

Language equity and Assessment in south African education*

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that language and assessment are closely linked and that the Language-in-Education policy and other additive bilingual initiatives have failed to address educational equity in South African schools. Despite the aspirations of politicians to move towards a policy of multiculturalism through the additive approach to bilingualism in education, it is the opinion of this study, that this policy essentially remains a symbolic gesture.

Key words: language equity; assessment; multilingualism; English as medium of instruction; differential outcomes

The language policy as stated in the *South African Constitution adopted by the Constitutional Assembly of South Africa on 8 May 1996, Act 108 of 1996* (S A Govt, 1996a) aims to redress the injustice of apartheid, where two languages, English and Afrikaans, were given status and privilege over all other languages. Eleven languages, nine African languages together with English and Afrikaans are now recognised as official languages. In the LANTAG Report it is stated that

[e]very person shall have the right to basic education and equal access to educational institutions, to instruction in the language of his or her choice whenever this is reasonably practicable, and to establish, where practicable, educational institutions based on a common culture, language or religion, provided that there should be no discrimination on the grounds of race (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996: 43).

There is a perception that the vision of the ANC to redress inequities of the past by offering all South Africans the use of the language of their choice to provide equal opportunities to teaching and learning, is likely to remain a symbolic gesture in the foreseeable future. The South African government has not shown commitment to the resourcing of multilingualism or the additive bilingualism model in a co-ordinated, systematic way. The financial and human resources that are required to implement the language-in-education policy are not readily available. As a result of the functional and economic value attached to English both nationally and globally, the economic

* Article based on research for an M.A. in the Department of Linguistics and Literary Theory, RAU, prepared under the supervision of Prof. Henk Kroes.

survival of the African language population will require high levels of proficiency in English. At present 80% of the South African population choose English as the language of learning and instruction but, ironically, in making this choice, they reinforce their linguistic colonial heritage. English as the language of choice of the majority of South African learners will result in entrenching unequal opportunities to teaching and learning and thus undermine the success of the additive bilingual approach to a multilingual policy in education (see NDoE, 1998: 22).

Equity in education through multilingualism

Equity in education is a theme that has demanded attention throughout the world and at home (see ANC, 1994: 60). Notions of equity are associated with terms such as *fairness, equivalence, parity, balance, consistence* and *comparability*. Although equal opportunity in education is a priority for the government, the implementation of the Language-in-education policy and the impact of language on the achievement of learners has not received the funding and attention it deserves. Research reveals that language and achievement are inextricably linked and the use of English as the language of learning and teaching by the majority of second language learners in South African schools should be seen as a major contributor to the poor pass rates and dropout rates of learners throughout the education system (see Barry, 1994; 1999, Roessingh & Watt, 1996). English proficiency and cognitive language skills are essential for the achievement of learners who are required to complete assessment tasks in English, and who use English to perform assessment tasks in the other learning areas. The majority of learners in South Africa are still examined in English at NQF levels 2–8 therefore implementation of the language-in-education policy should receive urgent attention if equity in education is not to remain a myth.

It is the opinion of the writer that the interventions being made at political, theoretical and pedagogical levels in an attempt to influence future language use in South Africa are essentially uncoordinated and full of contradictions (see Chaka, 1997: 252).

In 1997 Minister Bengu admitted that, although theoretically learners have the right to education in the language of their choice, there are practical considerations that may hamper the choice of language medium and undermine the implementation of the language-in-education policy. The government's multilingual education policy has two essential aims.

- The first is to encourage the acquisition among learners of more than one language.
- The second is to provide a platform for cognitive and effective development for as many learners as possible.
- In pursuit of both aims, languages are taught as subjects as well as languages used for teaching and learning.

English as the medium of instruction should not be viewed as being the same as English second language and it should not be assumed that academic English is acquired in English programmes that teach English as a school subject. Krashen (1993: 144) criticises the effectiveness of most second language methods saying that they are limited in that they provide conversational language only, whereas most English programmes offering English as a subject focus on literature or grammar. It has been well documented that second language learners need more than conversational English for academic success across the curriculum.

