

## **Between policy ideal and success falls the shadow: the challenge of building a literate culture in African home languages and providing access to English**

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### **Abstract**

The South African Constitution enshrines the right to basic education for all, mentioning both children and adults. It is specific about learners' right to 'receive education in the official language(s) of their choice in public educational institutions' (Constitution, 29.1 – 29.2), and identifies eleven major languages as 'official'. These languages are to 'enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably'. (Constitution, 6.1 – 6.4). The reality in education reflects a situation which serves neither the languages nor the majority of the speakers of these languages.

While the *South African Language in Education* policy (1997) indicates that 'the Department of Education...is tasked...to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect for all languages used in the country' and that 'the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s) while providing access to effective acquisition of additional language(s)', current strategies do not support the home language nor create conditions appropriate for learning additional languages effectively .

This paper considers the proposed mandatory introduction of English for all children whose home language is not English in Grade 1.

It considers too the implications of findings in a report on the status of the language of learning and teaching in South African public schools (2010) published by the Department of Basic Education.

**Key words/phrases:** African home languages, language policy, language of learning and teaching

## The issue of languages in South African schooling

The issue of the language or languages of instruction in South African schools has been a laden issue for well over a century, and continues to be so. Language planning here has been substantially different from that in other African countries, not least because of South Africa's dual colonial history – Dutch and English occupation over a period of 350 years – and a very belated independence in comparison to that of other African countries.

After the South African war, 1899 – 1902, (also known as the Anglo-Boer war), Britain's active policy of Anglicization in the first decades of the twentieth century, led to strong resistance amongst the Boers to the imposition of English in schools and a fierce commitment to the development of Afrikaans, particularly after the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948. Afrikaans was actively developed as a language of higher education, given both legislative and judicial status, and supported the language of the economy. The favouring<sup>1</sup> of Afrikaans as a language, and of its speakers in positions of influence, was resented and resisted by both African language speakers and the English speaking community.

The Nationalist Party, in its efforts to strengthen the advantage afforded to Afrikaners, developed a separate educational policy for African language-speaking learners, the Bantu Education Act of 1953, under Minister Hendrik Verwoerd. The Department was to develop a curriculum that suited the 'nature and the requirements of black people'. The key elements in the Bantu Education policy were the use of the children's mother tongue as the medium of instruction till the end of the primary school phase (that is, the first eight years of schooling), with English and Afrikaans being introduced as subjects during primary school. Pupils going on to secondary schooling would then learn their home language as a subject while the remaining subjects would be taught in equal measure in both English and Afrikaans.

Black South Africans immediately understood the intent behind the act as a means to under-educate young black South Africans, and the implementation of a mother tongue policy was seen as integral to the creation of an underclass, not least by deferring access to English, which came to be viewed as the language of resistance to Afrikaans, and which was regarded as providing access both to power and ideas. The coalescence of the idea of inferior education<sup>2</sup> and of using children's home languages for learning has had such a powerful impact on people's thinking that

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<sup>1</sup> The Setswana word for apartheid, *tlhaolelo*, is translated as 'favouring' or 'advantaging'.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Heugh (2003: 22) indicates that, from archival research into school textbooks in African languages, especially between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, 'there is no textual evidence thus far of a cognitive diminishment either by way of content or scope in the written materials of the period (Mahlalela and Heugh, 2002).' The materials appear to have been direct translations of English and Afrikaans textbooks. So while there may have been policy intention to create a more limited curriculum in Bantu education, the reality was that learners had access in their home language to the same content as white learners in the system. Heugh (1999: 303) also points out that 'during the time that the mother tongue was phased in and maintained for eight years as the primary language for learning, the matriculation results steadily improved, reaching their zenith in 1976 (83.7%).'

it has allowed for an uncritical fostering of English as ‘the language’ for education, which remains current even now.

The riots of 1976, which began in Soweto and rapidly spread nation-wide, resulted from state insistence that Afrikaans be implemented as the language of instruction – and examination – for half the subjects in secondary schooling. This grass roots rebellion against the language policy in education is regarded by many as the critical turning point in resistance to apartheid. In fact, the resistance to instruction in the mother tongue (and Afrikaans) proved so great that, by 1979, the state passed the Education and Training Act, which allowed for the introduction of English or Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in African-language schools after Grade 4. In effect, this meant that English became the official medium of instruction in the majority of South African schools, and has remained so, despite the birth of the ‘rainbow nation’ in 1994, when the ANC finally came into power with an unsurprising two-thirds majority.

