Content and Language Integrated Learning in Namibia

Workshop Report

‘Using Language to Learn and Learning to use Language’
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in conjunction with The Working Group
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 ‘lan-
guage sensitive methodologies’ in respect to enhancing teaching and learning through English.

This series of workshops has examined the challenges facing Namibian teachers in their at-
tempt 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 expo-
sure 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 en-
couraging 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 ex-
tensive dialogue on experiences from different environments leading to focus on possible solu-
tions.

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 meth-
odologies.

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 sup-
port 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 spe-
cialists were invited to contribute comments on the broader implications of the main out-
comes 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 con-
text, and Bruce Marsland comments on the relationship between language teaching and ‘language-sensitive’ meth-
ods.

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 re-
quires greater understanding of what are termed ‘language-sensitive methods’.

The report does not address broad issues about the impli-
cations 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 educa-
tional performance indicators recently reported and dis-
cussed. 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 suc-
cessful 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 teach-
ers and learners because, in differing ways according
 to location and social context, the position of the lan-
guage is not predominant in the lives of people involved.

Broadly speaking, English can be considered a ‘second lan-
guage’ in this context, although linguistic diversity within
the country means that for some it will be the ‘first’ lan-
guage, and for others it will be far-removed from daily re-
alities 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 adapta-
tion of educational methods that may be suc-
cessfully used when a child learns through
his/her first language (first language me-
dium education).

It should not be assumed that second language medium education is a disadvantage for
learners or the societies in which they live. For ex-
ample, forms of second language medium education are
deliberately introduced in some heavily monolingual socie-
ties in order to reap the rewards that may be realized. Rec-
ocognition 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 individ-
uals and societies in relation to linguistic, communicative and
cognitive development. However, if implemented inappropri-
ately 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 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 learn through English, are both highly topical issues in the aspirations of individuals, and in the understanding of societies.² Correspondingly, there is increasing recognition that plurilingualism (individuals able to communicate in different languages) and multilingualism (societies comprising individuals using different languages) offers the foundation for strengths through uniformity. In essence, focus on the role of languages, from regional policy through to individual learning preferences³, is a critical issue worldwide, which acts as a catalyst for re-examining what we have to be considered as having an effort to identify and implement solutions. Therefore much can be learned from examining how good practice is achieved in other contexts that share 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’.⁴ If language-sensitive methods were more widely employed in Namibian schools, this phenomenon could be described as a ‘language problem’ might well be re-considered as ‘language potential’.⁵ Second language medium education should not be considered in terms of “second-best education”.⁶ On the contrary, it can be viewed as one feature of an educational system that attempts to achieve the best possible outcomes for the broadest range of learners. But 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 national teacher education institutes develop initial and in-service teacher development programmes that combine subject-specific and language-sensitive methodologies. 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 rationalized as a large-scale module, but could be included 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, input 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’ and the English language and to 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 (e.g. Brock – Utre, 2000; Heugh, et al, 1995; Ramirez, 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 with. This kind of learning is called subtractive bilingualism² (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 difficult learning in another language than one’s own and ‘subtractive’ in that it denies, or takes away the place and the value of another language.

1 (Donald, et al, 1997) It is difficult learning in another language than one’s own and ‘subtractive’ in that it denies, or takes away the place and the value of another language.

2 (Donald, et al, 1997) It is difficult learning in another language than one’s own and ‘subtractive’ in that it denies, or takes away the place and the value of the first language in the context of formal learning.


well as social benefits through the process of ‘additive’ bilin-
guism. A second (or more) language (s) is/are added to the
first language through a process of gradual transition. In
this process (linguistically 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
their 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 Namibian language policy provides for the mother
language (or home language), and then transferred to English.
Avenstrup, R. (2001). Learner-Centred Education in the Namibian Context: A Concep-
Educational achievement in sub-Saharan Africa should be
better. Literacy levels and school attendance and ma-
triculation rates are too low (Bannobye 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 unconfident. In countries where paren-
tal literacy and school resources are low it becomes particu-larly 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
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.
Lessons make cognitive demands on learners: that is, they
assume that learners have certain cognitive skills. For ex-
ample...
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 the science concepts? 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 and drawing conclusions by phrases such as so, therefore)? Teachers need to ask themselves these questions like those 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 policy. This report lists the techniques available to teachers within their subject, and ensure that teacher education in INSET and ITT requires trainees high standards in language-sensitive practice.