Cummins (1984a: 21–34) has distinguished between two sets of language skills: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). So, for example, we are able to distinguish between the information processing demands of engaging in a casual conversation (BICS) and reading or writing a complex expository text (CALP). He argues

that learners will be unable to cope with the school curriculum unless their CALP is sufficiently developed. A learner's language-cognitive abilities need to be sufficiently well developed to cope with the curricular processes of the classroom. This proficiency could be developed in either of the bilingual learner's languages or in both simultaneously. In Cummins's view, CALP involves some universal underlying proficiency that is shared across languages. Once acquired in one language it can be transferred to any other language. Thus, CALP acquired in any African language could be transferred to English medium classes and vice versa. This theory of skills transfer is supported by research in cognitive science where attempts are made to look for representational schemas for complex narratives in two languages (see Hakuta, 1990: 34–40). Hakuta maintains that literacy is best developed in the mother tongue when integrated with activities in which the parents can participate; and that knowledge acquired during this period through instruction in the mother tongue will transfer to English (see Hakuta, 1990: 34).

The BICS/CALP distinction does help us to understand the contradictions in evidence about differences in academic achievement among second language learners. These hypotheses have been interpreted to mean that a solid foundation of mother tongue literacy and subject matter learning would best prepare learners for learning in English. Hakuta (1990: 34) claims that the primary justifications that are given for mother tongue instruction are that the development of a full range of proficiency skills in English takes time. Cummins (1986: 18–36) suggests that the learner with limited English proficiency may need five to seven years to obtain sufficient CALP to perform well on academic tasks, whereas BICS take about two years.

If this theory were considered valid by South African policy makers, it would be apparent to them that most L2 learners are unlikely to have acquired the English proficiency to study the type of cognitively demanding, context-reduced subjects they are exposed to from Grade 4. Limited English proficient (LEP) second language learners are not able to demonstrate higher order thinking, such as analysing, categorising, distinguishing between fact and opinion, generalising, hypothesising, arguing etc. because they lack the CALP required for performing higher cognitive operations through the medium of English (see Barry, 1999: 244–247). Additionally the majority of South African parents do not have the English proficiency to assist their children academically.

According to Elley and Mangubhai (1992: 53–67), there is a strong correlation between literacy and achievement. Economic and social contexts impinge on literacy, which in turn has an effect on achievement. High economic status seems to create an environment in which reading skills are developed and hence higher achievement follows. High levels of literacy also appear to impact beneficially on the overall achievement of learners. Elley and Mangubhai (1992: 53–67), also draw our attention to the negative impact of instruction in a second language, maintaining that it relates very closely to the language mastery of the teachers themselves. In South Africa for many second language teachers, their lack of English competence is often compounded by a lack of subject knowledge. They are not trained or qualified to teach across the curriculum using English as the medium of instruction (see Van Rooyen, 1990: 4).

Additionally, Elley and Mangubhai (1992: 53–67) claim that literacy levels correlate highly with school reading resources, as opposed to home reading resources, and the importance that teachers place on reading. A lack of reading material in the environment when the child is initially learning to read may inhibit his reading development. If learners are faced with texts that are too difficult for them they often gain little information from their reading and become demotivated. A reading development deficiency therefore has the potential to make any disparity that the Grade 5 child experiences greater than already described (see Macdonald, 1990: 100–101). The three components of the language transition problem are the child, the teacher and the texts they use.

Van Rooyen (1990: 2–3) goes on to suggest that, because of the home milieu, the linguistic environment of the LEP child is often deprived, for example through lack of English written material, English radio and television. Moreover LEP pupils often lack the childhood heritage of fables, nursery rhymes, proverbs, songs and games which form part of the English-speaking child's cultural world and which are often referred to within a classroom situation.

In reality English dominates the educational landscape in South Africa and it is evident that we are moving towards a monolingual society. There is also the perception that English is being entrenched by the ANC as the dominant language in business, commerce, industry and government in South Africa in its effort to marginalise Afrikaans by restricting its use in the world of commerce, industry and the public sector (see Nzimande and Pampallis, 1992: 122). According to Nzimande and Pampallis (1992: 122) and Chaka (1997: 255–264) educational achievement and proficiency in English can still be regarded as the epicentre of equal opportunities. They maintain that English is still regarded as being more important than either the maintenance or development of the indigenous languages and that in cities, the trend in education appears to be that black parents are sending children to previously white schools where the language of learning is English. Additionally, the majority of black parents insist on their children being taught in the medium of English from Grade 1 (see Macdonald, 1990: 63). This preference for English as the dominant language in education largely undermines the multilingual nature of the additive approach to bilingualism advocated by the ANC and contradicts the notion of language to promote equal opportunities in South Africa (see Chaka, 1997: 253–254). The implementation of the gradual immersion model to support the additive approach to bilingualism has not been implemented successfully in the majority of schools in South Africa (see Meyer, 1997: 226–237).

