Content and Language Integrated Learning in Namibia

Workshop Report

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Foreword

Hafeni Hatutale
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This report is the product of a joint co-operation project between the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, the Association of Teachers of English in Finland, the Namibian National Teachers Union (NANTU) and Ongwediva College of Education. The project examined the relevance of a set of methodologies, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), to teacher education needs in Namibia and our college diversification programme.

The workshops brought together thirty English language and subject teachers from Ondangwa (east and west). Overall focus was on identifying teaching and learning problems specific to the use of English as a medium of instruction. Specific attention was given to what are termed ‘language sensitive methodologies’ in respect to enhancing teaching and learning through English.

This series of workshops has examined the challenges facing Namibian teachers in their attempt to teach through the medium of English, alongside the potential for improved outcomes. The teachers report experiencing many problems. A key issue relates to the level of English exposure which is considered very low, particularly in the remote rural areas where English may be viewed as a foreign language for many learners and some teachers.

The co-operation between the groups involved in these workshops has clearly resulted in encouraging outcomes. Some of these appear likely to be effective and essential in enhancing the quality of English medium education in Namibia. The workshops have provided a platform for extensive dialogue on experiences from different environments leading to focus on possible solutions.

Based on the results of this project, the pilot phase has offered scope and clear direction on how to implement CLIL in Namibia and identified possible indicators to be considered in the process of implementation. We therefore wish to take our co-operation further and work together in designing and testing a module for subject and language teachers on language sensitive methodologies.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge with appreciation the efforts of all those who contributed to the development and production of this valuable document.

Introduction

David Marsh, Anne Unter, Tautiko Shikongo

This report is the result of a series of workshops and field studies carried out under the auspices of the Ongwediva College of Education (2000-2002) in conjunction with the University of Jyväskylä (Finland), the Namibian National Teachers Union (Namibia) and the Association of Teachers of English in Finland. The NGO partnership received support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Finland).

In addition to contributions from a range of experts involved in the workshops and studies undertaken in Namibia, some external specialists were invited to contribute comment on the broader implications of the main outcomes as found in Approaching Language-sensitive Expertise. John Clegg (UK) and Dieter Wolff (Germany) focus on methodological success factors in second language-medium education. Carole Bloch (South Africa) considers the role of African languages in relation to English-medium education as the basis of a successful teaching and learning strategy. Patti Swarts considers relevance to the Namibian context, and Bruce Marsland comments on the relationship between language teaching and ‘language-sensitive’ methods.

The Working Group consisted of thirty-five people, thirty of whom work as teachers in the Ondangwa (East-West) region of Namibia. The primary need identified by the working group at the outset was to identify means by which to upgrade teachers’ language and methodological skills in order to teach through the medium of English. The conclusion was that whereas the language needs should be enhanced through long-term development, to successfully teach through the medium of English in this context requires greater understanding of what are termed ‘language-sensitive methods’.

The report does not address broad issues about the implications of language policy in Namibia with respect to the role of English and local languages. Nor does it wish to imply any opinion, directly or indirectly, on Namibian educational performance indicators recently reported and discussed. It is merely an attempt to summarize the insight, views and opinions of practising teachers (grades 1-10, English language and non-language), and external experts, on means by which to enhance the quality of teaching and learning which could be implemented in local contexts.

It does reflect a view that language is at the centre of any educational enterprise, and that if it acts as a barrier to successful learning then strategies should be identified, tested and implemented to overcome any resulting deficiencies.

Education through the medium of English in Namibian schools is viewed as placing an extra burden on teachers and learners because, in differing ways according to location and social context, the position of the language is not predominant in the lives of people involved. Broadly speaking, English can be considered a ‘second language’ in this context, although linguistic diversity within the country means that for some it will be the ‘first’ language, and for others it will be far-removed from daily realities and could thus be considered a ‘foreign’ language.

There is considerable evidence that learning through a language which is not the first language of the child (second language medium education), requires adaptation of educational methods that may be successfully used when a child learns through his/her first language (first language medium education).

It should not be assumed that second language medium education is a disadvantage for learners or the societies in which they live. For example, forms of second language medium education are deliberately introduced in some heavily monolingual societies in order to reap the rewards that may be realized. Recognition of such benefits is resulting in introduction into mainstream education becoming increasingly widespread and commonplace. Second language medium education can, if implemented appropriately, offer advantages for individuals and societies in relation to linguistic, communicative and cognitive development. However, if implemented inappropriately it can result in negative consequences.
Finally, some comments on the English language and multilingualism. It is estimated that there are some 750 million people1 who have English as a second language, and who can use it effectively enough for their own purposes. This figure exceeds those who could be considered as having English as their first language. There are also considered to be a billion people presently learning English as a foreign language. To learn English, and to through English, are both highly topical issues in the aspirations of individuals, and the education of society. Correspondingly, there is increasing recognition that multilingualism (individuals able to communicate in different languages) and multilingualism (societies comprising individuals using different languages) offers the foundation for strengths through fusion, not weakness through fission. In essence, focus on the role of languages, from regional policy through to individual learning preferences2, is a critical issue worldwide, which acts as a catalyst for re-examining what we have considered to be problems in an effort to identify and implement solutions. Therefore much can be learned from examining how good practice is achieved in other countries and regions similarities to those of Namibia.

