

## **Biliteracy Development: Problems and Prospects - an Ethnographic Case Study in South Africa**

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**Abstract:** *This paper investigated the conditions necessary for the development of literacy in two languages, that is, biliteracy in Sepedi and English, among Foundation phase learners in a rural primary school in South Africa. It is based on a qualitative study, in the form of an ethnographic case study in which one-on-one interviews with the teachers, lessons observation and classroom print environment observation were used for data collection. One of the key findings is that routinized teacher-centred and a print-impooverished environment do not bode well for biliteracy development. Different strategies and methods with respect to teaching and learning should be pursued for effective teaching and learning. Homework was found to be crucial as a tool to reinforce learning. Homework can only be successfully implemented, if the Conditions at home are conducive. The major contribution of this paper is the 3C's framework which posits that Conditions at home, Community/Culture and Curriculum are important ingredients for effective teaching and learning. The absence of any one of them is a precursor for failure. The paper advocates a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** literacy, biliteracy, community, culture, curriculum, South Africa

### **Introduction**

The aim of this paper was to investigate the development of literacy among Foundation phase learners in a rural primary school in the Limpopo Province of South Africa and more specifically, to find out if literacy in two languages, i.e. biliteracy in Sesotho sa Leboa (Sepedi) and English, is being developed. Literacy and numeracy are regarded as the key competencies to be acquired by primary school learners. Educational achievement and progress are crucially dependent on these competencies. Yet many scholars (Hayward 1998; Taylor & Vinjevold 1999c; Pretorius & Ntuli 2005; Fleisch 2007) have asserted that primary school children in South Africa are not acquiring these competencies. An important assessment that was carried out on the literacy achievements of learners world-wide is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2006). PIRLS's summary report of South African children's reading literacy achievement shows that the reading achievement of South African Grade 4 and 5 learners is the lowest when compared to 44 other countries. The PIRLS focused on three aspects of learners' reading literacy, which were: processes of comprehension that involve being able to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information, make straightforward inferences, examine and evaluate language and textual elements. The purposes for reading that

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include the examination of literary experience and the ability to acquire and use information as well as reading behaviours and attitudes towards reading were also tested.

Van Staden & Howie (2007) state that more than 30,000 Grade 4 and 5 learners were assessed using instruments translated into 11 official languages to cater for South African language populations. The South African Grade 4 and 5 learners achieved the lowest mean performance scores well below the fixed international mean of 500 points. The results of PIRLS 2006 show that learners are struggling to develop the reading and literacy competencies needed to make the transition to reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase in South African schools.

The PIRLS 2006 international report indicates that on average, internationally; teachers allocate 30% of instructional time to language instruction and 20% to reading instruction (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy 2007). On average, internationally, Grade 4 learners are taught explicit reading instruction for more than 6 hours a week. Teachers' reports in the South African study reveal that only 10% of Grade 4 learners receive reading instruction for more than 6 hours per week, 18% for between 3 and 6 hours and 72% for less than 3 hours per week (Mullis et al. 2007). From these data, it becomes clear that South African reports fall far below the international averages in terms of time spent on reading instruction.

This is not in tune with the South African Revised National Curriculum Statement, which states that the most important task of the Foundation Phase teacher is to ensure that all learners learn to read. Forty per cent of teaching time in the Foundation Phase therefore, is allocated to literacy (DoE 2002: 23). Van Staden & Howie (2007) state that the teachers' data presented in PIRLS (2006) indicate the need for Intermediate Phase teachers' continuous professional development, as Grade 4 learners' low overall achievement scores, in relation to teacher qualifications, perhaps suggests that these teachers have not been adequately prepared to teach literacy. Of concern is the high incidence of low achievement among learners who are taught by teachers aged between 30 and 59 years.

### **Literature Review**

According to Trok (2005:59),

Bantu Education of apartheid South Africa has left countless black families with few reading and writing skills, particularly in rural and poor households. For them not much has changed. The school curriculum of yesteryear is still used in some schools in rural areas. Teachers who are products of Bantu Education pass their teaching on to this generation and so continue the cycle.