Students realise that a high level of language proficiency is essential for successful participation within the global village and that technology has opened new contexts with wide ranges of purposes and participants to new linguistic challenges internationally. In Chaka's study, undertaken at the University of the Western Cape, students themselves experience the importance of access to international participation. In an interview response a student emphasises the need to ... have one common language of instruction and communication – one international language which in this particular instance is English (1997: 253).

The implementation of the *Language-in-Education Policy* of multilingualism and additive bilingualism, along with the total integration and the *Anglicising* of Afrikaans schools remain some of the most highly contested areas of government policy. The language issue has led to racial confrontation at Afrikaans-medium schools in areas such as Potgietersrust and Vryburg. Currently Minister Asmal is being challenged by the Veterinary Faculty of the University of Pretoria to allow students studying at Onderstepoort to write their examinations in Afrikaans.

Multilingualism to promote equal educational opportunities

As early as 1981, Banks interpreted multicultural education as a type of education that is concerned with

...creating educational environments in which students from all cultural groups will experience educational equity (1981: 52).

The interventions being made at the political and educational policy levels clearly reflect his view in the strong emphasis placed on equitable and meaningful access to education and the establishment of additive multilingualism as an approach to language-in-education in South Africa (see NDoE, 1998: 43).

The terms “multilingual” and “multicultural” are used interchangeably in the context of the policy documents reflecting the notion that the way a culture sees the world is reflected in its language (see Hyde, 1994: 300). From this perspective there is an emphasis on equal opportunity to learning through the provision of education in the eleven official languages (language of choice) where it might be practicable in multicultural educational settings. Therefore the concept and implications of *equal opportunity* for bilingual or non-mother tongue learners who learn and are assessed in a language other than their mother tongue, requires clarification in the South African context.

In a study undertaken in British inner city schools, Rex found that many non-English speaking children were placed at an educational disadvantage because they were obliged to use English as the language of learning. He maintains that the notion of equality of opportunity

...refers to the elimination of differences in the opportunities offered to different children of different class, racial and religious backgrounds ... The issue of equality of opportunity is that of ensuring that children of different class, ethnic and racial backgrounds have the same chances of success in selection and examination (1989: 11–12).

Furthermore the language implications for this interpretation of equality of opportunity are that language and achievement are directly linked. Given the dominance of English in South African schools it is critical for children to be equipped as early as possible with a good command of English, since that is the language in terms of which their educational performance will ultimately be judged.

Despite the introduction of sweeping educational and language reforms in South Africa, the national examinations for the Grade 12 Senior Certificate are currently administered in English and Afrikaans only, therefore the above definition would appear to apply to the South African situation. Selection for positions in both higher education and the job market are currently based on the achievement of learners in the above examination, despite strong affirmative action initiatives in these domains (see NDoE, 1998: 32–35). Since the majority of learners in South Africa will ultimately be examined at Grade 12 level in English, English is placed firmly at the centre of language development for all South African children. Thus, according to Nzimande and Pampallis (1992: 122) and Chaka (1997: 255–264) the acquisition of English is still regarded as being more important than either the maintenance or development of the indigenous languages.

Language equity and assessment

Bias in relation to assessment is generally taken to mean that the assessment is unfair to one particular group or another. Differential performance in examinations where different groups obtain different score levels, is not necessarily the result of bias in the assessment. It may be due to real differences in performance among groups which may in turn be due to differing access to learning, or it may be due to real differences in the group's attainment in the learning area under consideration.

When the existence of group differences in average performance on an assessment task is taken to mean that the assessment is biased, the assumption is that one group is not inherently less able than the other. However, the two groups may well have been subject to different environmental experiences or unequal access to the curriculum. This difference will be reflected in examination scores. It is important to note that an examination that reflects such unequal opportunity in its scores is not, necessarily biased.