Longer-term steps

1. Improve adult literacy in L1 and English: Literate parents can help their children achieve in school.
2. Improve early years L1 literacy: children with good foundations in L1 literacy and cognitive skills are better prepared for schooling and especially for schooling in a second language.
3. 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.
4. Provide evidence, over time, for the benefits which high-quality education through a home/community language has 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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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, 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 how new 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 methods have been referred to as language-sensitive 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 child’s first language); they can also be related to the German “enmatterungspläne” in which children are made aware (in non-language lessons) of language, its structure and functions through the different languages spoken in the multilingual and multicultural classroom. But there can be no doubt that the language-sensitive methods found nowadays in content and language integrated grades, although they share with these ideas an interest in language, are chiefly content-oriented: their main concern is to promote content, geographical, historical, mathematical or any other content which is part of the curriculum in a specific educational system. In a number of countries, for example in Germany, it is stipulated in the curriculum for children learning a content subject through a foreign language must have the same knowledge of this subject as children who learn it through their mother tongue. Although in Namibia such a choice of the language of instruction is not possible, the German example shows the educationalists’ fear that the results of such teaching are not comparable to mother-tongue teaching. This is also the reason why they insist on methodological adaptations when the classroom language is not the first language of the learner. It is clear that such adaptations will have to include a focus on language in order to reduce and in the end displace the discrepancy between the learner’s cognitive ability and his linguistic competence.

Although the methodological discussion is in full swing in many countries there still does not exist a fully developed methodology for teaching content in another language. There exists, however, a number of proposals which have been tried out in the classroom and seem to be working well although they cannot be regarded as a consistent methodological approach. In the following I will look at some of these methodological success factors and explain in very general terms why they are so important. I will leave it to the reader to transfer them to the Namibian context which I do not know well enough.

It has become very clear in practical teaching that although language should always be second with respect to
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 is 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- plaining, concluding and evaluating are ways of learning and teaching not only in Geography and History, but also in Biology or in the Social Sciences. The linguistic means nec- essary to carry out these activities in a second language must be at the students’ disposal, otherwise content learning will not take place. This does not mean, however, that spe- cific language lessons should be offered. Once children have some basic knowledge of the language of instruction the lin- guistic means necessary for the content subject can be pro- vided in the content subject lessons. If the different content means working ‘project-oriented’ at the same time: learners must be at the students’ disposal, otherwise content learning is not possible simply to provide lexical and grammatical means as at a later age. That is why teachers make use of the so-called narrative approach: they introduce a certain theme by dealing with a narrative or a poetic text in the for- eign language, in my example the poem of the owl which can see in the dark. Such a text provides key words and ani- mates children to activate their knowledge of the topics re- lated to the poem. What is important in this approach as well is that teaching and learning is con- tent-oriented but that language is fo- cused upon whenever it is neces- sary. The approach is language- sensitive because it neither excludes the foreign language (as in immersion) nor does it present the foreign language systematically (as in a tradi- tional foreign language classroom). Language is thus fo- cused upon when it is needed. There are a number of other methodological questions which are being discussed in the overall context of teaching content through a second language. Quite a number of methodologists have made interesting proposals for materi- als development but also for simplifying foreign language materials in order to use them in the content classroom. There also exist some exciting proposals for the use of the new technologies, especially the Internet in a content and language integrated classroom. All these ideas have led to very successful classroom work. Here are again, in a nutshell, my methodological recom- mendations for the content and language integrated class- room: 

- Teach content but pay specific attention to language 
- Focus on the promotion of specific reading and writing skills 
- Organise the classroom in such a way that it becomes a research laboratory 
- Develop learner autonomy 
- Focus on themes and make use of a narrative approach, particularly at primary level 
- If possible, integrate the new technologies into the classroom
Language-sensitive Methodologies in Namibian Teacher Education

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At the conference on Language and Development at NIED, Okahandja in April 2000, John Clegg made a call for teacher education institutions to start using ‘Language Sensitive Methodologies’ in order to enhance English medium education. The paper was well-written and timely because much of what was said proves to be true and overdue in Namibia (see Clegg, J. 2000). Numerous comments on his article are included below.

