UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE
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Distance Education Project

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*Core Education
Studies Course*

*Helping Learners
Learn*

Umthamo 3

*The Languages
of
Learning and
Teaching*

Contents

HELPING LEARNERS LEARN

Umthamo 3

The Languages of Learning and Teaching

Introduction

This is the third umthamo in the strand 'Helping Learners Learn'. In the first umthamo, we considered ways in which different classroom management styles *help learners to learn* more effectively. We made group work our special focus. We saw that effective learning can take place in groups when learners work co-operatively on a task that has meaning for them. Using groups is one way (but not the only way) of putting the learner at the centre of what happens in the classroom.

In the second umthamo, we looked more generally at how learner-centredness helps learners to learn. We read about educationists who changed the world by introducing child-centred approaches and philosophies into schools. We looked again at group work, and explored other ways of being learner-centred. Some of these were: open-ended questioning, peer learning, profiling your learners; creating a learner-centred classroom environment.

In lo mthamo, we will look more closely at the languages you use in your classroom. Nowadays, these are called the **Languages of Learning and Teaching** (LOLT). The term we used to use for this was **'medium of instruction'**. We will ask ourselves which language is the LOLT which helps learners to learn best. As we do this, we will also look in more depth at **different ways of questioning.**

Most language and learning experts say that it is best to learn using the Primary Language (the first language you learnt, when you were a small child).

In South Africa, because English is a language of such power, there is pressure from parents, from teachers and from learners for English to be the LOLT.

In practice, a mixture of languages is used in most of our classrooms. In the lower grades, most teachers use the primary language, but try to introduce English gradually. As learners move up through the school, teachers often use English as LOLT, but include explanations and discussions in the Primary Language. This practice of moving backwards and forwards between two or more languages is called "code-switching".

Other terms sometimes used to refer to the Primary Language are: home language; mother tongue; first language; heritage language (see LLC umthamo 17).

Additional Readings (1) contains extracts from 3 papers on the subject of Languages of Learning and Teaching. You are encouraged to read them so that you gain insight into some of the issues involved.

The cartoon on the next page shows a teacher and learners code-switching in a class in Gauteng.

(from Diteme tsathuto, ELTIC)

The question, "Which language should be used as LOLT?" has long been a hot issue in South Africa. We saw, in Umthamo 16, how it sparked off the Soweto uprising in 1976. This uprising was a turning point in the history of our country, and of education in South Africa.

Language in education policy has now changed. Government policy now promotes respect for, and the development of, African languages, which have been under-valued – often even despised - in the past. All 11 official languages can now be used as languages of learning and teaching. Every child has the right to learn through the medium of her/his own home language. Every learner (or his/ her parent) has the right to choose the language through which his/her child will learn. And every school has been asked to formulate its own language policy.

Do you know what the language policy of your school is? Has your school formulated its language policy?

You have just done a Natural Science umthamo on 'investigation'. In lo mthamo, we will investigate the issue of LOLT. As you struggle with questions about which language(s) to use in the classroom, there are many factors you need to take into account:

- Effective learning;
- Learner-centredness;
- The attitudes of learners and their parents;
- Your own language competences and the language competences of your learners;
- The realities of your context, and the languages your learners are exposed to outside of school;
- The language(s) learners will use for reading and writing;*
- The language(s) in which learners will be assessed.*

*We will not be able to deal with these aspects in great detail in lo mthamo. There will be an umthamo on assessment, which will look at the language(s) of assessment in the context of different forms of assessment, and of the continuous assessment which is part of Curriculum 2005. But as you think through the issue of LOLT, remember to keep these factors in mind.

We will return to these as we work through the umthamo.
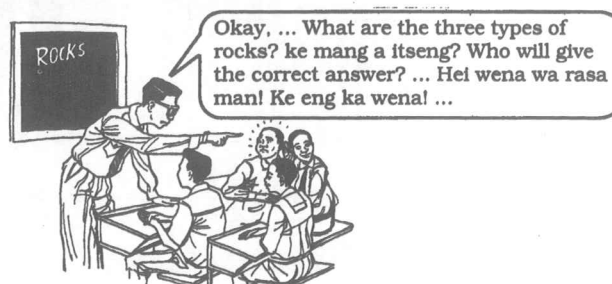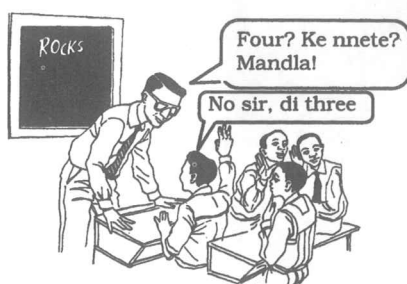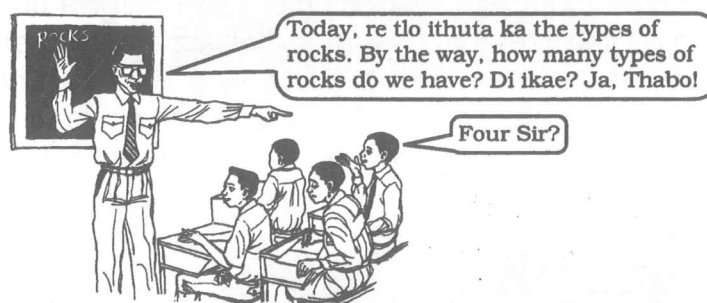
Here is a brief overview of how we will go about our investigation:

In Unit 1 of lo mthamo, you will first think about the languages you use in different situations. This should make you more aware of the language(s) that you use for thinking and learning. You will then do a mini-research project, investigating the languages you use in your classroom, and how you use them. This is **Part 1 of the Key Activity.**

In Unit 2, you will look at extracts from other teachers' lessons. You will investigate the way they code-switch. You will also think about the way they set thinking tasks and use questions to help their learners to learn. You will also look at the way they develop the English competence of the learners in their classes. This should make you more aware of how their language use and your language use helps learners to learn, and how it helps learners to learn English.

Unit 3 will ask you to develop a policy for LOLT (the Languages of Learning and Teaching) in your own classroom. You will write this down, as **Part 2 of the Key Activity.**
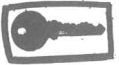
In Unit 4, you will put your policy into practice. You will organise a learning experience for your class. Your class will investigate and ask questions about the kinds of things that sink in water, and the kinds of things that float. You will then present the lesson and reflect on it. We will ask you to write a reflective report on the learning experience, as **Part 3 of the Key Activity. These 3 parts of the Key Activity will be handed in for umKhwezeli appraisal, once you and your peers have appraised them.**

We hope that lo mthamo will help you to clarify your ideas, and formulate some useful and usable language strategies for your classroom. We wish to emphasise that we do not expect all of you to use languages in the same way. Different situations require different strategies. Different teachers have different styles. You need to find a style and a language strategy which suits you, and *helps your learners to learn.*

Intended outcomes

When you have finished working through lo mthamo, you will have:

1. Thought about your own language use, and researched language use in your own classroom;

2. Read transcripts from other teachers' lessons and thought about:
   - The way they (and you) code-switch, and their (and your) reasons for code-switching;
   - The kinds of questions they (and you) ask, and the languages used for questions and answers;
   - Whether learners are helped to develop thinking skills in their (and your) lessons.
   - Whether the learning of English is promoted in their (and your) lessons.

3. Developed a policy for LOLT in your classroom;

4. Prepared a lesson, thinking carefully about:
   - Using questions to promote thinking;
   - Which language(s) you will use, how and why.

5. Presented the lesson and reflected on it;

6. Written a reflective report on the lesson.
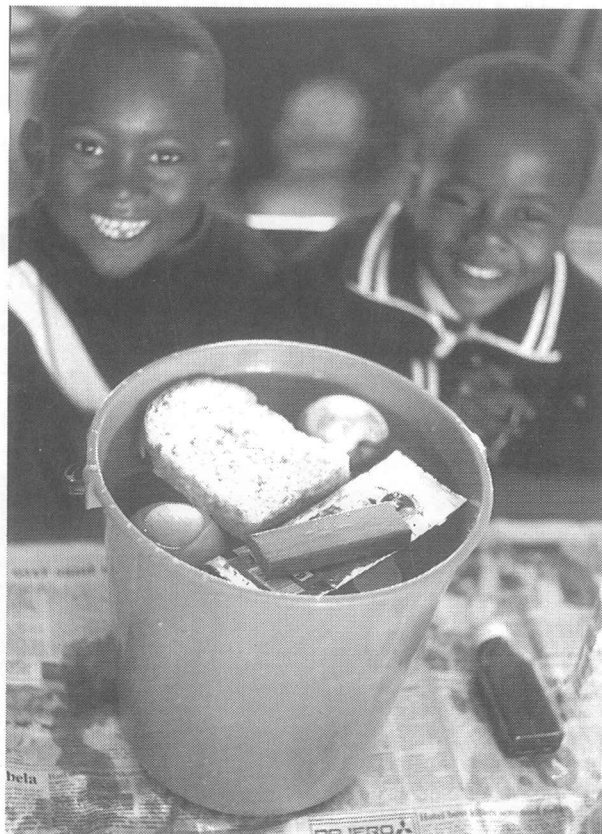
Unit 1: Think about your own use of languages

1.1 My languages

Before you start thinking about your classroom and your school, we would like to ask you to think about *yourself,* and the languages you use every day. We would like you to write about these things in your journal.
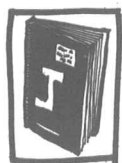
Journal write

- Do you have a single primary language or more than one? (e.g. Some people who live in Soweto grow up from babyhood speaking isiZulu and seTswana, for instance.)

- Who do you speak to using Xhosa (or whichever language(s) is/are your Primary Language(s))? What kinds of things do you speak about in your Primary Language?

- Who do you speak to using English? What kinds of things do you speak about in English?

- Are there other languages that you use? Who do you speak to using those languages? What kinds of things do you talk about?

- What language do you dream in?

- What language do you pray in?

- What language to you think in? If someone asks you a question in English, do you think about it in your Primary Language before answering? Do you have to translate your answer in your head before you give it?

- In the Learning about Learning umthamo 18, we heard about two kinds of talk: **presentational talk** and **exploratory talk.** Which languages do you use for these two kinds of talk?

Share your journal write with another teacher-learner at a face-to-face session. Have a general discussion around these questions. What insights do your answers give you about which language(s) is/are the best for learning in?

