in that they are advocating having Afrikaans introduced as a language of learning and teaching from Grade 1 as soon as possible. As yet, however, the pro-English ethos still dominates all aspects of school communications with parents, learners and teachers.

One focus area of my study was how the teachers interpreted the school language policy, in particular the key aspect of sensitivity towards the learners' home language. The school's language policy states that teachers should be sensitive to the learners' needs if the home language differs from the LoLT. I conclude from my data that although there is a visible shift taking place towards English, especially with regard to the younger members of families, Kaaps Afrikaans remains the dominant language variety in the community. Secondly, the teachers do not interpret the concept of sensitivity in the same way. This is evident in how and when the teachers use Afrikaans during their lessons.

Teachers use various methods to make the curriculum more meaningful to learners. These include code switching, translating, and the use of peer interpreters. Notwithstanding these best attempts, two issues of concern emerge from the data. Firstly, teachers are not as knowledgeable as they should be about language pedagogy: the theories concerning the learning and teaching of language subjects at different levels, i.e. Home Language and First Additional Language. Secondly, because of this lack of knowledge, teachers often misdiagnose the learners' learning difficulties and barriers, and end up making a faulty judgment on the learning readiness of the learner. Mostly the lack of language proficiency in the target language is given as the cause of the learners' difficulty in adjusting to formal schooling. Teachers report that the problems faced by Socrates stem from the mismatch between the home language and the LoLT, when in actuality; the problem is much more complex. Because there is no clear policy on language pedagogy or which literacy approaches to follow, the teachers at Socrates understand the learners' academic barriers only in the current context of the mismatch between LoLT and home language.

Teachers disapprove when learners use a language other than English in class. This disapproval is not overt and the teachers do not prohibit learners from using their mother tongue(s). However, the use of the mother tongue as a learning tool is not completely embraced by the school. This then reinforces the central barrier faced by many learners in the InterSen phase: that of a lack of reading comprehension exacerbated by the teachers' inability to teach reading. An unforeseen outcome of the study was the emergence of the teachers' lack of knowledge of language pedagogy and literacy approaches in implementing a language policy based on a language of wider communication (English), which is not the mother tongue or home language of the majority of the learners at school, nor of the community.

All these barriers find their origin in how the teachers engage with the school's language policy. From the lack of annual reflection on its language policy, to the lack of an in-depth knowledge of its implications for the learners' success or failure, I conclude that teachers do not pay much attention to the school's language policy, other than to know that the medium of instruction is English. I now address the implications of my research for the school, for the teachers, and for further research, respectively.

5.2 Implications for the school

Flanagan (1980) writes that the school's identity is intricately woven into the identity, culture and language of the community it serves. It is through language that we are able to express our communal cultural values, as well as our personal and or group views, beliefs and attitudes. In other words, through language we position ourselves culturally, emotionally and physically in our communities, be it at school or at home. At Socrates, many of the learners identify with Kaaps Afrikaans (the communal language) either as a home language, or as the language spoken by the extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents). There are, however, feelings of ambiguity attached to speaking Kaaps Afrikaans. Kaaps Afrikaans is considered a "kombuis taal", an inferior language compared to standard Afrikaans taught at school. However, from the data, I detected a greater assertiveness from the learners concerning Kaaps Afrikaans (as a marker of personal and social identity) into the classroom discourse, and a distinct distancing from standard Afrikaans (as a LoLT as well as a subject) as taught at school. Using Kaaps Afrikaans in the classroom, therefore, signifies the learners' identity, consciousness and reality (Stone 2002).

It is for this reason that the school's language and the language of the community should be viewed as being complementary. At Socrates, the overtly pro-English ethos contradicts the Kaaps Afrikaans practice of the immediate school community. Provided there is an active and vibrant maintenance policy that enhances and validates learners' home language(s), this contradiction need not be a barrier to academic and cognitive growth. The school can start by making all school notices to parents available in Afrikaans and English, as well as isiXhosa for the growing number of isiXhosa-speaking parents. Raising awareness amongst the parents should be the first step in validating Afrikaans as a language of learning and teaching. The implementation of Afrikaans as a LoLT could be phased in from the inception. The teaching staff, because of their position of power and greater knowledge of current language issues, is in a position to convince parents, without disregarding the latter's right to choose their child's LoLT, that the home language is the language the learner knows best when starting school and that it is the foundation upon which other languages can be learnt. Parents need to be made aware of the scientific basis for the overwhelming benefits associated with mother tongue education, especially for the first six to eight years of schooling.