The issue at stake is whether or not individual learners have acquired the level of English proficiency that is required for them to demonstrate their knowledge and achieve successful scores

on the given assessment tasks. In accordance with *The Draft Assessment Policy for General Education and Training Grades R to 9 and ABET* (see NDoE, 1998) the Continuous Assessment model (CASS) requires that a range of assessment tasks involving a variety of language contexts, and a range of response formats and styles are used to ensure that learners are given numerous opportunities to demonstrate their competence. Morrow (1985: 8–10) emphasises the importance of the appropriacy of form, content and mode of assessment for different learners. He maintains that the broadening of the approach to assessment is most likely to offer learners alternative opportunities to demonstrate achievement if they are disadvantaged by any one particular form of assessment.

Messick's (1995: 5) concept of equity in assessment implies that assessment practice and the interpretation and use of assessment results need to be fair and just for all groups. Messick's view of using examination scores to make far-reaching judgements about individuals, includes the ethical values that provide the basis or justification for that interpretation or use. This aspect of assessment draws one's attention to the ethics involved in the adjustment of marks for learners who have not unequivocally demonstrated their mastery of the content and skills required to earn a pass in the Senior Certificate examinations.

Implications of differential outcomes in multilingual education

The discrepancy between the examination results of English mother tongue and English second language learners, who are assessed in English, remains controversial. There is little empirical evidence, based on South African studies, that has been published on the effect of language on academic achievement to substantiate the claims made by educationists in this regard (see Holman, 1999: 7). Serious equity issues in education and assessment have been raised as a result of the Department of Education's policy to award non-mother tongue speakers of English an additional five percent to enhance their scores on the 1998 Senior Certificate examination. The Department of Education maintains that this policy is to compensate for the fact that second language learners are placed at a disadvantage because the Senior Certificate examinations are provided in English and Afrikaans only. According to Holman the adjustment was fully justified. She claims that,

[a]n increase of six percent would have been reasonable. ... Incidentally, the adjustment need not be applied to children who speak more than one language at home, even if they do not habitually speak the language of tuition. For example, children speaking Zulu and Setswana at home, need not have had their matric marks adjusted (1999: 7).

Assessment in the OBE paradigm is criterion-referenced and credits are awarded for *demonstrated performance* and the information obtained from assessment must be used to improve and remedy the cause underlying the poor performance of learners. If assessment is to be used formatively for improving the quality of teaching and learning, the above practice will undermine the principles of equity that the NQF are seeking to promote.

In the opinion of this study, the fairness of a *general, across the board* adjustment based on home language is highly questionable. Given the mix of subjects, the varying degrees of cognitive demands they make, and opportunities for language interaction they offer, perhaps the most valuable adjustments would be to adapt the language models used in primary schools and the nature of the transition to English in the early stages of education (see Macdonald, 1990: 48; Ramirez et al., 1991: 40; Perez, 1996: 173). Children do not come to school with identical experiences and they do not have identical experiences at school. We cannot, therefore, expect assessment to have the same meaning for all learners. So, too, children enter school with different levels of English proficiency and one cannot assume that all children from a particular language

group are equally proficient at the outset or will progress at an equal rate in English. The complexity of choice of medium of instruction and the controversial arguments both for and against learners choosing English are well documented (see Cummings, 1976: 1–43; 1984: 21–34; Krashen, 1980: 155–175; 1984: 61–64; Porter, 1998: 28–39) and indicate that there are some clear differences in the performance of English first and second language learners (see Bond, 1995: 23–24). Swain (1986: 103) maintains that in different subjects, different threshold levels of the second language need to be reached. She adds that there are different thresholds for different content areas: the language proficiency required to succeed in mathematics may be both greater than and different from that needed to master business economics. Life skills on the other hand may be relatively generic yet provide an opportunity for learners to form and express opinions concerning attitudes and judgements rather than having to master specific terminology and learning content. Thus it creates a language rich environment.

In the South African context, Macdonald (1990: 40) found that young learners who do not have the support structure cited in the Canadian studies to develop subject-specific terminology and concepts are placed at an educational disadvantage if they are not initially supported by mother tongue education (see Swain, 1996: 91–93). Language structures also differ across the eleven official languages and there are psycholinguistic issues involved in the acquisition of a new language where ties continue to be made to the first language. At the ASEESA Conference held in Pretoria (1996), Cress expressed concern that in using alternative assessments as an enabling mechanism for the disadvantaged learner, these learners may in fact be placed at an educational disadvantage. She maintains that many learners in the rural areas have limited English proficiency and little, if any, exposure to English mother tongue speakers and written resources. Many of these learners have not been assessed by a wide variety of performance-based assessment tasks prior to writing the Senior Certificate examinations. Additionally, unlike learners in the Canadian, British and American ESL programmes, South African learners do not enjoy the benefit of enriched English input from the majority of ESL teachers (see Van Rooyen, 1990: 2; Meyer, 1997: 226–237). Most African language syllabi focus on grammar and as a result learners are not exposed to English forms that relate to meaningful use in communicative contexts and much of the input they receive could be termed functionally restricted (see NDoE, 1998: 22–23).

