Promoting Social *cum* Racial Integration in South Africa by Making an African Language a National Senior Certificate Pass Requirement[1]

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Sibe simunye **at last**!

Abstract

While schooling or formal education has become the main locus of education and training in South Africa, little recognition is given to local African languages in the curriculum. The trend is the so-called former Model C schools, which use English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), teach English and Afrikaans as subjects and usually give no significant recognition to the mother tongues of African learners. It is only in township and rural schools, widely considered as dysfunctional, that African languages may be used as LoLT during the first three years and are taught at

[1] The core argument developed here was triggered by discussions, sometimes heated, over the years, with friends and colleagues, too many to acknowledge here. The idea was presented at a seminar organised by the Anthropology Department of Wits University under Prof. Coplan in October 2009. Philip Pare, Lily Pretorius and Vic Webb were kind enough to comment on an early draft. Their contribution is willingly acknowledged.

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meaningful levels for native speakers. Thus, the education system maintains, albeit in a subdued manner, the apartheid-era partition of the society and creates a context prone to the continued exclusion of the marginalised.

I argue that making African languages compulsory at the school-end exam would help level the playing fields between black learners and their white counterparts. Furthermore, township and rural schools would be recognised as having some currency to trade, which would contribute in turn to improving their own image. Banking on the linguistic capital of black learners in 'black' schools could lead to the phasing-in of symmetrical exchanges between learners from both ends of the educational divide, through bussing and school pairing.

Such initiatives would not only contribute to bridging the educational gap and fighting social exclusion, but would also go a long way towards promoting reciprocal knowledge and mutual understanding between youth across racial and social barriers, thus paving the way for a more caring and united society.

Keywords: education, South Africa, language, language in education policy, language policy, transformation

Introduction

This paper is a call to the education authorities to use their prerogative in setting the school curriculum to place African languages firmly on the education map, *for all learners*, by making one of the official African languages compulsory for the 'National Senior Certificate' (NSC), viz. 'matric'. Let us clarify immediately that by African languages is meant here exclusively an indigenous language, or a formerly disadvantaged one, from among the eleven South African official languages[2].

[2] This definition of African languages is meant to exclude Afrikaans, regardless of the sociolinguistic position one ascribes to it. South Africa's official languages include 9 African languages as well as English and Afrikaans.

This suggestion is, by no means, original. As early as 1997 it was the object of a jointly written paper (Granville *et al.* 1997) which followed closely and critically the arguments in the then recently released Langtag report, which, however, stopped short of such a recommendation (Alexander 1996). The three main reasons invoked by Granville *et al.* were i) redress, ii) development and iii) reconciliation (Granville *et al.* 1997:14). The argumentation remains wholly valid. As South Africa, more than a decade later, remains confronted with inequality in education, I argue further for the social necessity of bridging the educational gap still reflecting apartheid-era racial categories[3], in order to end the social exclusion it entails.

Bringing African languages and hence tenets of African culture into the education framework would acknowledge the linguistic capital of black pupils who would then be seen as commanding a valuable expertise. This long overdue recognition would enhance the status of township and rural schools (henceforward 'black' schools) in society at large, as well as trigger a gain in self-confidence among black learners and black teachers and reverse the negative attitude of many towards their own languages (see for instance Govender 2008:5), which is probably a precondition for any significant improvement in school practices. Such a requirement could trigger the systematic phasing in of bidirectional skills' exchange programmes across schools belonging to different universes which in turn would go some way towards mitigating the impact of the huge gap between schools and thus redress imbalances drawn from the past.

Rather than the usual view which seeks to facilitate the movement of more 'black' children into former Model C schools I suggest ways of facilitating learners' mobility across social *cum* racial boundaries.

Besides contributing to a levelling of study conditions, as all learners would experience the hugely different contexts of South African education, such exchanges would create space for meaningful interaction between youth

[3] Apartheid-era racial categories are definitely enduring, particularly when one considers education, and reference to them is, one has to admit, often enlightening regarding the dynamics at play. The 2003 South African Social Attitudes Survey confirmed that '*race and ethnicity are the key markers of identity*' (Dinga Sikwebu, accessed January 2010). However, resorting to them should not be taken as a recognition of any scientific validity.

across the whole social and racial spectrum, leading to reciprocal knowledge and mutual understanding. This is a condition if the inclusive transformation of South African society is to ever take shape. It would strike at the heart of the ignorance, or even denial, of the past that many white students still harbour as a result of growing up in insulated institutions, the school being one of them, powerfully depicted among the mostly Afrikaner community by Jansen (2009). Such a truly revolutionary move might, in turn, usher in a more inclusive and united South African society.

