

Minding the gaps – an investigation into language policy and practice in four Eastern Cape districts

MARGIE PROBYN, SARAH MURRAY, LIZ BOTHA, PAULA BOTYA, MARGIE BROOKS, VIVIAN WESTPHAL

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Abstract

South Africa's new Language in Education Policy (LiEP) has been described as one of the most progressive in the world but few schools have implemented it. This article describes research that investigates the gap between the policy goals and what is actually happening in schools in four districts in the Eastern Cape. The research attempts to make explicit community and school language practices and the factors that support or frustrate the formation and enactment of a school language policy in these four linguistically diverse sites. It appears that school governing bodies are not well equipped to make decisions about school language policy which meet the requirements of the national LiEP and economic imperatives to acquire English override considerations of multilingualism and additive bilingualism as expressed in the policy.

Context

South Africa's Constitution gives official status to eleven languages (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) The country's new Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (Department of Education, 1997a) has been heralded as one of the most progressive in the world (Landon, 1999) and an example to other African countries (Alexander, 1999; Mateene, 1999).

The policy advocates:

¹⁹ The following are the research team members, all of whom contributed to the initial reports which form the basis for this paper:

Ms Liz Botha, Distance Education, Fort Hare University, Bisho

Ms Paula Botya, Distance Education, Fort Hare University, Bisho (Ms Botya was on temporary secondment to the University of Fort Hare)

Ms Margie Brookes, Dept of Education, Rhodes University, East London

Ms Monica Hendricks, Dept of Education, Rhodes University, Grahamstown (Evaluator)

Ms Pinkie Mdaka, Dept of Education, Fort Hare University, Alice

Ms Sarah Murray, Dept of Education, Rhodes University, Grahamstown (Team Manager)

Ms Margie Probyn, Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA), Rhodes University, Grahamstown

Ms Bulelwa Nosilela, Dept of African Languages, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

Ms Pinkie Sobahle, Dept of English, Fort Hare University, Alice

Ms Vivian Westphal, Dept of Arts and Culture, Bisho

Dr Denise Zinn, Research Associate, Dept of Education, Rhodes University (Team leader)

Research assistants:

Ms Irene Muriuki, Dept of Politics, Rhodes University

Ms Mweru Mwingi, Dept of Education, Rhodes University

- The maintenance of learners' home languages at the same time as they acquire additional languages (i.e. additive multilingualism).
- Communication across the barriers of race, language and region.
- Respect for languages other than one's own.

Learners may choose their language(s) of learning and teaching (LoLTs), although this is a qualified right (Department of Education, 1997a, 2). It is recommended that schools adopt a language policy supportive of general conceptual growth among learners. Where learners are disadvantaged because their home language is not the LoLT, schools are advised to provide support for them.

The research problem lies in the gap between these policy goals and what is actually happening in schools, what Webb (quoted in NCCRD, 200, 20) describes as "a mismatch between the dream and the reality".

The power and responsibility for putting the policy into practice has been devolved to School Governing Bodies (SGBs). The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Department of Education 1997b) requires an SGB to "announce the school's language policy and to state how it will promote multilingualism through a variety of measures".

However, an accumulation of small-scale, qualitative research studies suggest that very few schools have developed school language policies in line with the LiEP (Brown, 1998; Taylor and Vinjevoid, 1999; Burkett, 1999). In a longitudinal study to monitor education policy implementation and change, Kgobe and Mbele (2001, 123) report on case studies of a representative group of 27 schools in all provinces of South Africa. They found that by 2000 only five had developed language policies and only one had made changes in the direction proposed by the LiEP. They conclude, "(t)he findings are consistent with those of last year, which showed very little SGB involvement in language policy debates and development".

A number of reasons have been put forward to account for schools' failure to implement the LiEP: that schools do not have knowledge of the policy, do not clearly understand the extent of their powers and responsibilities, lack experience and expertise in developing their own policies, and do not know what support the Department of Education will provide (ELTIC, 1997; Taylor & Vinjevoid, 1999) and that education department district officials, who might advise schools, also lack knowledge of the LiEP (NCCRD 2000). In addition, the introduction of the LiEP was overshadowed by the concurrent introduction of the Curriculum 2005, and district officials and teachers were too preoccupied with curriculum implementation to attend to the LiEP (NCCRD 2000). Taylor and Vinjevoid also suggest that existing practices and realities in schools militate against implementing the policy.

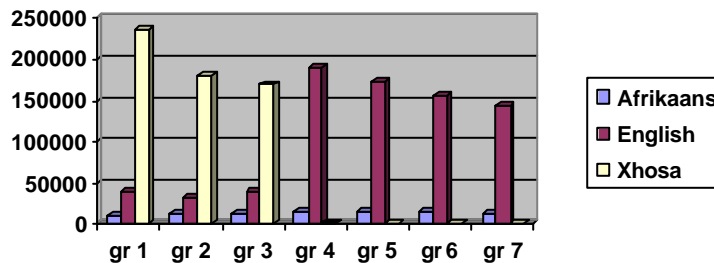
In 1998 the Department of Education proposed an ambitious plan to monitor the implementation of the policy by the provinces (Department of Education, 1998). However, it appears little has happened since then. Whether the resources (both financial and in terms of capacity) will ever be available to put the plan into practice is arguable.