1.2 Languages in my classroom

Key Activity, Part 1: A mini-research project

In this first part of the Key Activity, we would like you to do some research. We would like you to get some accurate information about the languages you are using in your classroom. Our experience in trialling this umthamo has shown us that teachers often know unconsciously how best to use languages to *help learners learn.* We would like you to become aware of the good things you are doing, and later to think about ways of improving what you do. (i.e. Once again, we are asking you to reflect on your practice).

To do this research, you will use a tape-recorder and record one or two of your lessons. We suggest that you record the whole lesson, but try to make the lesson fairly short (about 30 minutes). We would like to focus in lo mthamo on the teaching of so-called 'content subjects', so if you choose to tape a language lesson, please **also** record another lesson, e.g. **Natural Science, Life Skills, Maths** or **Human and Social Sciences.**

Try to forget about the tape recorder while the lesson goes on. You need to find out about what *usually* happens in your classroom. We do not want you to put on a special show for the tape recorder. It might help you to do this if you ask a colleague or a learner to operate the tape recorder. Then you will be able to forget about it.

Some people may feel that they ought to be using English in the classroom. They may therefore try to use more English in the taped lessons than they usually do. ***Don't change what you usually do.*** You have your reasons for what you are doing, and they are probably very good reasons. There are many ways of using languages to promote good learning. You will become more effective as a teacher as you become more aware of what you are doing, and why.

So, before you go any further, tape one or two of your lessons. (One lesson is sufficient, but two lessons will give you a broader picture of what you do.)

Now that you have taped the lesson(s), read the 'research procedure' below.

Research procedure

You probably used 2 (or perhaps 3) languages in your lessons. For most people, those languages would have been Xhosa and English. Some teacher-learners may have used Sotho or Zulu instead of (or in addition to) Xhosa. Some may have used Afrikaans. The statements below refer to 'Primary Language' and 'English'. If you have used other languages, please do not feel excluded. Explain how, when and why you used the other languages.

1. Listen to the recording(s) you have made, and work out the amount of time the primary language was used, and the amount of time English was used. You can do this by using a watch which has a second hand. We will describe the way we did it, but feel free to do it any way which works for you.

We found that it was easiest to do it this way:

• Start by noting the time when you started listening to the recording of the lesson (e.g. 09h37).

• If the lesson seems to be mainly in Xhosa, listen **only** for the amounts of time spent using English. Write them down as you go along.

(English: 1 sec.; 5 sec., 4 sec.; 10 sec.; 1 minute; etc.)

• Note the time when you finished listening to the lesson (e.g. 10h04). Work out how long the lesson was. (27 minutes)

• Add up the amounts of time spent using English (e.g. 10 mins 15 sec.) and then subtract from the total time of the lesson (27 minutes). This means that Xhosa was used for 16 minutes 45 seconds. (Remember that I minute = 60 seconds). If part of the lesson was quiet (i.e. the learners were writing or reading silently), you need to include that, noting which language they were using.
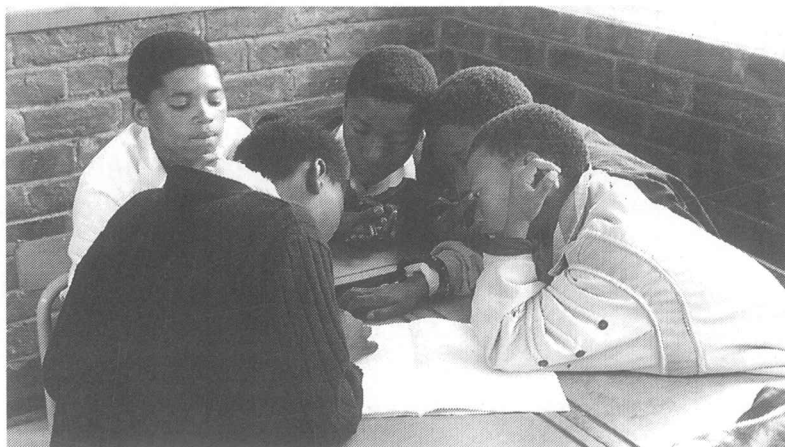
2. Write down your results like this, using the form which you have been given, together with the 3 essential readings, in a separate handout:

Grade and Learning Area: *Grade 6, Science lesson*

Languages used

Primary language (*Xhosa*): *16 minutes 45 seconds*

English: *10 minutes 15 seconds*

Other:

3. Now read through the descriptions on the form (A, B and C). Decide which main heading fits your lesson, and tick the block next to it. For instance, the Grade 6 Science lesson above fits main heading A.

   Then tick any of the sentences under the main heading which fit your lesson. Maybe none of them will fit your lesson. Then make up a sentence which describes how or why you change from one language to another. Write it in one of the blank spaces at the bottom of the section, and tick it.

4. Now answer the additional questions which appear below. Answer them on a separate sheet of paper. These answers will be useful to you when you prepare for the lesson which forms Part 2 of the Key Activity.

As you work through Unit 2, you will have a chance to reflect on this research you have done.

Additional Questions

1. What language(s) did you use to ask questions? Write down the questions you asked, in the languages you asked them.

2. What language(s) did the learners use to ask questions. Write down the questions the learners asked, in the languages they asked them.

3. Did you have to introduce new words or concepts in the lesson? Which language(s) did you use to introduce them? Write down the new words and concepts you introduced, and explain how you introduced them.
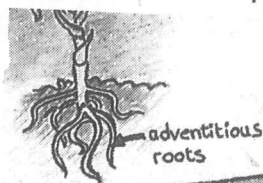
adventitious roots

tap root

The mielie has lots of roots growing from its stem.

The bean has one big root with little side roots.

Roots = izimpande (Zulu)   Roots = metso (Sotho)

Unit 2: Think about the use of different languages in the classroom

In this unit, we will give you a 'peep' into some other classrooms. You will read extracts from transcripts of lessons other teachers have given. These are teachers just like you. Some of them are taking the B.Prim.Ed. course. These lessons are not 'special' or 'exemplary'* lessons.

We will reflect together on certain aspects of these lessons, helped in our reflections by certain readings, written by people who have researched and studied the issue of "Languages of Learning and Teaching" in South Africa and elsewhere.

*exemplary lessons: lessons you should copy or take as an example
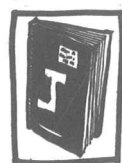
2.1 Start by reading the lesson extracts below, guided by the questions which follow.

If time is limited, choose 2 extracts to read. Read one from Foundation Phase and one from Intermediate/Senior Phase. Ask yourself these questions before you read the extracts. Try to answer them after you have read each extract. You could do this by discussing them with a partner, or by thinking on your own and writing brief notes in your journal.

1. Thinking tasks

What kinds of 'thinking tasks' are the learners doing? Where, in these short extracts, are the teachers challenging their learners to think in new ways, to develop new skills, or to explore and discover? How could they do this more, as the lesson progresses?

2. Questioning

What kinds of questions do the teachers ask? What kind of answers do the learners give? What languages are used in this questioning and answering? Are the learners 'talking' to each other, or to the teacher (in Xhosa or in English), in ways that help them construct meaning?

Remember, from Um-thamo 18, how important talk is for learning?

3. English usage

What is the teacher asking her learners to do in English? Do you think they can do more in English than she is asking them to do? In what ways could she challenge them to understand and use more English, as the lesson goes on? Do learners seem to be becoming more competent in English as they move up through the school?

4. LOLT

Could the learners have learned more if the Primary Language was the accepted LOLT, and teachers didn't feel pressurised to use English? Could they have learned more if only English was used? Is the quality of learning which takes place dependent on the choice of LOLT?

Teacher A, teaching Grade 1 Maths

T: Khupha iphepha eli bendikunike lona kusasa encwadini yakho. Sizakubala ke ngoku, Masikhe sibaleni:

(Children sing)

Siyathanda ukubala, ukubala ngeminwe yethu. Inye, zimbini, zintathu, zine, zintlanu, zintandathu sixhenxe, sibhozo, lithoba lishumi (x2)

One, two, tie my shoe,

Three, four, open the door,

Five, six, pick up sticks,

Seven, eight, lay them straight,

Nine, ten, a big, fat hen.

Inye, zimbini, zintathu, zine, zintlanu, zintandathu, sixhenxhe, sibhozo, lithoba, lishumi (x2)

T: Kanti xa sibala inani eliza emva ko-one ngubani?

Ls: Ngu-two

T: Inani eliza emva ko-zero ngubani?

Ls: Ngu-one

T: Emva ko-one sithini?

Ls: Ngu-two

T: Emva ko-two sithini?

Ls: Ngu-three

(This pattern of questioning continued until they reached '7')

T: Phambi kokuba sithi seven sithini?

Ls: six

T: Phambi kokuba sithi six sithini?

Ls: five

T: Phambi kokuba sithi five sithini?

Ls: four

(This pattern of questioning continued until they reached 'zero')

T: Khawusalathele u-seven edongeni. Ngubani elanani? U-seven uphakhathi kwawaphi amanani amabini? Masingathethi sonke. *(repeats question)*

L: Uphakhathi ko-six no-eight.

(The teacher continued the lesson by working through parts of the OBE worksheet on 'seven' with the children. Xhosa was used throughout, except that the English words for numbers and colours were used.)
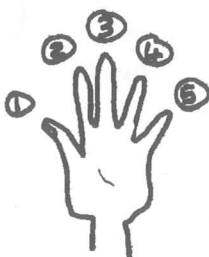
Teacher B, teaching Grade 2, Maths

(Kids chant together from 1 to 200 in English.)

T: Now, can you tell me the number between 2 and 4? Nantsi i-number card. Nantsi i-number card. Yes.

L: 3 is between 2 and 4

T: Very good. Sonke bethunana.

Ls: *(Class repeats)*

T: What is the number between 35 and 37? (x2) Hands up.

L: 36 is between 35 and 37

T: Very good. Sonke bethunana.

L: *(Class repeats)*

(A similar pattern is followed for a few more numbers)

T: All right. What number comes after 29? (x2)

30 comes after 29. Uza emva…

T: What number comes after 47? (x2) Yes, Thabiso

L: 48 after comes 47.

T: Ja. 48 comes after 47. (x2) Class.

Ls: *(Class repeats)*

T: What number comes before 16? Hu? Before. Before 16. Yes.

L: 15 comes before 16.

T: What number comes before 9? (x3) Phelele.

L: 8 comes before 9.

T: Very good. 8 comes before 9. OK. What is the date today? (x3)

L: The date today is the 15th of September.