To support my view I shall first briefly describe the school system in present-day South Africa and offer some insights into the role of public policy in language planning with South Africa in mind, which I feel vindicate my point. I shall then stress the centrality of education for the creation of common ground between different cultural and linguistic groups who share the same geographical and political space. To this end, I shall draw in particular from Gundara (2008) who, in an enlightening paper on the legacy of '*separate faith-based schools*' in Northern Ireland, questions the acceptability of separate curricula and separate schools as claimed by some parents in democratic states in the name of freedom of choice. Is not granting of such claims eventually inimical to the fostering of a common society, which requires that children from all walks of life share opportunities to interact freely? Is this not, eventually, entrenching inequalities? Along those lines, I will characterise the current South African education system as maintaining *de facto* social *cum* racial discrimination.

I then look at how the obligation of obtaining a pass in an African language for the Grade 12 examination could significantly help change the practices, perspective and, hopefully, final outcome of the education system in terms of individual and social attitudes, by stimulating interaction across boundaries.

At the Root of the Problem: Partial Transformation of the School System

One of the priorities formulated during the democratic transition in South Africa was the transformation of education. This policy was enacted at an institutional level. All stipulations upholding racial segregation with regard

to access to education were scrapped by 1992. In an 'upward' move, learners from all formerly disadvantaged 'racial' categories, i,e, non-whites, were able to register in schools where they had been prevented from doing so before: black learners moved into coloured, Indian and white schools, coloured learners into Indian and white ones, Indian into white ones[4].

After a somewhat protracted process it can probably be safely stated that hardly any school in the country, among the public or state-aided sector at least, is now purely white in terms of its learner complement, even if the number of black learners may remain low.

However this has been a one-way process. White learners have not moved to township schools. '*In township this morning*' never became a popular motto, to paraphrase Coplan's (1985) famous book. The taxis that ferry black children from the townships to city schools return empty to fetch a new load.

This situation is a sombre reflection on the enduring duality of the education system fifteen years after its legal and regulatory unification[5]. Schools are broadly divided according to resources and what we could call operationality—their perceived quality and efficiency—which still largely reflects the former separate education departments: township and rural schools, i.e., schools that, under apartheid, depended on the Department of Education & Training (DET)[6] and the various homelands administrations, as

[4] One could argue that whites too were disadvantaged by a segregationist system that limited their opportunities for interacting beyond their own 'racial' group, a perception that under-girds this paper as will become obvious later, but the focus here is on material factors. For decades if not centuries, whites in South Africa clearly received more than their fair share of public funding, notably education, and in that sense they were undoubtedly favoured. The cumulative effect of this factor allowed for the entrenchment of their socio-economic privileges, whether or not they agreed to the system.

[5] For the history of education in South Africa, see *inter alia* Behr (1978); Hartshorne (1992); Heugh (1995); Malherbe (1977); Macdonald (1990); Bloch (2009).

[6] The DET was the last label of the administration in charge of education for Black people during apartheid.

well as a good number of schools formerly under the House of Representatives (i.e., for the 'coloured' population) contrast with a few schools formerly under the House of Assembly (i.e. for the white population), and under the House of Delegates (i.e. for the Indian population), which are now loosely labelled together as 'ex (or former)-Model C'. Since 1994, a number of schools with no root in that history have opened. But, due to the influence of their surroundings, they appear to continue the same trend. This enduring duality is confirmed by the 2007 report of the South African Institute of Race Relations (Botsis & Cronje 2007:50) which states: '*dysfunctional and impoverished schools, used by the majority of South African children*', contrast with '*a small number of well-resourced schools used by the privileged minority*'[7].

Resources appear to be a key to understanding this persisting inequality. It is well known that State spending per learner was grossly unequal according to racial categories during apartheid, even if the gap was reduced towards the end of the regime. From 1969 to 1976, the heyday of *Bantu Education*, the State was spending 15 times more on white learners than on black ones; in 1989 the gap was reduced to 4,4 (Carpentier 2005: 48) and in 1993 expenditure, still unequal, amounted to R55OO per white learner against R1700 per black learner (Motala *et al.* 2007a:3). Still, one must keep in mind that post-1976 figures omit Bantustan whose schools were by far the most neglected ones (Bloch 2009:45). Since 1994, in order to redress past inequalities, State funding has been increasingly directed to public schools in the lower quintiles whilst the upper ones receive proportionally less and less[8]. By 2002, disregarding teachers' salaries, State equalisation had been achieved (Taylor *et al.* 2008:23; cf. Motala 2006). But this effort is seriously mitigated, if not reduced to naught, by the free rein (if not encouragement) given to schools from 1994 onwards to collect fees from parents. This move

[7] Estimates on the proportion of dysfunctional schools out of the approximately 26000 public schools vary, from around 85% (*Mail & Guardian* 22/05/09 p23) to a more palatable 60% (Motshekga 2010).