During the apartheid era, blacks were denied access to quality education. Teachers who are products of Bantu education are still using the methods that were used to teach them. Obviously it would be difficult for them to adapt to new curricula and unfamiliar methods of teaching and assessment. Trok

(2005:59) argues also that black children are still not introduced to libraries early enough to stimulate them to read for fun and there is little of sharing of books within the family. Pretorius & Ntuli (2005) state that pre-school children whose parents read storybooks to them have a linguistic and literacy head start over other children when they start school. It is well-known that success at school depends heavily on language and literacy skills. However a culture of family reading is not part of the experience of the majority of black learners.

Access to education is not enough. Children also required adequate textbooks, competent and prepared teachers, a curriculum that built a strong foundation, better teaching facilities and laboratories, and a safe environment. (The Children's Institute 2009:01).

### **Biliteracy**

Reyes (2001:98) defines biliteracy as "mastery of two languages", but she extends the concept to mean mastery of the fundamentals of speaking, reading, and writing (knowing sound/ symbol connections, conventions of print, accessing and conveying meaning through oral or print mode, etc.) in two linguistic systems. Biliteracy refers to written language development in two or more languages to some degree, either simultaneously or successively (Garcia 2000; Shin 2005). Taking a broader view, Romaine (1995) observes that biliteracy development reflects both the cognitive procedures of individuals and that of the involved family, community, and society, using two written language systems.

### **Links between home and school literacy**

Children's early phonological awareness and familiarity with books is linked to their later reading and writing skills (Nicholson 1999; Hamer & Adams 2003). McLachlan (2006) and Tayler (2006) show that if these literacy and other practices are poorly developed or these skills are missing prior to schooling, then this is an indicator of later reading difficulties. Many scholars have asserted that emergent literacy or early literacy is very much a social practice that develops in different social contexts rather than through formal instruction. They believe that when there is a bridge between home and school literacy practices, then children can more readily (McLachlan 2006; Tayler 2006) make the transition to schooled literacy.

Proposing a model of continuity between two languages, Hornberger (2004:155) says that the "continua model of biliteracy offers a framework of interrelationships between bilingualism and literacy and the importance of the contexts in which to situate research, teaching, and language planning in linguistically diverse settings." The continua model of biliteracy uses the notion of intersecting and nested continua to demonstrate the multiple and complex media and content through which biliteracy develops. Biliteracy, in this model, refers to "any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing" (Hornberger 1990:213).

The reason for quoting so extensively from Hornberger is that she offers the most highly developed model to both analyse and train teachers to promote biliteracy. Researchers indicate that being bilingual and participating in quality bilingual education programmes that include effective reading and writing instruction have positive effects on children's academic, functional, social, and linguistic development (Baker 2006; Cheatham, Santos & Ro 2007). Especially notable is the transfer of literacy skills from one language to another (Garcia 2000). Researchers emphasize the importance of social environments for bilingual children's oral language and literacy skills development (Bauer 2000; Jimenez, Garcia & Pearson 1995; Tabors & Snow 2001). Parents can purposely construct an environment to foster biliteracy and bilingualism for their children. Parent-child interactions are critical to spoken language and literacy learning. For example, parent-child conversations during meals may help develop children's language skills (Purcell-Gates 1996; Ro 2008) and can facilitate the development of literacy skills.

Learners come to school with rich oral language experiences such as rhyming, language play, informal phonemic awareness activities, and songs yet none of these activities are ever tapped and made part of the school's curriculum. Hornberger (1990) points out in her biliteracy model that there is a continuity of experiences, skills, practices, and knowledge stretching from one end of any particular continuum to the other but teachers seems to be unaware of this and do not use oral practices to develop literacy. Bloch (2002) and her colleagues have shown how multilingualism can be maintained and promoted through the rich oral tradition that learners bring from their communities. They demonstrate that the songs and language games that are such a natural part of a child's world can be transcribed into written texts and used creatively for literacy development.

Interactive storybook reading appears to be helpful, especially for bilingual learners who are exposed to two languages (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998; Tompkins 2006). Goodman (1980) asserted more than thirty years ago that the roots of children's literacy development stem from their experience as well as the attitudes, beliefs and views they encounter as they interact within their family environment and community. She maintains that children begin from an early age to cultivate a conscious knowledge about the forms and functions of written language.