T: The 15th of September? Is it the 15th of September?

Ls: No.

T: What is the date then? What is the date today? (x2) The date today is the 20th of September. Abantu bane tendency yokungayazi i-date xa ibiyi-weekend. Besigqibele iyintoni i-date ngokuya besisesikolweni? Besigqibele ngantoni i-date? Masibale ukuba ngomGqibelo ibiyintoni na i-date? Sibale ukuba ibiyintoni ngeCawe? Masibale ukuba inokuba yintoni namhlanje. Sibala ngolohlobo i-date. Kufuneka ubale nangomGqibelo i-date, andithi?

T: What is the date today?

L: The date today is the 20th of September 1999.

T: OK. Xa kengoku iyi-20 namhlanje, what was the date yesterday?

L: The date yesterday was 19th of September 1999.

T: OK. Class.

Ls: *(Class repeats)*

T: What will the date be tomorrow?

L: The date tomorrow will be the 21st of September 1999.

T: Right. Sonke bethunana.

Ls: *(Class repeats)*

(Teacher writes the sum 9 – 4 on the board.)

T: Yintoni leya? Ngubani onokundixelela?

Ls: Yi-sum

T: Kufuneka siyithini?

L: Kufuneka siyibale.

T: OK. Xa ubale i-sum ufuna ukukhupha ntoni?

Ls: i-answer

(The teacher continued to work through the sum in this fashion on the board with the children, speaking Xhosa. The lesson then continued with a learner leading the class in doing another subtraction sum, and then the learners did some sums in their books.)

Teacher C, teaching Grade 4, Health

The teacher begins by asking the learners, in English, to give her examples of the things we eat. They give examples, in the form, 'We eat bread', 'We eat potatoes', etc.

T: OK, we know all the food that we eat…Mngqusho…ipapa…porridge…zonke zona…so! We are going to learn about the three kinds of food. Why do we eat food? Why? Sikutyela ntoni ngoku oku kutya? Xa sithetha ngokutya sikutyela ntoni? Why do we eat that food? (x2)

L: We eat food for energy.

T: We eat food for energy. Very good. Give her a hand. For energy. Ubemkhulu ubenamandla neh? Why do we eat food? What else can you tell me? Nokuba sithetha ngesiXhosa bethunana, nokuba uthetha ngesiXhosa bethunana. Sikutyela ntoni ukutya?

L: We eat food to build our bodies.

T: We eat food to build our bodies. Very good. Yakheke imizimba yethu. What else?

T: We eat food to protect our bodies from illness (x3) You understand. Kungabilula ukuba uphathwe sisifo, jonga kum, umane usitya ukutya okuzakuba kwakhe umzimba wakho okunye kuzakwenza ube nantoni? Uthi build your bodies. Do you understand?

The lesson continued with learners working with pictures of different foods, and later working in groups to group foods.

Teacher D, teaching Grade 7, Human and Social Sciences

This lesson dealt with the question, 'What do people think of South Africa after Apartheid?' The teacher began by making sure that the learners understood certain terms, such as 'Apartheid' and 'vote'. This was done almost entirely in English. She then put the learners into groups, and gave them posters to look at. As she walked around, she said:

T: I want you to look at these posters. Each group should get one. Look at the posters. Try to find the message there. Nalen' igroup, nalen' igroup. Sherishani bantakwethu. Ukusherisha ke kukuthini? Andijikelezisi eli phepha. You share the information because I want you to look at the posters. Try to find out what the people who wrote these posters wanted from a new government. OK? Umntu obhalayo wenzani ke ngoku?

Ls: Uyabhala.

T: Uphendula ntoni? Umbuzo lo siwubuzayo? Xa ujonge phaya babefuna ntoni aba bantu? What did they want? Thethani, thethani abhale unobhala. Ukuba nifumene 20 i-right ukuba nifumene 5 i-right lo nto niyifumeneyo ngokubafast benu. Vumelani unobhala abhale kaloku. What did they want from a new government? Nikhe nibone moss ezaposters ziphakamiswayo xa abantu betoytoya, neh? Batoytoyela lo nto bayitoytoyelayo. I want to get it from you.

After the groups had discussed, using any language they chose, they reported back in English. The teacher congratulated them on their work.

She went on to write up two definitions on the board, in English. One was a definition of 'Facts'. The other was a definition of 'Opinion'. She gave them some sentences in English, and asked them whether they expressed fact or opinion. They had to give a reason for their answer. Most of this exercise took place in English. On one occasion, explanations were given in Xhosa.

They were then given some readings. These readings gave the opinions of a number of South Africans about the changes that have taken place since 1994. Learners had to sort these responses in certain ways. This exercise generated lively discussion. English extracts from the readings were mixed with Xhosa comments, made by teacher and learners.

Teacher E, teaching Grade 7 English (Reading lesson)

T: What I want you to do now I will read first, and I will ask you to follow me at some times. Ne?

Ls: Yes

T: *Long ago, the King of Egypt wanted to know how his people lived.* Where is Egypt? Yes

L: Egypt is in the North of Africa

T: (Repeats) You agree? Do you agree?

Ls: Yes (Chorus)

T: Right. *One night he dressed like a poor man and went into the city.* What is a city?

L: A town…

T: *He listened to his people grumbling.* His people were grumbling. When you grumble is when you…seem to be unhappy…

L: Grumblisha

T: Jaaaa, gramblisha, siyagramblisha andithi?

Ls: Yes.

T: Now. *They said that they were poor and the food was expensive… .No one laughed in this town. No one sang, and no-one was happy. Everybody was unhappy.* Wonk'umntu wayequmbile kuledolophu. Kungeko nomnye ohlekayo. *When the king was walking back to his palace, he passed a shop.* You walk back to…you walk to…you walk to… the palace. What is a palace? `Siphokazi.

L: A palace is where a king lives.

T: Yes good (Repeats) Libhotwe, andithi. *Inside he heard someone singing. Inside a little shop. He went inside the shop. …. A young man was sitting on the floor, making shoes, and as he worked, he sang. When the shoemaker saw that there was a visitor, he stood up and greeted him.* Molo, mfondini. *Then he gave the king some bread and water.* Only what?

Ls: Bread and water.

T: Was the shoemaker aware that this was the king? In reality. He was not aware. Ne? He just said Oooh! Poor soul! Because why was he not aware? Why?

L: He dressed like a poor man.

T: (Repeats) Andithi. Just have a picture of Madiba wearing the old clothes. Ezikrazukileyo, ezinikiniki eme pha phandle. Ela xesha akumazi ukuba uMadiba uqabe ipeyinti emnyama apha ebusweni okanye ipolishi emnyama. Do you have a picture of what I am saying?

Ls: Yes.

T: Now do you know Madiba when he comes to that door like that?

Ls: No.

T: No, nobody could know him, ne?

The teacher continued to read the story with the learners, asking them questions about it. Most questions were of a similar kind to those recorded above. The learners answered them briefly, in English. Here are the two questions which the teacher discussed with the learners in Xhosa:

T: What would you have done if you were the shoemaker?

T: Do you think the shoemaker was an educated person? Tell me what you think and give me your reasons.

She also debated with them, in Xhosa, the importance of school.

The total time spent using Xhosa was finally more than the time spent using English.

(You will find the rest of the story with your additional readings.)

2.2 Examine the lessons in more detail

You have done a lot of thinking already about the extracts from lessons. We would now like you to reflect on them in more detail, with help from some 'experts'.

Study the **two extracts** you have already read, if you do not wish to study them all. As you reflect on these lesson extracts, reflect on **your own lesson as well.**

Remember, though, that you will get a broader picture if you read and study more than two.

We are going to think about these lessons from three different angles: *Code-switching, Questioning,* and *Additional Language Learning. F*or each of these areas, there is a reading which will help you in your thinking. We will deal with them one by one. This activity of reflecting, reading and writing in your journal will occupy quite a lot of your time. **Give yourself time to do it.**

A. Code-switching

1. Read *Reading 1: Code-switching in Multilingual Classrooms: A Teachers' Debate.* This reading presents two different views on code-switching. The first teacher believes that code-switching is helpful for learning. The second believes that teachers should speak English all the time. You might think that one view is right and the other view is wrong, but this is not necessarily so. Which of the two teachers do you agree with? You may find that there are valuable points in both views, but that you think one is more practical than the other. Read the passage and then write your response to it in your journal. Which are the points that you agree with? Which points that these teachers make are helpful to you in your classroom? (Remember that both of these teachers are Secondary School teachers. Their strategies may not apply in your Primary School classroom.)

2. Now look at the extracts from the lessons you have chosen to study. Think also about *your lesson*. All the teachers whose lessons are recorded in the extracts have made use of code-switching. Did *you* make use of code-switching? Look at each lesson in turn, think about the following, and write in your journal:

- Do you think the teacher was **conscious** of her code-switching. Do you think she knew how it was affecting the learning in her class? Give reasons for what you say.

- Was the teacher **purposeful** in her code-switching? Why did she switch? Do you think the switch provided her learners with better opportunities for learning?

- Was the teacher **systematic** about her switching. Do you think she switched for similar reasons throughout the lesson, or was her switching haphazard?

The first part of the reading lists a number of reasons for code-switching. The form which you filled in in Unit 1 also lists a number of possible reasons for code-switching. Think carefully about each of the reasons mentioned **in the form.**

- Which of them *help learners to learn?*

- Which of them hold learners back, limiting the amount of thinking that they do?

- Which of them are simply boring the learners, telling them the same thing in different words?

- Which of them give the learners a challenge which is stimulating, but one that they can cope with?

If learners are to learn, they need to be challenged to stretch a little further than they have already reached. Questions and tasks need to stretch them to think and to do what they haven't done before — to be creative, to explore their world, to understand a new word, a new concept. But at the same time, these questions and tasks need to be rooted in the world that they know. They need to start where the learners are. Code-switching needs to do all this, if it is to *help learners to learn.*

Discuss the above questions at your next face-to-face session, and share your ideas with the whole group.

B. Questioning

1. Read **Reading 2: What it means to be in Standard 3.** This reading is taken from a book by Carol Mac-Donald, a South African academic who specialises in psycholinguistics*. She did a major research project into the experiences of learners as they moved from the old Standard 2 (Primary Language as LOLT) into the old Standard 3 (English as LOLT). Although education policies have changed since 1991, when the report was published, many learners and teachers continue to go through the same experiences.