[8] Since 1996, schools are distributed in socio-economically defined quintiles which serve to regulate state funding. From 2007, the lowest two quintiles have been made non-fee paying, an acknowledgment of the overall poor socio-economic backgrounds of the learners.

was meant to try and retain wealthy white families in the public school system, rather than seeing them opt out altogether in favour of independent institutions, for which the Constitution makes provision in the name of freedom of association. The fees parents contribute help maintain and modernise the schools while allowing the state to redirect public financial flows towards needy establishments. For schools already well-endowed, the financial burden shifted from State coffers to private purses. This move fostered what Woolman and Fleisch (2009: 13) have called '*a quasi-market in education*' as, by remaining public schools, they would have to admit learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and exempt them from paying fees[9]. Thus a minority of disadvantaged children would benefit from a considerably better education than they otherwise would have access to. This measure, implemented fairly by a large number of former Model C schools, has been dubbed 'cross-subsidization'.

A major drawback of this policy, however, is, as observed by Taylor *et al.* (2008:23) '*the continuation of older patterns of financial inequality, albeit that the advantaged schools now serve both the black and the white middle-class*'. And further, even more to the point, the authors insist:

> *the combined effect of the school funding norms and the school fee policies is to reproduce existing patterns of inequality, with children who attend historically privileged schools de facto having substantially more resources devoted to their educational experience. When the existing physical infrastructure and equipment is added to the annual difference between advantaged and disadvantaged per learner expenditure, the full magnitude of the inequality is striking.*

Carpentier (2005), comparing two schools belonging to the opposite extremes, shows that fees dwarf the impact of public funding (illustrated also in Lafon 2008). Pampallis (2008:25) concludes: '*This structural inequality in the school system is inherited from apartheid, and South Africa has not*

[9] Exemption can be total or partial, according to the financial situation of the learner's care giver. Pampallis (2008) details the regulations governing exemptions.

succeeded in overcoming it, despite the stated will of government and of policy aims which seek greater equality'.

Blame however cannot be ascribed merely to the democratic government's alleged lack of commitment to redressing inequalities. The gap between schools in terms of infrastructure and qualification of teachers as well as staff, and the proportion of needy schools are such that a real levelling of all schools, including infrastructure, would have required a significant increase in taxes, a decision which was politically inappropriate at a time when economic liberalism was the order of the day. It would also have required the prioritising of education over other social needs for a long period (see Woolman & Fleisch 2009:24). White schools, one should recall, have not only benefited from the fifty odd years of the apartheid period: they have benefited from State support from the very beginning of the colonial era, to the detriment of the indigenous population[10].

One has to accept that, given the socio-political and economical context, the upward levelling of the whole spectrum of deprived schools, from infrastructure to teachers' qualifications and skills through resources for classroom as well as extra-curricular activities, is not within reach in the short term at least, especially when one factors in the constant need for investment in schools to keep up with modern trends. However, funding might not be the only problem. Habits that are not conducive to a healthy learning environment, such as '*corruption, maladministration, defiance of authority*' to quote Msimang (1992:36) referring to De Villiers' interesting narration of her own teaching experience in a Soweto school in the 1980s, have taken root in some schools, creating '*all-time low morale*' among teachers, a situation that still prevails to this day as many commentators have observed. Jansen (2007:2) thus considers that '*there is a powerful [teachers] union structure and culture that resists change*'.

In response to this unfortunate situation and with the interests of their children at heart, black families, seeking to escape what they feel are

[10] In colonial Natal, for instance, white schools were erected from the proceeds of taxes extracted from the black population whose education was left to a few fee-paying mission schools. '*While Africans suffered taxation without representation, white settlers enjoyed representation without taxation*' crudely observes Etherington (1989:175).

essentially dysfunctional schools whilst still residing in the townships, took to enrolling their children *en masse* in former Model C schools. This movement started immediately after 1994 and has continued unabated to this day (see Lafon 2008) and some township schools are now much below capacity (Botsis & Cronje 2007:52)[11]. It has extended to rural areas as well[12]. This has given rise to a new type of school that we can tentatively label 'intermediate' or 'grey', viz. former Model C schools in terms of their location and infrastructure as well as their staff and management, but increasingly black in terms of the learner population. Indeed, many are now a long way from being multiracial. When they feel the proportion of black learners exceeds what they consider is manageable, white parents tend to move their offspring to schools that are located further away and charge higher fees and are hence more racially exclusive, or even opt out of the public system altogether[13]. Although most of these 'grey' schools are certainly functional, some of them, especially in poverty-ridden town centres, may well be on a downward course as fees, pegged by the parents, are not adequate to meet escalating costs, a situation worsened by the presence of a growing number of learners whose parents cannot, or just do not, pay fees. Indeed, from 2008, as government took stock of this new situation, quintiles were defined according to the socio-economic status of the learners' families, regardless of the school's physical infrastructure (Mario Pillay Wits EPU senior researcher, personal com, April 2008). One could argue that some of

[11] In Gauteng alone, in 2008, about 40 schools were empty (Mario Pillay Wits EPU researcher, personal communication). At the start of the 2010 school-year, an estimated 2000 classrooms in Soweto had no pupils (see Serrao 2010:4).