Where schools have changed their policies, this appears to have been in response to economic and political pressures and the introduction of the new curriculum, rather than to conform to the LiEP: many have introduced English as LoLT in Grade 4, a year earlier than previously, to align with the change from Foundation to Intermediate Phase in Curriculum 2005, and some as early as Grade 1 (NCCRD, 2000; Taylor & Vinjevoid, 1999). National statistics show that at the primary school level, the use of English as LoLT increased from 33% in 1991 to 42% in

1997 (Bot & Schlinder, 2001). Statistics for the Eastern Cape show that there is a transition from Xhosa LoLT in the Foundation Phase to English LoLT in Grade 4, the start of the Intermediate Phase.

This shift to English is happening despite the fact that teachers, and sometimes even parents, know that this creates problems for learners (Mgudlwa, 1997; ELTIC, 1997) especially those in rural areas with little access to English (Nomvete, 1994). It is not surprising, therefore, that what happens in classrooms often differs dramatically from official school language policies (ELTIC, 1997).

Figure 1: Bargraph of Learners' LoLT in Eastern Cape Province 2000



(EMIS data)

This research is informed by an understanding of policy as dynamic and changing as it is interpreted and reinterpreted at different levels in the (education) system by different role players in terms of particular contexts, existing ideas, values and practices (Czerniewicz, Murray & Probyn, 2000, 4) Thus it would be mistaken to view the formation and implementation of policy as a simple hierarchical, linear process. The ways in which policy is interpreted and reinterpreted needs to be understood and fed back into policy-making.

Policy at national level is a response to particular political imperatives and pedagogical perspectives; there may be a different set of imperatives on the ground and different contexts, which may account in part for the range of responses (including lack of response) to the LiEP.

In addition, policy decisions are informed by educational and linguistic theory. For example, in South Africa the work of the Canadian researcher, Jim Cummins, has been influential. It has been reinterpreted in the South African context by, for example, Luckett (1995). However, theory and research alone cannot determine what should happen in specific contexts. It can inform, but it must be understood within those contexts.

This research seeks to trace the ways in which policy interplays with contextual factors; what constrains and enables language policies and practices in schools.

Research goals

The primary goals of the research were to:

- investigate the current state of language policy in primary schools in four districts of the Eastern Cape;

- establish the school and classroom language practices in one primary school in each of these districts;
- find out what constrains and enables each of the four schools selected to draw up language policies which meet the requirements of the national LiEP;
- Identify possible conflicts between the perceived needs of schools and the requirements of the national LiEP.

Research methodology

The districts were selected for convenience as they are the districts in which the researchers' institutions are located. Permission was obtained from the provincial Department of Education to carry out the research.

The research fell into three parts:

- Census (1996, in Statistics South Africa, 1998) and EMIS (1999, 2000) data on school language backgrounds in the Eastern Cape to provide the broad picture.
- A survey of primary schools in each district to provide more detail of schools in relation to the LiEP and give some sense of how typical the individual schools were.
- A case study of one primary school in each district to understand language practices within that particular, immediate context and to understand school language practices from the perspectives of those involved.

The research focused on primary schools because this is where critical decisions about language policy are made and where policies are most open to debate and a range of possibilities.

Four different types of schools were selected:

- rural primary;
- township primary;
- formerly white suburban primary;
- formerly coloured primary.

It was decided to work with teachers in schools in order to understand both explicit and implicit school language policies. The methodology is described as *participatory research* because it attempts to bring together two kinds of knowledge and expertise: the researchers' 'outsider' expertise as language researchers based in universities; and the 'insider' knowledge of teachers, learners and parents about language practices in classrooms, schools and homes.

It was hoped that the jointly constructed understanding of classroom, school and home language practices, and of explicit and implicit policies, would provide the starting point for schools either to develop or improve their policies.

For the survey of the districts, a questionnaire was developed in English, translated into the two other main languages of the Eastern Cape, Xhosa and Afrikaans, and piloted. The questionnaires were distributed to schools in the four districts. 227 returns were received from a possible 617 schools – a return rate of 37 percent.

Data collection methods in schools were as follows: Home language practices were surveyed through a questionnaire for parents distributed in the four schools. School and classroom

language practices were identified through a questionnaire filled in by teachers, through classroom observation by the researchers, and through self-reporting on recorded lessons by the teachers. Focus group discussions were held with teachers and learners where the collated data was discussed and attitudes towards languages and learning were explored.

The researchers compiled a comprehensive report on the language practices in the school and community, and presented these to the teachers in the schools. The intention was that the research reports should be presented to the school governing bodies, and should provide the basis for discussions and decision making around the LiEP for the school.

Findings

Linguistic context from EMIS (1999, 2000) and 1996 Census data (Statistics South Africa 1998).