   Read the reading once through, to get the general meaning. Don't worry if you don't understand every word.

2. Now read **Reading 2** a second time. As you read it, notice especially what Carol MacDonald says about questioning. When you have finished reading, write notes in your journal about what she says about questioning.

3. Now read the two extracts from lessons again. How has each teacher used questions in her lesson? Which of her questions are closed? Which of her questions are open*? Did the learners ask questions in the lesson? Which languages were used to ask and answer the closed questions? Which languages were used to ask and answer the open questions? Remember to ask these questions about your own lesson as well. Write your thoughts about these questions in your journal.

4. Think back over the Key Activities in the Core Learning Areas imithamo (Language, Literacy and Communication; Natural Science; Maths and Technology). How many of the classroom activities have involved **open questions?** Can you remember what languages you and the learners used when you discussed these questions?

Discuss your journal entries with a colleague, or at the face-to-face session.

*psycholinguistics: The study of how people learn language

*allowing for a number of different opinions and answers, none of which is the only 'right' one

You might also like to look at what Additional Readings (3) says about questioning. It is on page 13, under the heading 'Tailoring of Student Participation'.

Do you remember what was said about open and closed questions in Umthamo 12, pages 19 & 20? Umthamo 18, about talking and learning, also asked who asks the questions in your classroom, and what kinds of questions they are.

Do you remember the findings reported in Umthamo 18 that children talk far less at school than at home, and ask far fewer questions? And yet it is through talk that they construct their own meanings. It is through talk that they learn.

For instance, in the Natural Science umthamo 11, you gave the learners a picture of 'footprints', and asked them, 'What do you think is happening here?' In the Language, Literacy and Communication umthamo 9, you asked the learners to make up their own questions about the part of the intsomi that they had not yet heard. They then talked about the possible answers to those questions.
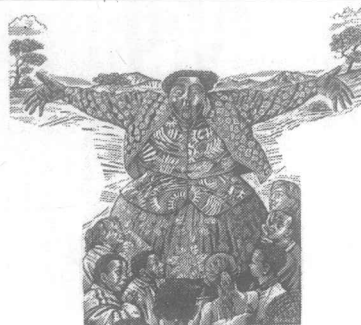
Carol Macdonald says that when teachers teach using an unfamiliar language as the LOLT, it is easier for them to use closed questions (questions to which the answer is 'Yes', or questions beginning with 'What'). Sometimes, the asking and answering of such questions becomes almost completely meaningless. She shows how learners can answer questions about a passage from a text book 'correctly' without knowing what the passage or the question is about. Does this 'ring true'* with your experience, as a learner, and as a teacher?

People are often afraid when a teacher asks them a closed question. They fear that they will get the answer wrong. This fear goes away when the learner sees that the teacher is asking a question which *doesn't have a right answer. The* teacher is also exploring the question. She or he is saying, 'What do you think?' When you ask 'What do you think?' questions, answers from different people are different and unexpected. Discussion will often arise from a 'What do you think?' question. It is difficult to answer and discuss an open question in a language which you do not know well.

You might have noticed that the Grade 7 teacher asked many closed questions in English, and the learners answered them. But when she asked them, 'What would you have done if you were the shoemaker?' and, 'Do you think that the shoemaker was an educated person?', the discussion moved into Xhosa. This was when the learners began using critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking skills usually need to be developed through **talking** (among other things), in a language you know well. Later, the skills can be transferred into an additional language. Eventually, you may be able to develop those critical thinking skills further in the additional language.

C. Additional Language Learning

1. Read **Reading 3: Learning an additional language.**
   Later in the course, there will be a Language, Literacy
   and Communication umthamo on the learning of addi-
   tional languages. We will not deal with the subject in
   depth here, but we do need to think about it. We need
   to think about it because many teachers and parents
   choose English as LOLT because they believe that
   their learners will learn English that way.

2. Once you have read Part 1 of the reading, write down
   your responses to it in your journal. What does this
   story tell you about the learning of an additional
   language? What kind of environment do you need to
   create in your classroom for your learners to be able
   to learn English? Can you achieve this in a situation
   where all your learners are Xhosa-speaking? Can you
   achieve it in a situation where your learners hear very
   little English outside the school? What can you do in
   your own situation? Write your ideas in your journal.

3. Once you have read Part 2 of the reading, look once
   again at the two extracts from lessons which you have
   chosen. Think about each extract in turn, and write
   your ideas in your journal.

- Do you think this teacher was aiming to help her
  learners to learn English through this lesson? (This
  may be the case even though she was teaching a
  'content subject'.)

- If so, ask yourself, 'Which of the principles listed in
  Part 2 has this teacher fulfilled?'

Then think about your lesson, and write your ideas in
your journal.

- Were you aiming to help your learners improve their
  English through this lesson?

- If so, which of the principles in the list did you follow?

Think also about what kinds of code-switching help
learners learn the new language (English). The box on
the next page tells us what an academic called Lily Wong-
Fillmore thinks about the code-switching practice of
'translation'.

Discuss your journal entries with a colleague, or at the face-
to-face session.

Lily Wong-Fillmore, the person who wrote Additional Readings (3), argues that translation does not help learners to learn the new language (English). Here is what she says (slightly adapted and shortened):

Language learning occurs:

- when students try to figure out what their teachers and classmates are saying,

- when teachers through their efforts to communicate with learners provide them with enough extra-linguistic cues* to allow them to figure out what is being said.

- and when the situation is one that allows learners to make astute guesses at the meaning of the language being used in the lesson.

Translations appear to prevent this from happening, in two ways:

- When translations are used, teachers don't bother to simplify their English and provide non-verbal clues as to what they mean. They do not find it necessary to do this, because the translation will give the learners the meaning. This means that the English is no longer 'comprehensible input' for the learners. But aside from the fact that the English which is translated fails as input ...,

- it also fails because the learners tend to ignore it. When learners know that they will get the information in a language they already know, they do not pay attention when the language they do not understand is being used.

(Wong-Fillmore, in Gass and Madden, 1985)

*extra-linguistic cues: non-verbals, like gestures, pictures, actions, etc.

Unit 3: Develop an LOLT policy for your classroom

In this unit, we will try to draw together some of the ideas and issues which have emerged as we reflected on the lessons in the extracts, and on your own lesson. We will then present some alternative approaches to the use of different languages in the classroom. We will ask you to make a decision about the approach which you think is best for your classroom.

*dilemma: a situation which is confusing, in which one does not know what to do

3.1 New knowledge and a new language

In South Africa, the question of which Language to use for Learning and Teaching presents teachers with a dilemma*.

It is clear that it is easier for learners to think and talk and develop new ideas and concepts in a language which they know well.

Fluency in English can develop quite rapidly, but this requires the right kind of exposure to fluent speakers of English, preferably both in and outside of school.

On the other hand, most South African parents and teachers want their children to learn in English, because they believe that English is the gateway to success in the world of work, and of further study. Millions of books are written in English, whereas very few books are written in African languages. Parents and teachers see English as an international language, which can open doors for their children.

Umthamo 20, on 'Talking and Learning' showed us that people construct meanings as they talk with others. Later, they learn through expressing themselves in writing, and reading other people's experiences and ideas in books. This means the teacher is no longer a 'transmitter' of knowledge. She is a facilitator, guiding the activities of learners as they work in groups on interactive tasks. They share ideas and develop and construct meanings for themselves. Learners and teacher need to have a fair degree of fluency in a common language in order to be able to do all of this.

This means that you, the teacher, have **two important tasks.**

1. You need to help the child to learn. This means you need to help the child's thinking skills, knowledge, attitudes and values to develop.

2. You probably also feel that you need to enable the child to develop skills in English, in order to give him or her a better chance of success in work and further studies.

An important question to ask is, 'Can the child learn new knowledge and new language at the same time?'

Some of the best learning is very active, and involves doing, seeing, feeling and touching. In this kind of situation, learners and teacher may find that they can learn new knowledge and new language at the same time. We can call this kind of lesson 'context-rich'. There are many things for the learners to see, touch and do which help them to know what the words are referring to. If the LOLT is an unfamiliar one (e.g. English, with Xhosa-speaking learners), learners may find that they have absorbed quite a lot of new language as they did, saw and felt things.

But you need to be careful not to overload the learner. In most situations, if the learner is learning new knowledge, skills and attitudes in an unfamiliar language, the teacher needs to make sure that the learner has something familiar to hold on to. The writer of Additional Readings (3) describes how this can sometimes be the familiar, repetitive structure of the lesson. It can be the non-verbal communication of the teacher, with which they have become familiar. It can be the skilful use of the additional language, not introducing too many new elements at once.

The learner usually needs to learn new content, skills and attitudes by using *language she is already comfortable with.* (This can be her own Primary Language, or it can be a clear and simple form of English, which she already understands.) If she is exposed to too much which is unknown at the same time, she may become confused and demoralised*.

*She will lose confidence.

Here is a diagram to explain what we mean.

Learn something new, using language you are familiar with.

Expand your language knowledge to describe the new things you have learnt.

Use the new language knowledge you have gained until you are familiar with it.
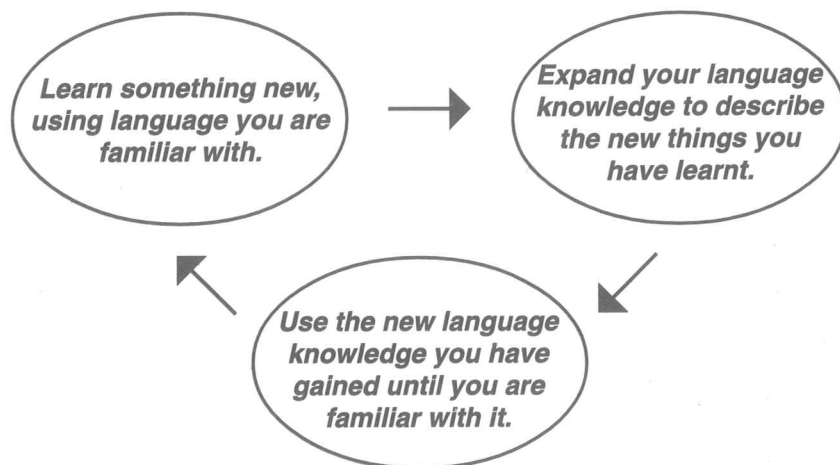
(These three steps are usually not completely separate. They often overlap.)

Example 1

This process even takes place where children are only using one language in school.