Clearly the home environment affects children's bilingualism. Morrow & Weinstein (1986) suggest that creating a visible, accessible, and attractive library corner can benefit bilingual children. Similarly, parents in bilingual families could put out books written in the child's first language. Parents' education, efforts, goals, and home environment are critical to improving children's oral bilingual and biliteracy skills. Bloch (1997:5) argued that parents are the first teachers and that becoming literate is a process, which emerges as children learn and experience reading and writing practices in a personally meaningful way. Bloch (2002) describes all the ways that learners can develop their

biliteracy skills, which include families reading, children writing, interactive writing, letters and journals. Children start reading books at home only if they are exposed to reading while they are still young.

### **Quality of instruction**

According to Prinsloo (2008), the quality of literacy instruction and literacy opportunities of most Grades R - 4 learners in South Africa is limiting literacy development. Prinsloo (2008) argued that a delayed introduction to English as a first additional language to mother-tongue or home-language instruction, usually in Grade 3, followed by a switch to English medium as a language of teaching and instruction in Grade 4, means that most learners are faced with an impossible transitional hurdle. When this is accompanied by mother-tongue instruction that is too shallow and an all too abrupt and early termination of solid mother-tongue teaching and learning, more warning lights start to flash. Under such circumstances, the study showed, learners can be expected to perform very poorly and are unlikely to successfully engage with the rest of the curriculum from Grade 4 onwards (Prinsloo, 2008).

With regards to learning environment, Kadlic & Lesiak (2003) point out that a print- rich classroom is one in which children interact with many forms of print including signs, labelled centres, wall stories, word displays, labelled murals, bulletin boards, charts, poems and other printed materials. The question teachers need to ask themselves is, "Does my classroom environment promote literacy learning?" Hamer & Adams (2003:13) argue that the use by children oral, visual and written language allows expression of their individual identity and participation in a literate society.

### **Role of culture**

Regarding the role of culture in biliteracy development, Aronstam (2005:24) affirms that culture is important for a child's literacy development because it is through culture that, children acquire knowledge and content and it is culture that 'provides children with the processes or means of their thinking.' Vygotsky (cited in Aronstam 2005:24) called this 'the tool of intellectual adaptation' and states that culture teaches children both what to think and how to think.

### **Research Methodology**

The research is broadly qualitative, in the form of an ethnographic case study. Shuttleworth (2008) defines a case study as an in-depth study of a particular situation, while Davis (1999) defines ethnography as a research process that is based on fieldwork using a variety of research techniques but including engagement in the lives of those being studied over a period of time. The need to spend time in the community or culture being studied is an important requirement of ethnography. The eventual written product of ethnography draws its data primarily from this fieldwork experience and usually emphasises descriptive detail. Another common method used in ethnographic research is interviewing, which may range from an informal conversation to highly structured formats in which

questions are pre-determined and involve different levels of complexity. Since ethnographic research takes place among real human beings, all ethical protocols were observed such as informed consent, use of pseudonyms in reporting and the researchers ensured that the research does not harm, physically or psychologically, or exploit in any way the subjects.

In this research, the classroom studied is treated as small-scale community in which certain ways of doing things have evolved over time. The classroom may be seen as a small-scale local culture with its own practices and beliefs. Teachers carry certain beliefs about teaching and learning, as do learners. It is the task of the ethnographer to uncover these beliefs if possible and describe them in detail. Though the research conducted in the Limpopo classrooms was not a full-fledged ethnography, it was based on ethnographic principles, and used some of the tools of ethnography, namely observation and interviews, and is therefore an ethnographically-oriented study. As such, the researcher was only an observer, rather than a participant, as getting involved in the classroom events may have altered the nature of the interaction. The researcher was aware that her very presence may affect the interaction but she tried to minimize this by being unobtrusive and not calling attention to herself in any way.