The three main languages for the Eastern Cape are Xhosa, Afrikaans and English with figures for home language speakers as follows:

Table 1: The three main languages for the Eastern Cape

Xhosa	5 663 498
Afrikaans	579 964
English	233 986

(1996 Census, in Statistics South Africa 1998)

EMIS data (1999, 2000) and the research survey provide detailed information about the linguistic makeup of schools in the four districts. The general picture in the four districts is one in which Xhosa is overwhelmingly the home language of primary school teachers (78%) and learners (86%) (EMIS, 1999). Xhosa, either on its own or mixed with English, is also the language most commonly used for assembly, for school meetings, for talking to parents, for sports and extra mural activities, and in the playground. However, when it comes to the LoLT, English dominates. The first three years of schooling is most commonly in Xhosa, but in Grade 4 a switch is usually made to English as the official LoLT. This pattern is consistent across all four districts. The switch is occurring one year earlier than was typical in the past, probably to align with the transition from Foundation to Intermediate Phase in Curriculum 2005. A relatively small but stable number of classes have Afrikaans LoLT throughout primary school. Similarly, a substantial minority of schools in East London (and to a lesser extent in Grahamstown and King William's Town) have English LoLT throughout.

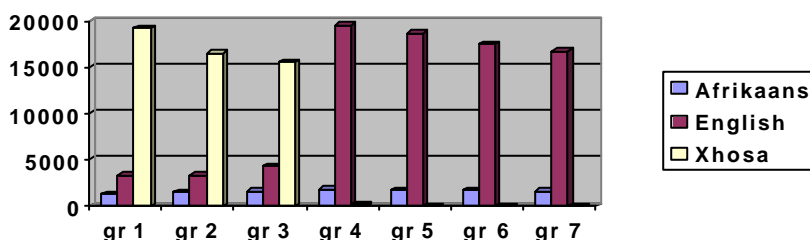
Language in Education Policy

Although most schools (over 75%) which responded to the survey questionnaire had heard about the LiEP, only slightly more than half (52%) had discussed the question of a language policy for their school, and less than half (37%) had decided on a formal policy. The fact that school policy making peaked between 1997 and 1998 suggests that those schools which do not yet have a formal policy, may be unlikely to develop one. In answer to an open-ended question, a number of schools expressed the need for more support and information in order to understand and implement the policy.

Case studies of individual schools

Case studies were made of one school in each of the four districts. Two of the schools (Alice and Grahamstown) are typical of the majority of schools. Teachers and learners are all Xhosa-speaking, Xhosa is the language of communication in the school, the playground and at home,

Figure 2: Bargraph of Learners' LoLT in districts of Alice, East London, Grahamstown, King William's Town, 2000



(EMIS 2000)

but English is officially the language of the classroom after the first two or three years of school. The third school located in East London is one in which English is the LoLT throughout, with Afrikaans medium classes in Grade 6 & 7. In the fourth school, located in King William's Town, the majority of children learn through the medium of Afrikaans, but a minority of mainly Xhosa speaking children are in parallel English medium classes.

The case studies are rich in detail. It is only possible to highlight some of the interesting facts that emerged through the questionnaires to parents and teachers, classroom observation and focus group discussions with teachers and learners.

Alice

Context: The school is situated in a rural village, five kilometres from the small town of Alice. There are 270 learners in the school, and there were 10 teachers including the principal at the start of the research. Class sizes are therefore relatively small. As a result of redeployment, however, the number of teachers has been reduced to eight.

Most parents are unemployed. The school qualifies for the school-feeding scheme, but currently this is not available. There are high rates of learner absenteeism.

School language policy: The school does not have a formally constituted language policy but it was stated by the teachers that Xhosa is the LoLT in Grades 1 and 2, and thereafter it is English. This transition occurs a year earlier than the majority of schools in the Alice District as revealed in the EMIS (2000) data. English and Xhosa are taught as subjects from Grade 1 and conversational Afrikaans is introduced in Grade 2. Afrikaans remains a conversational subject throughout and is not examined. Teachers interviewed were aware that the school should have formulated a school language policy, but said they did not know how to go about developing one.

Language use outside the classroom: According to the questionnaire responses, Xhosa is the home language of all the teachers, learners and parents and it is the language of communication in the community. The questionnaire indicated that learners have very little exposure to English outside of the classroom besides television. Learners reported occasionally using English words

to impress their Xhosa friends who go to the local independent English medium school. At school, Xhosa is used for assembly and for most communication outside of the classroom.

Classroom language practices: In the classrooms, it was observed that teachers did most of the talking, frequently asking closed questions, to which learners responded with short individual or chorused answers; in interviews teachers said this was because learners could not cope with open questions and more elaborated answers. This was confirmed by the researchers who observed that learners would frequently give responses completely off the point when teachers occasionally did ask open questions. Teachers used drills with learners repeating phrases after them in English.

Explanation was mainly done in English with some code-switching to Xhosa when learners could not understand. Teachers confirmed learners' responses mainly in English but half the teachers code-switched when rejecting and correcting learners' answers. Writing on the chalkboard was in English.

Teachers used Xhosa to make jokes, exclamations; informal conversation between learners and teachers and between learners was in Xhosa. Praise was mainly in English and reprimands in both languages. Learners' discussions in groups and pairs were in both languages.

There were not many learning support materials in evidence. Classroom walls were mostly bare. In the lower grades there were some posters, some in Xhosa, but mainly in English.

