INTERVIEW – PARTICIPANT 1.  25/06/04

Q: How do you and your colleagues make sense of teaching in multilingual classrooms?
P: mmm ……..do you mean? How do you mean? What do we think about it? How do we experience it? I think its very difficult because a lot of the kids that don’t speak English or who English is not the first language and then kids who’ve got I mean - I’ve got 3 children in my class that don’t speak English so …. for them its very difficult and I and you can see that they its, its often you don’t have time to go and explain things to them umm so they get kind of left behind sometimes and I think that’s where also where the like some behaviour problems coming through that don’t understand what you are talking about and then they start to fidget and umm start talking to other people or they start talking to other people to ask you or you know to ask them to help and you see them as talking all the time so it gets a bit out if hand or it can. (clears throat).

Q What do you think of the whole idea of having multilingual classrooms?
P: Well I think I mean you obviously can’t have different like completely separate schools for everybody umm but sometimes its I think they have to be they should be at a certain level they should be tested I mean having kids that can’t speak English, they should be going to a school where you know a Zulu school or a Chinese school or coz it just doesn’t make sense for them to be here and sit and struggle and then obviously you can’t say well you can only come here if you can need a school [like this?] maybe they should be tested or something so they’re at a certain level umm coz obviously for coming into xxx senior primary they need to be reading [most?] books and textbooks and whatever and they can’t speak it they can’t read it they’re not going to be able to manage work.

Q. Tell me more about the different levels
P: umm Well obviously we've got s, s English speakers which aren't a problem they can read and write and speak and then you, you have other children that can, can speak it but can't really read it very well umm and they become a problem because you know like I said a lot of our notes and work and what have you they have to read and understand and then give answers for umm and then you get other ones that just don't speak at all English (huh) and that's and then you have to start right at Grade 1 with them to be able to get them to, to a stage where they can understand what they're supposed to be doing so-o-o-o.

Q What do you do about the problems?

P: Um, um The three children that that are the language barriers I put with other stronger learners in the class that do understand English and they help them along so I say I'll give the instruction and then they'll explain it to, to the person in their own language so they know what they are supposed to be doing and they'll help them along like if they read a passage or something and then they'll sort of summarize it and explain it to them in, in their own language so they can understand but x I find that that's almost an easy way out for them because there's no reason for them to have to have to try and learn it so in some cases I do say right you, you know you have to read this book or you have to read this page and this page and then answer these questions. I've got some I went and got some Grade 1 and Grade 2 books for them to read so they are a little bit easier for them uh and then very simple questions which they have to then answer. [in what?] the other children are doing in comprehension then those children have to do the comprehension of an easier book it's, it's um but ja just grouping them with, with stronger learners that understand I find that that's the best way to help them otherwise they don't understand me and I don't understand them and (laughs, clears throat)
Q Are there any other illustrations that you can give me that describe this kind of thing that happens in your class?
P: Sorry I don't understand the question (laughs)

Q Okay give me other illustrations that describe what you are talking about, how the children battle to understand what you are saying because they speak different languages.
P: I think they battle the most um in English because its got a lot of comprehension and even, even the children that do understand English and do um, you know that can speak and can read it, the level (sighs) they don't understand a lot of the words and that kind of thing so often I'll, I'll say to them when you are reading you have the dictionary so you can look up those words so it can make more sense um and I find that as well because they, they L2 learners in a well and then by the time they get to do Afrikaans then its really they really do struggle because they they're trying to put English words in Afrikaans sentences and it doesn't make sense or they trying to write an Afrikaans sentence directly from, from English which they battle to write anyway because they Zulu speaking so ja (chuckles)