Since the research described in this article was based on one school and a limited number of classrooms, the design is that of a case study. According to Bromley (1990:302), a case study is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest and enables the researcher to understand the complex, real-life activities using multiple sources of evidence. The observations started on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 and ended on the 02<sup>nd</sup> of November 2010. Only 20 lessons were observed.

This research targeted Grade 3 learners from the Foundation phase and the teachers who teach all the learning areas in Grade 3, namely, Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. Observation involved the researcher sitting in on lessons and observing the activities that were taking place in the classroom and ascertaining whether two languages (the home language, Sesotho sa Leboa/ Sepedi and English) are being used to develop biliteracy among the learners. The researcher focussed mainly on the interaction between the teacher and the learners to see what strategies are being used by teachers and learners, which languages are being used. Hancock (2002:12) argues that

Observation is a technique that can be used when data collected through other means can be of limited value or is difficult to validate. Observation can also serve as a technique for verifying or nullifying information provided in face to face encounters.

Hancock's argument captures well the main reasons why classroom observation was selected as the primary data collection method.

It was also important to investigate if the lessons are always teacher-fronted or if the learners are grouped for learning (one-on-one with their teachers, small groups, pairs, whole group or are they doing activities independently). It was also crucial to examine the role of the teacher during the lesson; whether the teacher is doing most of the talking by lecturing the learners, or was the teacher guiding the learners? Did the teacher ask questions? How did the teacher handle learner responses? Does the teacher carry out activities that promote literacy development? Are the learners doing sufficient reading and writing in class? How is feedback given? Are there pictures, texts, and other materials on the walls, in the corridors and in other places in the school? Is there a book corner or reading corner? Does the school have a library? Is there any evidence that reading for pleasure is encouraged in the school to provide visual evidence of the print environment of the classroom? Hence observation was adopted in this case.

One-on-one interviews were also carried out with the teachers with aim to obtain the teachers' perceptions of what is effective or not in developing biliteracy among the learners. There are four teachers (three females and one male). Each interview lasted for about 30 to 45 minutes.

The content analysis was used for analysis focusing on the common themes that emerged from the responses of the teachers.

### **Results and Discussion**

In a one-on-one interview, the principal highlighted that the school has a quintile 3 classification which means learners do not pay school fees in terms of South African Education policy. The school has a feeding scheme and learners are also provided with stationery and any school material by the government. Selected women from the community are responsible for implementing the school feeding scheme by cooking and serving meals to the learners during lunch time. The principal claimed that eighty per cent of the families from which the learners come from have no formal schooling. Low literacy rates prevail amongst the inhabitants of the area around the school. As such, most parents of the learners are unable to help their children to read and write at home. The principal also claimed that resources such as story books are unlikely to be available at their homes.

#### *Language policy*

The language policy of the school (2010) states that all languages are accorded equal status, with the understanding that some languages will be used as languages of instruction while some are treated as primary languages and additional languages. The language of instruction in the Foundation Phase is Sepedi (mother tongue) and this was indeed the case. However, the policy states that English would be introduced as a second language in Grade 1 but this was not the case. The school introduces English only in Grade 2. So there are some serious gaps in the way the policy is

implemented. The failure especially to introduce English in Grade 2 as an additional language means that the learners have little or no exposure to English till they reach Grade 3.

Sepedi is used in the school assembly. School communication to the parents and guardians is done in Sepedi and it is the language of communication among teachers. Sepedi is used even in the English lessons, where all instructions are given in Sepedi, and at times the teacher would translate the English questions into Sepedi. The dominant language in the classroom is Sepedi. This is in line with the language policy of the school that the first language should be used as a medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase.

#### *Teaching and learning of English literacy*

The duration of the English lessons varied. On some days it went on for one hour and on others it could go on for two and a half hours. The duration of the lesson was quite arbitrary and depended entirely on the teacher. Sometimes the lessons were so long that the learners were tired but the teacher continued with the lesson nevertheless. The teacher used both English and Sepedi when he was interacting with the learners, but sometimes, 90% of the English lesson was conducted in Sepedi, obviously because the learners did not have enough competence in English to understand him. During the period under observation, it did not seem that learners were given any home work; in other words, they did not seem to be given the opportunity to review what they learnt at school. As such, there seemed to be no reinforcement of learning. Overcrowding made matters worse as it denied struggling learners adequate attention from the teacher during lessons.

