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The continual conundrum of the "language across the curriculum" issue: lessons from the Bullock report (1975) for South African higher education today

A B S T R A C T The link between language and learning and how to develop language across the curriculum is a persisting theme in education research over time. In this article, the first in a series, we wish to contribute to the current vibrant debate about language issues in higher education – both internationally and locally. It primarily aims at providing a critical historical review of the conundrum of the "language across the curriculum" issue and its implications for the South African higher education sector. This is done by critically comparing current local circumstances to lessons learnt from the original context where the notion of "language across the curriculum" was presented to improve the quality of education in schools in the United Kingdom in the mid-1970's. The premise behind this is that "to interpret the developments within a field competently, one needs a sense of its history" (Weideman, 2011: IX). Adding a very specific historical perspective is thus, and indeed, a necessary point of departure as it may enable South African practitioners and policy makers to: (a) evaluate if all relevant information is considered in decision making today, and (b) situate strands of current thinking in a framework that could clarify assumptions and implications potentially accepted uncritically today.

Keywords: LAC (language across the curriculum), language and literacy development, higher education, multilingualism, Bullock report

1. Introduction

In South Africa, there is general agreement that the education system at all levels needs well-planned and well-implemented interventions to improve. In the work of academics one often finds references to the notion of "a crisis in education" (referring to a variety of possible causes;

cf. Davidowitz, 2009:206; Fraser & Killen, 2009:262-263; Jacobs, 2009:250; Koch & Dornbrack, 2008:347; Nel & Nel, 2009:127; Ngcobo, 2009:209; Scott, 2009:25-34; Marais & van Dyk, 2010:1; Van der Walt, 2010a:268). A stance like this, however, could easily develop into a so-called "crisis narrative" as Ivanič *et al*. (2009:14) label it. Hence, it is necessary to take in particular cognisance of more composed views. In her analysis of change in South African schools over a period of 10 years, De Bot (2005:9-10), for example, presents a more balanced interpretation of the state of schools when she asserts that:

> [t]he brief overview of a selected number of indicators shows that progress has been uneven in extending the provision of schooling … perhaps the most worrying aspect is that quality is still elusive in many schools, partly related to backlogs and poverty in the surrounding community, but also related to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The uneven improvement in the quality of school education obviously influences the success of entering learners in higher education. In this regard, Scott's (2009:25) urgent question, *Who belongs in higher education in South Africa?* presents a challenge to tertiary institutions. Based on the performance of South African learners in a variety of international literacy and numeracy tests (cf. results in the 2006 "Progress in Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS]" reported in Mullis *et al*., 2007; and results reported in the "Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study" [TIMMS] in 2007 reported in Mullis *et al*., 2008), as well as analyses of the failure and drop-out rates of students in higher education in South Africa (Scott, 2009), we are of the opinion that the issue is indeed serious, that the problem is complex and that it deserves systematic and continuous attention from an interdisciplinary perspective. With this article we, therefore, neither wish to play down or to overstate the urgency of the matter, but rather contribute to the discussion.

2. Language and the South African education system

Within the broad discussion of the "failure" of the South African education system, there are various views about the role of language. It is widely accepted that language is a contributing factor to success or failure in education (Van Rensburg & Weideman, 2002:153), but there are clear differences of opinion about the importance of language as a cause for educational failure in South Africa and a variety of potential solutions are proposed by participants in the debate.

One cluster of commentators focus on issues related to the use of the mother tongue in education. They argue that the use of the mother tongue especially in early education is paramount and that our failures to use the mother tongue effectively in this domain cause education failure in a broad sense (cf. Alexander and Bloch, 2004; Alexander, 2005; Bloch, 2006). Some scholars in this cluster argue that the notion of bi- or multilingual education (even conceived as "additive") is problematic (cf. Banda, 2009: 5-6). Other scholars go as far as arguing that the aim should be to extend the use of the mother tongue at all levels of education (as was the case with Afrikaans) as far as possible and that this would solve the educational problems experienced in South Africa (cf. Deyi *et al*., 2007). Another cluster of commentators argue that in a global society, a bi- or multilingual approach is best and they propose the use of the mother tongue especially in early education, while English is added as a language to be

used as medium of instruction in later education, especially higher education (Altbach, 2004:3; Altbach & Knight, 2007:297). Within this group, some scholars argue that we should work towards multilingual pedagogies at all levels of education (Henning *et al*., 2001; Henning & Van Rensburg, 2002; Banda, 2009:6; Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2010:19).

Heugh (2000:5-6) probably qualifies the debate about the role of language in educational failure in South Africa aptly when she states:

> … should the role of language continue to be shrouded in a confusion of ill-informed myths, it would eventually become the most important factor, which determines the failure of the majority and success for a tiny minority [in education in South Africa].

Finding a framework from which to propose recommendations for the language issue in education could assist practitioners to constructively move to at least testing viable solutions to ascertain which are the most appropriate for different levels of education and different contexts. What is to follow is an attempt in this regard.

3. Problem statement and aim of the article: on the tight-rope between uncritical acceptance of contextually irrelevant approaches for South African education, and … historical amnesia

An information overload, or an over-emphasis on the uniqueness of the South African context rooted in our extra-ordinary history, seemingly overshadows discussions about possible solutions to educational failure in South Africa. This often results in narrow and parochial deliberations that obscure the universal nature of concerns about the quality of education systems across the world and over longer periods. There, in fact, seems to be a sort of historical amnesia at work in some cases. Maton and Moore (2002) argue that "much of what is described as 'new', 'original' and 'radical' in the humanities and social sciences is based on what we shall call historical amnesia … This … affects the ways in which the field's past is available as an intellectual resource, and the possibility of today's work being built upon in the future".