With the 1991 unbanning of the ANC, many issues which the future state would need to address suddenly required some form of agreed upon approach. Education was one of these issues, as was the role of languages in education. At that point, even as new policy was being formulated, competing approaches to the challenges of a multilingual state emerged: the one approach favoured a deeply integrated multilingual approach which supported the development and retention of the home language as the primary language of learning, while allowing for the acquisition of additional languages; the second approach, apparently favoured by the ANC cadres returning from exile, was a model where English became the language of education, it being regarded as the language of global power, communication, commerce and higher learning.

### **Policy environment**

The South African Constitution, Act No 8 of 1996, is specific about the right of individuals to ‘receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions’ (paragraph 29.1 – 29.2), and identifies eleven major languages in the Republic as ‘official’. These languages are—in terms of the Constitution—to ‘enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably’ (paragraph 6.1 – 6.4).

The passing of the South African Schools Act, 1996, Act 94 of 1996, devolved the responsibility of determining the norms and standards for language policy to the Minister of Education, but permitted the determination of language policy to individual public schools, through their school governing bodies (SGBs), a loophole that has allowed the state to deflect its responsibilities both to learners and to South African languages.

In July 1997, the then-Department of Education published the *Language in Education Policy and Norms and Standards regarding Language Policy*, both formulated in terms of constitutional rights granted to individuals regarding education and language, while attempting to balance these against the state’s capacity to implement its responsibilities practically. The standards for languages, regarded as residing the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), have undergone several reviews since their introduction in 1998: the discussion of the latest amendments to this policy concludes this paper.

In terms of its preamble, the *Language in Education Policy*, the following principles are enumerated as underpinning the policy: being multilingual should be regarded as a defining characteristic of being South African; the learner's home language is maintained while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s); an additive approach to bilingualism is regarded as 'the normal orientation' in the policy; and the right to choose the language of learning and teaching is vested in the individual (read 'the parent of the learner' for learners in schools).

According to the *Language in education* policy, the following situation would obtain in classrooms:

1. All learners shall offer at least one approved language as a subject in Grades 1 and 2 (the first two years of formal schooling for the majority of South African children);
2. From Grade 3 onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching (LOLT) and at least one additional approved language as subjects;
3. All languages shall receive equitable time and resource allocation;
4. Promotion for the first four years of schooling is dependent on performance in one language and mathematics, while only a single language requires to be passed from Grade 5 onwards. In the last three years of schooling (Grades 10 -12), however, two languages must be passed, one on first language level (it may be the learner's home language, but need not be) and the other at second language level. At least one of these languages must be an official language.<sup>3</sup>

While the language curriculum requirements for the various years of schooling are stipulated in the most general of terms, it is immediately apparent that the policy is silent with regard to determining *which* language or languages the child shall be exposed to at school even in the first, critical years of education.

Reference to the National Curriculum Statement (2002) documents provides little additional information, though the overview indicates that 40% of the teaching time is allocated to literacy in the Foundation Phase (ie Grades 1 – 3), that is, between 8.8 and 10 hours/week, depending on the grade. In schools where the home language has been taught *without* the introduction of another language, all that time would have been allocated to the learning of the home language. From Grade 3, however, were the Language in Education policy adhered to, this time would have been divided between the 'language of learning and teaching and an additional language'. The deliberate vagueness of the policy regarding the use of languages in classrooms (cited above) allows for at least the following interpretations:

- a. English as the 'language of learning and teaching' even if it has *not* been introduced before, and an African language (which may have been the language of learning and

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<sup>3</sup> The reference to first and second languages is terminology associated with the Senior Certificate, the school-leaving qualification which preceded the National Senior Certificate. These terms were subsequently replaced by 'home language', 'first additional language', 'second additional language'.

teaching in the previous grades) as the ‘additional language’, offered at home language level;

- b. An African language as ‘the language of learning and teaching’ (as a continuation from earlier grades) and the introduction of English as an additional language; and
- c. In the former Model C schools<sup>4</sup>, English continues as ‘the language of learning and teaching’ but Afrikaans is introduced as the additional language at Grade 3.