#### *Teaching and learning of Numeracy*

In most of the Numeracy lessons that were observed, not all learners would pay attention to the teacher as they constantly kept glancing out. No numeracy homework was given to the learners during the observation period. The teacher did not use the Numeracy textbook and instead wrote all the questions and problems on the chalkboard. Sepedi was used in all the lessons except for the names of the numerals, which were in English. It would be accurate to say that 95% of the time Sepedi was used in every Numeracy lesson that was observed.

#### *Classroom routines*

Although textbooks were available, they were stacked in the cupboards and learners copied their work from the chalkboard. This practice created a real challenge for learners who were sitting furthest away from the chalkboard. Teachers had the same way of teaching; they all used the same methods. They always wrote activities and other material on the chalkboard and learners were made to read aloud. Reading aloud as a whole class was the only way in which learners read as no other reading methods were used. Children hardly ever read individually or discussed their work in groups. Only on one occasion did the Sepedi teacher bring some photocopied material to class. The English literacy



teacher also showed some creativity by getting the learners to create a portfolio. Except for these two instances, the teaching in all the learning areas was highly routinized, with the same approach being followed periodically.

#### *The classroom environment*

Two of the three Grade 3 classrooms were painted but the last one was still brick-faced. None of the rooms were in good condition. The rooms were overcrowded with three learners sharing a desk meant for two. The learners' school bags took up a lot of space and were placed between desks and along the walls. The teachers hardly had any space to move between the desks and therefore learners had no individual contact with the teachers during lessons.

It was evident that there was hardly any learning materials (charts, posters, and learners' own work) displayed on the walls. Two of the Grade 3 classrooms had no learning materials at all. Only the third classroom had eleven examples of learning materials displayed. However, the learners could not see them as they were displayed on the back wall of the classroom. Of the eleven materials that were displayed, eight were local (made by the teacher) and the remaining three were professional charts (supplied by a publisher). Seven of the local materials were in Sepedi and one was in English. All the published charts were in English. There are no story books or materials to promote reading for pleasure.

It can be argued that learners in this school work in an extremely impoverished learning environment. Except for the few posters mentioned, the learners were not exposed to any stimulating material in their environment. Teachers seemed to be unaware of the value of an attractive and engaging environment for Foundation Phase learners. Even when textbooks and other learning materials were available, the teachers were not using them while they wasted precious time writing everything on the chalkboard. Furthermore, the teachers' writing on the chalkboard was not always legible. Not having textbooks, denied the learners familiarity with this genre which is so central to education.

#### *Language use in the classroom*

In terms of language use in classroom, two teachers asserted that they use both English and Sepedi when they are teaching. The Numeracy teacher uses English only for the numerals and the rest of the lesson is conducted in Sepedi. The English teacher's response was somewhat contradictory because sometimes he said he uses English with the learners but in the same breath, he also said that learners do not understand English and he is therefore forced to use Sepedi. The findings from the classroom observation revealed that only when the teacher reads the actual texts that he has written on the chalkboard or when the learners repeat after him, are they using English. In fact the English teacher said that he is using the learners' home language to teach the second language. All

instructions and the language of classroom management in the English lessons observed were in Sepedi.

*Teacher experiences of teaching and learning*

Though there was no specific question on the language policy of the school in the schedule of interview questions, all the four teachers referred to it. The teachers blamed the language policy for the poor English proficiency of the learners. Because the school language policy states that Sepedi is the medium of instruction from Grade R to Grade 3, the learners did not take English seriously. The teachers claimed that they are forced to use Sepedi even in the English lessons as the learners do not understand anything if they are spoken to in English. The English teacher said that he is worried about giving the learners books written in English as the learners look confused. It seems that the teachers themselves are denying their learners opportunities to learn English by only using Sepedi. It is clear that the learners are not gaining biliteracy, not in their own language, Sepedi and as for English, there is no oracy development either as the learners are hardly spoken to in English.