We wish to argue, akin to the argument presented by Maton and Moore (2002), that an over-emphasis on the uniqueness of the South African context could lead to a perspective on educational science that promotes a view that there is nothing applicable in the experiences of people living in different contexts and in different times that could potentially inform local thinking about solving present-day problems. In all fairness, we need to acknowledge that forms of historical amnesia are also reported for other education contexts (cf. Zeichner & Liston, 1990:3 for a discussion of "lack of historical consciousness" in the United States of America educational context). The significance of this contention is that historical amnesia could negatively affect the ability of South African educationists to contribute to the presentation of solutions to educational problems, because it is as if we are "putting together prefabricated bungalows, one after the other, each knower assembling their own (seemingly) from scratch" (Maton & Moore, 2002). In this way, our thinking is impoverished and it undermines attempts to build a cumulative body of knowledge that could deepen our understanding and lead to improved practice over time.

This article is consequently an attempt at balancing our views of possible ways to address the "language across the curriculum" notion by investigating the usefulness of a particular view

from the past (the language across the curriculum initiative in the UK in the 1970s). This may perhaps serve as an instrument to deepen our understanding of a similar issue (the "language issue") in South African higher education today, while keeping the adjustments required by differences in contexts in the equation.

The remainder of this article will thus focus on the issue of language and its relationship with academic success in higher education in South Africa today, by applying a critical but historically informed approach. Particular attention will be given to the notion of "language across the curriculum", by exploring how this concept was used to improve the language in education situation in the past and in a different context (UK schools in the 1970s onwards). The results of this analysis will then be applied to current discussions about the language issue in higher education in South Africa. The underlying assumption is that learning from a context where this concept was utilized comprehensively, could provide important indicators to consider in the current South African debate.

4. Blast from the past: an exposition of the main findings in the Bullock report (1975) and applications by Marland (1977) and Corson (1990)

In our brief presentation of the findings of the Bullock report (1975) below we will focus on the principal recommendations presented in Chapter 26 (1975:513 – 516) that focus on language and literacy policy development and the establishment of support structures for the development of these phenomena. These clusters of recommendations were selected because they represent 10 out of the 17 final recommendations and conclusions in the report, and because they would remain important for the development of a language and literacy across the curriculum approach in other education systems. It simply is not possible to present a sense of the findings of this comprehensive report in any other way. Language and academic literacy teachers, lecturers, and academic development practitioners would find reading the full report interesting though.

Secondly, we will focus on two other sources that claim to work towards the implementation of the Bullock report (1975): Marland (1977), a member of the original Bullock committee who participated in the implementation of the report in the school where he worked, and Corson (1990), a language in education policy specialist who worked in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand at various times in his career.

Finally, we will propose a framework with which insights presented in the Bullock report (1975), and experiences from those who worked towards the implementation of this report in different contexts (Marland, 1977 and Corson, 1975), could be used to guide thinking about the "language and literacy across the curriculum" issue in South African higher education today. At the end of this section differences and similarities between the contexts for which the Bullock report (1975) and the work of Marland (1977) and Corson (1990) were created will be discussed to ensure that we do not commit the fallacy of applying insights from contexts which would not be applicable or advisable in the current South African higher education system. The aim of this historical and critical approach is to underscore lessons we can learn from the past and different contexts in order to inform discussions about the issue today.

4.1 The Bullock report

Recommendations 3 and 4 of the Bullock report (1975) relate to language and literacy **policy development** at schools. We reprint the relevant recommendations in this part of the article for the sake of readability and because the recommendations are brief:

> **Recommendation 3**: Every school should devise a systematic policy for the development of reading competence in pupils of all ages and ability levels (1975:514).

> **Recommendation 4**: Each school should have an organized policy for language across the curriculum, establishing every teacher's involvement in language and reading development throughout the years of schooling (1975:514).

The focus of the Bullock report (1975) on the development of reading proficiency is clear from both these recommendations. The popular and well-known notion proposed by George Sampson and accepted widely in education circles in the UK from 1921 (1970 edition: 44) onwards is included in recommendation 4: "[e]very teacher is a teacher of English because every teacher is a teacher in English". Both recommendations emphasise the importance of an organized and systematic policy in which the development of language and literacy across the curriculum is captured, as well as the important role to be played by subject teachers across the curriculum to contribute towards language development.

Recommendations 15 and 16 focus on the **training of teachers** to implement a language across the curriculum approach.

> **Recommendation 15**: A substantial course on language in education (including reading) should be part of every primary and secondary school teacher's initial training, whatever the teacher's subject or the age of the children with whom he or she will be working (1975:515).

> **Recommendation 16**: There should be an expansion in in-service education opportunities in reading and the various other aspects of the teaching of English, and these should include courses at diploma and higher degree level. Teachers in every LEA should have access to a language/ reading centre (1975:515).

In the foreword to the recommendations, the authors of the report emphasise that the quality of individual teachers and their ability to implement these recommendations is of the utmost importance (1975: 513): "[a]ll our recommendations are designed to support and strengthen the teachers in the schools, for it is with them that improvement in standards of reading and language most assuredly lie".

The bulk of the recommendations of the report refer to the notion of **language and literacy development and support structures** at schools.