In summary, teaching and learning through the medium of a second language requires adaptation of methodologies that may be found effective in first language medium education. These have been referred to as ‘language-sensitive methods’. If language-sensitive methods were more widely employed in Namibian schools then that what is described as a ‘language problem’ might well be re-considered as ‘language potential’. Second language medium education should not be considered in terms of ‘second-best education’. On the contrary, it can be viewed as one feature of an educational system that allows for the best possible outcomes for the broadest range of learners. For this to happen, obstacles need to be converted into opportunities, and policies into good practice.

Recommendation

The Working Group

It is recommended that one or more of the four national teacher education institutes develop initial and in-service teacher development programmes that combine subject-specific methodologies and language sensitive pedagogy. These programmes should target teachers of all subjects that are taught through the medium of English, including teachers of English. Parts of such training could usefully involve subject and language teachers working alongside each other. An initial teacher education programme would not need to be realized as a large-scale module, but could be embedded into the teacher training curriculum. The links between subject-specific linguistic skills and conceptual demands, and a focus on subject-specific reading and writing in English, alongside spoken language, need to be embedded in these training programmes. In addition, put on language awareness and second language acquisition would be relevant in order to provide greater understanding of the potential and pitfalls of second language medium education in the Namibian context.

Programmes of this type would better equip teachers of languages and other subjects to face the challenges of education in the modern Namibian context. A focus on how we use language to learn and learn to use language would help a wide range of learners develop greater self-confidence and ‘thirst for learning’ through English-medium education in Namibian schools.

Applicability of Language-sensitive Methodologies to the Namibian Context

Patti Swarts

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Learning through a language other than one’s own, is an extremely complex issue. Many authors on language in education (eg, Brock – Utne, 2000; Heugh, et al, 1995; Ramirez et al, 1991) argue that language policy and practice in most post-colonial southern African countries has constituted one of the most wide-spread and devastating of contextual disadvantages to learning. This argument is based on the fact that the majority of children in these countries have to learn through a language in which they are neither competent nor feel comfortable. This kind of learning is called subtractive bilingualism1 (Donald, et al, 1997), and can arise from a situation where neither teachers nor learners feel proficient and comfortable in the language used as medium of instruction. This, naturally, can have a negative influence on the quality of the teaching and learning process. To a certain extent, this is what we experience in some Namibian schools, as is demonstrated by learner achievement (or the lack thereof). A policy of bilingualism in education is not necessarily undesirable. (Donald, et al, 1997). There is evidence (Heugh, et al, 1995) that bilingualism can have positive learning as

1 (Donald, et al, 1997) It is subtractive in language to learn in another language than one’s own and “subtractive” to the extent that it takes away the value of the first language in the context of formal learning.