I would like to start by acknowledging that there is a great need for teacher education institutions in Namibia to introduce Language Sensitive Methodologies for various reasons, but I would like to concentrate on three.

1. Many teachers are reluctant in rural areas especially in Ondangwa (east and west) have experienced considerable problems in teaching and learning through the medium of English.
2. There is a need to introduce Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at teacher training institutions in Namibia so that both language and subjects teachers nurture the linguistic development of the learners.
3. Trainees should be made aware of the importance of the first language (L1) and how to use it to enhance the learning and teaching of a second language (L2).

Teaching and Learning through the Medium of L2

Many teachers and learners face problems in using English as a medium of instruction 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 prospective 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 its’ 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 necessarily achieved through early and maximum exposure is accepted. This seriously compromises meaningful learning for African language speaking children, who in practice learn neither their own 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 thus, 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 succeed in education.

South Africa

Meaningful education comes about also through recognising the various aspects of language in multilingual contexts (talking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as interpreting and translating) and not learning in separate and mutually exclusive ways. Kreeft Payton reminds us that the same dynamics that promote oral language development promote writing development, for they are the dynamics of bilinguality and literacy. Children who are oral and written language skills continua, through the medium of two (or more) languages and literacies. Literacy development and expression (in two or more languages) has the greatest chance of being successful when the learning contexts and contexts of use allow children to draw from across the whole of each continuum (Hornberger 1990). In South Africa, research indicates that simultaneous Xhosa - English bilinguality is desirable in particular bilingual contexts where interaction with written language is purposeful and where writing develops as an interactive dialogue (Bloch & Nkence 1998, Alexander & Bloch 2001: forthcoming).

A well-liked principle of early childhood education is to begin with what children know, and to build on this (Bruce 1987). Its application to multilingual settings is that the starting point is the vast oral linguistic capacity of each child and that we develop, from this point, approaches that are sensitive to children’s concerns and those of their families, their communities and their teachers.

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 in their role of being in the front of 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 researched 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 communication and interaction in 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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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 (additional language) are added at various points depending on the priorities of the situation.

This alienation of home and community (life) from school and classroom contexts (talking, listening, reading and writing, as well as interpreting and translating) are not learned in separate and mutually exclusive ways. Kreeft Payton reminds us that the same dynamics that promote oral language development promote writing development, for they are the dynamics of bilinguality and literacy. Children who are oral and written language skills continua, through the medium of two (or more) languages and literacies. Literacy development and expression (in two or more languages) has the greatest chance of being successful when the learning contexts and contexts of use allow children to draw from across the whole of each continuum (Hornberger 1990). In South Africa, research indicates that simultaneous Xhosa - English bilinguality is desirable in particular bilingual contexts where interaction with written language is purposeful and where writing develops as an interactive dialogue (Bloch & Nkence 1998, Alexander & Bloch 2001: forthcoming).

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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 communication, in this case, English?

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 in their role of being in the front of 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 researched 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 communication and interaction in 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 recognising the various aspects of language in multilingual contexts (talking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as interpreting and translating) and not learning in separate and mutually exclusive ways. Kreeft Payton reminds us that the same dynamics that promote oral language development promote writing development, for they are the dynamics of bilinguality and literacy. Children who are oral and written language skills continua, through the medium of two (or more) languages and literacies. Literacy development and expression (in two or more languages) has the greatest chance of being successful when the learning contexts and contexts of use allow children to draw from across the whole of each continuum (Hornberger 1990). In South Africa, research indicates that simultaneous Xhosa - English bilinguality is desirable in particular bilingual contexts where interaction with written language is purposeful and where writing develops as an interactive dialogue (Bloch & Nkence 1998, Alexander & Bloch 2001: forthcoming).