[12] In July 2009 the press reported on youth from the Eastern Cape surviving in appalling conditions in neighbouring Natal, particularly in Pietermaritzburg, where they had moved with the hope of obtaining in urban, former Model C schools the decent education that rural schools in their areas could not offer them (see Gower 2009:12-13).

[13] In 2002, in 40 schools that belonged to the former Transvaal Education Department (*id est* previously reserved for the white population), over 80% of the learners were black while over 90% of the educators were white (quoted in Motala *et al.* 2003:19).

the very same features from which parents tried to escape in the townships are, slowly but surely, recreating themselves in urban settings (see Govender & Van Rooyen 2009:5).

Thus, township and rural schools are the option for those who have no other, that is, whose parents cannot afford school fees and transport costs involved in having their children attend urban schools, usually distant from their homes. Learners who attend such schools constitute a large majority - probably close to 80%[14]- of the African and, especially in the Western Cape, the Coloured school-age population.

The school landscape is therefore truly multiracial in a minority of schools only, i.e. those catering for the middle and upper strata of society. For the vast majority of black learners, it is still very much as before: black co-learners and black teachers in black locations, with some 'grey' schools in city centres having white teachers and a dwindling proportion of white learners. In black schools situated in townships and rural areas, and even in most of those in city centres, racial integration is definitely not happening in the school-yard. It is important at this stage to note that, contrary to the attitudes of some Afrikaans-speaking white parents prone to use the School Governing Body's prerogative to set the language of instruction as a deterrent to black learners (see severe comment in Jansen 2009:35)[15], the majority of black parents in South Africa do not want separate education facilities for their children: they are forced, or abandoned, into them.

Can transformation then be said to have been fully achieved when a majority of 'black' learners sit in mono-racial schools, where no white face, be it that of a learner or a teacher, is seen on a regular basis? What I advocate here is a drastic departure from this context[16], to create conditions for

[14] The oft quoted figure of 80% is extrapolated from other data such as tests on learners' achievements─see Fleisch (2007:6). It might need to be corrected downwards slightly due to the change in school population.

[15] This had led to numerous litigations since 1994 (see Woolman & Fleisch 2009 for a detailed study of major cases).

[16] White people visiting black schools are usually involved in NGOs or charities. These interventions, however well intended they may be are typically asymmetrical and could possibly even reinforce preconceptions of racially-set roles (the needy African, the well-meaning European).

symmetrical exchanges between equal partners. This presupposes structural changes that can only be initiated by the administrative authorities.

Formal Education as a Tool for Fostering Feelings of Togetherness in Ethnically Complex States

In 'modern' countries, formal education has become the main vehicle through which youngsters are socialised. For better or worse, formal or school education has taken over many functions formerly carried out by the family and/or the community. Traditional forms of education which had evolved over centuries are now marginal, when and where they exist. In South Africa, even though grandmothers may still look after their grandchildren, the era of tales told at the fireplace or under the moonlight is, for most children, long gone, as is the era of clergymen's sermons resonating through the walls of farm kitchens in the remote interior. So-called initiation schools that served as rituals to mark adulthood still occur in some communities but they are now somehow subservient to the school system— they are scheduled to take place during holidays, so as not to hamper school attendance, and, due to the shorter period of time and, possibly, the influence of the media, they seem to be focussed on the physical trial rather than knowledge transmission.

South Africa has indeed become a wholly modern country, or rather a country given to western ways in many domains, not least education[17]. With the passing of the 1996 constitution, schooling became compulsory for all (Motala *et al.* 2007b:16). By the beginning of the 21st century, formal western education was near universal, as is extensively documented in the education section of the Fifteen Year Review commissioned by the Presidency and issued in 2008 (Taylor et al, 2008): gross enrolment ratio for 2005 is pegged at 103% of the total age group for primary and 89% for secondary; in 2007, more than 90% of the school age population was in school, making South Africa compare favourably with European countries

[17] Modernisation of a country is often measured as the degree of its westernisation. We follow this trend for convenience whilst remaining aware of its cultural and political bias.

(Taylor *et al.* 2008:27 table 30[18]). Formal education has undoubtedly become the main form of education across all groups and plays a central role in shaping the society. Still it is important to keep in mind its alien origin. '*we are dealing with an institution that does not grow out of the local societies*' observed Hanf *et al.* (1975:68).

In sharp contrast to many historical precedents, democratic South Africa is avowedly and proudly a multicultural and multilinguistic country. The South African Constitution does not make assimilation to a dominant culture or language a goal of the state. Quite the contrary, it sees in the diversity of the communities inhabiting the country a source of cultural and human enrichment. '(T)*he promotion of linguistic pluralism and national unity [is seen] as being complementary rather than antagonistic*' comments Orman in his study on post-apartheid South Africa (2008:92). In doing so, the South African Constitution tries, arguably, to wed universal human rights to rights based on different histories and cultures. This is premised on the hope of a harmonious and peaceful cohabitation of people practising different languages and cultures, and it explicitly tasks schools to achieve this. Thus, the 1996 Language in Education Policy '*is meant to facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and region (…) and create an environment in which respect for languages other than one's own would be encouraged*' (p1).