> **Recommendation 5**: Every school should have a suitably qualified teacher with responsibility for advising and supporting his colleagues in language and the teaching of reading (1975:514).

> **Recommendation 7**: English in the secondary school should have improved resources in terms of staffing, accommodation, and ancillary help (1975:514).

Recommendation 8: Every LEA should appoint a specialist English advisor and should establish an advisory team with the specific responsibility of supporting schools in all aspects of language in education (1975:514).

Recommendation 10: Additional assistance should be given to children retarded in reading, and where it is the school's policy to withdraw pupils from their classes for special help they should continue to receive support at the appropriate level upon their return (1975:514).

Recommendation 11: There should be a reading clinic or remedial centre in every LEA, giving access to a comprehensive diagnostic service and expert medical, psychological, and teaching help. In addition to its provision for children with severe reading difficulties the centre should offer an advisory service to schools in association with the LEA's specialist adviser (1975:514).

Recommendation 13: Children of families of overseas origin should have more substantial and sustained tuition in English. Advisers and specialist teachers are required in greater strength in areas of need (1975:515).

These recommendations aim at assisting schools to establish a wide range of language and literacy development and support structures ranging from general support to learners in the mainstream, to support to learners with special needs. It includes the acknowledgement that the English department (or any language department, so to speak) that takes responsibility for co-ordinating this support would need additional help and infrastructure.

Other themes addressed in the recommendations not discussed fully in this article include the notion of **defining and assessing literacy** (recommendations 1 and 9) (1975:513,514); the acknowledgement of **language and literacy development at different stages** in the lives of people (recommendations 2, 12) (1975:514,515); **articulation** between various education **systems** (recommendation 6) (1975:514); the importance of the **availability of books** in this process (recommendation 14) (1975:515); and the establishment of **national language and literacy structures and resources** to support efforts in strengthening the language across the curriculum efforts in schools (recommendation 17) (1975:515).

Three of these issues have been addressed extensively in the context of higher education in South Africa. A lot of work was done on defining and assessing literacy fit for purpose in higher education in South Africa (Koch & Dornbrack, 2008; Yeld, 2001; Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004; Van Dyk, 2010; Van Schalkwyk, 2008) and libraries at South African universities are reasonably well developed across the board. Language and literacy development at different stages are getting some attention (see the work of Pretorius and associates (cf. Pretorius and Mampuru 2007; Pretorius and Currin, 2009) on the literacy development of children in the early stages of school; cf. the special issue of the *Journal of Education* on adult education (including literacy) that was edited by Mackie (2006)).

Two of the issues mentioned in the Bullock report's (1975) recommendations, however, deserve more attention in the current South African higher education context. The first is that of the articulation of language and literacy development efforts between the school system and the higher education system (also discussed thoroughly by Scott, 2009; Balfour, 2010; Van

der Walt, 2010b). The second is that of the establishment of national language and literacy structures and resources. These issues, however, fall without the scope of this article and they will therefore only receive cursory discussion whenever they relate directly to issues of relevance in this article.

Overall, the writers of the Bullock report (1975) emphasise the complexities involved in any process that aims to improve education via a focus on the influence of language in that process. They state (Bullock, 1975:513):

> … we have been opposed … to the idea that reading and the use of English can be improved in any simple way. The solution does not lie in a few neat administrative strokes, nor in the adoption of one set of teaching methods to the exclusion of another. Improvement will only come from a thorough understanding of the many complexities, and from action on a broad front.

A last reference to the Bullock report (1975) is that it acknowledges the extent of the effort it would require to implement recommendations. The quotation above includes the notion of the complexity of the task at hand, and that the task would require efforts on various fronts. This is echoed in various other sections of the report, for example: "[w]e are convinced that the benefits would be out of all proportion to the effort it would demand [implementing a policy for language across the curriculum], considerable though this would undoubtedly be" (1975:193).

4.2 Implementation of the findings of the Bullock report

Marland (1977:ix) states that his book is not "a summary of the Bullock Report" and that the main aim of the book is "to take the central challenging recommendation of the report, and try to help secondary schools make it operational". In other words, "this book accepts the Report's arguments for a language policy, and takes on the task of working out some of the details" (Marland, 1977:ix). Marland's view is that the central recommendations of the Bullock report are recommendations 138 and 139 (Bullock report, 1975: 529) that form part of the Conclusions and Recommendations related to every chapter in the report. These recommendations are:

> **Recommendation 138**: In the secondary school, all subject teachers need to be aware of:
> i the linguistic processes by which their pupils acquire information and understanding, and the implications for the teacher's own use of language;
> ii the reading demands of their own subjects, and ways in which the pupils can be helped to meet them (1975:529).

> **Recommendation 139**: To bring about this understanding every secondary school should develop a policy for language across the curriculum. The responsibility for this policy should be embodied in the organizational structure of the school (1975:529).