According to Greywinsten et al., a wide range of variables also influence performance in the assessment of language in the South African classroom, such as the attitude of the teacher, the learning environment, the learner's familiarity with assessment procedures, formats and technology used in the administration of the assessment (see 1992: 2).

It is interesting to note that the findings from a study undertaken by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the USA, which assessed the performance of high school students using different examination formats reflect similar outcomes to those found in South Africa. Bond found that extended-response essays result in mean differences between Afro-Americans and Anglo-Americans that parallel and actually exceed the differences found on multiple-choice reading assessment. Afro-Americans also received lower scores on their portfolio evaluations than did their white counterparts, regardless of the race of the rater. By recognising the discrepancies, a rigorous programme of performance-based assessments has been implemented to improve American education (see Bond, 1995: 23).

According to Morrow (1985: 2–6), the washback validity requires complementary changes in assessment practices to support the change in teaching and learning. Cress maintains that knowledge is constructed by a learner in interaction with others and with the environment, with the teacher facilitating this process. The assessment tasks and activities set must provide the

opportunity for this construction of meaning to take place and for its outcomes to be demonstrated across a variety of contexts (see 1996: 4). If learners are compensated with additional marks on tasks that they have not yet mastered, the policy of adjusting of marks will undermine the very principle of outcome-based assessment and the national outcomes or unit standards recognised by the South African Qualification Authority. It is the responsibility of the government, in the interest of the learners, the employers and the tertiary institutions in South Africa to give the assurance that learners who are awarded the Senior Certificate deservedly obtain the required results in English, and all the subjects taught via English.

Findings from Barry's research indicate that the following factors in the language-in-education arena remain a major influence on education and training in South Africa.

- The equal recognition of eleven official languages in South Africa does not automatically translate into equal status for all eleven languages. The official recognition of English as the language of the government confirms the power and value attached to English as the lingua franca at government level.
- Many black learners continue to associate English with social, educational and employment opportunities and therefore choose it as the language of instruction (see NDoE, 1998: 22).
- The studies undertaken by Meyer (1997: 226) indicate that there is a need for implementation of the Language-in-Education policy to be more rooted to realities on the ground. The importance of decisions pertaining to language policy to be taken at local and regional levels must be emphasised.
- In spite of the government's policy of multilingualism and additive bilingualism, English and Afrikaans remain the only two languages used for the Senior Certificate examinations. The government has not been able to deliver examinations to all South Africans in the languages of their choice and the funds for implementing this option are unlikely to become available in the near future. Thus the functional value of English as the/a medium of instruction is endorsed and learners are obliged to *change to English* in order to progress through the educational system.
- The complexity of matching mother tongue and bilingual teachers with learners is exacerbated by the large-scale retrenchment and deployment policy of the National Department of Education. Although black learners theoretically receive their education through the medium of English, in practice this does not happen. Many teachers have minimal English language skills and are not trained to teach the conventions of written Standard English, with the result that a great deal of the tuition takes place in the vernacular (see Meyer, 1997: 226; NDoE, 1998: 22). Additionally, unlike learners in the Canadian, British and American ESL programmes South African learners do not enjoy the benefit of enriched English input from the majority of ESL teachers (see Van Rooyen, 1990: 2; Meyer, 1997: 226–237).
- Learners have not acquired the cognitive academic language proficiency to describe or explain subject-related concepts across the curriculum. Learners have also not mastered the necessary cognitive language and reading skills to critically evaluate scientific or technical texts to master the content across the different learning areas. The assessment of English language skills is not restricted to English as a subject. It is imperative that all teachers are aware of the learners' prior knowledge and level of understanding across the learning areas to ensure the successful academic progress of all the learners in the classroom. Barnard (1995: 2) makes the point that mathematics is not simply application of numbers. The high failure rate in mathematics is

exacerbated because learners have not mastered the language of mathematics and specifically, mathematical terminology and concepts.