2 See, for example, Harlech-Jones, B. 2001. Some prevalent assumptions in language policy, with contextualisations from Namibia. In Trewby, R. & Fitchat, S. as above. He notes that ‘There is a distinct, describable pedagogy of bilingual schooling for a democratic South Africa’ in Heugh, K., Siegruehn, P., and Ramirez et al, 1991) argue that language policy and practice in most post-colonial southern African countries has constituted one of the most wide-spread and devastating of contextual disadvantages to learning. This argument is based on the fact that the majority of children in these countries have to learn through a language in which they are neither competent nor feel comfortable. This kind of learning is called subtractive bilingualism (Donald, et al, 1997), and can arise from a situation where neither teachers nor learners feel proficient and comfortable in the language used as medium of instruction. This, naturally, can have a negative influence on the quality of the teaching and learning process. To a certain extent, this is what we experience in some Namibian schools, as is demonstrated by learner achievement (or the lack thereof). A policy of bilingualism in education is not necessarily undesirable. (Donald, et al, 1997). There is evidence (Heugh, et al, 1995) that bilingualism can have positive learning as
well as social benefits through the process of "additive" bilin-
gualism. A second (or more) language is "laved added to the first language through a process of gradual transition. In this process (linguist viewed as an obsta-
cle to communication, but is regarded as a source of enrich-
ment. Language skills are first developed in the mother tongue (or home language), and then transferred to English. According to Avenstrup (2001) this process makes the following demands:
- oral and written development in the mother tongue has to be very rich and intense both in its own right and as a solid basis for skills transfer to English.
- the actual process of transfer of language skills from mother tongue to English must be optimal, and
- particular attention must be paid to widening and deepening the English language proficiency of teach-
ers and learners alike to meet the demands of the curriculum.
Namibia adopted the policy for children to learn through the mother tongues (home languages) during the first three years of schooling when basic skills of reading, writing and concept formation are developed. From Grade 4 on-
wards English becomes the medium of instruction and the mother tongue can be taken as a subject. It is intended that the education development cycle should enable learners to ac-
ture reasonable competence in English and be prepared for English medium instruction throughout the secondary cycle. Namibia, in its language policy, thus combined the study of English (a widely used and international language) with the study of local languages, in an attempt to meet the demands of globalisation, but also to take advantage of its richness of local languages for their pedagogical and cultural ben-
efits. If this is the intention, what can be done to ensure that both teachers and learners become proficient, compe-
tent and comfortable in English?
I believe that the demands could, to a large extent be met through Language Sensitive Methodologies as described in other chapters in this publication. The main reasons are that the Namibian language policy provides for the mother tongue as the basis to facilitate the development of a second language, and the philosophy of learner-centered education requires holistic development, interrelatedness, integration, active participation, collaboration and reflection.
The question that arises now is how to prepare teachers to utilise Language Sensitive Methodologies. In this regard I will suggest strategies for teacher education programmes. These include the development of:
- reflective teachers who continuously examine their own practice in order to improve and enhance learning
- teachers who are willing to experiment with new ideas and methodologies
- teachers who are confident and proficient them-
selves in the medium of instruction (for Grades 1-3 mother tongue, from Grade 4 onwards English)
teachers who can employ a variety of methodologies relevant to the needs of the learners and the particu-
lar situation
- teachers who have both subject and language competence
- teachers who can facilitate active participation and collaborative learning by learners
- teachers who can plan and work together in a team to integrate aspects across subjects, and to demon-
strate the interrelatedness of what is to be taught and learned
- teachers who are familiar with and can make use of the new technologies to enhance learning, including
language learning
- teachers who respect cultural diversity and who are tolerant of difference.
Many of the above aspects are already intended by the Basic Education Teacher’s Diploma (BETD), but need to be strengthened and emphasised through research (including action research), professional development of teacher edu-
cators, and enrichment of the syllabuses. These, I believe, are the issues to be considered in developing proposals for further collaboration on language sensitive methodologies.

Towards Successful English-medium Education in Southern Africa

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Educational achievement in sub-Saharan Africa should be better. Literacy levels and school attendance and ma-
triculation rates are too low (Bambosse 2000). There are good reasons for this. There are, for example, with low
levels of literacy and education in children’s home back-
grounds; they have also to do with a lack of school re-
sources and high class sizes. Crucially, however, the effec-
tiveness of learning and teaching is limited by the fact that
teachers and students are working in a second language (L2) in areas in which exposure to the language in the com-
munity is low. It is difficult in the best-resourced contexts for teachers and students to teach and learn in a language in which all may feel uncertain. In countries where paren-
tal literacy and school resources are low it becomes particu-arily difficult. To teach successfully in these circumstances requires special skills. In my experience, teachers and learn-
ers in Namibia are as dedicated as in any country I know;
and their command of English is often good. But like their peers in other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, they have a big task. The linguistic and cognitive barriers to learning, which education in a second language places in their way, are too high for them to overcome without a significant change in their practice.

What is the solution to the problem of under-achievement in L2-medium schools? There are two routes to a solution. One is gradually to introduce high-quality education through the home/community African language. This is not my sub-
ject here, but it is without doubt a vital ingredient in raising school achievement (Alexander 2000) and I return to it be-
low. The other route is to improve L2-medium education.

One should stress (as others do in this report) that it is not L2-medium education itself which is difficult (though it does, arguably, make heavier demands than learning in a first language). The problem is that it requires special skills to teach a subject in a second language and conventional teacher-education rarely provides them. Teachers need to teach in a specific way – which I will refer to as "language-
sensitive" teaching. This is especially important for subject

Lessons make cognitive demands on learners: that is, they assume that learners have certain cognitive skills. For ex-


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Lessons make cognitive demands on learners: that is, they assume that learners have certain cognitive skills. For ex-


ample, when a science teacher asks students to conduct an experiment, s/he may assume that they can think in certain ways (such as, hypothesising, predicting, showing cause and effect, drawing conclusions). These cognitive processes make language demands on the students. In other words the students must be able to express these cognitive processes in English in speech and writing. The question the teacher must ask herself is: can the students do these things?