For instance, you will remember that in Maths umthamo 1, learners knew how to add when they were asked:

How many is two lollipops and one more? (Patrick answered: Three)

At that stage, Patrick couldn't answer the question:

How many is two and one more? (He answered: Four.)

He learned to add (by himself) using the 'language' he knew (i.e. the language of lollipops, elephants and giraffes). Later, he learned the more abstract **language of Mathematics** to talk about addition. He could then give correct answers to sums like:

Two plus three (2+3)

Translating between the language of maths and real experiences, might be an important thing for teachers of maths to keep in mind.

Example 2

So, in a Natural Science lesson, learners can explore and talk in Xhosa (or Zulu, Sotho, etc.) about the way their bean and mealie seeds have grown. The teacher can talk to them in English, helping them to compare the way the two kinds of plants are growing. (She may support what she is saying with explanations in the Primary Language.) Through listening to the teacher, or through talking and writing about the growing plants in English, learners can start learning certain new English sentences and phrases, some expressing 'botanical' concepts:

The mealie has lots of roots. They all grow from the end of the stem.

The mealie has adventitious roots.

The bean has one big root with little side roots.

The bean has a tap root.
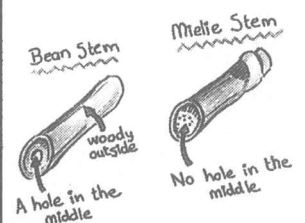
The mealie has a long thin leaf.

The veins on the mealie leaf are parallel.

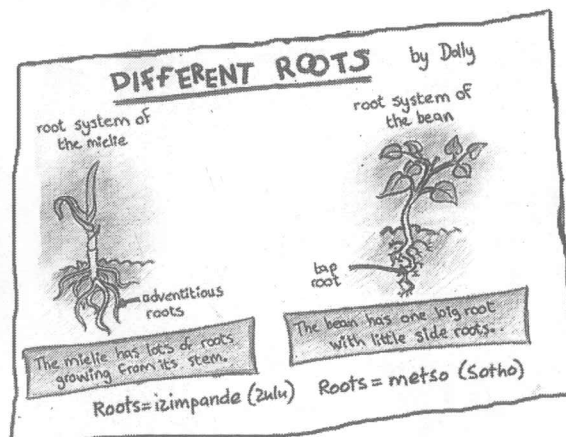The bean has a heart-shaped leaf.

It has one main vein with many side veins.

The amount of new language they will learn will depend on their age and level. They may not yet be able to use the new sentences in their own speech. They may only be able to understand some of them when they hear them or read them. It is very important that learners have the freedom to experiment and make mistakes as they try to talk about their experience in English.

Later, when they talk about plants, they may be sufficiently familiar with these terms to hold some of their discussion in English. Their ability to do this will depend on how often they have heard these words and similar sentences used. It will depend on whether they have heard them used in meaningful ways and in practical contexts. It will also depend on whether they have been given the freedom to experiment with the new words themselves. In this experimentation, they should feel free to make mistakes and enjoy their exploration of the new language.

The next day we started growing our own bean and mielie seeds.

Klasi, amabhodlela e-cold drink enziwe ngeplastiki mahle kakhulu ekumiliseni imbewu.

Bean Stem — woody outside — A hole in the middle

Mielie Stem — No hole in the middle

Pictures from "Spider's Place", by Handspring Trust.

A few days later.

Bhekani ukuthi impande kabhontshisi wami yinde kangakanani!

My mielie's root is different to yours.

DIFFERENT ROOTS by Dolly

root system of the mielie

root system of the bean

adventitious roots

tap root

The mielie has lots of roots growing from its stem.

The bean has one big root with little side roots.

Roots = izimpande (Zulu)   Roots = metso (Sotho)

Kunomgodi maphakathi nesiqu salobhontshisi.

Isiqu sombila wami asinawo umgodi phakathi naso.

3.2 Additive bilingualism or multilingualism

If you think of languages as 'resources for learning', a person who has two languages is better off than a person who has one. S/He has two ways to think about the same thing. There is research evidence to show that bilingual* people, or multilingual* people, have a cognitive advantage* over monolingual* people. Their minds are more flexible. They can see things from more angles.
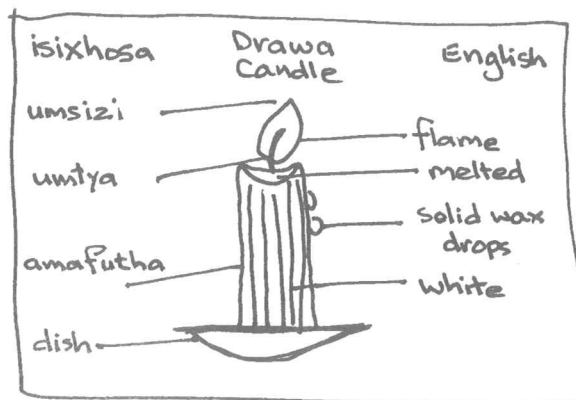
Think about activities like the one about candles which you did with your learners as part of the 'Natural Science' um-thamo. Learners write down all that they knew about candles, in English on one side of the picture, and in Xhosa on the other.


*They have a cognitive advantage: Their minds work more effectively.

This should encourage us to make sure that our learners have a rich and fluent command over their own language, as well as the best knowledge of English as is possible. A good command of one language is better than a weak command of two languages. A good command of two languages is better than a good command of one language, and much better than a poor command of two languages.

Our new language in education policy recommends **Additive Bilingualism,** or **Additive Multilingualism.** This means that the Primary language should not be impoverished or replaced or de-valued by the Additional language. Both languages should be developed and valued. Don't forget to encourage your learners to enjoy and be proud of their own language, and to learn to communicate in it richly, beautifully and well.

Read the article by Ngugi wa Thiongo at the end of the Additional Readings.
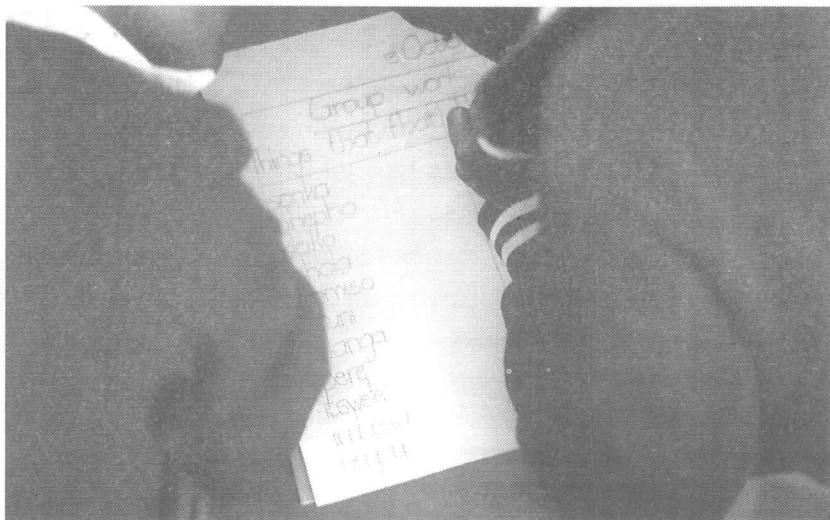
3.3 Some possible LOLT classroom policies

There are a number of possible decisions you can make about how you will use English and the Primary Language(s) in your classroom. None of these ways is wrong.

- One may suit the age level of you learners better than another.

- One may suit the context of your school better than another.

- One may suit the mixture of learners in your class better than another.

- One may suit your personality and your language competences better than another.

- And you will definitely be influenced in your choice by the language(s) your learners will use for reading and writing,

- and the languages in which your learners will be assessed.

- You will need to think about which will help your learners learn best,

- And which will be most learner-centred.

- You may also need to take the attitudes of parents into account.

We are going to ask you to decide on an LOLT policy for your classroom. You do already have one. You already use languages in a certain way in your classrooms. You may want to stick with the way you are using languages, or you may want to make some changes. Three options are given below. Choose one of them, or adapt one to suit yourself.

1. Primary language as LOLT and English as a subject

You might choose to teach content subjects in the Primary Language, and teach English at special, separate times, as a subject. Competence in English can be very effectively developed through good teaching and learning in English lessons. In the English lessons, you might decide to use English only.

You might choose this option because your learners are still very young. Maybe you think that they should learn through English as LOLT in later years. If this is so, you need to introduce concepts and vocabulary which will later be required in content subjects in your English lessons.

(Of course, you may believe that the learners should learn throughout their schooling in the Primary Language.)

2. English only as LOLT and Primary Language as a subject

You might decide to use English **only** in all lessons, except the Primary Language lesson. Remember what has been said above about Additive Bilingualism. If you adopt an English only policy, it is important to make sure that the Primary Language (e.g. Xhosa) is also used, developed and enriched. Learners need to build their competence in the Primary Language, so that they can think in their own language and use it for a wide variety of purposes.

If English is used as the only LOLT for content subjects, the teacher's use of English needs to be skilful, in order to enable learners to understand and to learn in spite of the unfamiliar language (and to learn the unfamiliar language at the same time). The kind of English the teacher would need to use has been called 'comprehensible input' by some academics.

'Comprehensible input' is clear and relatively simple language which learners can understand. It may be understandable because it deals with familiar or interesting topics, which are fun for them. It may be understandable because it is accompanied by gestures, pictures, actions, activities or dramatisation. It may be understandable because it draws the learner into meaningful interaction with the teacher, or a friend. Comprehensible input should also provide a challenge – something new which the learner doesn't yet know.

Meaningful interaction is important. An academic called Swain emphasises that there must also be 'comprehensible output'. In other words, the learners need to try to express themselves in the new language too. When they try to express themselves, they start to work out for themselves how the new language works.

It is important at all levels that learners are exposed to as much 'comprehensible input' as possible. At lower levels, it is important to encourage learners to communicate in the language they are best able to use – either Primary language, English, or a mixture. Learners *need to talk to construct meaning.*

WORKING IN A GROUP

PREPARING TO PRESENT A PLAY

TELLING THE TEACHER WHAT THEY KNOW

HELPING A FRIEND

3. Code-switching

You may choose to use some form of code-switching, especially in 'content' subjects. This is not necessarily a weaker option.

However, for it to lead to effective learning and effective additional language learning, it needs to be used with care. You, the teacher, need change from one language to another for **reasons which promote learning.** For instance:

- We have read in Unit 2 that simple translation (i.e. saying something in English, and then repeating it in the Primary Language) is not usually a helpful way of code-switching;

- It does not usually help learners to learn if you code-switch because your English is inadequate for the topic. In this case, it might be better to use the Primary Language in this particular lesson, and to use it well.

