

Kathleen Heugh, Amanda Siegrühn and Peter Plüddemann (Editors): *Multilingual Education for South Africa*. 1995. Heinemann, Johannesburg. 150 pp.

South Africa is currently experiencing dramatic changes in education policy and practice, changes which were set in motion even before the first democratic elections held in this country in 1994. Most significantly, the creation of one National Department of Education (NDE) to replace the many fragmented bodies which administered education in the Apartheid era has precipitated changes in the policy, structure, goals and content of education. The amended document: *Curriculum Framework for General and Further Education and Training*, released by the NDE in July 1996 and focusing mainly on aspects of curriculum development such as learner-centredness, learning outcomes and outcomes-based evaluation, also addresses the language-in-education policy. In doing so, it acknowledges that

language is central to learning and that it is through language that ideas are clarified and communicated . . . moreover, that policies for language in education could affect learners' opportunities for cognitive development as well as their sense of identity and relative worth. (p. 24)

In accordance with the new Constitution, whereby South Africa now recognises eleven official languages, the national language-in-education policy includes the following aims:

- the establishment of additive multilingualism as an approach to language in education;
- the promotion and development of all the official languages;
- the countering of disadvantages resulting from mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching. (p. 25)

Given the contentious policy of the Department of Education and Training (DET) in the past, i.e. that black pupils received mother-tongue instruction in schools up to Grade 4, whereafter the medium switched to English, this book argues strongly for the maintenance and development of first language medium of instruction throughout schooling, and for the need to learn at least one second language. It therefore favours a policy of additive bilingualism which is a term it applies to a context "in which speakers of any language are introduced to a second language in addition to the continued educational use of the primary language as a language of learning. The second language is never intended to replace the primary language; rather, it is seen as complementary to the primary language" (p. vii).

In support of this policy, the authors, most of whom are South African educators with work experience in sectors as diverse as early childhood development, formal schooling, adult education, teacher education and publishing, provide both a conceptual framework and examples of successful practice in bi- and multilingual classrooms. In brief, the book sets out to persuade readers that multilingual education works by stimulating debate on the implementation of a multilingual policy "as a source of enrichment for an emerging core culture in South Africa" (p. v).

The authors do not underestimate the complexity of the process of implementation involved, but simultaneously warn of the impending crisis if this is not done soon. The book is thus intended both for teachers to use as a practical resource, as well as for teacher-educators and educational planners. The first of the book's four sections (on classroom practice) is written primarily for teachers, while Section Two (*Major Issues*) is more theoretical. Section Three (*Proposals and Models*) looks to future implementation possibilities, while the final section (*Aspects of Implementation*) is more general in nature, incorporating as it does chapters on language teaching at universities, language schools in Australia and on educational publishing.

The first section on classroom practice calls for the active promotion of multilingualism as a classroom resource at a time when classrooms have become increasingly monolingual. Multilingualism is seen as an asset as it promotes cognitive flexibility and achievement at school. Innovative teaching techniques are advocated, by means of which the teacher adopts a more participatory role, and knowledge is generated in a partnership between children, teachers and parents. Other issues raised in this section include the various biases teachers have to overcome in a racist society in order to create a positive language-learning environment for preschoolers. There is also a chapter on language activities which draw on knowledge children have about the various languages they speak.

The major issues raised in the second section of the book frame the debate and establish the terms of reference for the book as a whole. Taken together, they present a powerful argument for the active promotion of African languages and for the introduction of additive bilingual educational programmes in South Africa. One of the points made is that language struggles are part of the social struggle for equality and liberty in this country and that multilingual policies can help bring about national unity. The history of language-in-education policies thus receives particular emphasis here. The cognitive advantages of bi- and multilingual education for children are also broadly discussed. This leads logically to the next section which contains proposals for the implementation of a language policy that promotes African languages, while guaranteeing access to English (which is seen as 'the current language of power').

The final section, *Aspects of implementation*, comprises six chapters on topics such as undergraduate and teacher education courses at university level, the creation of appropriate educational materials, and textbook provision. One belief expressed, namely that all teacher trainees should preferably be trilingual, is likely to prove contentious. An interesting perspective

is provided by a report on language schools in Australia which addresses the diverse linguistic needs of that multilingual society. The book closes with an account of various textbook options open to the teacher in multilingual classrooms.

As the original trickle of black and so-called coloured pupils into traditionally white schools increases, teachers are being forced to confront the challenges of multilingual and multicultural classroom practice. This represents a site of possible conflict of interests which needs to be sensitively handled. It is particularly appropriate that nearly all the authors are South African with vast experience in various aspects of the field of education, as overseas models of multicultural and multilingual education are unlikely to prove suitable in addressing the unique and complex needs of South African society. For this reason, this publication is a most timely addition to the literature on this topic. It makes an important contribution to the on-going debate and to the search for solutions to what has become a major issue in the current education crisis in South Africa.

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