Similarly, if s/he asks the students to write about the experiment and its results, s/he makes other cognitive demands on them. She may assume, for example, that they understand key concepts and have the planning and composing ability to organise their ideas and write them in a logical order. These cognitive processes also make language demands on the students: do they have the English vocabulary to express these cognitive processes? Can they show the sequence of ideas required by a good written record of an experiment (e.g. showing time sequence by using connectors such as first, then, next etc and drawing conclusions by phrases such as so, therefore)? Teachers need to ask themselves questions like these about their students’ cognitive and linguistic ability to take part in lessons. If they think the students need support, then they need to provide it.

Providing language support

Students who are learning in a L2 face heavy linguistic and cognitive demands. They are working harder than students learning in their first language. This means that teachers need to give them a lot of support. They can do this in many ways. Language-sensitive practice turns essentially around aspects of teacher-talk, the design of classroom tasks, the teaching of learning strategies for the L2-medium classroom, encouraging and refining the use of learners’ first languages in the classroom, and developing school language policies. This report lists the techniques available to teachers who teach their subject in a second language and I will not discuss them further. It is, however, important to emphasise the steps which should be taken within any education service which intends to raise school achievement by taking account of the fact that most teaching and learning is done in a second language.

Taking account of language in L2-medium education:

Shorter-term steps

1. Ensure that all the main stakeholders and especially the decision-makers within the education service understand on the one hand the concept of language-related disadvantage in education, and on the other the very specific approach to education which is required within a context in which a L2 is the main medium of teaching and learning. This is difficult and can be a long, uphill struggle.

2. Ensure that the education service can call on expertise in teaching and learning the primary and secondary curriculum through a second language, both in INSET and initial teacher-training (ITT). It is often difficult to find.

3. Train all teacher-educators, in INSET and initial ITT to apply language-sensitive practice to the training of teachers within their subject, and ensure that teacher-education in INSET and ITT requires of trainees high standards in language-sensitive practice.

Longer-term steps

4. Improve adult literacy in L1 and English: literacy parents can help their children achieve in school.

5. Improve early years L1 literacy: children with good foundations in L1 literacy and cognitive skills are better prepared for schooling and especially for school in a second language.

6. Gradually introduce high-quality education through the medium of home/community languages, offering schools which exemplify a range of roles for these languages, as vehicles for the whole or parts of the curriculum. At an early stage, introduce African languages in some schools as a medium for the whole of primary education.

7. Provide evidence, over time, for the benefits which high-quality education through a home/community language has both for learning generally and for learning English in particular (Baker) and conduct a campaign to convince more parents to support it.

References in next page

Methodological Success Factors

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There is a great amount of information available now all over the world on the teaching and learning of content subjects through a language which is either a second or a foreign language for the learner. Although the political and linguistic contexts into which such pedagogical approaches are embedded are, in general, not comparable in the different countries, the methodological issues are more or less common to all of them which seem to contribute to achieving successful outcomes.

To begin with, educational specialists have understood why now that learning through another language makes it necessary to adapt the methodological approaches which are normally used when a child learns content through his/her first language to the new conditions. These methodological approaches have been referred to as language-sensitive(m) methods: somehow they can be traced back to the language-across-the-curriculum idea developed in the British school system in which the importance of language for all learning processes is emphasised (but in which the main focus is laid in all subjects on the German “encounter programmes” in which children are made aware (in non-language lessons) of language, its structure and functions through the different languages spoken in the monolingual and multicultural classroom.

But there can be no doubt that the language-sensitive methods found nowadays in content and language inter-related disadvantage in education, and on the other the very specific approach to education which is required within a context in which a L2 is the main medium of teaching and learning. This is difficult and can be a long, uphill struggle.

3. Train all teacher-educators, in INSET and initial ITT to apply language-sensitive practice to the training of teachers within their subject, and ensure that teacher-education in INSET and ITT requires of trainees high standards in language-sensitive practice.

Larger-term steps

4. Improve adult literacy in L1 and English: literacy parents can help their children achieve in school.

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7. Provide evidence, over time, for the benefits which high-quality education through a home/community language has both for learning generally and for learning English in particular (Baker) and conduct a campaign to convince more parents to support it.