Teachers' perceptions: Despite the obvious difficulties of teaching and learning through the medium of English, in focus group discussions, all but one teacher said they were firmly convinced that the LoLT should be English after Grade 2. The reason given was so that learners should be able to speak to the learners (mainly Xhosa HL speakers) at a nearby independent English medium school without feeling inferior; and because English is an international language. The researchers noted that serious consideration did not appear to have been given to the obvious alternative of learning through the medium of Xhosa; the language medium appeared to be taken as a given.

Teachers were divided regarding the use of Xhosa in class: Those who code-switched argued on the basis of conceptual and affective reasons: that it was necessary to explain difficult concepts which learners did not understand in English, and also to help learners feel free in class. Those who did not code-switch maintained that the medium of instruction was English and so learners had to use the language.

Nevertheless, the use of English as LoLT did not seem to result in learners acquiring high levels of competence in the language. The teachers felt the learners' proficiency in English was poor, even when they left the school after Grade 7. On the other hand, teachers felt learners' competence in Xhosa was good and that they coped well in Xhosa as a subject in Grade 8 at high school. However, this judgment was limited to learners' grammatical competence. As one teacher put it, "(i)f the learners are able to identify the noun and verb from 'inja iyatya' then I am happy". None of the teachers had received any specialised training to teach through the medium of English.

Learners' perceptions: Learners said they preferred to be taught in both Xhosa and English (and one mentioned Sotho (*Sesotho*) because they wanted to know the languages. One learner was very adamant that he wanted to learn in Xhosa only.

Parents' views: Teachers said that parents want their children to learn through the medium of English but are also concerned about their children losing their identity. At an unofficial SGB

meeting (the chairperson was not present) parents on the SGB confirmed this perception and said that they wanted their children to learn through the medium of English and to learn Xhosa as a subject. However, they also said that they realise how difficult it is for their children to learn in English and wanted to find out from the researchers as to how they could assist to improve the situation for their children.

East London

Context: The school is an ex-model C (formerly 'white') school, in a formerly white suburb, with 825 learners and 29 teachers. According to teachers, learners come from relatively wealthy homes apart from a small minority from a nearby squatter camp – mainly the children of domestic workers in the area.

The home languages of the teachers are: English (23), Afrikaans (5) and Xhosa (1). The home languages of the learners are English (538), Xhosa (202), Afrikaans (78), other languages (7). Most children have attended English pre-schools.

School language policy: The school was founded in 1930 as an English medium school and in 1978, with increasing enrolment of Afrikaans-speaking pupils, changed to English/Afrikaans parallel medium. The changing demographics prompted a change back to English medium in 1989 and Afrikaans medium is being phased out with an Afrikaans medium class remaining in Grades 6 and 7. Afrikaans is taught as a second language and Xhosa as a third language. The additional languages are allowed to be used to support learning but are not encouraged for socialising: 'We are not supposed to tell secrets in Afrikaans', and 'In this school the Xhosa-speaking people are not allowed to speak Xhosa' (Grade 2 learners). It has a formally constituted language policy, drawn up in 1999. However, it was discussed by the teachers, parents and SGB and the final decision was made by the principal and staff, rather than the SGB as stipulated in the LiEP.

Language use outside the classroom: At home, Afrikaans and foreign language learners claim to have lots of books in their home language, whereas Xhosa-speaking learners say they do not have many Xhosa books at home. All learners said they watched television at home, mostly in English.

The questionnaire responses indicated that at school, assembly is held in English. The new school song has verses in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. Meetings, informal staffroom conversations, extramural activities are mostly in English with a little Afrikaans, and Xhosa is used during soccer. Learners said that they talk to one another in the playground in all three languages, but when speaking to one another in a mixed language group, they use English. Learners speak English to teachers in formal situations but in informal situations some reported using Afrikaans. Teachers reported that learners use English with the office staff and like to practice Xhosa with the maintenance staff.

Classroom language practices: Teachers' reports and classroom observation confirmed that all lessons are in English except for language lessons which are taught in the target language. Learners are allowed to use their HL in groups, if they do not understand, but are encouraged to revert to English. In Grade 1, the focus is on English literacy as teachers feel that learners will be confused with reading and writing in more languages. Learning support materials are mainly in English with some Afrikaans and no Xhosa books. In the school, 75% of literature books are in English, 20% Afrikaans and 5% in Xhosa. Teachers used a variety of strategies to facilitate understanding: visuals, explaining back, explanations given step-by-step, drama/role play, moving from concrete to abstract ideas. Some teachers in the intermediate phase reported code-

switching to Xhosa to facilitate understanding, whereas others say they encourage English only.

Teachers' perceptions: Teachers saw English as the language of educational and economic access and were concerned to provide support for learners to adjust to English LoLT. Teachers said they respected the language and culture of Afrikaans-speaking learners but researchers got the impression that in general it was Xhosa and Afrikaans speakers who had to accommodate to the language and culture of the school. Some teachers and parents were concerned about Afrikaans disappearing in the school and felt that English and Xhosa were now the school languages. They believed in the effectiveness of natural language learning through immersion: "In this situation they learn very fast. They hear English all the time. They were thrown in at the deep end." If children have a problem with English they are encouraged to go to after-school care facilities where they played with English speakers.

Learners' perceptions: Learners said they were keen to learn a second and third language. Some experienced language loss – for example a child from a bilingual home described how her parents now only spoke to her in English. Another child reported: "When I came to school I was Afrikaans but then I went English."