This role being devolved to schools is not unique to South Africa. Many states, in the multilingual and multicultural world of today, having to integrate significant minorities from very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, sometimes with a history of conflict between them, have turned to schools to foster the common grounds that can ensure social stability. Sharing benches at school is seen as a key to nurture a culture of tolerance and to stimulate mutual understanding and respect for one another. '*Many societies purposefully use schools to develop shared and common value systems, especially to strengthen democratic engagement and to provide higher educational outcomes*' points out Gundara (2008:339).

However current realities in South Africa raise questions about the ability of the education system to fulfil this duty, especially as regards the

[18] A rate over 100% is obtained due to the inclusion of underage and overage children that attend a given grade (Taylor *et al.* 2008:27).

view raised by Gundara (2008:340f) that '*simply co-existing in the same geographical area does not constitute 'living together'. Intercultural education implies action: hence key processes of interaction, conversation, engagement, meeting, listening, debate, dialogue and the like*'; and further, '*separate schools, even those sharing a common written curriculum, would institutionalize and perpetuate these communal divides in the realm of the public domains and institutions*'. In that sense, it can be argued that, one way or another, a great majority of South African schools fail to prepare the youth for the building of a common nation (or a shared feeling of nationhood) among groups that emerge from a history of enforced separation and conflict, and may not necessarily share common goals and references. When one contrasts the lofty objectives of post 1994 education and actual practices, which still perpetuate separate schools (*id est, de facto* discriminatory) for a majority of black learners, the South Africa education system appears largely schizophrenic[19].

The Crucial Role of Public Policy in Shaping Language Status: The Case of South Africa

Bourdieu established that the status of languages at any given moment is not a chance result of circumstances or of features of the language itself: it is the product of history and it expresses power relations. '*[…] a language does not impose itself by its own force but derives its geographical limits from a political act of institution, an arbitrary act misrecognized as such*' (Bourdieu 1991:257). A particular instance is the spread of European languages in the wake of colonial expansion. In this respect, the history of English in South Africa is a case in point.

English was brought to South Africa from the time the British took over the former Dutch colony at the Cape in 1806. Through contact, trade, exchange as well as the dire necessities of survival when Africans were

[19] Schizophrenia refers to '*a disease marked by a breakdown between thoughts, feelings and actions*' (Thomson, *Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 3rd revised ed. 1998). We apply it by extension to a system whose stated policy remains largely divorced from its real practices.

forced into wage employment on settlers' farms or in their homes, the language reached into African communities[20]. The burgeoning mission schools that dispensed education played a central role. Meanwhile, its imposition on the Dutch/ Afrikaans-speaking settlers from the early days, as it was proclaimed the official language in the Cape colony in 1822 (Behr 1978:4), as well as the pursuit of an assimilationist policy in the wake of the Boer defeat in the South African war from 1902 onwards, triggered a defensive response that translated into ideological and political action. Afrikaans was developed as a language separate from Dutch and gained official status in 1925. When elections brought the National Party to government in 1948, the further development and spread of Afrikaans, which shaped the identity of its mainly Afrikaner constituency, was high on its agenda.

By order of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, as government took over African education from the missions, Africans, who were to receive primary education in their own language, were forcefully made to study Afrikaans and use it as a medium of instruction on a par with English beyond the primary phase. This, paradoxically, gave an immense boost to English as Black people in general opposed apartheid policies which they associated with the Afrikaner establishment. The imposition of Afrikaans was felt as a political ploy to keep them under control while English was purported to be a powerful instrument of liberation (N. Crawhall quoted in Bekker 1999:108).

This chapter of South African history demonstrates that political events and public policies may have a huge and often decisive impact on language status and hence on language attitudes one way or another. Some analysts, reflecting on this history, consider that the choice of languages in South African education should lie solely with parents and/or learners and that the government should refrain from making any regulation regarding which languages ought to be present at one level or another in the education

[20] Like conversion to Christianity, the spread of English generally followed the trail of the gradual submission of African polities. Natal remained a partial exception as, due to the peculiar Shepstonian policy of indirect rule, Zulu was the medium used between the colonial administration and its subjects as well as in dealings with the Zulu kingdom and its sequels until the annexion (see Hamilton 1998).