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content, this does not mean that it should be neglected. To- tal immersion does not work in a classroom in which learn- ers learn content through a second language. The Canadian experience, a negative example as Canadian researchers now openly admit. On the other hand the results obtained in a number of European models of bilingual education clearly show that both content and language can be learned very ef- ficiently even in a limited number of contact hours in school. Methodologically speaking, in these approaches content is central, but it is made possible by making at the same time accessible the necessary linguistic means (both lexical and structural). In general, it is easier to make available the linguistic means for specific purposes than for everyday language use: it is much more limited both lexically and structurally and, apart from specific tech- nical vocabulary, it is very similar in many content subjects especially in the humanities. This is due to similar methodo- logical approaches to content. For instance, describing, ex- plains, concluding and evaluating are ways of learning which are most frequently used in the content classroom. In content subjects like History, Geogra- phy or the Social Sciences, students mainly work with texts: in their geographical vocabulary, it is very similar in many content subjects especially in the humanities. This is due to similar methodo- logical approaches to content. For instance, describing, ex- plains, concluding and evaluating are ways of learning which are most frequently used in the content classroom.
Teaching and Learning through the Medium of L2

Many teachers and learners face problems in using English as a medium of instructions in rural upper primary schools in Namibia. This is because many teachers have limited English and lack knowledge for using a second language for teaching and learning. Many teachers are afraid of using the L1 in the classroom because they have no training on how bilingualism goes hand in hand with L2 medium teaching.

Teacher education institutions in Namibia need to introduce language sensitive methodologies to teachers to ways of teaching that are sensitive to language, and at the same time help teachers with limited English language proficiency to function effectively in a bilingual education context. They need to use the types of language-sensitive pedagogy which Clegg (ibid) describes, in practice.

Teacher education institutions also need to train prospective teachers how to formulate school language policies that are relevant to their own context. This is because most schools especially in Ondangwa (east and west) have no school language policies. They try to implement the national language policy without detailed examination and interpretation to see how the policy can be used effectively in their context.

Introduce CLIL at Teacher Training Institutions in Namibia

CLIL refers to any learning context in which content and language are integrated (see, Marsh, D. and Marsland, B, 1999:21). The main advantage of CLIL is the fact that it simultaneously concentrates on the subject matter and the L2 through adapting language sensitive methodologies that takes into account the demands brought by learning in the L2 which leads to language and content becoming easier for the learner.

We need CLIL to improve English medium education as well as to nurture the language development of a learner. In

his article Clegg points out that subject teachers have more contact time with learners than any specific teacher of English. Thus, the subject teachers have the potential for developing the learner’s language especially if content and language are methodologically integrated.

It can also be argued that a language teacher should use content from other subjects to teach language. Within a CLIL context, you can read a history text and focus both on the linguistic, content and cognitive skills required by the subject. What I mean by nurturing the learner’s language is through re-enforcing the language over and over. For example, the geography teacher could emphasise the use of language connectors like although, but etc. The language, history and the science teachers may do the same. In this way, the learner has more chances of learning about language connectors in different contexts.

It could be argued that the above-mentioned skills demand too much of any teacher and are unachievable. However, with careful planning the skills can be introduced and acquired. This will not only improve teachers English language abilities, but also their abilities to teach their subjects through English. Teacher education institutions in Namibia should therefore start training teachers that are able to teach both language and content in an integrated way, and give them the skills to teach using language sensitive methodologies.

Using the L1 in Enhancing the Learning of the L2

Trainees need to be made aware of the importance of L1 in teaching and learning the L2 and understand how to use the L1 in enhancing the learning of the L2. The report by Swarts (2000) shows that in Namibia some people believe that using the L1 in the classroom is a barrier to learning the L2. It is for this same reason that some schools opt for early immersion into the L2.

Teacher education institutions need to challenge this myth and demonstrate how the L1 can be naturally used in L2 medium. Clegg describes how the L1 can be used in the classroom to perform certain functions in the classroom. Such methodologies are language-sensitive and need to be emphasised at all teacher training institutions in Namibia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the call for language sensitive methodologies is long overdue in Namibia. Whereas we can all see the need, for some reasons we have been reluctant to acknowledge it. The skills seem difficult to acquire from the onset, because some of these issues are unfamiliar in teacher education curricula. With careful planning their implementation could greatly enhance the use of English medium education in Namibia.
English in it’s Place: Meaningful Learning through Bilingual Education

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While it is clear that for the foreseeable future, it will be desirable for children growing up in most African countries in the British or US sphere of influence to know English well (Alexander 2000), it is equally clear that in most cases, this is not happening. The general situation is one where African languages are neglected as languages of learning and teaching (Lofts), and the seemingly logical, but simplistic and incorrect view that competence in English is simplistic and incorrect view that competence in English is necessary achieved through early and maximum exposure is accepted. This seriously compromises meaningful learning for African language speaking children, who in practice learn neither the first language nor English well enough to succeed in education.