It is clear that language continues to play a vital role in the reconstruction of a democratic South Africa; and as long as learners' home

languages are not validated in learning and teaching, the aims of democracy will not be met. The school, therefore, has a responsibility to ensure that all learners achieve a high level of language proficiency in the home language and in the additional languages. The school should, therefore, consider the following models for its language policy as suggested by Target 1 of the WCED's Language Transformation Plan 2007:

- The mother tongue as LoLT approach, based on its cognitive and psychological benefits for academic success, enjoys the most support. The ideal, however, is a mother tongue-based bilingual education approach wherein the learner's mother tongue is used as a LoLT, and an additional language is gradually introduced to the curriculum until the learner has gained adequate CALP skills in it, for it to function as a LoLT, on an equal basis as the mother tongue.
- Within a well implemented and maintained plan, a dual-medium or parallel-medium approach may also ensure the necessary literacy proficiency required at Grade 7 level.

The growing number of isiXhosa-speaking learners should also not be marginalised, as is the case at present. IsiXhosa, as an additional language, could be introduced as a subject in the curriculum. The ideal, however, would be in accordance with Target 1 of the WCED (2007), which states that where practicable the mother tongue should be used as LoLT until the end of Grade 6. While this is not practicable at Socrates at present, a plan can nevertheless be devised whereby Afrikaans and isiXhosa are taught as subjects at home language level, for the duration of primary schooling. In this way, both Afrikaans- and isiXhosa-speaking learners will feel included as part of the school community, as their languages would now be validated by the timetable. The isiXhosa-speaking teacher on the staff could also be utilised more proactively in that she could facilitate an isiXhosa communicative competence programme at school, aimed at teachers. This strategy will also be in line with Target 2 of the WCED (2007), which targets the learners, but the teachers can also benefit from such a strategy as this would enhance the classroom relationship between teacher and learner. In addition, learning isiXhosa, will ensure a smoother transition from home to school for many learners, as the teacher can now address the learner directly without the assistance of a peer to translate (see Chapter 4, Table 9) to facilitate the learning and teaching process. For this reason, a vigorous language awareness campaign is recommended before the school decides to change its language policy.

5.3 Implications for the teachers

Ideally, teachers need to be proficient in all the languages offered by the school, i.e. Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. The teachers should, as a minimum, at least be communicatively proficient in all three official languages of the Western Cape. That is, they need to have an understanding of the languages at home, as well as at an additional language level. The teachers' language endorsements should serve as a guide to their language profile and proficiency. In principle, the teachers should be able to teach in their language endorsements for which they qualify. An extended goal of the WCED should be that all teachers acquire language endorsements in the three official languages of the province. For example, a teacher may qualify to teach two languages at HL level, and a third language at FAL or SAL level. An added advantage would be the enhanced competence of the teachers in understanding the nature and causes of language barriers, and this will eliminate the misdiagnosis of barriers as perceived by the teachers.

A better understanding of how learners acquire literacy and language would also change the teachers' attitude towards the language(s) the learner brings to school. An in-service training course on critical language awareness might help teachers understand how learners acquire literacy and language. The teachers' attitude towards the learners' language is shown to be a factor in how well the learner does at school. When the teacher's attitude is positive and the learner perceives it as such, the learner shows greater motivation to learn and achieve. Conversely, however, if the teacher's attitude is perceived to be negative, this has a detrimental effect on the learners' success at school. Teachers should therefore constantly reflect critically on their own language attitudes, practices as well as on the school's language policy. This reflection could also be formalised as part of whole-school evaluation at the end of every school year when the staff and governing body reflect and plan for the next year. This mechanism would ensure that the school's language policy, and/or the teachers' language profile do not become barriers to the academic success of the learners at Socrates.

5.4 Implications for further research

The following implications for action and further research flow from the study.

Firstly, a thorough language audit of the school community should be undertaken so that a comprehensive language profile can be drawn up. I would define the school community as all individuals who interact with

the school on a regular basis. This would include the teachers, parents and learners as the inner circle of this community. The outer circle would be all the service providers, such as the WCED, booksellers, and NGOs. Included in this group would be the community poets, musicians and community leaders. An in-depth audit of the teachers' language profile would ensure that any incompatibility between the school and the community's language profiles are identified and addressed. Without such an audit, it is possible that a policy based on a language in high demand, and not necessarily on what is most beneficial to the learners, will be implemented.

Arising out of the finding that InterSen teachers often complain that they are unable to, or not skilled in teaching learners how to read, the teaching of reading is another area that lends itself to further investigation. A comprehensive in-service programme to address these teachers' concerns should therefore be a key area not only for the school but also for the WCED to invest in. Initially, the foundation phase teachers at the school can facilitate this programme. Thereafter, the WCED should be responsible to add greater legitimacy to the programme by ensuring that the strategies of the Foundations for Learning Campaign (RSA Government Gazette 2008) with its key focus on the reading competency of the learners are implemented at every school.