Marland (1977:3) summarises the relationships between language and education (as underscored in the central recommendations identified by him) as follows:
a difficulties with language hamper understanding and growth in most areas of learning, and, conversely, those areas of learning could provide real contexts for language growth
b if a school devotes thought and time to assisting language development, learning

in all areas will be helped; if attention is given to language in the content and skill subjects, language development will be assisted powerfully by the context and purpose of those subjects

Marland (1977:9-11) presents the following approaches towards curriculation if one attempts a "whole school policy", such as a policy for language across the curriculum. In the **disseminated** approach, it is argued that "a particular activity is too important to be left to specialists. To leave it to a timetabled slot would be to risk artificial isolation". In the **specialist** approach, it is feared that "if specific provision with a specialist at a fixed time is not made, the aspect under consideration will at best be mishandled by under-prepared teachers, and at worst disappear altogether". Marland (1977:10) presents a table where the "pros and cons of both the disseminated and the specialized approaches are clear":

Disseminated approach to curriculum	Specialized approach to curriculum
Possibility of linking to other concerns	Risk isolation
Pupils sense importance through variety of staff involved	Pupils sense importance through focus of staff involved
Risk of no one having sufficient expertise and experience	Security of known specialists
Risk of activity being ignored	Certainty of pupils meeting "proper" tuition

Marland concludes this discussion by emphasizing that "[c]areful curriculum planning involves judging which combination of these two approaches suits the aim. A whole-school language policy is likely to demand both approaches" (1977:10) and he insists that "there is no single, simple magic solution to any aspect of language education" (1977:23).

Two important points raised in Marland (1977: 235, 213, 247-249, 243) about the implementation difficulties in schools in the UK are firstly the establishment of structures within the school (and between schools) as an organization to co-ordinate implementation, and secondly the attitudes of subject teachers (including the effect of work pressure on teacher attitudes). From the case studies presented in Marland (1977:231-260) it is clear that these two issues are challenging and complex. One of the authors of a case study expresses the difficulties with the school as an organization aptly when he writes (Marland, 1977: 248):

The Bullock Report asks something new, and difficult of teachers – not only that they should each as individuals foster children's reading and writing, but that they should collectively organize language policies for their schools. This is proving particularly difficult in secondary schools because these are mostly organized in subject departments with nearly every teacher a subject specialist.

A head teacher who was driving the discussions towards a language across the curriculum policy for his school writes the following one year after his task started (Marland, 1977:245):

… having carried the process on I realize that I was, if anything, underestimating the complexity and difficulty of what I had undertaken … Careful slowness still seems

to me to be the appropriate strategy, small-scale discussion the basic tool … What I am documenting is of course exactly the reasons why the pursuit is long-term. I foresaw them in general but I am nevertheless worn down by them in their endless particularity. … The last two terms have been dispiriting but in trying to evaluate what has happened, I have returned to firmer belief in my sense of the difficulty of the task and the possibility of change. Certainly a few people have indicated interest in talking about talk. When I am tempted to be depressed about the tiny step forward, I need to recall that I know of no convincing examples of actual cohesion on language in a school.

Another teacher tasked with co-ordinating the "language across the curriculum" policy development for his London school wrote (Marland, 1977:247):

[l]anguage across the curriculum talk has in fact featured very little since last summer … and we are now pinning our hopes on the response to the questionnaire and on the interest that is being aroused by ILEA's follow up to Bullock … A policy document does not, in practice, 'establish every teacher's involvement' and I feel increasingly that, while it may encapsulate the views of a particular group at a particular time and even give guidance on specific issues which will outlive that group of teachers, it can never really be more than a point of reference … This is an enormous undertaking … That is a continuous process and that is why it is so important that each school should appoint someone with specific responsibility for this language development with plenty of school time made available for working with staff (ensuring, amongst others, that they come to meetings!) … As it is, we are still dealing far too often with those already converted.

These snippets from case studies documented during the implementation phases of the "language across the curriculum" policy development processes for schools in the UK in the 1970s highlight important challenges and complexities which would be present in probably all education systems engaged in this type of exercise.

Corson (1990:1) states that the content of his book, "Language Policy Across the Curriculum" is based on course material, which he developed while teaching two master's degree courses (one in Australia and one in New Zealand). The criticism of and necessary adaptation of the "language and literacy issues across the curriculum" made by Corson (1990) are very relevant to the purpose of this article because the contexts in Australia and New Zealand are more similar to South Africa than that of the UK. Corson (1990:5) states that he wants to "update" the notion of a language policy across the curriculum. The main criticism he levels against an uncritical application of notions in the Bullock report (1975) to contexts such as Australia and New Zealand, is that the report and Marland's (1977) work following on it (1975) do not address "the social and cultural problems that confront schools today" which exist in "pluralist societies" (1990:11; also noted on 1990:72,143-158). As a result of this criticism, he transforms the notion of a language policy across the curriculum to develop examples of "A language policy across the curriculum for a pluralist primary school" (Corson, 1990:201-206).

Also relevant to our discussion, is Corson's (1990: 83-84) emphasis on one of the main difficulties related to the implementation of a language across the curriculum approach, namely a lack of teacher preparedness:

The pedagogical demands of LAC imply greater difficulties for school leaders than is often appreciated. This fact may partly explain the slowness of LAC's spread in schooling. LAC asks of teachers to operate at a level of professional development that many may not have reached and perhaps cannot reach without a great deal of support and modelling opportunities. If we accept the conclusion that part of the difficulty for LAC is that implementation requires major changes in teacher attitudes and in the choices of pedagogy that many teachers make, then a prior condition for promoting those changes will be to establish a general level of professional development in the school staff sufficient to make the necessary changes in attitude appear reasonable, realistic and attainable … Professional development for these teachers, who may be present in large numbers in secondary schools, will need to be gradual and carefully scheduled; it will need to be built on successful examples of LAC that have been introduced by respected colleagues, either within the school or in neighbouring districts. Involving these teachers in the policy making process itself … may be a very worthwhile professional development activity.