Countries in Africa are increasingly recognising this and are initiating attempts to revive the use of African languages in education (Ibid 2000). There is, therefore, movement towards finding solutions to a fundamental educational question in multilingual countries like Namibia, where colonial languages still dominate in the economy: how best to proceed both in respect of language medium, and teaching methods that concentrate on the teaching of senseless isolated skills in a particular order so that essentially decontextualised aspects of reading and writing are hammered into the skulls of children. Such narrowly defined skills-based methods passed down and adapted from the ‘literate’ North, drastically underestimate the conceptual, cognitive and linguistic capacities of children. These have been challenged and methods have changed, in the light of debates around the nature of literacy and insights have been challenged and methods have changed, in the light of debates around the nature of literacy and insights into young children’s literacy learning in the far better resourced countries of the North.

However in print-scarce rural environments where people’s cultural and social practices rarely involve written language, and stories do not exist in print in African languages, children’s first encounters with written language continue often to be these meaningless ones at school, which fail to help them work out the complexities of written language. This alienation of home and community (life from school education) that is an all too present feature of so many post-colonial situations needs to be challenged by educational approaches that put meaning making at the heart of learning and teaching, so that educators gain both insights into and dignity over their teaching. In the USA, referring to teaching immigrant bilingual children, Louis Moll has called for curriculum development that draws on the ‘funds of knowledge’ from the lives of the children and the communities they live in (Moll 1992).

Reading for enjoyment (described as Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) by Krashen, 1993) is a well-known research and vital but little respected component of reading development in both L1 and L2. Krashen describes FVR as the ‘missing ingredient’ in reading programmes in the USA. Stories, whether alive or lying dormant, are in the funds of knowledge from communities, African countries, but the bridge from oral literature to print must be constructed to put this wealth of stories back at the heart of education.

Meaningful education comes about also through recognizing that the various aspects of language in multilingual contexts (talking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as interpreting and translating) are not learned in separate and mutually exclusive ways. Kreetey Peyton reminds us that the same dynamics that promote oral language development promote writing development, for they are the dynamic bases for meaningful learning that is oral and written language development, as does all learning, grows out of personal knowledge and interests, occurs in interaction with others, grows out of diverse experiences and takes diverse forms, and takes a great deal of time.

(Kreetey Peyton 1993:3)

In this context, questions arise as to which language or languages and what approaches to use for initial literacy learning. Effective literacy learning is the cornerstone of school education as it is presently constructed. Yet innumerous classrooms across Africa still reflect misguided practices both in respect of language medium, and teaching methods that concentrate on the teaching of senseless isolated skills in a particular order so that essentially decontextualised aspects of reading and writing are hammered into the skulls of children. Such narrowly defined skills-based methods passed down and adapted from the ‘literate’ North, drastically underestimate the conceptual, cognitive and linguistic capacities of children. These have been challenged and methods have changed, in the light of debates around the nature of literacy and insights into young children’s literacy learning in the far better resourced countries of the North.

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However in print-scarce rural environments where people’s cultural and social practices rarely involve written language, and stories do not exist in print in African languages, children’s first encounters with written language continue often to be these meaningless ones at school, which fail to help them work out the complexities of written language. This alienation of home and community (life from school education) that is an all too present feature of so many post-colonial situations needs to be challenged by educational approaches that put meaning making at the heart of learning and teaching, so that educators gain both insights into and dignity over their teaching. In the USA, referring to teaching immigrant bilingual children, Louis Moll has called for curriculum development that draws on the ‘funds of knowledge’ from the lives of the children and the communities they live in (Moll 1992).

Reading for enjoyment (described as Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) by Krashen, 1993) is a well-known research and vital but little respected component of reading development in both L1 and L2. Krashen describes FVR as the ‘missing ingredient’ in reading programmes in the USA. Stories, whether alive or lying dormant, are in the funds of knowledge from communities, African countries, but the bridge from oral literature to print must be constructed to put this wealth of stories back at the heart of education.

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(Kreetey Peyton 1993:3)

By this it is meant that the first language (L1) of the child is used as a medium from the beginning of education, and is supported and maintained for as long as possible throughout schooling. Other language(s) (additional languages) are added at various points depending on the peculiarities of the situation.

Brian Street is a ‘ideological’ model views literacy as being intertwined with the social and cultural practices of individuals and communities and challenges the ‘autonomous’ model (still prevalent in Africa) of seeing literacy as a set of tools, which can be given to people (Street 1995).

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(Kreetey Peyton 1993:3)
Towards Integrated Methodologies

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In language use, context is everything. Language teaching methodology has for a long time now recognised that the most benefit for learners comes from using the target language in a context that they can relate to and find relevant. In simple terms, the whole movement of a language, often English, being learned ‘for special purposes’ is based on this precept. The teacher uses texts and simulations that reflect content-based contexts and purposes, and exploits these for language development. Without the content, the language work could be viewed as an empty exercise.