Parents' perceptions: Parents were also in favour of natural learning through immersion. Afrikaans- and Xhosa-speaking parents had sent their children to the school specifically so they could learn English. However they felt that all teachers should be able to speak all three languages and that not enough was being done about the teaching of Xhosa as an additional language. Afrikaans speakers were concerned that Afrikaans 'was being pushed out'. Some parents could not help with language homework as they could not understand the languages themselves.

Grahamstown

Context: The school selected for study is a township primary school with approximately 300 learners and 14 teachers (including the principal), a secretary, and a caretaker. At the time of the research, six teachers were due to be redeployed, causing uncertainty and tension.

According to the teachers, learners come mainly from the poorer shack areas and from farms on the periphery of Grahamstown. School fees are R12 per annum but many parents are unemployed and unable or unwilling to pay even that. Fund raising is difficult as parents cannot easily support such activities. Consequently the school has very limited resources. Very few learners have attended pre-schools and they have limited access to television at home, so do not see educational programmes that would help prepare them for school and expose them to English.

Teachers said that many parents are not fully literate and so find it difficult to support their children's learning at home. This was evident in the questionnaires where many parents appeared to have difficulty responding to some of the questions even though they were written in Xhosa.

Some learners did not attend school regularly and so it was difficult for them to progress. In some cases parents did not come to the school when requested to do so. Teachers felt this was because parents' low literacy levels made it difficult for them to relate to what was happening at school or because they were afraid that they would be asked for money.

Thus for reasons of poverty – educational and economic – parents seem to find it difficult to engage with the school or to support their children's learning. This also means that the school has very little in the way of resources.

School language policy: The school had not formally constituted a language policy in terms of the LiEP. The informal policy as stated in the questionnaire is Xhosa LoLT in the Foundation Phase and English LoLT from Grade 4, with English introduced as a subject in Grade 1. Afrikaans is not taught as a subject.

Language use outside the classroom: According to the questionnaire responses, the home language of all the teachers, learners and parents is Xhosa. In addition, teachers speak English and Afrikaans. The language spoken by learners and their parents in their community is overwhelmingly Xhosa. Learners said they have little contact with English speakers and their only exposure to English outside the classroom is through pop music and limited access to television.

At school Xhosa is used for most communication outside the classroom: As one teacher put it, "Pupils use their mother tongue everywhere outside the classroom, and they change only in the classroom." Xhosa is spoken between learners, at assembly, for extramural activities, informally in the staff room, and at parents' meetings. A mixture of Xhosa and English is used in staff meetings, between teachers and learners in the playground; and English is used for the minutes of staff meetings.

Classroom language practices: In the Foundation Phase the LoLT is Xhosa and by the end of Grade 1, learners are expected to be able to read and write English. From Grade 4, teachers said they gradually move to more explanations and classroom talk in English, with all reading and writing and learning materials in English. In Grade 4, teachers present lessons in Xhosa and translate to English; the social studies teacher in Grade 5 said she would teach a lesson in Xhosa and then teach it again the following day in English, first introducing new vocabulary. Teachers would code-switch to explain difficult concepts and terms. By Grade 6, teachers expect to teach mainly through the medium of English and by Grade 7, teachers expect learners to be learning entirely through English, with some code-switching to explain terms and concepts. It appeared from the focus group discussions that teachers' own use of Xhosa and English and tolerance of learners' home language use in the classroom varies according to the demands of their respective learning areas and their personal views.

Teachers' perceptions: Teachers felt that on the whole, learners' proficiency in English lagged behind the demands of the language as LoLT in the classroom. They therefore were obliged to code-switch to Xhosa more than they would have preferred to. They firmly stated that English should be the LoLT despite the difficulties faced by learners and the fact that this was time-consuming. They said that township schools were losing learners to ex-model C and HoR (i.e. for previously classified 'coloured' children) schools in town because parents wanted learners to acquire English; township schools therefore felt under pressure to offer English LoLT earlier to counter this trend. Teachers complained that parents did not appreciate how difficult it was to teach through the medium of English. In a meeting between the researchers and teachers it was evident that code-switching was regarded by some as illicit: one of the teachers remarked that it was good to have the researchers in the school as it helped teachers to teach 'the right way' (in English) as teachers often used the mother tongue because it was easy and there was no-one checking up on them.

Learners' perceptions: Learners said that it was easy to read and understand Xhosa but that the LoLT should be English because they wanted to be able to communicate with English speakers.

However they preferred to be interviewed in Xhosa as they found it difficult to express themselves in English. They also said that they found it difficult to answer questions in class in English; their textbooks in English were difficult to understand; and it was difficult to learn in English, so they used to memorise their work.

Parents' perceptions: The researchers were unable to meet directly with parents but teachers reported that parents wanted their children to learn in English because "English puts bread on the table."

Language resources: Learning support materials were available in Xhosa for the Foundation Phase. The Intermediate Phase did not have any new textbooks and what old textbooks there were, were only in English. However teachers said they did not make use of them because they were not suitable and because the learners could not understand them. Instead they gave learners notes to copy. New textbooks designed for outcomes based education were available for Grade 7. Learners did use them but were not allowed to take them home. The school did not have a library, but READ was working in the Foundation Phase and those teachers had box libraries.