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Towards Integrated Methodologies

Bruce Marsland
Language Advisor
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Finland

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 referred to as ‘content-based’ work, has been gaining momentum because teachers themselves are the most vocalise the opinions of teachers through identifying what seems to work best on a macro level and very often the possibilities together can only be carried out on a micro level. For that reason, the 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.

Therefore, much in the same way that practitioners have often seen the need for content-sensitive language teaching methodologies, in the context of the school curriculum we can also see a need for content-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.

Anne Onera
Representative and Project Coordinator, Association of Teachers of English in Finland

The workshop 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. 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 content-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 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 perspectives on content, language, culture, and educational theory becomes apparent.

The purpose of these CLIL Workshops has been to further explore 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.

Further reading:
Approaching Language-sensitive Expertise

David Marsh
Field Specialist
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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 implementation in Namibia schools. It is not a comprehensive list of what should be done, but depending on grade and type of school, on what could be done with regards to interweaving language sensitivity into the fabric of education.

Key issues relating to enhancing learning and teaching through the medium of English have been identified and included in alphabetical order as follows:

Acoustics
classroom sound quality

Poor acoustic conditions result in problematic learning environments regardless of language. When learning takes place through the medium of a second language, such problems become compounded. Although attention can be given to how speech, by both teachers and learners is projected in the classroom, lowering of any unnecessary noise thresholds should be given continuous attention.

Activating English in the Environment
using English outside the classroom

In some Namibian environments, use of English outside the school is clearly minimal. Although the role of the school will be quite limited in activating use of English outside in the surrounding community, and bearing in mind that there are many questions surrounding the use of English vis-a-vis first languages, some steps could be made to activate the English language in the surrounding social environments. For example, public announcements such as those made after collective prayers, could be made in English more often so as to activate use of the language. According to the outcomes of one of the field studies conducted by the Working Group, there is a direct relationship between use of English outside of the school, and superior school performance. However, more cannot be automatically assumed to be better. Unresolved questions over competence in a first language continue to make this a highly significant issue with regard to language policies.

Articulation & Voice Projection
hearing and being heard

Inappropriate volume or articulation in English, by teachers and learners, will inevitably hinder good learning performance. Spoken language, particularly in large classes, must be pitched at an appropriate level in order that everyone can hear as clearly as possible what is said. This is of particular importance for learners working in a second language.

Assessment
judging performance

Testing of subject matter needs to be done so that language does not interfere with success in showing understanding of the topic at hand. The way in which questions are structured and tests administered are particularly sensitive to language barriers.

Classroom Organisation, Methodology & Interaction
learning through teamwork

Given appropriate techniques, forms of pair and 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 obstacle that might result from excessive teacher talk to be negotiated by the learners on their own terms. Different types of group formation allow use of forms of cooperative or collaborative learning. These have much to offer in large classes where there is heterogeneity of competence both in terms of subject learning and language.

Comprehension Checks
are you with me?

Extensive use of comprehension checks is necessary in second language-medium education due to the added language burden.

Extra-curricular Activities
learning by doing

Extra-curricular activities, organised by teachers possibly in conjunction with others in the community can provide alternative opportunities for language development that may be beneficial for a wide range of learners. Leisure-based (sports, games) and special interest language groups/clubs can provide alternative contexts for activating learners to use English in non-threatening contexts. Building linguistic self-confidence for better performance in the classroom is one key goal of this type of endeavour.

Feedback
balancing positive and negative feedback

Errors, due to language or cognition, should be commented upon in a manner that is encouraging as well as instructive. Constructive criticism, balancing positive and negative feedback, would allow for the emotional needs of the learner with regard to language obstacles to be balanced against content learning problems. Standard phrases for giving and explaining feedbacks need to be learnt and used so that learners themselves can remain motivated towards learning the content, and not become withdrawn. Constructive criticism, balancing positive and negative feedback, would allow for the emotional needs of the learner with regard to language obstacles to be balanced against content learning problems. Standard phrases for giving and explaining feedbacks need to be learnt and used so that learners themselves can remain motivated towards learning the content, and not become withdrawn.