Let us look at the same idea from the content side. Language exercises might seem pointless without content-based context, but how could content exercises work without language? Is it possible to teach content without also developing language skills? This might involve a foreign or second language, or a learner’s home language or mother tongue. In any case, vocabulary and terminology development, content-specific language style issues, and the general linguistic elements involved in classroom management are among those content classroom features that actually, and naturally, draw on and develop the learners’ language abilities.

Therefore, much in the same way that practitioners have often seen the need for content-sensitive language teaching methods, in the context of the school curriculum we can also see a need for language-sensitive content teaching methods. In a truly integrated curriculum, this leads to an examination of the crossover and integration of the respective pedagogical skills and methodologies.

A number of challenges are involved in this, whatever the educational context. Teachers, learners, and planners may experience unforeseen changes, both in and outside the classroom. This report on the Namibian context outlines ways of approaching these new issues in a constructive manner. Furthermore, the content-teaching professionals in a CLIL situation will also need to consider aspects such as material development to complement the language-sensitive methodologies.

The materials aspect perhaps also needs considering in a new light. For after all, the change in, and variety of, language in the classroom presents opportunities that can be independent of high technology or mass-produced of a language. Materials. Having a range of languages available can in itself add extra dimensions to known or existing themes and materials, shedding a new light or presenting a fresh angle, and adding to the depth of content learning and understanding. It is perhaps from this that one of the potentially most dynamic changes could come. The relationship between teachers and learners can evolve to encompass communication in different languages, so the vast possibilities of studying content from different cultural perspectives can be released. The teacher can also, in some cases, develop the learning environment from a book or material-centred focus to content-centred, language-sensitive, human communication. Then the capacity of CLIL in terms of providing fresh approaches to content, language, culture, and educational theory becomes apparent.

Further reading:

Achieving Solutions through International Partnerships

Anne Ontero
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The purpose of the workshops and field studies carried out by the Ongwediva College of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Namibia National Teachers Union and Association of Teachers of English in Finland, was to examine issues relating to the use of English as a medium of instruction in the Namibian context, and make recommendations for future action.

The partnership was designed on the basis that sometimes it is highly advantageous to combine differing professional interests, especially when a given problem is multi-faceted. For example, good results in school education are not only the consequence of language proficiency, but also implementation of appropriate methodologies. Improvements in the methods of education are considered the best guarantee for educational success across the majority of learners. The role of teacher unions in in-service education is important because teachers themselves are the most important implementing agency in any educational reform.

The CLIL Workshops were planned with the regional offices of the Namibia National Teachers Union, Onandua (East and West), and the Association of Teachers of English in Finland. Because cooperation is not always at its best on a macro level and very often the possibilities for learning by working together can only be carried out on a micro level, this kind of reciprocity was found to be very useful. The selection of schools, and participants, was made by Nantu, with the assistance of principals, across the two educational regions and the three phases of basic education. The institutional facilitators, Ongwediva College of Education and the University of Jyväskylä, handled issues pertaining to methodology.

After widespread recognition in the past few years that there is a problem as regards the English proficiency of Namibian teachers, there has been an attempt to investigate and quantify the problem in Namibia. Namibian teachers have improved their English by way of different projects but this does not yet appear to be sufficient. Intensive programmes that involve university staff, non-governmental organisations, teacher unions as well as individual teachers, can achieve a great deal through cooperation. Through collaboration teachers can produce their own definitions of the problems within their own situations. Without the willingness and conviction of teachers, educational reform generally flounders. These Workshops have comprised a process in which options have been generated and explored, in which teachers have spoken freely and openly about their experiences, and in which realistic goals have been set by the teachers themselves. The implications stretch beyond Namibia because although the core issues are relevant to very different contexts.

As well as trying to identify non-financial ways of rewarding teachers for improving their instruction in English and the English language, it is vital that teachers see that government bodies are supportive of initiatives undertaken. The purpose of these CLIL Workshops has been to further vocalise the opinions of teachers through identifying what could be termed ‘good practice’ alongside identification of the steps that need to be taken to establish ‘best practice’ in Namibia.
To be a good English-medium teacher is not dependent on having a high level of fluency in the English language. A teacher with an imperfect command of the language can still achieve a high level of excellence in the classroom. Fluency is always going to be advantageous, but fluency alone will not result in good teaching practice. This is due to the significance of what we have described above as language-sensitive methods.