King William's Town

Context: The school is large (1109 learners) and well-equipped, situated in a formerly coloured township. It has 33 teachers including the principal and the deputy, a secretary and three cleaners. From Grade 1 to 7 there are four classes per grade, three Afrikaans medium and one English medium. The English medium stream was introduced in 1991 when African children started attending the school. Most children in this stream are Xhosa- or Afrikaans-speaking.

School language policy: The school does not have a formally constituted language policy. Children in the English stream learn Afrikaans as a second language. Those in the Afrikaans stream learn English as a second language. Xhosa is not taught in the school.

Language use outside the classroom: The dominant home language of the township is Afrikaans and in most homes it is the primary language. English is the 'status language', but using it makes people seem a bit 'above themselves'. A minority of learners come from Xhosa speaking homes, many of which are outside the township.

The 616 returns of the parents' questionnaire revealed high levels of home bilingualism and to a lesser extent multilingualism. All groups used more than one language in the home:

- 80% were Afrikaans speakers (42% also spoke English and 15% also spoke Xhosa in the home);
- 10% were Xhosa speakers (95% also spoke English and 15% also spoke Afrikaans at home);
- 5% were English speakers (81% also spoke English at home; 19% also spoke Xhosa at home) and
- 5% were bilingual English/Afrikaans.

Afrikaans speakers, Xhosa speakers, and Afrikaans/English bilinguals tended to use Afrikaans and Xhosa for community and family oriented activities, but English dominated their interactions with the media except for radio where Afrikaans and Xhosa also featured. It was only English speakers whose home language dominated in all activities.

At school all the teachers were Afrikaans-speaking and spoke the language almost all the time informally with their colleagues. Most of them spoke English fluently, some were fluent in

Xhosa; most had at least some understanding of Xhosa. Afrikaans was the main language used at assemblies and in the staffroom. Afrikaans and Xhosa were the languages of the playground. Afrikaans and English are used in communicating with parents.

Classroom language use: English was used most of the time in English medium classes. Researcher observations and teacher reflection schedules indicated that teachers and learners were conscientious about using English almost exclusively in the English medium class. According to one teacher in response to a questionnaire, this 'rule' is sometimes enforced with a fine! In focus group discussions, the teachers confirmed this, but said that in Afrikaans second language lessons, much English and Xhosa were used, especially initially. Teachers stated that sometimes they code-switched, mainly to ensure understanding or for emphasis or discipline.

Resources were scarce for the English medium stream. They did not have text-books, either for English 'first language', or for Afrikaans 'second language'.

Afrikaans was used almost all the time, in Afrikaans medium classes, except during the English second language periods. A teacher who was fluent in Xhosa had helped one learner at first with Xhosa explanations, but he had picked up Afrikaans quickly from the other children.

Some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which English was taught as a second language to Afrikaans medium learners. It was felt that teachers tended to teach English through Afrikaans and did not give learners enough exposure to English. However, one of the Foundation Phase teachers said she had 'English days'. She said she did not believe in code-switching.

Teachers felt English proficiency was important for learners when they left school. They claimed that the English proficiency of learners in the English medium class was markedly better than that of learners in the Afrikaans medium class although both were learning English as an additional language. Teachers felt that learners in the Afrikaans classes were not given enough opportunity to practice their oral skills. In focus group discussions, Grade 7 learners from the English medium class seemed far more confident and outgoing than those from the Afrikaans classes. This may have been related to their socio-economic backgrounds – teachers suggested that ambitious parents with bright children placed them in the English classes; in addition the parent questionnaires indicated that nearly all (95%) of Xhosa families spoke English at home as well.

Although immersion learning seemed to be effective for the majority of learners in the English class, teachers reported that there were some children who did not seem to benefit. They said that they sank into passivity, but 'came alive' when they had the opportunity to communicate in their mother tongue. Teachers felt that Xhosa learners were being disadvantaged by not having the opportunity to learn their home language at school. Teachers had found it difficult to teach through the medium of English at first but after a while found it no different from teaching in Afrikaans.

Learners' perceptions: Learners felt positive about learning English and said that they could help their families at home because they were more fluent in English. However they noted that their home language skills were not good and one said he sometimes felt "a bit of a stranger at home". Some of the Xhosa learners said they would like to learn their home language at school.

Discussion of case studies

The purpose of the case studies was, firstly, to understand how individual schools were responding to the national LiEP, and secondly, to help the schools understand their language practices as a first step towards either developing a school language policy or improving their existing one.

There was no intention of generalising from the case studies. However, we believe it is helpful to compare the situations in the four schools, and to relate these to the survey and EMIS (1999, 2000) data.

Of the four schools investigated, only the well-resourced, suburban school had an official language policy, although it was not drawn up in accordance with the LiEP guidelines. However, all four schools were making adaptations to changing linguistic circumstances. The suburban school in East London and the township school in King William's Town had responded to the diminishing importance of Afrikaans as a national language: the former was in the process of terminating Afrikaans medium classes, and the latter had become a parallel medium school with an English medium stream. The rural and township African schools had responded to the increasing importance of English as a national and a 'status language' by introducing English as a subject from Grade 1 and English as LoLT early on, in Grade 3 in the rural school and in Grade 4 and in the township school. In practice, however, there was bilingual LoLT and a much more gradual transition to English than these stated objectives indicated.