As will be apparent from the data discussed below, 76% of schools which teach an African language as a home language in the first three grades select option a, and almost none choose the second option. The third option allows for English (and Afrikaans) home language speakers to continue being taught through their home language, and alongside them almost 25% of African-language home language speakers are immersed in one of the traditional ‘colonial’ languages.

It is clear then that the Curriculum Statements for Home- and First Additional Language (2002), under *Language of teaching and learning*, provide *advice*, not any form of obligation:

It is *recommended* that the learner’s home language *should* be used for learning and teaching *wherever possible*. This is particularly important in the Foundation Phase where children learn to read and write.

Where children *have to make the transition* from their home language to an additional language as the language of learning and teaching this *should* be carefully planned:

- The additional language *should* be introduced as a subject in Grade 1.
- The home language *should* continue to be used alongside the additional language for as long as possible.
- When learners enter a school where the language of learning and teaching is an additional language for the learner, teachers and other educators *should make provision for special assistance* and supplementary learning of the additional language<sup>5</sup>, until such time as the learner is able to learn effectively in the language of learning and teaching. (italics added for emphasis) (2002b: 5; 2002c: 5)

No additional substantive advice appears to have been made available from the Department on the nature of the ‘careful planning’ required ‘where children have to make the transition’.

Since policy allows for the parent to exercise the minor’s language right on behalf of the learner through selecting the language of teaching at the point of admission to a particular school, and

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Former Model C schools’ refer to schools that were designated for white children prior to 1994, and which have generally maintained a good quality education in the new democracy. The schools frequently retain English (or Afrikaans) as the language of learning and teaching, but enroll children irrespective of home language.

<sup>5</sup> No mention is made of the fact that the school should also be obliged to continue to support the child in learning and maintaining her/his home language

schools themselves determine the language policy of the school, the state effectively abrogates its responsibilities regarding the active promotion of the child's home language and/or the acquisition of an additional language that could become the language of learning and teaching, as will be seen.

### **The South African language picture**

The 2011 mid-year estimate for South Africa's population is 50, 59 million, with 31, 3% of that total being younger than 15 years old. The 2011 mid-year estimates would seem to suggest that there are approximately 15.8 million youngsters between the ages of 4 and 19, the majority of which is – or ought to be – in schooling<sup>6</sup>.

Briefly, South Africa has eleven languages, all with populations of a million or more home language speakers, with official recognition in its Constitution. The African languages fall into two major groups – the Nguni and Sotho languages – where the learning of another language in the same group is, relatively speaking, a simple task. Structurally, the Nguni and Sotho languages are *also* closely related, sharing a common language ancestry<sup>7</sup>. The fact that the African languages are cognate helps to explain why so many South Africans are able to speak four of five African languages. The urban areas apart, the language distribution of the various South African languages is regional, with distinctive patterns of home language speakers. The challenges in the urban areas are complex, especially since the urban versions of, say, isiZulu, have begun to diverge – in vocabulary and idiom – from the isiZulu spoken in rural KwaZuluNatal.

The two related languages of European origin are English and Afrikaans. Both languages are rooted in the post-1652 history of the country, with Afrikaans, a language with Nederlands roots, having developed entirely in the Southern part of Africa. While Afrikaans has been associated with a white minority (and one which was all-powerful in the Nationalist government prior to 1994), in reality Afrikaans is the home language of a large number of South Africans of mixed descent, who are primarily settled in the Western and Northern Cape, and in the Western part of the Eastern Cape as well. (This group is still referred to as 'Coloured' in the 2011 SA Statistical analysis of population, and account for 9% of the total population, while 'Whites' account for another 9%). English and Afrikaans speakers are often bilingual, speaking both English and Afrikaans, few are fluent in an African language, as these have not been promoted in schools.

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<sup>6</sup> Compulsory schooling in South Africa begins in the year in which a child turns 6, and a learner is entitled to leave school after Grade 9 or his/her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, according to whichever comes first. In reality, however, many 19 and 20 year olds continue in schooling in the hope of achieving the National Senior Certificate, the school-leaving certificate, known colloquially in South Africa as the 'matric'.