This section comprises of a list of key features that are linked to the use of these methods in the classroom. The list has been compiled on the basis of sustainable implementa-

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In conjunction with The Working Group

First Language Interference

The impact of teacher talk as monologue is unlikely to be as effective in many instances than the use of cooperative techniques that lead to differing forms of interactive and communicative talk. Conceptual understanding of new topics can be supported through dialogic forms of communication. Methodologies suitable for this type of second language-me-

dium education are generally highly communicative. Coopera-
tive and collaborative learning through teamwork are highly desirable in this instance. The following key points illustrate the value of learners working in groups:

1. Teachers can focus on learning to communicate
2. Group work can enhance learning through providing opportunities for learners to communicate with each other so as to reach a common goal. It allows for the threat of any language ob-

First Language Interference

Interference in English speech production resulting from characteristics of first language requires special attention. For example, in Oshiwambo, the Kwambis speak a strong ‘r’ sound whereas the Oshindongo speakers have a problem producing ‘r’, and particularly in differentiating ‘y’ and ‘i’ as in mixing red and led. This type of interfer-

e is cited as a common reason for mockery in classroom contexts that may be highly intimidating for certain learn-

ers. Teachers should be particularly sen-

sitive in ensuring that such mockery does not adversely impact on the self-

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Language-support Activities
focussing on language and content simultaneously

To encourage teachers to use a wide variety of activities which allow the learning context to be as linguistically rich as possible so as to develop opportunities for meaningful language practice between the teacher and students, and the students themselves.

Language-medium Bridge
switching from one language of instruction to another

The transition from teaching through local languages and English at Grade 5 should be done so as to smooth transition of language medium so as to ‘nurture an asset and not weaken an inheritance’. A methodological bridge should be implemented by those teachers involved, spanning Grades 2 – 5, which reflects understanding of the stages of second language acquisition. In this respect the language of both instruction and materials should complement the reality of language learning at any given stage of the educational process.

Linguistic Simplification
being simple but not simplistic

The ‘step-by-step’ use of spoken English reportedly commends itself as a means to support and reinforce speaking practice. In second language-medium education it is normal that teachers find themselves simplifying their speech, and the manner by which they present ideas.

Repetition
reinforcing learning

Formulating the same thing in different ways through repetition, reformulation and paraphrasing is a common feature of good teacher talk in second language-medium education.

School Language Policy
working together towards agreed principles

A language policy for the school, and the learners and parents they serve, need clarification on how to handle language medium issues. In order that a coherent and predictable language policy is implemented it is necessary that one exists for any given school in any given context. This is particularly important in terms of trans-linguaging (see below). Thus it would be optimal if each school establishes a language policy which not only confirms national requirements but also situational strategies employed by the school to best manage situational needs.

Thinking and Study Skills for
Linguistic and Cognitive Demands
learner strategies in handling content and language

Identify and build a core vocabulary of key concepts that the teacher can use accurately, which are systematically taught by the language teacher. What it does mean is that in the current Namibian context, a pragmatic approach that allows for flexibility on a case-by-case basis would be optimal. Enforceance of “English only” in certain types of class works against the interests of learners, teachers, schools and ultimately the surrounding society. Trans-linguaging (often referred to as code-switching) can be considered as a strategic means by which to improve message comprehension.

Thinking and Study Skills for
Linguistic and Cognitive Demands
routines

 teachers need to develop, introduce and continuously use a range of phrases for language routines for classroom management in relation to instruction, organisation and personal communication with learners.

Visuality
hearing and seeing

Gestures, demonstration and illustration should be used to make meaning as clear as possible. Although traditionally more common in the teaching of younger learners, it is part of a communicative style which could be more fully utilised in all levels of teaching. Linguistically complex descriptions can be more easily understood through use of non-verbal explication.

Conclusion

Some of these features could be considered the essence of good practice regardless of the language medium used. However, it is the link between the language policy and day-to-day language teaching practice which is critical. This is not to suggest that a non-language subject teacher should be viewed as taking on the role of a language teacher. What it means is that in the current Namibian context, all teachers, and indeed other stakeholders outside the school, need to take greater responsibility for nurturing language development at all times because language is the central platform upon which all learning takes place. The non-language subject teachers need to embrace language-sensitive methods just as the language teachers need to ensure that they build on the needs, strengths, weaknesses and experiences of the learners and teachers, in their own work. Thus another key success factor lies in collaborative teamwork that supports the language policy that the school has established.

1 See, for example, Mawdi, O.; Maniband, B. & Stokoe, K. 2001. Integrating Computation for Working Lif. UNICOM: University of York (UK).
2 Se, for example, Marsh, D. & Marsland, B. 1997. Aspects of Implementing Plurilingual Literacies for Working Life. UNICOM: University of Jyväskylä (Finland).