The language policy choices made by the four schools have given the researchers the opportunity to look at three broadly different approaches to the LoLT:

- home language (Afrikaans) throughout
- early English immersion in two situations:
 - where all the learners and the teachers speak English as an additional language²⁰
 - where the majority of learners and teachers speak English as their first language and others do not²¹
- home language (Xhosa) LoLT in the early years, with a gradual transition to English – it is important to bear in mind that in this situation all the learners and the teacher share the same home language; it is not the case that there are two different language groups in the same class.

It also offers the opportunity to look at parallel medium, transitional and single medium options.

Perhaps the first thing to note is that the language policy choices of the schools are determined to a large extent, but not entirely, by the socio-economic context in which they are located. The two African schools in the study are contextually similar. Both schools are small and relatively poorly resourced, with high rates of learner absenteeism and teacher morale eroded by the threat of redeployment. Parents are poor, uneducated, often unemployed and unable to pay much in the way of school fees. Parents in these schools see English as a way to 'put bread on the table', a way out of the poverty trap. Both parents and teachers equate English acquisition

²⁰ This is similar to the situation in Canadian immersion programmes, which are the context for much research on bilingual education.

²¹ Discussing the Canadian situation, Cummins (2001) claims that learners are more likely to achieve native like proficiency in this context than in an immersion programme.

with time on task, and the pedagogical theories supporting home language support and additive bilingualism, as recommended in the LiEP, have not circulated amongst teachers or parents.

In the township context, parents with greater means send their children to better resourced English medium schools in town. The perception amongst township teachers is that parents do so because town schools offer English LoLT from Grade 1. This perception is confirmed by de Klerk (2000) in interviews with parents in Grahamstown who had sent their children to English medium schools (see also de Klerk's two chapters in this issue). This has put pressure on township schools to offer English LoLT earlier, to boost shrinking learner numbers. As Brown (1971, in Pratt, 1999, 88) puts it, "In an unequal system the deprived tend to formulate their goals in terms of the favoured" and demand for access to English overrides consideration of linguistic realities or learners' access to knowledge.

However, the socio-economic and linguistic circumstances are unable to sustain the early introduction of English as LoLT. Xhosa is the dominant language of the school and community (it is the home language of all learners and teachers) and there is very little, if any, exposure to English outside of the classroom. In practice, therefore, there is extensive code-switching in the classroom and a gradual transition to English as LoLT. This process appears to be more systematic in the urban than the rural school.

In both the urban and rural schools the differences between the stated LoLT and actual practices in the classroom have serious implications for such things as assessment and provisioning. It is problematic if children are learning in two languages but only being assessed in one, if they are talking about ideas in two languages but only have access to written material in one. One of the consequences of this is extensive oral translation, which is time-consuming; and rote learning rather than conceptual understanding, which impedes children's educational progress.

In both schools, classrooms were dominated by teacher talk, drills and learners' responses were mainly limited to short answers to closed questions. In the Alice school, teachers claimed that this was because learners did not have the English language proficiency to engage in open-ended answers. However it should be noted that while teachers code-switched between languages to a greater or lesser degree according to their personal beliefs, it appeared that even teachers who did feel free to use Xhosa in the classroom did not seem to engage in markedly different language practices. It would appear therefore that as Arthur (1998) has noted, practices become institutionalised and appropriate choice of (and adherence to) LoLT is not a sufficient condition for the promotion of the 'general conceptual growth of learners'. Teachers need specific training and a better understanding of the role of language in effective learning in the classroom.

Thus in these two schools, there appear wide gaps between the intentions of the LiEP and the language practices in the schools; between the political imperatives at the level of policy formation and the socio-economic imperatives on the ground; between the theoretical underpinnings of additive bilingualism that have guided policy formation and perceptions on the ground that time on task is the route to language acquisition; between the desire for access to English and the capacity to support English LoLT in schools; between stated school policies and actual school practices; between the aim of English proficiency for learners and their actual lack of proficiency.

It is important to keep in mind that according to our survey and the EMIS (1999, 2000) data, these two schools are typical of the language profiles and practices of primary schools in all

four districts under investigation in the Eastern Cape. However, it is also important not to disregard those minority schools with different profiles and practices.

The suburban school in East London and the township school in King William's Town have a number of similarities with each other and some differences. They are both large, relatively well-resourced schools. The staff are relatively homogeneous, in the case of the suburban school they are mainly English-speaking, whereas in the township school they are mainly Afrikaans-speaking. In both cases, the learner profile is multilingual and multicultural, however the suburban school is more heterogeneous than the township one. There are also differences within the parallel medium township school: the Afrikaans medium classes are linguistically and culturally more homogeneous than the English medium classes.

The two schools seem to hold similar views about inducting children into the LoLT. The same LoLT is used from the beginning to the end of primary school. For the majority of children in these two schools, this is their home language. In the case of the minority of children who are learning in their additional language (in both cases this is English), early immersion is seen as the best route. There is very little mixing of languages in the classroom, though code-switching is occasionally used in situations that demand it. Parents are encouraged to expose their children to as much English as possible out of school.