system, lest this imposition be rejected and, possibly, nurture resentment. If the stakeholders themselves show no interest in African languages, then so be it! Any change of attitude, desirable as it may seem, should come from them. In the South African context however, the *laisser-faire* option is a convenient way of disregarding the way the present situation came about and the need for redress. Contrary to lessons of history, it denies the state any agency in informing the symbolic level where attitudes are shaped. Drawing from Bourdieu (1991:51) who observes that language attitudes do not change by government fiat but are rooted in '*symbolic domination*', the acceptance by speakers of the validity of a given language for various purposes, such a position is often supported by those who have a vested interest in the continuation of the *status quo.* As it brings about '*the internalization of bourgeois European values*' (Higgs 2008:447), it fits well the objectives of the new ruling African elite despite its oft-repeated claims to revisiting its heritage[21]. Granville *et al.* (1997:16) dispose nicely of this counter-argument: '*it [is] ironic that African languages which once suffered underdevelopment through Afrikaans and English domination should now suffer another round of underdevelopment on the noble but mistaken sensitivities over perpetuating our legacy of imposition*'. Given this legacy, in fact, '*(E)ducational and other state institutions should emphasize the multicultural and multilingual nature of the South African nation*' states Benjamin (1994:107), as a way of levelling the field and that should be reflected in the curriculum if equality of opportunities among all learners is to be realised. Indeed, as Hulmes (1989:8) reminds us, '*Intellectual discrimination, predicated on an unquestioned assumption of the supremacy of western analytical thought, may be one of the more difficult kinds of discrimination with which teachers have to cope in the long term*'.

African Languages at National Senior Certificate Level for All Learners

I contend that, if South Africa's future is to be based on reciprocal know-

[21] Due to the personality of President Jacob Zuma, who took charge in mid-2009, this may be less true for his government than it was for the preceding Mbeki administration.

ledge and mutual understanding across racial boundaries, i.e. among the various groups that make up the country, and if education is about preparing the next generation for such a future, a shared experience initiated on school benches is a requirement. For *all* learners in South Africa to experience multiracialism – i.e. the presence of co-learners from other ethnic backgrounds in the same classroom- given the demography of the country and its distribution, proactive ways have to be explored. To enrol all black learners in so-called multiracial or multicultural schools is just not possible. It would only result in displacing the problem as the multiracial character of such schools would in most cases fade away.

A Trigger for Integration: African Languages at NSC

There might be an alternative way of ensuring integration and reducing the impact of the gap between schools: that learners share all facilities through bidirectional exchange programmes. In the South African context, I argue that such an outcome could be initiated with a proactive change of approach to African languages by making an African language a National Senior Certificate pass requirement.

In 2008 the new National Senior Certificate examination was introduced. Much attention has been given to the wording of language stipulations to ensure equality among all eleven official languages. The text refrains from mentioning any language explicitly, that is, by name or even by language family: they are captured by acronyms apt to fit for diverse situations (Home Language (HL), First Additional Language (FAL), Second Additional Language (SAL), Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)).

Leaving aside specific cases warranting exemptions, a learner has to offer two of the 11 official languages, with one at least at 'HL level', i.e, first position, the other being at FAL level, i.e. second position─although it can be at HL level as well. Contrary to the previous dispensation, where *per force* the LoLT was to be offered in first position (then called first language), the LoLT can now be either first or second position, that is, at HL or FAL level (DoE 2005:6 & 25).

In the same document, 'Home-language' is defined as the language '*first acquired by children through immersion at home*'. A comment on FAL is found in the Revised Curriculum statement which reads '(T)*he first additional language assumes that learners do not necessarily have any*

knowledge of the language when they arrive at school' (DoE 2002:5). However, a later document specifies that FAL '*provides for levels of language proficiency that meet the threshold levels necessary for effective learning across the curriculum* (DoE 2005:21). Indeed, the difference between the levels expected in HL and FAL has become, to say the least, minimal, as a brief look at the related documents shows: same weekly time allocation, almost identical exam stipulations, etc (DoE 2005:16; DoE 2008:3).

These new stipulations were obviously worded with learners of African linguistic background in mind, who use English as their LoLT and presumably study their own mother tongue at FAL (or HL) level. They are now allowed to offer their mother tongue at HL level and their LoLT as FAL. This places them on a somewhat comparable footing with their European-language counterparts, for whom the language taken in the first position is usually their home language. Moreover, since both HL and FAL require native or near-native competence, it is pushing African learners towards offering their own mother tongue as the other language, rather than Afrikaans.

A drawback of the present stipulation is that it is discouraging for non-native speakers who would want to offer an African language as they normally stand no chance of passing at either HL or FAL level (B Muller, UKZN Zulu 2nd language lecturer, personal communication, 2009). They have to go for second additional, which refers to a language learnt in the school context but which falls outside the compulsory subjects and therefore can contribute only marginally to pass the NSC. This has resulted in the reduction in numbers of interested learners, which in turn has led schools to abandon the teaching of African languages as second languages especially since, after a resounding court case, they may have to organise it at either HL or FAL for African-language speakers[22]. The teaching of African languages

[22] Mrs Nkosi, whose Zulu-speaking son was attending Durban High School (a former Model C school) at Grade 8 in 2007 and was taught Zulu as a third language whereas Afrikaans was offered as a second language, challenged the school practice on the grounds of unfair discrimination. The court concurred. This sent a strong message to former Model C schools and many pledged – as did Durban High School from 2008 – to offer African languages at HL or FAL level, often discontinuing as a consequence the SAL option (Sanders, Durban Magistrate Court, case 77/2007, adjudicated: 30/09/2008).

to non-native speakers has thus been dealt, probably inadvertently, another blow[23].