4.3 Language across the curriculum in South Africa today – a framework

In what is to follow, we wish to present a framework based on our analyses of the Bullock report (1975) and two texts that aimed to operationalize the recommendations from the Bullock report (Marland, 1977; Corson, 1990). This framework presents the lessons learnt from the Bullock report (1975) that would be used to analyse the current discussions about the language and literacy issue in South African higher education today, taking into account the potential adaptations needed when applied to another context.

An analysis of the themes of the recommendations of the Bullock report (1975:513-516) indicate that we should pay attention to the following issues in our discussion: policy development, establishment of language and literacy development and support structures, and training subject teachers to understand their role in language and literacy development. In terms of language and literacy policy development, the UK in the 1970s and the current South African higher education system are in very similar positions. There is widespread concern about the quality of education in both contexts and the role of language is seen as an important contributing factor. The difference, however, between the development of language and literacy policies for schools in the UK in the 1970s and the language policies for South African higher education today, is that the policies for the UK in the 1970s focused very strongly on the link between language and learning. The language policies for South African higher education institutions today focus on an acknowledgement of the multilingual nature of the South African society, and how a variety of languages could be used for general communication at these institutions. Very few of the current higher education language policies in South Africa focus on the role of language in the learning and teaching process directly. Another obvious difference to take into account is the reality of multilingualism, which is particularly prevalent among South African urban students today. The holy grail in terms of language and literacy development and current South African higher education would be to unlock the potential cognitive advantages of the multilingual mind to contribute towards academic success. Another obvious difference between the UK in the 1970s and South Africa today, is the impact of the spread and transforming nature of technology in terms of language use and

new literacies in general. In both these cases, the notion of a "languages and literacies across the higher education curriculum" are surely more complex than that of an "English across the curriculum" approach that was prevalent in the UK in the 1970's.

Due to its nature as a tertiary education sector, and possibly the quality assurance regime introduced via the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) quality assurance audits of higher education institutions in South Africa during the past decade, the academic and language development support structures are fairly common nationally. These structures are often marginalized and under-resourced (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004:57), but they at least exist and could be utilized to support the implementation of language and literacy development efforts. They are often particularly well positioned to assist with language and literacy development due to the historical cause for their establishment, which was the "language issue" of the first African students admitted into white English-speaking universities (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004:48). In this case, the higher education institutions in South Africa are probably better positioned to implement language and literacy development policies than the UK schools in the 1970's.

The important issue of teacher training captured in so many of the Bullock report's (1975) recommendations present a challenge to the current higher education teaching fraternity. The first issue to consider is that "higher education" is not a "profession" in the true sense of the word. There is no "higher education" body or board that monitors and controls the admission of "higher education practitioners" into the education system. Related to this issue, is that there is no requirement for "higher education practitioners" to undergo any formal training in "higher education" at all. It is a well-known fact that academics are often appointed based on the demonstration of their research acumen (embodied in the requirement of qualifications and a body of published research), or their industry experience. Neither of these requirements necessarily lead to an interest or skill in the teaching of their knowledge (see for example Pocklington & Tupper's (2002:180,185) riveting discussion of the fallacy of the teaching/research nexus). Related to this issue is the "voluntary" nature of academic development for lecturers in the South African higher education system today. Very often, lecturers who attend teaching development activities are the already converted who are in any case implementing innovations to improve their teaching and the learning of their students; for those who are on the other hand, and so to speak, not converted, the aim is to be satisfied rather than anything beyond that (Cilliers & Herman, 2010:254). Lastly, one should consider the impact of transformation in the current South African higher education system on the attitudes of "higher education practitioners" to spend time on improving their teaching quality at all. Various transformation issues (indeed, different maybe in intensity if compared to the UK school context in the 1970s) result in a general concern about the levels of wellness of academics in South Africa today (cf. Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010). Waves of transformation that hit academics in current South African higher education institutions in the past decade include the announcement of mergers by the minister of education, the implementation of the quality assurance processes led by the HEQC, the rapid changing of the nature of the student body, a bigger emphasis on financial sustainability which leads to bigger classes and not necessarily the appointment of more lecturers, and the increasing drive towards research and postgraduate output. It seems as if workload was also an issue in the time when the Bullock

report (1975) was implemented in schools in the UK (Marland, 1977:243). We do, however, believe that the current South African higher education system is more intense and problems experienced in the UK in the 1970's would be exacerbated in the South African context today.

Lessons learnt from Marland (1977) are that we should consider the three "models" and the risks associated with each model of curriculation when we work towards arrangements for the implementation of a "language and literacy across the curriculum" policy in higher education. This could potentially be one of the most important frames to apply in an analysis of the current writing about language and literacy across the higher education curriculum in the current South Africa. It should be clear from the next section that various language and literacy experts in the South African higher education system advocate one or combinations of the three models explained by Marland (1977). What we found missing though in many of the articles we reviewed, was the overt acknowledgement that all of these positions entail that there are clear risks to be managed. Highlighting the risks entailed in different approaches towards language and literacy across the higher education curriculum in South African today is a contribution we hope to make with this article. Corson's (1990) criticism adds the very relevant notions of "languages and literacies across the curriculum" and an emphasis on the roles of subject teachers and how to prepare them to contribute to this effort (also discussed above).

5. Back to the future: implications of the Bullock report (1975) for higher education today

The aim of this section is to use the framework developed from an analysis of the Bullock report (1975) and ensuing attempts to implement the recommendations (as illustrated by Marland, 1977, and Corson, 1990) in order to review the current discussion of the "language and literacy issue" in higher education in South Africa in terms of that framework.