There seems to be quite a strong belief on the part of parents and teachers in a natural approach to additional language learning. However, this is really only put into practice with regard to English as LoLT. There is concern in the King William's Town school that English is poorly taught as an additional language to Afrikaans speakers. Neither school takes advantage of the opportunities for learners to learn languages naturally from each other. These schools do not take full advantage of the opportunities available to, "facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and region, while at the same time creating an environment in which respect for languages other than ones own would be encouraged" (Section 4.1.3 of the LiEP). Consequently, they do not communicate the message to learners that "being multilingual should be a defining characteristic of being South African". (Section 4.1.4 of the LiEP)

The dominant language of the suburban school is English, and although learners are allowed to use Xhosa or Afrikaans in the playground, there seems to be quite strong social pressure to use English. The dominant language in the township school in King William's Town is Afrikaans. However, both Afrikaans and Xhosa are freely used in the playground. African learners use English to communicate with their Afrikaans-speaking playmates, and in both schools English appears to be the *lingua franca* for intercultural communication. However, in the King William's Town school, perhaps because of the small number of African children, English is largely a 'language of the classroom'.

In both these schools, classroom practices seem to be aligned with school language policies, and appear to be successful in meeting the requirements of the LiEP to give the majority of learners access to education (with the notable exception of a minority of Xhosa-speaking learners in the township school). However, in both cases, there are considerable gaps between the LiEP aims and the school language policy intentions: for African- and some Afrikaans-speaking learners, English acquisition may be achieved at the expense of their first language, that is, considered a 'subtractive' form of bilingualism in terms of the LiEP. However Makoni (1994) cautions the use of this concept in the African context which is not directly comparable to minority immigrant societies in a Western context, and perhaps it is more correctly interpreted in terms of home language shift in the context of these particular kinds of schools, (Winkler, 1997).

A related concern is that Xhosa is neglected, though it is taught as a third language in the suburban school, and so Afrikaans and English-speaking children are not becoming communicatively competent in the most widely spoken language in the Eastern Province, contrary to the LiEP aims of multilingualism and developing all official languages.

How should these schools take the project of developing a school language policy, or improving their existing one, forward? In the case of those schools that do not have an official policy, it would make sense to formalise existing practices, so that all concerned know what is happening and can plan accordingly. In the case of the schools in Grahamstown and Alice, this would mean being explicit about code-switching practices, and necessitate reaching some kind of consensus amongst teachers about the value of code-switching so that it could be developed into a coherent dual medium practice. It would mean thinking carefully about the stages of gradual transition to English, and formalise this as policy.

There would also need to be consultation with parents. This process would need to be managed by the SGB, though in practice the principal would have to play a guiding role.

However, as long as parents and teachers equate English acquisition with time on task and therefore English LoLT, they are unlikely to make decisions about school language policy that include a stronger role for home language as LoLT, as suggested in the literature and the LiEP. Therefore a prerequisite would be thorough and accessible information on the literature and research underpinning such proposals and a careful consideration of both theory and context to develop an appropriate policy.

Once schools have formal policies, they can take steps to monitor, evaluate and improve them. It is important to see the official policy as something flexible and open to change, since in every school the sociolinguistic context is dynamic (Corson, 1999). In the case of the suburban school in East London, for example, the school community under the guidance of the SGB might use the information gathered in this research to identify and prioritise what they see as problems with their policy. They might for example prioritise the fact that children from Xhosa-speaking backgrounds are not becoming fully literate in this language. They could then seek solutions, for example, making Xhosa reading material more widely available in the school and encouraging parents to make it available at home. Teachers expressed concern in the Foundation Phase that it would muddle children to have more than one language in their print environment. One class could introduce Xhosa in the print environment and carefully monitor the effect on children. If it is positive, the practice could be adopted by all classes. If it is negative, the reasons for this should be analysed and depending on the results, the practice adapted or dropped.

In our view, it is this kind of reasoned, gradual approach, based on evidence and contextually sensitive, that is most likely to result in sound policies (for further information on such an approach see Corson, 1999). Attempts to change schools language policies overnight are likely to further destabilise what are already fragile systems.

Finally, the capacity of School Governing Bodies needs to be noted. In the four schools studied, only one SGB, at the suburban school, had discussed a school language policy; in this case, the final decision had been taken by the principal and staff and the policy itself was not aligned with the recommendations of the LiEP. At this school the researchers were able to report back to the SGB who said they were keen to work with the researchers in developing the school language policy and practices. However the SGBs at the other schools had not considered the matter of a school language policy at all. The researchers tried several times to

meet with the SGBs to present the research findings and to discuss taking the question of developing a school language policy further. At one school an unofficial meeting did eventually take place; at the other two, there was no success. In all three schools it appeared that there were tensions between the SGBs and the teachers, and in one school the SGB was caught up in a protracted power struggle amongst the staff, that did not allow for any serious consideration of other matters. Although it is not possible to generalise from these findings, these difficulties and the reported low levels of literacy of parents of the two schools typical of the majority of schools in the Eastern Cape, perhaps prompt the need to carefully re-evaluate the capacity of SGBs to drive the process of school language policy development.

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