The teaching strategy of using code-switching and code-mixing to scaffold the teaching-learning process is another area that needs attention. For example, under what conditions are code-switching and -mixing a desirable teaching-learning tool, especially in the InterSen phase?

Finally, there is a need for more research into the teaching of English, particularly in the current climate of language shift taking place within the communities on the Cape Flats. A recent article in an Afrikaans-language Western Cape daily opines that very soon Afrikaans as a medium of instruction will be dead, moved aside by the growing need for a unifying language (English) in light of the latter's global dominance as a language of social and economic mobility (Lötter 2009). There is also a need for greater research on language attitudes and how these affect the teaching and learning of the mother tongue, in particular. As Young (1999 in Heugh 2000) has written, without the buy-in from the teachers, the school's language policy will be doomed to failure. Teachers therefore need to be knowledgeable about the educational theories driving the different LoLT models; hence the need for critically reflective language practitioners at our schools.

A final thought

Academic success begins with the validation of the mother tongue at home; it is the time spent reading (and possibly writing) before the learner starts formal schooling. Early childhood literacy therefore has a central role to play in determining how successful a learner will be at school. With a strong foundation in the mother tongue, the following are possible: authenticating the oral experiences the learner brings to the formal learning environment; making explicit the language skills of the target language; and importantly, allowing the learner's voice to enter the classroom discussion as an active and cognitively-able participant. But, it is only after the negative perception of the mother tongue and the status of vernacular varieties are recognised as important stepping stones in the development of the learner's cognitive ability that in-roads will be made into sustainable mother tongue classrooms. Finally, the global hegemony of English continues to create the impression that knowledge is constructed through English only, and by the English-dominant world. The predilection for especially American music, literature, culture and television from our learners, keeps our South African produced literature and culture in abeyance. We need grassroots-level awareness campaigns steered by our local communities and schools wherein local writers, poets, and musicians are celebrated. In this campaign, schools can host these mini-arts festivals and become hubs of local cultures and languages.

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Appendix A

LANGUAGE TRANSFORMATION PLAN:

(NAME OF SCHOOL)

QUESTIONNAIRE TO INFORM A SCHOOL LANGUAGE POLICY

Educator language profile

1. What language(s) do you speak and understand?

2. What language(s) do you consider your primary language(s)?

3. What language(s) do you use for thinking and reasoning? Explain if necessary

4. What media do you engage with most?

Books, television, radio, magazines, newspapers, education texts, (other?)

School context

1. Have you read the school's language policy of 2002? _____

2. What language(s) do you use for teaching?

3. What language(s) do you use for social interaction with the learners?

4. What language(s) do you use predominantly with parents?

5. In what language(s) do parents communicate with you?

Spoken: _____

Written: _____

6. Do you have knowledge of the following concepts?

Mother tongue education _____

Additive bilingualism _____

Dual medium approach _____

Parallel medium approach _____

Straight-for-English approach _____

Critical language awareness _____

Reflexive classrooms _____

7. Do you think that the school language policy should change?

8. If yes, who should be the role-players involved in this process, and why?

Thank you for your participation

TA da Rocha

Appendix B

05.03.2008

Good morning teachers

Can you supply me with the following information relating to our discussion about the SCHOOL LANGUAGE POLICY?

How do you implement the policy in your classroom with regards to:

1. English
2. Afrikaans
3. Xhosa (optional?)

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Educator Grade R | |
| Educator Grade 1 | |
| Educator Grade 1 | |
| Educator Grade 2 | |
| Educator Grade 2 | |
| Educator Grade 3 | |
| Educator Grade 3 | |
| Educator Grade 4 | |
| Educator Grade 4 | |
| Educator Grade 5 | |
| Educator Grade 5 | |

Thank you

TA da Rocha

Appendix E

| School | | Principal | | Class | | Teacher | | Date | |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----------|----|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---------|--|
| # Name of Learner (TY/M/DOB) | | MT | PS | Literacy / Reading / Numeracy / Other | | Details of Intervention Strategies Implemented. | | Comment | |
| 1. | DOB | | | | | | | | |
| 2. | DOB | | | | | | | | |
| 3. | DOB | | | | | | | | |
| 4. | DOB | | | | | | | | |
| 5. | DOB | | | | | | | | |

**EMDC CENTRAL METROPOLE
PROGRESSION: INTERVENTION REGISTER / FOLLOW-UP FORM**

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