First Language Interference
pride in first language influences

Interference in English speech production resulting from characteristics of first language requires special attention. For example, in Oshiwambo, the Kwambwe speakers have a strong "r" sound whereas the Oshindonga speakers have a problem producing "r", and particularly in differentiating "r" and "l" as in mixing red and led. This type of interference is cited as a common reason for mockery in classroom contexts that may be highly intimidating for certain learners. Teachers should be particularly sensitive in ensuring that such mockery does not adversely impact on the self-confidence of any learners when using English. Mockery can also result from students learning incorrect usage from previous class teachers. In grades 4-6 care should be made to protect individual learners from any form of public ridicule resulting from mistakes made in the English language according to first language interference or exposure to incorrect models of usage.

Any correct model of English language usage should not be perceived as projected as being of first language environments such as the UK or USA. Although these may be considered good models of usage, Namibian variants of English should be viewed, and seen to be viewed, as carrying equal status as another variant of English, not as standard.

Interactional Discourse
learning to communicate

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 re-entrenchment of new topics can be supported through dialogic forms of communication. Methodologies suitable for this type of second language-medium education are generally highly communicative. Cooperative learning techniques that allow for learners to work collaboratively in differing forms of groups is one of a variety of successful means by which to elicit and develop forms of interactional talk and communication.
Language-support Activities

focusing 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 smoothen 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 development at any given stage of the educational process5.

Learner Error Correction

learning from mistakes

The negative consequences of inappropriate student error correction can have a direct and indirect impact on certain types of learners. The result is found in reduced student motivation and reluctance to actively participate in classes. Mistakes in English language can be ‘corrected’ in different ways, either directly or indirectly, and strategies can be implemented which make the process of correction non-threatening and constructive. For example, the mistakes of one learner will almost certainly apply to others, and thus noting of errors and reluctance to actively participate in classes. Mistakes in language practice between the teacher and students, and the learners and parents themselves. What it does mean 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.7 Thus another key success factor lies in collaborative teamwork that supports the language policy that the school has established.

Linguistic Evaluation

understanding language complexity

It is necessary for teachers to have sufficient interest and skill in evaluating and monitoring the cognitive and linguistic complexity of methods and materials on a continuous basis. This allows teachers to be as aware of the learners’ needs and perspectives as possible.

Linguistic Simplification

being simple but not simplistic

The ‘step-by-step’ use of spoken English reportedly com- ments that should be considered as ‘spreading 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.

Routes

predictable traffic signals of teacher talk

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.

School Language Policy

working together towards agreed principles

The transition from teaching through local languages and English can be highly beneficial. It is necessary for teachers to have sufficient interest and skill in evaluating and monitoring the cognitive and linguistic complexity of methods and materials on a continuous basis. This allows teachers to be as aware of the learners’ needs and perspectives as possible.

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 teacher to the learners. Teach the language markers (e.g. key phrases) and linking words (e.g. it, they, here), used in English that are used to signal textual and semantic relationships of specific types (e.g. describing shapes and spatial relationships; logical sequences such as cause and effect) finding causes, purposes, conditions and results; giving and following instructions; asking for and giving directions and information; handling similarities and differences and identifying contextual clues and seeing implications; making explanations; comparing and contrasting, defining and classifying, and making predictions.

Introduce different forms of note-taking practice, in particular types that are ‘framed’ with some text already given with gaps that are filled out during a lesson. Re-examine English language reading skills, particularly with regard to handling difficult words, skimming and scanning text, identifying and matching key information through sense relations, and text organisation (e.g. discourse structure and paragraphing).

Teach the principles for interpreting non-linear texts (e.g. diagrams, graphs, drawings)

Trans-linguaging

switching from one language to another

Use of a home/community language during a lesson, for instance in group work, is a contentious issue in the Namibian context. A pragmatic approach that allows for flexibility on a case-by-case basis would be optimal. Enforcement 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 comprehensibility.

Visuality

hearing and seeing

Gesture, 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. Having a clear research-based language policy is fundamental to good teaching practice.8 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 does mean 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.7 Thus another key success factor lies in collaborative teamwork that supports the language policy that the school has established.

7 Research over 20 years on the Canadian experience of ‘streaming’ shows that mastery of the second language cannot be achieved only through learning ‘through’ that language but that formal language instruction is vital.