- Most African language syllabi focus on grammar and, as a result, learners are not exposed to English forms that relate to meaningful use in communicative contexts and much of the input they receive could be termed functionally restricted (see NDoE, 1998: 22–23).
- Demography and language variance has serious implications for multilingual education in South Africa, particularly for the implementation of the additive bilingualism model (see Chaka, 1997: 253–254).
- The large number of non-mother tongue speakers in the samples reported in the empirical study suggests that the enrolments in English schools are becoming increasingly heterogeneous. Multilingual classrooms create a new set of problems for EFL teachers who have not been trained in the teaching of English as a second language.
- Translating the language policy into practice without adequate financial and human resources is impossible.
- The lack of learning material at all levels of the education system and the lack of resources to fund the development of learning materials in the eleven official languages entrenches English as the language of learning across the curriculum.

Empirical evidence

In a study undertaken to examine the differential achievement of English first and second language speakers, Barry (1999) found that the English first language learners out-performed the second language learners consistently across Grades 4, 5, 6 and 12 in all the assessments, irrespective of the formats. Although English second language speakers were able to cope well on a literal language level in the reading and listening modes, they did not have the necessary competence in English to comprehend, make inferences about and critically evaluate the reading texts used in this study (see Barry, 1999: 209–232). These findings confirm Gray's findings that learners who participated in the TIMMS (1994) were unable to answer questions that required advanced reading skills and his assertion that there is no doubt that language competence exerts a considerable influence on academic performance (see 1997: 5–7).

According to Barry (1999: 243–244), English first language learners scored significantly higher in Grades 4, 5, and 6 in the oral and written modes. This clearly indicates that many learners do not have the productive skills to actively interact on an equal level with their English mother tongue counterparts in multilingual classrooms. Second language learners found it difficult to complete writing responses where they had to comprehend and interpret the question before they could recall the knowledge which then had to be formulated in the appropriate written form and register. Many second language learners across all levels in the sample did not attempt to answer the writing performance-based assessment tasks at all. The results of the study indicated that second language learners are not ready to demonstrate their knowledge on performance-based assessment tasks in English. All learners at all levels scored considerably higher on the multiple-choice formats (see Barry, 1999: 243–244).

Cress cautioned South African policy-makers that performance-based assessment could *disadvantage the already disadvantaged* learners in South Africa (1996: 3). This could certainly apply to English second language learners who have limited English proficiency and are assessed in English across the curriculum.

The disparity between the performance of English first and second language learners

Barry's (1999) findings confirm the differential performance of EFL and ESL speakers in South African schools and it is suggested that these differences cannot simply continue to be attributed to test bias or cumulative disadvantage. ESL learners at all grade levels were unable to answer questions which required them to process figurative, non-literal language, make inferences, predict outcomes and distinguish between facts and opinions. The consistent outcomes across all grades lead one to assume that these skills have not been taught to most of these ESL learners.

Recommendations

The recommendations that apply to the national and provincial departments are three-fold:

- To improve the English competence of English second language learners.
- To provide a learning environment that will afford all learners an equal opportunity to learn English.
- To provide the necessary resources and teacher training to ensure that all teachers are supported in the implementation of the new language-in-education policy, the assessment policy and OBE.

The complexity of the language-in-education question will need to be addressed at teacher training level. Teachers need to have an understanding of the theories underlying second language acquisition and be trained in second language teaching methodology to enable them to teach effectively in a multilingual situation.

Teachers need to have an understanding of the distinction between basic language proficiency and cognitive academic language proficiency which is fundamental to the teaching of higher order thinking skills. Additionally they need a sound theoretical knowledge of performance-based assessment methodology that supports the continuous assessment model (CASS) and they need to know how to use continuous assessment to enhance teaching and learning. Learners must be taught how to respond to assessment tasks that assess higher order thinking skills. Skills such as classifying, organising and clarifying facts should be taught. These are considered to be some of the basic thinking skills which are also necessary skills for successful reading and writing.

Teachers need to design appropriate classroom activities that include group work so learners can acquire the appropriate communication skills, which incorporate the components of communicative competence. They also need to provide a wide variety of classroom activities and assessment tasks throughout the year so that learners have the opportunity to use all four modes in English to demonstrate their knowledge. It is essential that reading and writing activities and tasks are given to them regularly so that learners are able to develop the necessary skills to carry out performance-based assessment tasks successfully.