- Some people believe that it is not very helpful to mix languages within one sentence. It is better to use one language for a particular purpose, and another language for another purpose. Then you can use both languages well, and model the use of both languages.

You have seen, in the lessons we studied in Unit 2, that teachers often use English for sections of the lesson which require straightforward communication, with closed questions and short answers. They also use English for practising new English sentence patterns which the learners have already learned. They change to Xhosa when more complex explanation or discussion is required, and when open questions are used.

This is fine, as long as you are making an effort to help the learners to say new and more complex things in English. If you never ask them to express opinions in English, their English will remain very limited. It is possible that their Xhosa will also be limited, because you are using it apologetically. (You are saying to yourself, 'I am doing the wrong thing. I should be using English.) Then there is a danger that they will know no language well.

You also saw teachers switching to Xhosa to clarify concepts, and to help the learners feel at home and relate to the topic. These are also helpful kinds of code-switching. You have discussed which ways of code-switching are helpful for learning. Think back to those discussions.

Code-switching works best when the person who is switching is fluent in both languages. Try to build your fluency in both languages all the time.

WORKING IN A GROUP

PREPARING TO PRESENT A PLAY

But do not become disheartened if your English is not as fluent as you would like it to be. If you have given the learners opportunities **to talk and to think and to learn** (in any language), and have given them a good start in English, they will be able to continue to learn on their own. They will also be able to continue to learn English on their own. If they have confidence in themselves, and are excited about learning, nothing will stop them. They will learn from people and from experiences and from books. They will learn English when they do come into contact with more English.

TELLING THE TEACHER WHAT THEY KNOW

Remember that there will always be some learners who are quicker at picking up language than others. This does not mean that those who are slow language learners are stupid. They may be very quick at drawing, or Maths, or Technology. They may be extremely creative. You need to make sure those children have lots of opportunities to learn and think in their Primary Language, and to do the things they are good at. This means that their learning will not be held back by their lack of confidence in using English.

HELPING A FRIEND

Key Activity, Part 2: Describe your classroom language policy

When you have decided how you want to use languages in your classroom, write your ideas down. Do not write more than one page.

Describe the way you would like to use different languages in your classroom. Give your reasons for your decision.

If you have decided to code-switch, describe when you will use the Primary Language, and when you will use English. Explain why you have decided to do this.

Hand in this description, together with the form you filled in in Unit 1, at the last face-to-face session dealing with lo mthamo.

Unit 4: Using questions and languages to scaffold learning

Umthamo 18 dealt with the importance of talk for learning. Vygotsky was a Russian who wrote some very important books about language and learning. One of them is called 'Thought and language'. His thinking has had a very strong influence on today's education. Many of the ideas in Umthamo 18 are influenced by Vygotsky.

Vygotsky said that it was important for learners to talk (and write) to themselves, and to talk to each other, in order to learn. But he also said that it was even more important for them to talk to a 'more knowledgeable other'. This could be an older child, an adult, a parent, or a teacher. As the learner explores ideas in conversation with a 'more knowledgeable other', he can develop further than he would have developed talking to himself or to people similar to him.

In Umthamo 18, you read about the twins, who only started to develop when they interacted with different people. While they interacted with each other, their development was stuck.

This means that it is not enough for learners to work on interactive tasks in groups. That can be a first step. It is also very important that you, the teacher, converse with the learners, discussing and exploring ideas. Much of this discussion and exploration will involve the use of open questions: 'What do you think…?' questions. You can ask open questions to stretch the learners' minds a little further than they can go on their own. You can also encourage them to ask questions, and to answer one another's questions. Once you have done these kinds of thinking tasks with them, they can go on to do them on their own. Then they are ready to take more steps forward. Your questions have acted as a 'scaffold*', helping the learners to reach higher than they could reach by themselves.

An example of this kind of conversation between teacher and learners appears in the box on the next page. It is an extract from the reading for the first Natural Science umthamo, where a group of five-year-olds investigate ways to move a bag of sand.

scaffold: a platform which builders use to help them climb higher and build the top parts of the building

In the Key Activity which follows, we would like you to be very conscious of the way questions are used, and the way you scaffold the learners' thinking. The activity we are suggesting is an investigation, like those you are busy with in the Natural Science umthamo 19. We are asking you to use of **three different kinds of questions** in the investigation which you organise.

And we are asking you to implement your **classroom language policy** in this lesson. In other words, you need to use languages in the way you decided in the **Key Activity, Part 2.'**

Extract from *'Pulley'*, by Vivienne Gussin-Paley

When we returned from winter vacation, there was a seventy-five pound bag of sand on the floor in the middle of our circle. The bag was inside a basket, and I could not move it without scratching the floor.

Teacher: *Look where Mr Prentise left our new sand. How are we going to move it over there by the wall?*

Wally: *Too bad Superman isn't here,*

(After some discussion about Superman)

Teacher: *Well, since Superman isn't here, what shall we do?*

Eddie: *I can do it easy. (He pulls on the handles of the basket and moves it about an inch. Everyone who wishes is given a chance to move the sand, and each child has great difficulty, all the while insisting it is easy.)*

Lisa: *Do it with a rope. I can do it easy if you tie a rope to my arm. (She ties a rope to the basket and strains as she pulls on it, but the basket does not move.)*

Lisa: *This is hard. The rope is too heavy.*

Rose: *Use a string.*

Teacher: *Here's some string, Rose. Try it.*

Rose: *I can't tie. (I tie on the string and the moment she pulls it the string snaps.)*

Wally: *I knew that would happen.*

Rose: *How did you know, Wally?*

Wally: *Real workers never use string.*

Kenny: *Let the whole class pull.*

Teacher: *That's too crowded. Try four children. Kenny, Rose, Ellen, Fred – you try. (They push and pull in all directions and the basket moves slightly.)*

Rose: *You made a scratch.*

Ellen: *Oh!-oh! We're scratching up the floor.*

Teacher: *Then we must think of another way.*

(Look back at the complete reading to see how the teacher 'scaffolded' them in their investigation until they 'invented' a pulley.)

Key Activity, Part 3: Sinking and Floating

This part of the Key Activity asks you to set up a learning experience for the learners in your class. A Natural Science lesson is suggested below, in which learners investigate what kinds of things float in water, and what kinds of things sink. We hope that you will use the suggested pattern (of 3 kinds of questions) for many other lessons.

Here are the three kinds of questions* you will include in the investigation:

1. Start by letting them **predict.** They will be answering the question, "What do you think is going to happen?"

2. At some stage during the lesson, let them **ask their own questions,** and try to answer each other's questions.

3. Later, you will try to extend the thinking by **asking more questions of the *'What do you think?'* kind.**

You will write, and hand in, **a plan for the lesson,** and **a reflective report on the lesson.**

*How could you use this 3-question model when you are dealing with a story in your class? What other Scientific investigations could you do using the 3-question model?

Here are some suggestions for presenting the lesson at different levels:

For Pre-school or Reception Class Learners (maybe even Grade 1)

As a teacher, you always have choices about how you approach an activity with your learners. In this activity, you could either bring in the things which you want your learners to investigate. Or you could involve your learners in collecting things which they are curious about in relation to whether the items float or sink. Your learners could either bring in items from home, or they could collect things in the classroom.

You also need to think about the languages you can work with. What choices will you make in your planning? Will you use one language or two? This investigation creates an opportunity for you to introduce or develop your learners' use of another language. The activity of testing whether something sinks or floats is very clear. So the words or phrases used in another language will make sense if they are supported by visible actions. This investigation is ideal for context-rich language learning. In other words, the context and the actions support your learners as they *'have a go'* in the new language.

Preparation

The day before you plan to carry out this activity, take your tape-recorder into your classroom. Then, at the end of the day, we suggest that you gather your young learners together, and ask them,

- Why do some things sink when we put them in water, but others float?
- What things do you think sink?
- What things do you think float?

We suggest that you tape this discussion, so that you can record your learners' ideas in your Journal, when they have gone home.

Then ask your learners each to try to bring **one** thing to school the next day to see whether it sinks or floats. You will need to make sure that you collect a number of different things for this investigation yourself, in case your children forget, or are unable, to bring in things. Make sure that you have a variety of items made of a range of different materials - metal, wood, glass, plastic, etc. Try to vary the things you choose, so that some are big, and others are small. For example a small marble, or a bean. A large apple or an orange. An egg is an interesting item to try.

You will also need to have some newsprint or a small easel and chalkboard on which to record what you and your learners discover. We suggest that you draw the following table on that large sheet of paper, or on one side of the chalkboard. Decide which language you are going to use.

Object / Into	Prediction / Kuzakwenzeka ntoni?		Finding / Kwenzeke ntoni?	
	Floats/iyadada	Sinks/iyatshona	Floats/iyadada	Sinks/iyatshona

You also need to make two self-standing cards. On one you need to print neatly and clearly, **These things sink/ Ezi zinto ziyatshona.** On the other you need to print neatly and clearly, **These things float/ Ezi zinto ziyadada.** If you are planning to work in more than one language, write in isiXhosa on one side, and in English on the other side of each self-standing card.

Carrying out the Investigation

1. Just before you plan to actually do this investigation, put some plastic (a black dustbin bag works well) on the floor in the centre of where you usually gather with your learners. Set up your chalkboard or large paper for recording your learners' predictions and findings, and make sure you have a pen that works. You will also need to put a table near where you will be sitting. On the table, put the two self-standing cards, one on one side, and the other card on the other side.

2. Next, ask the children to get the things they have brought in to school to find out what sinks, and what floats. If you have not asked them to bring in things from their homes, at this point you could let each child collect one thing from the classroom to investigate.

As your learners gather their things, put a large bowl of water on the piece of plastic. Get the paper ready for recording their predictions and findings. Then get your learners to sit down in a ring around the bowl of water.


3. Put the things you have brought with you, behind you. Use them after you have investigated the things your learners have brought or chosen. Call one child to come and sit with you, and to bring her/his item. Get this child to hold up the item s/he has brought, and ask your other learners, *"Do you think this will sink?/ Ucinga ukuba lento izakutshona? Or do you think it will float?/ Okanye izakudada?"* You are asking your learners to predict what will happen. (Try to discourage the learner who brought the item from saying what s/he thinks. S/he may have investigated already!)