5.1 Language and literacy policies for higher education in a multilingual society

It is acknowledged by scholars that various factors contribute to academic success or failure in the current South African higher education system (cf. Fraser and Killen, 2003; Scott, 2009). Scott (2009:24) for example argues that "shortcomings in first-year students' development of fundamental knowledge, academic literacies and learning approaches are likely to have a cumulative effect that leads to poor performance or failure in later years". Although proficiencies in languages and literacies are often included in studies of academic achievement of South African students as a contributing factor, we could find little evidence that the "language and literacy issue" with regard to teaching and learning was taken seriously enough (in comparison to the central importance of language and especially reading as presented in the Bullock report, 1975) in current South African language policies for higher education.

This oversight is mentioned by scholars like Van der Walt (2004), Koch and Dornbrack (2008) and Madiba (2010) among others. Madiba (2010:327) for example states that "[w]hereas most universities have thus far developed language policies that indicate how multilingualism will be promoted in general communication and environment, the implementation of multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes seems to pose a serious challenge". Van der Walt (2004) and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2010) argue that the language policies of higher education institutions today are not focused on the potential of the languages multilingual students bring to the

classroom to activate cognitive advantages that could support academic success. Work done by Henning and associates (Henning *et al.*, 2001; Henning and Van Rensburg, 2002) at the former Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, Ramani and Joseph (2002) at the University of Limpopo and Ncgobo (2009:209-226) at the Mangosutho University of Technology are obvious exceptions.

Fraser and Killen (2003) conducted a study in which they gauged the perceptions of lecturers and students to determine which factors are perceived to be influential in academic success. They found that (Fraser and Killen, 2003:256) "effective written communication skills" is ranked by lecturers as the 14th most important factor that influences academic success for first-year students (out of a list of 52 potential factors), and that first-year students rank effective written communication skills as 41st. The importance of "effective written skills" is thus ranked very differently by lecturers and students. Steenkamp *et al.*, (2009:148) found that improvement of English language and literacy skills is one of three contributing factors to academic failure mentioned by students (poor class attendance and concomitantly lack of study and poor time management were the other two). This finding is akin to research by Coetzee-Van Rooy and Verhoef (2002) and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2011) which indicates that there is a discrepancy between students' perceptions of their English proficiency and their scores on English proficiency tests (or other indicators of English proficiency). Students believe they are very proficient in English and their scores on English proficiency tests indicate differently. It is clear that raising the self-awareness (cf. Schreiner & Hulme, 2009:73 for a discussion of self-awareness) and knowledge of students of the relationship between languages and academic success in higher education in South Africa should be an important part of the establishment of a multilingual pedagogy, within the framework of a multilingual language policy for teaching and learning. An important implication is that students do not utilize the support offered by universities that they need to be academically successful (Dietsche, 2009:42) because they might hold misleading perceptions (Steenkamp *et al.*, 2009:146).

One of the biggest contextual differences between the UK situation in the 1970s and the South African higher education situation today, is the multilingual nature of our society and therefore the need for multilingual languages and literacies policies across the higher education curriculum. Despite South Africa's exemplary policy frameworks for multilingualism in all spheres of life (see for example the South African Constitution (1996) and the "Language policy framework for South African Higher education" (CHE, 2001)) we concur with Madiba's (2010:327) view that higher education institutions in South Africa focused on the implementation of multilingualism in general communication and that multilingualism in the teaching and learning contexts of higher education was not addressed comprehensively to date. The notion of multilingual languages and literacy development across the higher education curriculum would surely prove to be even more challenging than the implementation of a language policy across the curriculum where only one language of teaching and learning was envisioned. This element has not received sufficient attention in discussions related to the "languages and literacy issue" in higher education in South Africa today.

An analysis of some of the scholarship that addresses the "languages and literacy issue" across the higher education curriculum indicate that the disseminated, specialist and joint models of curriculation presented by Marland (1977:10) are promoted by a variety of authors.

5.2 Disseminated approaches

Scott (2009:24,30) advocates a reformation of the mainstream first year curriculum and suggests ample time for development "of capabilities in academic, quantitative and information literacies in a local or foreign language" (2009:30). He claims that "[t]here are certain critical aspects of learning that are most effectively addressed at this level, including the development of concepts, skills and epistemological understandings that are foundational to successful tertiary study" (Scott, 2009: 30), and that these develop best in disseminated contexts. Van Schalkwyk *et al.*, (2009:7) add to Scott's argument when cautioning against fragmented approaches – they argue that academic development work is often approached in a piecemeal fashion rather than systematically. Nel and Nel (2009:127) state that so-called add-ons would do little to change the chances of underprepared students. The same authors maintain that

> [i]n the crucial area of academic reading there is often only fragmented and limited provision of support at tertiary level … Regardless of student needs, most universities provide bolt-on generic skills courses offered by academic support units, language departments or schools, or study skills centres … Research indicates that generic skills courses are not effective and that students tend to avoid them because they regard them as irrelevant … Academic reading is a complex skill that requires an understanding of the nature of knowledge in the specific discipline … Reading to learn at university requires a systematic and comprehensive approach to supporting students. Institutions should not leave reading development to chance … Structures need to be put in place to ensure the consistent and gradual development of academic reading skills for all students (Nel and Nel, 2009:128).