<sup>7</sup> All eleven African languages, which share a common lineage (Niger-Congo > Atlantic-Congo > Volta-Congo > Benue-Congo > Bantoid > Southern > Narrow Bantu > Central > S group.

English continues to be promoted as the language of business, politics and the media and as the country's shared language, despite its being a home language to less than one sixth of the population. It is regarded, with trepidation, as a language to aspire to, even at the cost of one's home language, as will be seen in the analysis of the languages of learning in schools below.

### **Learners' languages and the language of learning and teaching**

This part of the paper draws on a Department of Basic Education report which provides a trend analysis of language data in schools for the decade ending in 2007. The data, drawn from reports that principals of schools are required to fill in annually, includes questions regarding children's home language and the language(s) offered in the schools. Principals often fail to respond to these questions, which has meant the data could not be used as is. The Education Policy Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand was asked to 'impute the data, with a view to improving the quality ... for the purposes of analysis' (2010: 10). Despite the limitations, the report indicates that the school-level aggregated data provides excellent basic quantitative information.

The report data for the percentage of 2007 learners by home language and grade, provides a picture quite similar to home language populations as presented by the 2001 census. Learners classified according to the language of teaching and learning (LOLT) for the 2007 indicates a very different picture: once the language of learning is aggregated across all 12 years of schooling, almost two thirds of all education in South Africa is officially registered as being through the medium of English. What this crude aggregation of figures points to, is that most African-language speaking children are expected to switch to English as the language of learning and teaching.

**Table 1: 2001 home language census figures compared with percentage of learners, identified by home language (2007) and with the 2007 percentage of all learners classified by their LOLT, in the Annual School Survey (DoE/DBE, 2010)**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Percentage of population Census 2001</b>	<b>Percentage of learners by home language 2007</b>	<b>Percentage of <i>all</i> learners by LOLT 2007</b>
IsiZulu	23.82	25.1	6.8
Isixhosa	17.64	20.4	5.5
Sesotho sa Leboa/Sepedi	9.39	10.7	3.1
Afrikaans	13.35	9.8	11.9
Setswana	8.2	7.6	2.4
English	8.2	7.0	65.3
Sesotho	7.93	6.5	1.6
Siswati	2.66	4.9	0.7
Xitsonga	4.44	3.3	1.4
Tshivenda	2.28	2.9	0.9
IsiNdebele	1.59	1.8	0.4

### *The situation in the first three years of schooling (Foundation Phase)*

Further analysis of the language data for the first three grades of schooling over the 1998 – 2007 period indicates, however, that during those ten years there has been an *increase* in the use of some African languages to induct children into schooling, literacy and numeracy in their home language, notably amongst the Nguni languages, while the figures for the remaining African languages appear to have remained stable or marginally declined.

**Table 2: Data drawn for Grades 1 – 3 from the Annual School Surveys (1998 – 2000 and 2005 – 2007) indicating a decrease in the use of English in the first three grades of schooling for initial education, and increases in the use of certain African languages**

Language	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3	
	1998	2005	1999	2006	2000	2007
English	31.7	24.6	35.7	24.6	36.0	27.7
Afrikaans	5.1	8.6	6.8	7.9	10.0	9.9
IsiZulu	17.0	23.4	16.8	22.1	10.7	20.1
Siswati	0.0	1.9	0.7	1.9	0.5	1.7
IsiXhosa	16.2	15.9	14.1	13.8	(28.2)	14.0

Analysis of the data in this table suggests that the importance of using the child's home language in the early years of schooling is being recognised: both isiZulu<sup>8</sup> and SiSwati show an increase in the percentage of children being schooled in the home language over the decade investigated. During that same period, the percentage of children receiving their initial schooling in English has reduced from just over 30% [23%] to just under a quarter [17%] (since 7% of both figures will be home language English learners). Nonetheless, trends across each three year period indicates that both English and Afrikaans figures pick up across the three years of schooling, while the percentages decline over the same three year period for the African languages.

The Departmental report, in its section, on Foundation Phase learners learning in their home language, argues that by 2007, some 80% of young learners are using the home language as the LOLT in the classroom. The report goes on to argue that by 2007, 76% of African home language speakers now used that language as their LOLT in the Foundation Phase, which means that just under a quarter of African home language learners in Foundation Phase are still learning through another language, most likely English. This group of learners is most likely to be enrolled in urban schools where they are in a language immersion situation without access to the resource of their own language(s).