4. Look for a learner who is ready to respond. Then ask that learner to say what s/he thinks. Then ask that learner to tell you **why** s/he think that. In this way you are encouraging your children to develop their powers of reasoning, and to explain (articulate) their thinking. At this stage, they are hypothesising. Record what your learners predict, and praise their thinking.

5. Next, let the learner who is sitting with you put her/his item in the water. What happens? When your learners exclaim, *"iyadada!" or "iyatshona!"*, repeat this, and then say the same thing in English - *"it floats" or "it sinks"*. Record what your learners find on the table which you have prepared. Then ask the child to place her/his item on the table next to the appropriate self-standing label.

6. Then invite another child to come to stand next you and ask her/him to hold up her/his item. Then tell her/him to say to the other children, *"I have brought a _____ to school. Do you think it will sink or float?"/ "Ndize ne_____ esikolweni. Nicinga ukuba izakutshona okanye izakudada?"* Record what some of the learners think. Then let this child place her/his item in the water. Does it sink or float? Again, when your learners exclaim, *"iyadada" or "iyatshona",* repeat this, and then say the same thing in English - *"it floats" or "it sinks".* Record what happens on the table. And ask the child to place her/his item on the table next to the appropriate self-standing label.

7. Work in this way with all the items your learners have brought in or found in the classroom. Start with the question and answers in isiXhosa. Then move to English, carefully supported by action and gesture. See if the children choose to answer in isiXhosa or English. We think that you will find that before long, more and more of your learners will be joining in when you say the English words. At the end of the investigation, you and your learners will have sorted the items. You should have two sets of items: a set of items which float, and a set of items which sink.

8. If your learners are still interested, take some of the additional items which you have collected for this investigation. If you have any learners who have not participated in this investigation, you could invite them to help you with the items you have collected. Work with one item at a time, and ask your learners to predict what will happen. Record their predictions, and then place that item in the water. Record your findings on the table. And add these items to the two sets.
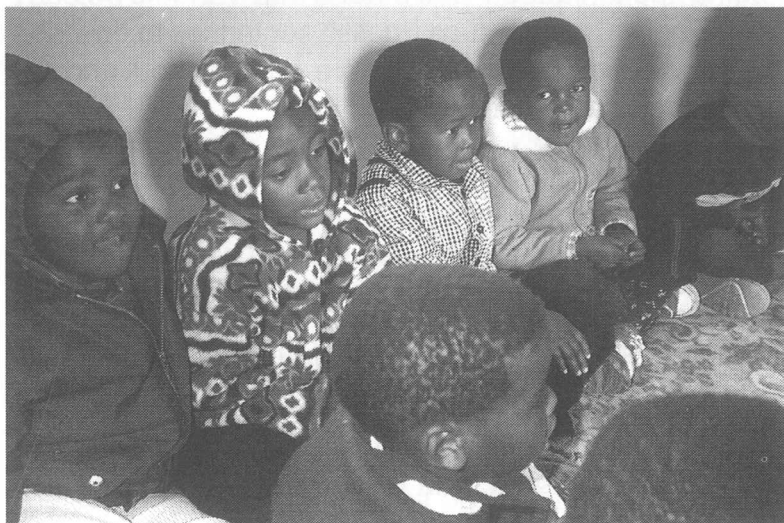
Optional extra

If you want to have a little fun, and leave your learners with something to think about, you may want to show them the following puzzling thing. Take a thin sewing needle. Tear a strip of a tissue or a piece of two-ply toilet paper. The strip should be about 2 cm wide and about 8cm long. Carefully separate the two layers of tissue paper. Lie the needle on one of the tissue paper strips and float the paper on the surface of the water in the bowl.

The tissue will float at first and support the needle. But, as the tissue gets wet, it will start to sink. If you are careful, you can push the tissue away from the needle, and .... wonder of wonders! The metal needle will stay floating on the surface of the water.

We don't suggest that you try to explain this to your learners. This can be something that remains a mystery to them. That is, until they learn about surface tension in water some time in secondary school.

Grade 2 upwards

(If you teach **Grade 1,** decide whether you would like to use the 'whole class' model – above – or the group work model, which follows.)

Planning

As you prepare,

Look at each stage in the investigation, and decide **which language** you are going to use, and which language the learners are going to use, in order to implement your **classroom language policy.** This is a 'context-rich' learning experience. Learners are seeing and doing what is being spoken about. This means that it should be easy to use English, or introduce English sentences to describe what is happening. It will not be difficult you and for learners to use sentences like:

It's going to sink. It's going to float.

It sinks! It floats!

It sinks because….

It floats because….

Because of the nature of the activity, they will be using this kind of sentence repeatedly, and meaningfully. This is very good for language learning.

If you are code-switching, they can start by saying this kind of thing in Xhosa, and then imitate you as you use the English sentence.

WORKING IN A GROUP

TELLING THE TEACHER WHAT THEY KNOW

Write your plan down, including your reasons for the language(s) you are going to use. You can use the numbers given in the description of the lesson, below. Next to each number, write the language which will be used, and the reasons for the use of this language.

Presentation

What you will need for this lesson:

- A bucket, bath or large basin, full of water, **for each group in your class.**

- A variety of objects, which might sink or float: an apple, an orange, a bean, a stone (large and small), a plastic bottle, a glass bottle, a piece of wood, a potato, slice of bread, etc., etc. **You could tell learners the day before about the activity, and ask them to bring objects of various kinds.** Bring some items of your own, in case they forget, or in case the items they bring are not representative. Some should be big, some small, some heavy, some light, made of different materials (e.g. a plastic spoon and a silver spoon).

- A piece of paper for each group, on which you have drawn a table, (see the next page).

- You may need some big sheets of paper* for learners to make a chart (see the suggestions about this later).

Carrying out the investigation

Select the steps that you think will be suitable for your group. For instance, you may decide to leave out some of the 'report backs' with very young children.

1. Divide the learners into 4 or 5 groups. There can be quite a number of learners in each group (8 to 12). They (or you) should decide who is the leader of the group (the chairperson), and who is going to tell the class about what they think (reporter). They may also need a scribe (someone to write things down).

2. Give each group a number of objects. The groups need not all have the same objects. But some objects in different groups could be the same. Each group should have about 12 objects (not more). Give each group a piece of paper with a table on it, like the one on the next page. Choose which language you will use.

| Object / Into	Prediction / Kuzakwenzeka ntoni?		Finding / Kwenzeke ntoni?	
	Floats/iyadada	Sinks/iyatshona	Floats/iyadada	Sinks/iyatshona

3. Tell them that we want to find out what kinds of things sink in water, and what kinds of things float. Later, you will give them buckets of water, and they can find out which of their objects sink, and which float. But first, they are going to **guess (predict).** Ask them: *Which things do you think will sink?/ Ziphi izinto ocinga ukuba zizakutshona?* (They should put those in one place on their desks.) *Which things do you think will float?/ Izeziphi ocinga ukuba zizakudada?* (They should put those in another place on the desk.) Members of the groups should discuss, and reach agreement about where to put each item. They should tell their group **why** they think it will sink/ **why** they think it will float. Once they have decided, their scribe should fill in the name of the item on their table, and tick 'floats' or 'sinks', under 'prediction'.

Be careful not to suggest any reasons why they might sink or float. e.g. Do not talk about 'heavy' and 'light'. It is not actually the objects 'heaviness' that makes it float, or its 'lightness' that makes it float. But do not tell them this. They need to discover it.
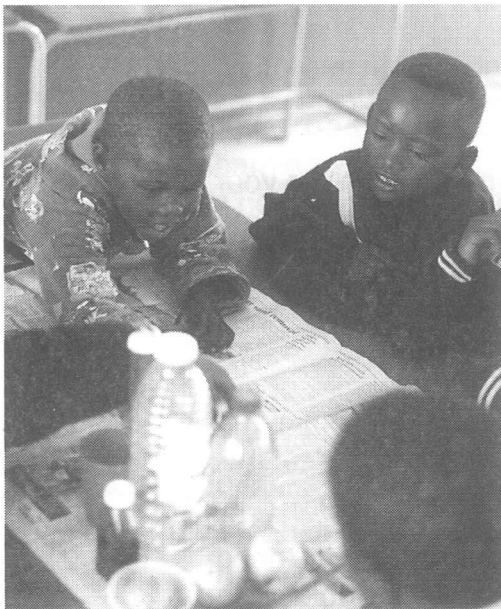
4. When they seem to have reached some agreement, stop them, and let the reporter report back. S/He should tell the class how they have divided the objects, and why. **Don't be tempted to say that any of their ideas are the right one**. You may find that they are still arguing about some of the objects. Let the learners each give their different views.

5. Now give each group a bucket and let them drop the items in. They should start by dropping in the items they thought would float. Were they right? Then they should drop in the items they thought would sink. Were they right? The scribe should fill in the results on their table. The reporter can now tell the rest of the class which items they were right about, and which items they were wrong about.
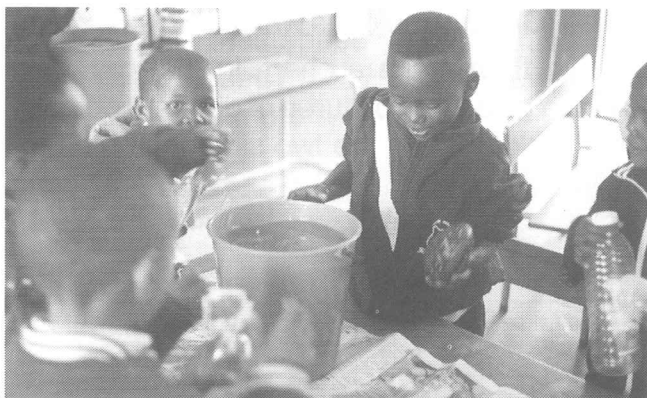
6. Now ask each group to make up 3 questions which they want to ask about what they have just done. **NB They do not need to give any answers to their questions. All you want is questions, not answers.**

7. Let them read out their questions, and let learners suggest answers. Say to them, *What do you think?/ Ucinga ntoni wena?/ Nicinga ntoni?* **NB Do not try to give them answers, or give them a response that indicates that they have given a 'correct' answer.** Tell them that you don't know all the answers either; you are investigating together.