A disseminated approach is normally valued highly as it provides a lot of flexibility and buy-in from subject specialists, or as Scott (2009:84) puts it: "[t]his blend empowered … [us] to implement FYE in ways appropriate to their wide-ranging needs"; and "[b]y allowing FYE to address unit-specific concerns, we found a relatively large number of faculty, staff, administrators and other stakeholders interested in helping design, implement, and refine FYE initiatives" (2009:91).

In our opinion, another strength is that students can see and experience the immediate effect of applicability – the issue of transfer of skills and knowledge is therefore not a concern here. Students lastly see academic literacy as an integral part to their specific subjects and are often motivated to master the academic literacy component of those courses.

There are, however, also weaknesses or risks to this approach that are not always mentioned and ideas about managing the risks in the approach are very rarely included in discussions. Typical risks to manage when applying this approach include among others the fact that language will always be treated as an "add on" when subject specialists are tasked with language development in mainstream modules. Subject specialists will always first have content "to cover" and they sometimes claim that language development/academic literacy development is not their job because they are appointed to teach students history, or law, or whatever may be the case. Furthermore, one often finds that subject-specialists do not know how language works or what a definition of language ability entails – the lingual and formative function of language – and therefore will not know how to include language and literacy development in a mainstream

course. A last criticism against a disseminated approach is that it is difficult to support large numbers of students with this way of thinking.

In her discussion of the challenges to incorporate language and literacy development in mainstream courses, Jacobs (2009: 241) acknowledges that it is difficult for subject specialists to identify, verbalize and teach the "tacit knowledge" related to language and literacy development. In the cases she reports on, she argues that it is in discussions between academic development experts and subject matter experts that this "tacit" knowledge became explicit enough so that lecturers could plan what and how to include this knowledge in mainstream teaching (Jacbos, 2009:242). Jacobs (2009: 248) acknowledges that one of the main contributors to success in this type of team teaching is the willingness of the partners to co-operate. Person *et al*. (2009: 82) argue that collaborative approaches such as these suggested by Jacobs (2009: 82) succeed as a result of a "serendipity". If the success of an approach depends heavily on the willingness of partners to collaborate in small teams, it is difficult to apply this approach widely and systematically. It is this risk or shortcoming to the disseminated approach that should be managed carefully if it is selected as the only strategy to develop language and literacy across the curriculum.

5.3 Specialized approaches

The notion of English for Specific purposes (ESP) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) probably embodies the "specialist" approach towards language and literacy development in higher education the best, capturing the "need for increased specialization of language learning" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:8). Ruiz-Garrido *et al*., (2010:1) argue that "[t]he relevance of English in academic and professional settings began some decades ago, in the 1960s, and it has not decreased". There is thus a case to be made for this kind of approach.

Strengths of this approach are that language lecturers are normally housed together, and can share expertise that will contribute to quality control. If generic courses are presented, fewer courses need to be developed and prepared, cutting down on material development and preparation time. In terms of economies of scale, this is a viable option. If, on the other hand, subject specific courses are developed and presented by outside units/centres/departments, students' specific language needs are taken into account – in terms of economies of scale, this is still a viable option.

Weaknesses are that students sometimes fail to see the relevance of these courses to the rest of their studies, which in turn may lead to decreased motivation. Furthermore, the assumption is that students from all faculties have the same needs and that specialist knowledge plays no role. Implicit in this is that, for example, teaching students to write effective essays fulfils the same role as teaching them to write effective reports. Another, and very current, weakness is that language lecturers are usually required to teach across a broad spectrum of disciplines, preventing them from specialising in the language needs of one specific faculty/discipline. This often results in language lecturers not being in regular contact with their colleagues teaching subject-specific courses. Academic language problems that subject-specific lecturers encounter when teaching are thus difficult to identify. In addition, both lecturers in the faculties, and students in these faculties, see the academic language courses as something 'outside' of their basic curricula, and

therefore attach little value to it. The very real danger of lack of application from the specialized course into mainstream courses presents the main risk to manage in this approach.

5.4 A combination of approaches

Granville and Dison (2009:182) focus on research to lead first-years into the academic community. They claim that,

> [t]his does not undervalue the importance of helping students acquire academic literacy skills, such as writing essays, constructing arguments and learning appropriate referencing procedures – these skills are integrated into the research course in the context of the research project. We argue that the strength of this particular intervention is that skills are integrated into the project, that it deepens both linguistic and cognitive development, and that it makes the more conventional academic approach more meaningful (Granville & Dison, 2009:182).

The same authors, however, also convey the fact that the success of these types of courses largely depends on intensive teacher input and mediation (Granville and Dison, 2009:183). They mention in this regard that,

> [f]rom our assessment of some of the student writing, it emerges that certain students may have mastered the skills of arranging ideas coherently, but often fall short when required to provide reasons for choosing their research topics and account for their findings. One of the key challenges in the pedagogy of the course is to place more emphasis on learning and language strategies for improving students' ability to explain and reconstruct information. Many students would benefit from a conscious attempt to develop [the] 'language of thinking strategies (Granville & Dison, 2009: 192).

Jacobs (2009:241-252) points to an important underlying premise of this approach, namely that "disciplinary knowledge has a tacit dimension, making it difficult for [language] lecturers to teach it explicitly, and therefore for students to learn" (241). She contends that the main strength of this approach is that,

> … it was through engaging with academic developers, who were 'outsiders' to their disciplinary discourses, that lecturers found themselves at the margins of their own fields, and were able to view themselves as insiders from the outside, as it were. This shifting location from a purely insider perspective to an insider perspective from the outside, shifted lecturers towards a critical understanding of the teaching of disciplinary discourses and enabled them to make explicit their tacit knowledge and understandings of their disciplinary discourses (Jacobs, 2009:242).