Even though ESL learners cannot be expected to demonstrate the same ability on tests in English as mother tongue learners, instead of adjusting the Senior Certificate examination scores (see Holman 1998: 1), English second language teachers should be trained in English second language teaching methodology and the fundamental principles of second language acquisition theory. Teachers should be equipped to deal with language-in-education problems at classroom level. Practice in answering different assessment formats that reflect authentic language tasks in the classroom should be provided. School staff should have the necessary knowledge to advise parents on the advantages and disadvantages of using English as the medium of instruction from Grade 1 (see Barry, 1999: 244–249).

Conclusion

Barry's research indicates that, while the disparity between English first and second language learners could be expected, these results must be accepted and acknowledged as real differences between the language competence of ESL and EFL learners. English proficiency and cognitive language skills are essential for the achievement of learners who are required to learn in English and who use English to perform assessment tasks in the other learning areas. Because one needs to appreciate that there are many reasons for the discrepancy in performance, it is argued that the adjustment of marks is not the solution to correct the inequity of Senior Certificate performance. All learners entering institutions of Higher Education or the workplace require advanced language skills therefore it is the duty of the education authorities to ensure that successful, systemic language reform is implemented through appropriate academic language programmes designed to cater for the diverse South African population.

Finally, it is important to use the information obtained from assessment to improve and remedy the causes underlying the poor language performance of learners.

References

- Altenroxel, L. 1998. Pupils get right to study in any of 11 languages. *Pretoria News*, 1996, p. 5. Pretoria.
- Banks, J.A. 1981. *Multi-ethnic Education: theory and practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Barry, D.M. 1999. Curriculum Reform in South Africa: Assessment of English in the National Qualifications Framework. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Johannesburg: Rand Afrikaans University.
- Bengu, S. 1996. Students must learn of SA's multicultural nature. As quoted in the *Pretoria News*, 6 February 1996, p. 2. Pretoria.
- Bengu, S. 1998. Bengu to focus on quality education. Interviewed by Kevin O' Grady in *Business Day*, 7 January 1998, p. 3.
- Bond, L. 1995. Unintended Consequences of Performance Assessment: Issues of Bias and Fairness. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*. Winter 21–27.
- Brand, R. 1999. Asmal pledges himself to 5% improvement. *The Star*, p. 2. Johannesburg.
- Chaka, C. 1997. English 105 and its "language rainbow" character. *Journal for Language Teaching* 31(2): 253–264.
- Chall, J.S. 1983. *Stages of Reading Development*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cress, C. 1996. Equity in Educational Assessment. Paper read at the ASEESA Conference. 30 September – 1 October 1996. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Cummins, J. 1976. The influence of bilingualism on cognitive growth: A synthesis of research findings and explanatory hypothesis. *Working Papers on Bilingualism* 9: 1–43.
- Cummins, J. 1981. Age on arrival and immigrant second language learning in Canada: A reassessment. *Applied linguistics* 2: 132–149.
- Cummins, J. 1984a. Implications of bilingual proficiency for the education minority language students. *Language Issues and Education Policies*. ELT Documents, 119: 21–34. London: Pergamon Press & British Council.
- Cummings, J. 1984b. *Bilingualism and Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. 1986. Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review* 56: 18–36.
- Cummins, J. and Swain, M. 1986. *Bilingualism in Education: Aspects of Theory, Research and Practice*. London: Longman.