What we suggest is to alter the NSC language stipulation so as to make one of the two compulsory languages an African language. This could be achieved through a stipulation requesting that a language other than the LoLT be a language which is not available as LoLT[24]. Another way to attain the same result could be to require that 'two non-related languages' be offered[25]. This would exclude the combination of English and Afrikaans, both belonging to the Germanic family. It would follow the rule that forbids a candidate to offer two Nguni languages or two Sotho languages (DoE 2005:7). Either of the wordings above keeps to the anonymity of languages cherished in Department of Education parlance and they do not go against the revered policy according to which a given language should not be imposed. For non-native speakers it might be appropriate to consider, temporarily at least, the possibility that the African language offered be at SAL instead of HL or FAL level.

Such a measure would seem to fall within the existing purview of laws and regulations governing education. The 1996 South African Schools Act and Norms and Standards for Language Policy in Public Schools do give each school a degree of autonomy in deciding its 'languages areas', i.e. languages selected as LoLT and as subjects, but this is exercised within certain limits and, decisively, the design of the NSC curriculum lies firmly within the prerogative of the DoE.

Furthermore the said measure could probably claim to be an implementation of Chapter 1, Section 6, Article 2 of the Constitution that reads '*the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the*

[23] It was common practice in former Model C schools to group in the same class beginners and native speakers of an African language. Unless the teaching is done with a lot of acumen, and using a carefully adapted strategy, this may be pedagogically unsound as the teacher will prioritise either group and create frustration among the other one.

[24] Even though the LoLT may be in theory any of the 11 official languages, with a proviso for German at primary level, only English and Afrikaans are so far available as LoLT beyond grade 4.

[25] Thanks to Umalusi Researcher E Burroughs for the suggestion.

status and advance the use of [the indigenous languages of the South Africa people]' (quoted in Orman 2008:91). Reference to the status book would add considerable weight to this measure, especially in case it is challenged. One could also argue on the inherent political nature of the curriculum, in particular language learning, as Chetty and Mwepu reveal (2008:332). Interestingly, '*making the learning of an African indigenous language compulsory*' was part of the intentions that the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, spelt out in her 2005 budget speech, according to the extracts in www.southafrica.info (accessed 7/02/08).

Social cum Racial Integration through Language Learning?

A compulsory pass in an African language to obtain the NSC would place all learners on a more equal footing and counteract '*the sacralisation of English*' (Louw 2004). This would also necessitate decisive changes to common practices. Non-native speakers of African languages would have to be exposed to African languages. It is common wisdom that there is no better way to learn a language than to interact with its speakers. The '*linguistic capital*' (Gundara 2008:350) commanded by the black learners would be valorised in the eyes of their more socially privileged colleagues now challenged to add an African language to their repertoire. Black schools would be seen in a positive light, as holding the key to a crucial resource regarding a significant and indispensable part of the curriculum. Black schools, even in their present condition, have also much to offer if the rich and powerful potential of black culture, urban and rural, is unlocked and made part and parcel of a (truly) South African multilingual (and multicultural) curriculum, in a determined departure from its present western orientation.

As former Model C schools would have to prepare learners for the new language requirement, school authorities might want to consider pairing with several corresponding township and/ or rural schools[26].

[26] It seems logical to expect the former Model C schools to solicit the agreement as they would be the ones requesting the skills, and also because they are normally in a better position to organise.

Such a strategy can be seen as a broad extension of the specialist secondary schools programme, whereby learners follow classes across schools in their district in order to study the discipline of their choice on which a given secondary school focuses (see speech by Minister N Pandor on education budget, National Assembly, 19 May 2005, http://www.kzn education.gov.za/news/2006/19-05-2006.pdf).

Obviously there are different ways to implement this scheme and the following are mere practical suggestions. It could start immediately after the Foundation Phase (Grade 4). In order to avoid duplication of administrative structures, the existing clustering of schools could be used. Clusters normally comprise around 10 schools located in the same area and, more often than not, belonging to the same social category. They offer member schools opportunities for sharing experience and discussing standards, among other things. Clusters made up of former Model C schools could be systematically dismantled, each school being reallocated to the closest cluster containing black schools so that, in as much as feasible, all clusters country-wide would include a mixed array of schools, with at least one former Model C in each.

What I anticipate are bi-directional skills exchanges involving movements of pupils whereby, say, a quarter of the learners of a given grade in a former Model C school would study during a period of time in one of the associated black schools, with the reverse happening simultaneously or at separate times—either for a full week or a fortnight, or on a daily basis, with each pair of schools freely deciding on the more convenient strategy, the only obligation being to act in one way or another.