8. You could extend their thinking by asking more questions of the *What do you think?* kind. Here are some ideas:

- Why does this very small stone and the very big stone both sink? The small stone is much lighter than the orange, which floats. (Use other examples, too.)
- Can you make any of the floating ones sink? How?
- Can you make any of the sinking ones float? How?
- What is the same about the floating ones? (What do they have in common?)
- What is the same about the sinking ones? (What do they have in common?)
- What is the difference between the floating ones and the sinking ones?

Follow-up ideas (Choose the ones which suit your class)

9. Learners could then make a chart, in the form of a table. You could give them pictures of different objects, and let them stick them on the two sides of the chart. They would put those that sink on one side, and those that float on the other. Or they could write the names of the things, or draw them.

THINGS THAT FLOAT/ EZIDADAYO	THINGS THAT SINK/ EZITSHONAYO

10. They could write a paragraph, theorising about the qualities of materials that float, and the conditions under which they will float. They could then write a similar paragraph about things that sink. Their paragraphs could start something like this:

I think that certain things float because they are/have....
For instance, ...

I think that certain things sink because they are/have....
*For instance, ...*

You can make certain things sink by....
For instance, ...

11. They could think of ways of testing their theories. Later, they could carry out the test. For instance, if they believe that things that float are lighter than things that sink, they could bring a scale, and weigh each item, to see whether their theory is true.

12. You could add questions such as the following to your list of 'extending' questions:

   • Will **you** sink or float if you fall into water?

   • How can a fish swim without sinking, and also without floating on the surface of the water? Will a fish sink if it dies in the river?

   • What very heavy things can you think of that can float? (e.g. ships – the Titanic)

   • What makes boats and ships float? Are they made of very light material, that floats? Is it something to do with their shape? Is it because they have lids, like a closed bottle? Does it have something to do with their motors/ engines?
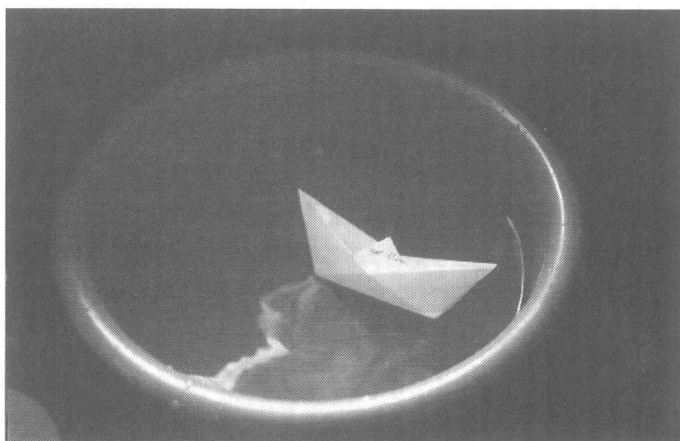
13. The learners could make boats, using different materials, and different shapes. If they have access to a library, or to picture books, they could look at pictures of boats and ships, to see what shape they are, and what they are made out of. They could try them out in a river or dam, to see whether they float.

Remember: It is not necessary for them to get any final answers from this exploration. They have discovered certain facts. You have helped them to explore further. You can leave them with questions in their minds which may be answered as they move up the school. Additional Readings (4) gives you some information about 'density', which will help you understand better why certain things sink, and others float (if you don't already know). With more senior classes, you might decide to give them some of this information.

Reflection

Once you have presented the learning experience, you need to think about it, and write a **Reflective Report**. This report should be at least 2 pages long, and should have 2 sections:

1. **Thinking tasks and questions**

   Under this heading, describe the things which happened in your lesson that made you think that learners were thinking.

   - Write about things they did which made you think they were thinking?
   - Write about things they said which made you think they were thinking?
   - Write about the questions they asked. How did these questions show they were thinking?
   - Write about the answers they gave, which showed that they were thinking.

   You may think that some of them were not thinking.

   - What made you think this?
   - Why were they not thinking?
   - How could you have helped them to think more?

2. **Languages used: Did they help learners learn?**

   Under this heading, you need to look at your **classroom language policy.** You made certain decisions about how you would use languages. You may have decided to use the Primary Language. You may have decided to use English. You may have decided to code-switch. You are now going to evaluate your decision, on the basis of this one lesson.

   - Were you happy with your decision? Why?
   - Did you manage to do what you had planned to do, or did you find yourself (and the learners) using a different language from the one you had planned? Why? How do you feel about this? Is it a reason to change your policy?
   - Do you think the way you used languages helped the learners to learn? Why?
   - Did you want the learners' English competence to develop in the lesson? Were you successful in doing this? How? Give reasons for your answers.

   Hand this report in, together with parts 1 and 2 and your plan, at the last face-to-face session dealing with lo mthamo.

Conclusion

In lo mthamo, we have once again been thinking about ways to *help our learners to learn.*

We have thought about the fact that we need to help our learners to learn to think, so that they can gain knowledge, skills and attitudes. In order to think, they need to talk, and this happens most easily in a language they are familiar with.

Most people also believe that we need to help our learners to gain fluency in an additional language: English. Many books are written in English, and English gives learners access to the world of work, the world of further study, and the international community.

So we have investigated ways in which we can do these two things at once: help the learners to think, and help the learners to learn English. We have considered the part that questions play in these tasks.

We have considered three possible approaches to the task:

- Use the Primary Language as LOLT, and teach English as a subject.

- Use English as LOLT, and support the development of the Primary Language as well. This requires skilful teaching, and skilful use of English. The teacher needs to make sure that the learners have a lot of 'comprehensible input', and 'context-rich' learning experiences.

- Code-switching in a principled way. This means switching between the two (or more) languages in ways which promote learning and thinking. It also means switching between the languages in ways that promote the learning of English. This also involves exposing the learners to 'comprehensible input' in English and 'context-rich' learning experiences.

You have developed a classroom LOLT policy for yourself, based on the thinking and reading that you have done. Remember that you can adapt this policy as you go along.

Finally, you helped your learners investigate floating and sinking. Questions formed an important part of this investigation. You tried to implement your 'classroom LOLT policy' as you conducted this investigation.

Once your class had done the investigation, you reflected on two aspects of it.

- You looked at the thinking which your learners were doing during the learning experience.

PREPARING TO PRESENT A PLAY

HELPING A FRIEND

- And you looked at the ways in which different languages were used. You asked yourself whether this 'LOLT policy' had helped the learners to think and to learn. You asked yourself whether the LOLT policy had helped the learners to improve their English fluency.

Journal write

Now that you have completed the work of the umthamo, write down what you have learned from it. What new insights have you gained? What new questions have arisen in your mind? Which of your questions have been answered? Which questions remain in your mind, to be investigated further as you work with your classes?

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What some Matric learners said:

"When I was in Std 3, we used to memorise the notes and we didn't know what, sort of the meaning of the words, we just memorised and closed the book..."

"...we wrote the words the teacher taught us we didn't write the words that come from us because we didn't know about English at all..."

"No we like...uh...we read the textbooks in English but she will explain it in Xhosa everything."

"It was confusing because it was the case that you can't even speak English, how can you write it? So it was very confusing...you will come to your mother let's say and she will not even know the words sometimes and then it was just frustrating..."

"I would like to say, it must be compulsory to speak English from Standard 6 because its a disgrace to find Standard 10 students not perfect to speak English. It's because we use our mother tongues on lunch, sometimes inside the classroom..."

"It will be better if we can learn on our language. We can understand easy, we can study at home before the teacher starts the lesson because we will understand some other things on that lesson and need just some explanation."

"...I can say that blacks, the majority of blacks are undermining their own languages. They take English as a superior language and that is what the English speaking people always wanted to do, to happen, even days before. Even the Afrikaner people wanted to do the same thing in 1976, forcing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, but they failed to do so. But now English has been in, so we can use English because we have already used English from 19... from 18... something.... I don't think we must change that but what we must do is to have both even as matric papers; at the end of the year, they have an English side and an Afrikaans side, you see, our own matric papers must have an English side and a Xhosa side...."

"I would prefer Xhosa for those who haven't started school; they must learn Xhosa everything, because there are those who are studying all their subjects in Afrikaans, but they can speak English, so I think we can do the same thing. For those who have already learned in English, they must proceed with that."

(Margie Probyn, 1995. *Exploring a myth.* Research paper)

...it is these everyday attitudes which will govern the choices that people make when they exercise their democratic right to determine what languages they will learn at school. As long as people believe that proficiency in English is the only way of getting ahead, the power of English will remain intact. What needs to be realized is that South Africa is unlikely to ever have enough human and material resources, such as good ... English teachers, to ensure that everyone has equal access to English. Of course all efforts must be made to improve access to English, but if English remains the language of power, it will serve simply to reproduce a powerful English-speaking elite and the majority of people will continue to be blocked from power and privilege because their English is not good enough.

The promotion and development of the African languages goes against most people's common sense. Yet it is precisely the advancement of these languages which will serve to empower the majority who do not speak English as their first language. Many of the modern concepts which are critical for national reconstruction and development would be better communicated and understood if the African languages were used to learn and teach them.

It will therefore require the use of state power and resources (as did the development of Afrikaans) and a national language awareness campaign to recover the value of the African languages as national resources. It is particularly the black middle class (who will have access to state power) who will be in a position structurally to enhance the status of African languages. The trouble is that it is this class of people who are unlikely to want to acknowledge the value of the African languages. It is their very proficiency in English which at present guarantees the black middle class their access to education, well-paid jobs and political and economic power.

The challenge then is to learn English in such a way that it does not work against the promotion and development of the African languages.

(Kathy Luckett, 1995. *National additive bilingualism: towards a language plan for South African education.*)
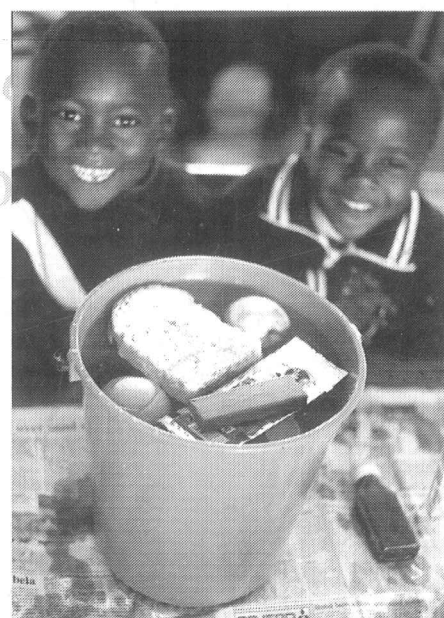
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