*Teachers' views on factors that hinder biliteracy development*

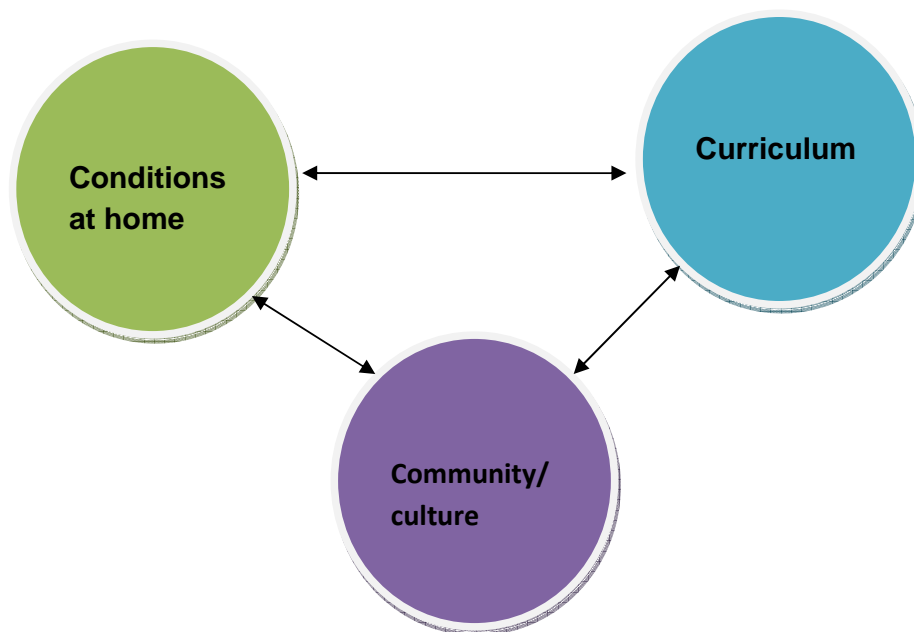
The teachers also mentioned the effect of the "Pass one, pass all" policy as it allows learners who have not yet acquired Grade-appropriate literacy and numeracy skills to progress to the next Grade. As a result, the majority of learners are still at the beginner's level even when they progress to Grade 4. The teachers claimed that lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms and illiterate parents are also hindering literacy development. The teachers said that they could not give individual attention to learners as the classroom is overcrowded. The teachers complained that they could not move freely in class because of congestion. They claimed that because the school lacked resources such as books which made it difficult to arouse interest in books among the learners. However, they did not seem to realise that they were not using the textbooks that were in fact available. They asserted that because the school lacks a library, learners cannot develop an interest in reading. They claimed that they could not give homework as the parents are illiterate and could not help their children at home with school work.

*Teachers' views on strategies for improving biliteracy development*

During the interview process, the teachers said that despite being in a rural school, they were eager to improve the literacy levels of their learners and highlighted the most appropriate ways in which this could be done. These include the adoption of a learner-centred approach, government support with resources, since parents from rural areas cannot afford to pay for some of the materials, needed for use in class. They also recommended devising new strategies for teaching learners how to read and write and that learners should be given homework from time to time. The provision of a conducive learning environment of a print-rich environment as well as creating a library and internet connectivity were also deemed necessary.

**Towards a model for effective teaching and learning environment**

We postulate a framework we consider ideal for creating a conducive environment to develop any type of literacy including biliteracy. We posit a 3Cs model comprising of **Conditions** in the home environment, **Community** and the **Curriculum** as key ingredients which support literacy in general and bi-literacy in particular. The framework is depicted in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows that **Conditions at home** are as important as the other ingredients. Conditions at home include the availability of parents or guardians who support education, their own education is also an important factor (whether they are literate or not literate), availability of facilities such as a study room, books, a print-environment, learning aides, chalk/whiteboards, desks and chairs and so forth. It is at home that learners can talk, listen, experiment, work with family as a group and learn family values and beliefs. The **Community and culture** are important as learners learn attitudes, community values, customs and beliefs from their culture/community. The **Curriculum** includes the teaching methods, learning activities, teaching philosophy which are influenced by the competences of the teachers at school. Within the context of systems thinking, any disjuncture between these components of this system cripples it with commensurate consequences.