For white pupils in black schools, the focus would be on language teaching, making full use of available language teachers as well as local pupils through some type of mentoring (or peer teaching), leading to an interesting blend of formal and informal learning[27]. That would give long overdue impetus to the teaching of African languages as second languages which, in spite of its dire need, appears to be lagging behind. Mostly, it will place African language teachers in black schools in a good position to

[27] Ellis (1990:2) considers that second language learning implies two different activities, formal and informal. Formal occurs mostly in school, informal in 'naturalistic' circumstances. The strategy proposed would mobilize both in schools.

innovate and improve on African language teaching methodology. Other subjects could be included, with Life Orientation probably coming top of the list.

The same naturally would happen the other way round when black learners would go for furlough study in the former Model Cs schools. Subjects could be per choice, with Mathematics, English, Sports (allowing them to enjoy better facilities), etc, probably most in demand[28].

Such exchanges would challenge teachers in many ways: for example, black teachers of African languages and other subjects as they would be compared to their counterparts by their temporary white learners used to a certain professional behaviour; former Model C teachers confronted with learners having difficulties with the LoLT but without the possibility of code-switching to another medium …. It would create a dynamics for multilingual teaching and constitute a first step towards a truly multicultural education, which, albeit on the official agenda, has so far never been really implemented (see Marais & Meier 2008). It would also vindicate the intentions of Higher Education Institutions to promote indigenous languages as incoming students would all have a degree of command in one of them at least.

Once the initial distrust is removed and mutual respect installed through a monitored programme, many friendships will undoubtedly ensue, as happens normally between youth. Whilst in the township school-yards, white learners would befriend some of their black colleagues, who would look after them and, again, the same would happen in white schools. Both

[28] Since the writing of this paper, I was privy to an experience which goes some way along those lines. Through an agreement with a couple of private schools in Johannesburg, notably the French school in Bryanston, pupils from Winnie Ngwekazi primary school in Pimville Soweto go and attend classes there for one or two week sessions during the breaks, taking advantage that the French school follows the French school calendar. Pupils from the French school are regularly invited to events at Winnie Ngwekazi. The programme, supported by the French cultural department, has been endorsed by both school communities (Thanks to Winnie Ngwekazi's principal Pumla Mabilo for sharing this information with me).

groups have so much to discover and share![29]

Interestingly, such a programme would be no novelty in South Africa. When, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Afrikaners developed the first model of Christian National Education, a significant number of schools were attended by children from *both* language-communities, i.e. English *and* Dutch, later Afrikaans, that a bitter war had just pitted against each other. Malherbe, who was very positive on this educational strategy for mutual understanding, recalls its appreciation in the words of J.H. Hofmeyr ('Onze Jan'), for a long-time the authorized voice of the Cape Afrikaners: '*I would like the English boy to learn Dutch from the Dutch boy, and the Dutch boy to learn English from his English comrade in the school and with whom he is going to mix in after life*' (in Malherbe 1977:7)[30]. Once we substitute learner for 'boy' and black and white for English and Dutch, what I advocate here is not more than an all-inclusive version of this plea.

Conclusion: The Myth of the Garieb River

It is high time that South Africa effectively promotes a more socially and racially integrated society, if only for the interest of social stability in the medium term. I believe that the systematic valorisation of black languages and culture would make short excursions in township and rural schools attractive for white learners, encouraging bidirectional exchanges to make multilingualism—including an African language—real. This could lead to lasting interaction across the entire racial and social spectrum, thereby paving the way for the advent in South Africa of the long overdue 'politics of

[29] Of course, skills transfers between teachers have been organized over the years. Van Huyssteen (2002) mentions the Ilwimi project of mutual mentoring of teachers in dual medium schools. There are many other initiatives, like Alison Kitto's intervention on Mathematics in township schools. What we suggest here is a systemic and mandatory programme.

[30] At the time, a frequent system was that of dual- or parallel medium schools, where, after an initial mother tongue instruction period, the 'other language' was used as secondary MoI. For more on this see Malherbe (1977).

becoming' (as opposed to 'the politics of being'), that Connolly defines as '*that paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of unexpected energies and institutionally congealed injuries …*' (in Maclure 2003:7). This process would represent a drastic change to inherited attitudes that bonded identities.

The youth of tomorrow would thus at long last make a reality of Neville Alexander's allegory of the nation as a river, the Garieb, strengthened by the converging of diverse streams[31]. South Africa does not take full measure of the wealth represented by the diversity of languages and cultures it contains. It is high time it builds on it rather than let it remain a dead weight in the education system.

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[31] The image of the nation as a powerful river—*Garieb* is the original name for the river christened *Orange* by the European settlers—was advocated by Neville Alexander (2001), instead of the *rainbow nation*, on the grounds that it suggests the merging of streams rather than their mere juxtaposition.

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