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<sup>8</sup> The Nguni languages are all agglutinating languages and this is reflected in the conjunctive orthography for the languages. The strategy for decoding a single continuous stream of letters which may often constitute, for example the subject prefix, negative infix, object infix and verb, must surely be different from decoding the same parts of speech represented as individual lexical items. The Sotho languages are also agglutinating, but have selected a disjunctive orthography.



What the Annual School Survey data *also* reveals is that less than 5% of learners are introduced to another language during the first three years of schooling, which is a real problem if schools have made it official policy to switch over to English as the language of learning and teaching in Grade 4, and the learners have not been exposed to the language at all in the Foundation Phase.

### ***Schooling after Foundation Phase – Grade 4 and beyond***

Unfortunately, the data for Grade 4 language of learning and teaching are not given for the period 1998 – 2007: Grade 4 marks the beginning of the second or Intermediate Phase of South African schooling. The Intermediate Phase introduces a whole range of new subjects to learners.

In order to gain some sense of what figures at the point of transition might look like, the only possible source from which this can be inferred, is the data offered by a table indicating the percentage of learners by language of learning for a *single* year, the year 2007. The data indicates that, in Grade 4, English officially becomes the language of learning and teaching for 79.1% of all learners. That trend increases slightly over the remaining years of schooling, so that, the 2007 percentage for Grade 12 indicates that officially 81.4% of all learners are learning through the medium of English, and 12.8% through the medium of Afrikaans. In other words, by the time learners reach their last year of schooling, less than 6% of learning appears to take place in an African language, and this small amount of time presumably accounts for the time when learners are learning their home language as a subject. The table below has retained the percentages in full for the first three years of schooling (where the home language learning gains are reflected), but includes too, the percentages for the beginning and end of the intermediate phase, the end of the senior phase, and then for the last year of schooling, which is the end of the FET (Further Education and Training) phase.

**Table 3: Percentages of learners by language of learning and teaching and grade in 2007 (Source: DoE Annual School Survey)**

Phases	% Population 2001 estimate	2007						
		Foundation			Intermediate		Senior	FET
		Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 6	Gr 9	Gr 12
Afrikaans	13.35	9.5	9.6	9.9	12.3	12.2	14.0	12.8
English	8.2	21.8	23.8	27.7	79.1	81.6	80.0	81.4
IsiNdebele	1.59	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1
IsiXhosa	17.64	16.5	15.0	14.0	3.1	2.0	1.4	1.5
IsiZulu	23.82	23.4	21.7	20.1	1.5	1.0	0.9	1.0
Sepedi	9.39	8.3	9.1	9.2	1.1	0.9	0.9	1.0
Sesotho	7.93	4.7	4.8	4.4	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.3
Setswana	8.2	7.5	7.4	6.8	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.3
SiSwati	2.66	2.1	2.1	1.7	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.1

Tshivenda	2.28	2.2	2.4	2.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1
Xitsonga	4.44	3.1	3.3	3.1	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.8

The figures in Table 3 above indicate that at Grade 4, the two ‘colonial’ languages (for want of a better word) suddenly become identified as the primary languages of the classroom. The 2% gain for Afrikaans at the point of transition is likely to come in provinces such as the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northwest and Free State, where Afrikaans remains the more common of the two languages for everyday transactions with Non-African language speakers. The provinces where the change to English as the language of learning and teaching will be most prevalent are Gauteng and KwazuluNatal, but also Mpumalanga, Limpopo and the Western Cape, which is becoming increasingly anglicized.

If the information in the principals’ Annual School reports is accurate, then the picture emerging suggests that learning English as a subject coincides with its introduction as the medium of learning – and with the introduction of a variety of new, cognitively demanding subjects. The newest curriculum revision process, currently underway, will reduce the number of subjects to be introduced at Grade 4 to two: Science and Technology, and Social Sciences<sup>9</sup>.

The weak guidance provided by the Language in Education Policy, which merely has the force of advice rather than law in the education system, means that while schools may be migrating to teaching children in their home language in the earliest years of schooling (Grades 1- 3), only about 2% of learners are exposed to the ‘additional approved language’ in the third grade. In effect, the majority of South African children are expected – on paper at least – to go cold into learning through a new language in Grade 4. The situation is fraught with irony: school children in Grade 4 are in the same position in 2007 as they were in 1979, when the South African Nationalist government of the time passed the Education and Training Act, which allowed for the introduction of either English or Afrikaans as the medium of instruction at Grade 4 Level.