- Cummins, J. 1996. *Negotiating Identities: Education for the Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. Los Angeles, CA.: Association for Bilingual Education.
- Eiley, W.B. and Mangubhai, F. 1983. The impact of reading in second-language learning. *Reading Research Quarterly* 19(10): 53–67.
- Gray, D.J. 1997. *Mathematics and Science in South Africa: an international achievement study at Junior Secondary Level*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Greywinstein, W., Horne, F. and Kapp, J. 1992. *The Scoring of the Oral Performance Test*. Unpublished Report. Pretoria: College of Education for Further Training.
- Hakuta, K. 1986. *Mirror of language: The debate on bilingualism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hakuta, K. 1990. Bilingualism and education: A Research Perspective. *NCBE Focus: Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education* (1): 34–40.
- Hargreaves, A. 1994. *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teacher's Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*. New York: Teachers College.
- Hyde, M. 1994. The Teaching of English in Morocco: the place of culture. *English Language Teaching Journal* 48(14): 295–305.
- Klenowski, V. 1997. *Portfolio Assessment in Teacher Education*. Curriculum and Instruction Department, Hong Kong Institute of Education.
- Krashen, S. 1980. Aptitude and Attitude in Relation to Second Language Acquisition and learning. In: K.C. Dillier (ed.), *Individual Differences and Universals in Language Learning Aptitude*. Rowley: Newbury House. 155–175.
- Krashen, S. 1993. Sheltered subject-matter teaching. In: Oller, J. (ed.), *Methods that Work: Ideas for Literacy and Language Teachers*. (2nd ed.) Boston: Heinle and Heinle. 143–148.
- Macdonald, C.A. 1990. Crossing the threshold into standard Three (Main Report of the Threshold Project). *Report SOLING-16*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Meyer, D. 1997. The languages of learning: current practice and its implications for language policy implementation. *South African Journal for Language Teaching* 31(2): 226–237.
- Mokoena, E. 1999. Gloomy results: Township schools fail to improve performance. *Sowetan*, p.1. Johannesburg.
- Molnar, A. 1992. Contemporary Issues in Public and Private Schools. What Are Our Choices? *Educational Leadership* 84–86.
- Monare, M and Altentroxel, L. 1999. Teachers are a rotten lot -- Asmal. *Pretoria News*, 27 September 1999, p. 1. Pretoria.
- Monare, M. 1999. Asmal warns of action against incompetents: Heads will roll if schools continue to perform badly. *Pretoria News*, p. 2. Pretoria.
- National Department of Education (NDoE). 1995. *Towards A Language Policy in Education*. Discussion document. November 1995.
- National Department of Education (NDoE). 1997. *Curriculum 2005.. Specific outcomes, assessment criteria, range statements. Grades 1 to 9*. April 1997. Discussion document. Johannesburg.
- National Department of Education (NDoE). 1998. *Report: Investigation into the Senior Certificate Examination by the Ministerial Committee*. Pretoria.
- National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI). 1992. *LANGUAGE*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). 1992. *Developing a Qualifications Framework for New Zealand*. Wellington: New Zealand Department of Education (NZDE).
- Nzimande, B. and Pampallis, J. 1992. After Word. In: J. Frederickse (ed.), *All Schools for All Children*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Odendaal, M.S. 1985. Needs analysis of higher primary teachers in KwaZulu. *Per Linguam* 1: 1–99.

- Onukaogu, C. E. 1997. The Whole Approach to Literacy in the Third World: The Nigerian Experience. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 10(3): 186–199.
- Porter, R.P. 1998. The Case Against Bilingual Education. *The Atlantic Monthly* 281(5): 28–39.
- Rex, J. 1989. Equality of opportunity, multiculturalism, antiracism and education for all. In: G. Verna (ed.), *Education For All: A Landmark in Pluralism*. Lewes Falmer.
- South African Government. 1996b. *Language-in-Education Policy in Terms of Section 3(4)(m) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act 27 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Sunday Times*. 1999b. Government is about to fail another matric exam. *Sunday Times*, 26 September 1999, p. 18. Johannesburg.
- Swain, M. 1983. *Communicative competence. Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development*. Paper presented at Second Language Forum, University of California at Los Angeles.
- Swain, M. 1996. Discovering Successful Second language Teaching Strategies and Practices: From Programme Evaluation to Classroom Experimentation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 17(2–4): 89–104.
- Taitz, L. 1985. The English Education Needs of Teachers in Farm Schools: Instructional Aspects. *ELTIC Reporter (English Language Teaching Centre)* 13(1): 13–24.
- Taunyane, L.M. 1998. South Africa can't afford the matric failures. *City Press* 8 February, p. 2. Johannesburg.
- Tollefson, James W. 1991. *Planning Language, Planning Inequality. Language Policy in the Community*. London: Longman Inc.
- Van Rooyen, H. 1990. The disparity between English as a subject and English as the medium of learning. (A final report of the Threshold Project) *Report SOLING-20*. Pretoria: HSRC.

Dr. Denise Barry
P.O. BOX 12156
QUEENSWOOD 0121
TEL. 012 329 6666
FAX. 012 329 6080
dmbarry@global.co.za