**Figure 1: 3Cs framework**

Martello (2007) maintains that emergent or early literacy is very much a social practice that develops in social contexts rather than through formal instruction. Early childhood educators therefore need to consider and incorporate home and community literacy practices into their teaching and learning

programme. When home literacy practices greatly differ from primary school literacy practices, children can experience difficulties. Effective literacy practices in early childhood services can help build a bridge between early literacy practices in the home and literacy practices at school (Martello, 2007). This implies that they may need to harmonise teaching and learning practices at home, in the community and at school for effectiveness.

## **Conclusion**

### *Development of biliteracy*

It can be surmised that the learners in Grade 3 of this case study are not developing biliteracy. They are also not developing literacy in their home language, Sepedi. Their exposure to Sepedi is only through the writing on the chalkboard in Sepedi by the teachers. They do not read Sepedi textbooks, let al. one Sepedi story books or any other material meant to develop the learners' reading capabilities in Sepedi. Even though the language policy of the school states that Sepedi is the medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase, the learners are only being exposed to the Sepedi of the teachers. The teacher uses a lot of Sepedi in the English lesson and learners are not getting sufficient exposure to English. Learners are being denied the chance to encounter English and learn it.

### *Teaching and learning materials*

Books of any kind are simply not being used at all in this grade. Not only does the school not have a library, whatever material is readily available is not sufficiently being used. The learners are simply not developing print literacy or any kind of literacy. All the lessons were extremely teacher-centred. Learners were not organised into groups. They rarely had opportunities to work independently. The teachers seemed to be using the same ritualistic and routinised way of teaching. However, the teachers laid the blame for their ineffectiveness on the lack of resources, frequent changes in the curriculum and poor training. Evidently, teaching is taking place in an extremely impoverished print environment. The walls are empty of print material and there is hardly anything in the environment that could stimulate the interest of the learners. Furthermore, the teachers in this study seem unaware of the processes involved in listening, reading, speaking, and writing and interpret these crucial skills to be mechanistic and developed through repetition and reproduction. They are doing nothing to help the learners develop the wide range of emerging literacy skills that the learners are potentially able to assimilate and embrace.

### *Developing literacy in two languages*

Gort (2004) shows that when children start writing and reading in two languages, they employ much the same strategies regardless of which language they are using. Once they develop phonological awareness (sound-symbol correspondence) they apply that awareness to whichever language they are engaging with at any particular instance. They transfer creative spelling and other strategies for decoding and encoding texts from one language to another. The processes of interpreting texts

remain essentially the same. However, the teachers in this study are unaware of these relationships. The teaching of literacy in the home language is so superficial that there is no solid foundation for the learners to build on either to develop their own language further or to transfer to skills to English.

The delayed introduction to English as a first additional language (only in Grade 3, rather than in Grade 2, as stated by the school's policy) only makes matters worse. Teachers seem to be unaware of how to handle the introduction of a new language as they adopted the same routinised approach that they use to teach Sepedi. When learners have to make the switch to the English medium as a language of teaching and instruction in grade 4, they are faced with an impossible transitional hurdle, from which they never recover. This study confirms the findings of the extensive Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) research (Prinsloo 2008) that the quality of literacy instruction and literacy opportunities of most grades R - 4 learners is limiting literacy development.

### **Recommendations**

Much research and many pedagogic initiatives have been carried out in many parts of the world. In South Africa itself, there are many models of biliteracy development, such as the one developed by the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA). Such models have to be made available to teachers, not in the form of theories but as demonstrations. Government needs to identify innovations that have been shown to work in South Africa and make them available to local school teachers. Therefore Government needs to set up demonstration schools where these innovations are implemented and teachers should be given time off to experience these demonstration schools in groups, in order to discuss debate and inform practice. It is only when teachers take control of their own teaching, and make decisions about what will work or not work in their own context, will their motivation and effectiveness be increased. An area for further research is the replication of this study within the context of either a secondary or tertiary institution in South Africa to unpack the effectiveness of current teaching and learning practices in order to enrich practice.

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