From another perspective, but in agreement with Jacobs' contention, one could argue that academic language lecturers, in this approach, also come into closer contact with their fellow subject-specific lecturers and are therefore more aware of academic literacy problems that are experienced by these lecturers, thus being able to adjust teaching content (to address such problems) in a relatively short space of time.

Other strengths include that academic language lecturers are in a position to specialise in the language needs of students in a particular field (e.g. the natural sciences). These lecturers

are also more readily accepted as part of the faculty, and the core-curriculum of the specific faculty, by both lecturers and students. Although academic language courses, in this approach, are specific in that they are focused on the general field of study of a specific discipline, they can still be said to be too broad or not focussing on specific subjects, like biology or physics, or history, or private law. Another question that could be raised here, is that of quality control and available funds – do we have the luxury to follow this kind of approach?

To conclude, it needs to be said that what we found missing in the South African discussion of the three approaches already discussed comprehensively in the Bullock report (1975) so many years ago, was a careful and overt acknowledgement of the risks involved in the individual approaches and the presentation of possible solutions to manage these risks. It seems that commentators and collaborators of the Bullock report (1975) had a much clearer sense of these risks than those found in current South African discussions.

6. Establishment of language and literacy development and support structures in higher education

There are considerable similarities between the challenges to establish joint structures to implement the language across the curriculum efforts in schools in the UK in the 1970s and the general capacity of higher education institutions in South Africa today to harness academic development and support structures (which will include language and literacy development) in a co-ordinated and systematic way. In their brief history of academic development as a field in South African higher education, Volbrecht and Boughey (2004:57) maintain that academic development is characterized by its marginality and fragmentation as practice: academic development activities were firstly (and in some instances remain) "marginal" primarily because of the "add on" and "voluntary" character of the services offered (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004: 60), as well as the notion that academic development units were established to assist mainly black students who were viewed as "non-traditional" students in higher education in the 1970s (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004: 62). Secondly, the attempts by academic development units to "address the difficulties experienced by black students as they entered tertiary institutions … was largely dependent on the willingness of individuals to work with them or on the influence they were able to wield at Faculty and Departmental levels" (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004:65) – again emphasizing the "marginality" of the work conducted by academic development units. One of the main drivers that led to the "fragmented" nature of academic development activities, was in the third instance the lack of capacity in the field to develop its own coherent and locally applicable theoretical frameworks (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004: 61). The uncritical adoption of international theories, especially in the domain of the powerful English Language Teaching (ELT) industry, fourthly continued to fragment curricula that were aimed at facilitating the improvement of teaching and learning for all students.

Volbrecht and Boughey (2004: 58) define academic development as "an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education through integrating student, staff, curriculum, institutional and research development". The close relationship between academic development and language and literacy development in South African higher education is explained historically. Academic development grew out of earlier activities termed "academic support" in the 1970s which were aimed "to provide support to

the, then, small number of black students who had managed to gain admission to the English speaking historically white universities and who were deemed to be 'disadvantaged'" (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004:59). One of the most "visible" inherent factors that contributed to the "disadvantaged" character of these students was lack of appropriate language proficiency in English and this resulted in an early focus mainly on language development (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004:61, which was fuelled internationally by the emerging powerful ELT industry. This resulted in the well-known fact that academic development practitioners often come from a background in language teaching and applied linguistics (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004:61).

Today, academic development units can be categorized into two types: hub-type academic development units, or units situated in mainstream faculties and departments (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004:70). Volbrecht and Boughey (2004:71) maintain that the profession is in disarray at a national level and that it is not altogether clear "what should constitute AD practice both amongst AD professionals themselves and amongst HET managers and academics with a stake in the services AD can provide". It should also be taken into account that all students are nowadays considered to be at risk and in need of some kind of support (Van Dyk, 2010:5).

A further exacerbating factor, is the turf wars between "Schools of Languages" and academic development units. The "language issue" in higher education provided an important current raison d'être for Schools of Languages which have witnessed a dramatic decline in student enrolments (Mesthrie, 2002:2; Kamwangamalu, 2003:70-71; Webb, 2006:133-134). Academic development units and Schools of Languages now claim that they have expertise related to language and literacy development. Depending on the institutional status of academic development units and schools of languages, one therefore finds a variety of structures implemented to address the "language issue" in the current South African higher education system.

7. The way forward

In this article, we attempted to contribute to the debate on "language across the curriculum" by discussing the Bullock (1975) report, first published more than three decades ago. It was argued that we need to understand and appreciate different developments from the past in order to come to informed decisions for application in South Africa today. An understanding of the articulation between various education systems could only lead to responsible "designs [that should] be based as much on an understanding of the student learning experiences that came before it as on the need to prepare for what is to follow. It is a key section of the educational pipeline" (Scott, 2009:24).

We envisage at least two more articles in this regard. The first will be on academic literacy support – how do we define it, how can it be fostered, and what are the responsibilities of institutions of higher education in this regard. The second will be on the notion of multilingualism and its implications for language and literacy support. We encourage scholars to contribute to the debate in whichever way. Possibilities for research are firstly a focus on teacher training and how the higher education curriculum could be amended to subscribe to current thinking about the notion of "language across the curriculum". A second could be a report on an investigation into the articulation between different education systems focussed on language and literacy development. A third possibility is a contribution on how and why language and literacy develop at different stages.

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