Phillipson, in his analysis of the education of African language learners under apartheid, indicated that then the South African majority were being treated as though it was a minority. More than three decades later, and under majority rule, African home language children are still subjected to an education system that treats them as though they were a minority. Furthermore, the Language in Education Policy fails to insist on learners’ passing both their home language *and* the language of learning and teaching, since only a single language is required to be passed, a situation which remains unchanged *until Grade 10*, at which point learners are finally expected to pass both languages. In short, the policy tolerates the fact that learners may fail the language of learning and teaching for six years, while expecting them to learn a variety of subjects through the medium of that additional language.

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<sup>9</sup> With the newest curriculum revision process (in progress), the number of new subjects introduced at Grade 4 has been reduced; while certain other subjects are deferred until the Senior Phase, Grade 7. This deferral frees up time for the teaching of the new language.

The report states that ‘(a)lthough the National Curriculum Statement calls upon (*sic*) schools to offer a language subject at the additional language level as from Grade 1, ...schools did not really implement the curriculum policy’ (DBE 2010: 20). New policy, which will begin to be introduced in 2012, is intended to address the flaccidity of the earlier policy transition, but, by doing so, further entrenches an early language transitional model and uncritically weakens the position of African languages in education even further

## Curriculum reform, 2012

In this section of the paper, the amendments proposed to the curricula for languages in the latest curriculum reform are briefly considered.

It is noted that in the *General aims of the South African Curriculum*, the document is completely silent on the issue of language, except to note that ‘the National Curriculum Statement is sensitive to issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors (DBE, 2011: 6).

In terms of time allocation, however, a new intent is evident. The hortatory advice regarding languages in the earlier National Curriculum Statement (DOE, 2002) has now been translated into more specific policy. Instructional time is allocated to both the home language and the first additional language from Grade 1 through to Grade 12.

**Table 4: Time allocated per week to the home and additional languages in the revised National Curriculum Statement (January 2012)**

Hours/week for	Foundation Phase			Intermediate	Senior	(FET)
	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4 - 6	Gr 7 - 9	Gr 10 - 12
Home Language	7- 8	7 - 8	7 - 8	6	5	4.5
First Additional Language	2 – 3	2 - 3	3 - 4	5	4	4.5

What is very much more apparent in the policy documents is that the Department of Basic Education:

- has committed itself to developing English as a language of learning and teaching in advance of its introduction as a medium of learning, and provides explicit guidance to that effect;
- expects learners to learn English as an additional language at the same time that they are becoming literate in their home language;
- unofficially sanctions the transition from the children’s home language to English from Grade 4 ( ‘In schools where children will use their additional language, English, as the LoLT from Grade 4...; 2010b: 12), without there having been a critical examination of this position at all.

While the January 2012 National Curriculum Statement for teaching English as a First Additional Language provides teachers with more guidance than before, and is ambitious in its intent for achievement (up to 2,500 English words by the end of Grade 3), the document engages superficially with ‘additive bilingualism’, indicating that the Additional Language curriculum ‘takes advantage of learners’ literacy skills in their home language’ (DBE 2010 b:12). Additive bilingualism is explained as ‘developing a strong literacy foundation in the home language and building First Additional Language literacy onto this’ (Ibid: 12).

In short, the new curriculum is entirely uncritical on the matter of the transition from the home language at Grade 4, and asks no questions around the possibilities of how learning a non-cognate language with a willful spelling and pronunciation history might affect the acquisition of reading in the home language in the Foundation Phase. Rather, the document makes every effort to support the wholesale transition of children into the lesser known language at Grade 4.

Given the powers vested in school governing bodies (SGBs) to make policy for schools regarding language and the pressures under which parents feel themselves to be to do the best for their children, and given the fact that the Department itself has not empowered itself, the schools, the SGBs and parents to uphold the principles embodied in the Language in Education policy, it is really unsurprising that – in the absence of a bold national plan to support majority languages in the country – the education situation remains virtually unchanged from the last years of apartheid.

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