Q Okay how does this impact on / what does it do to your teaching experience? How does it make you as a teacher feel?
P: Sometimes I feel like I'm not like I'm not getting through to them like I when you look at the reports and see how badly they've done I often think well I should have done something more to help them but you- u its just not x I just don’t have the time to, to do enough for them and enough for everybody else in the class in a normal teaching day umm I think it also it x when, when I’m doing my prep I have to remember that I have to have a very wide range of stuff for the children to do because the-e-e slower or not slow the barrier children are not going to be able to cope with a normal Grade 5 question
or normal Grade 5 worksheet so I have to make them a
special worksheet that still covers the same work but asks,
asks the [different?] questions in a slightly different way so
they can you know to help them to understand maybe also
using more pictures for them rather than, than writing
because that also I find that if I give them a, a picture and
say now label the picture rather than say write me a
paragraph about night and day if I say draw me a picture
about night and day then, then they can cope with that but if
I say write a paragraph then obviously they can't do that
(clears throat) so and also I have to um have extra work for
the for the faster children in the class so that they can carry
on and do extra work while I'm still helping the, the barrier
children to cover the minimum amount of work that they
have to do to get through.

Q Are there any other methods that you and your
colleagues have tried to enable these children to learn?
P: Umm no not really, other than obviously coming to see
you but that's it (laughs)

Q Do you believe there are any better solutions to this
circumstance?
P: Umm well very short to say that they have to go obviously
they came here for a reason I mean I know that two of the
children that last year were previously in um zulu speaking
schools and then they've come here so obviously they have
come here for whatever reason it was umm but it's very, very
difficult for them I don't I don't think short of saying to them
you can't actually come to this school which isn't really a
solution because then they still not going to learn English
anyway um it's just really a question of not getting
despondent because they not working as fast as everybody
else is and just keep sort of plugging along with them until
they get to the stage where um and maybe offer them extra
lessons in the afternoons or um things like that
Q You said reasons do you have any idea what the reasons might be?
P: Um I know one of the little boys mothers um is a domestic worker and she has you know people that she’s staying with and they moved to Edenvale and they used to live in Kempton Park and its easier for them to then go to the school they are going to but obviously now travelling the distance and things like that um the little girl she’s come um from xxx I think so again it was just the facility she was living in um and then the little Chinese boy he um his father wants him to his father is English speaking and he wants him to learn English so that’s why he’s obviously come to an English school.

Q And do you think that the multilingualism has an effect on the kids Um I think (pause) you mean positively or whatever I think? um sometimes because I don’t speak (chuckles) the language they will often try and do group work and that kind of thing in their own language which obviously is a is a help for them but I [can’t really?] control it because I don’t know what they are discussing so you have to be very careful how you how you put people together when, when its time to do work um and just general talking I think you, you actually have to say no you have to speak English coz again otherwise you just, you just can’t control them um (pause) what was the question again?

What is the effect on the rest of the children? The rest of the kids? I think positive or negative? Um Obviously its in, in some respects its good for the English speaking children to hear other languages but they don’t understand it either so um but I think by, by ruling it out completely its bad for the, the other speaking children because then you kind of cutting off their whole commun the whole way they can communicate um I think it just has to be very carefully monitored and, and you have to have time when they can and when they can’t and I don’t mind them
speaking if they in group work I don’t mind them speaking
their own language because um you know its (coughs) worth
it to be able communicate that way and possibly understand
and then I have to make sure that there is one person in that
group that is a serious student so they gonna say u uh come
we are not discussing that we need to discuss this um but
that’s ideal it doesn’t always happen like that

Q and any positive effects?
Well I think… positive effects of not using or having it?
Well any positive effects in general
I think positive effects are, are recognizing it obviously
means that you do have 11 official languages and you can’t
really sort of say you know you’re not speaking Zulu um and
I think a lot I know a lot of the children in my class like to
learn like some of the black children will teach them like
simple sentences and simple words and things like that so
that’s I think is good for them they being they being um
exposed to it to the language um negatively I think a lot of
the time like I said because I don’t understand it they can
really take advantage of the situation and children being
children obviously they don’t really want to be working so um
you know the quickest way out of not being able to work is
xxx group working in Zulu then you know xxx today they
don’t have to do any work so

Q. Do you find that group work works better than if you
are just giving direct instructions
P: Um I think well I think you have to have you can’t just
have group work you have to have them both but um I found
that we normally we try and do group work once a week and
I found that the children it teaches them to, to work together
and not just be reliant on themselves but also to to know that
they are being part of this group and therefore they have to
do work their, their part of it otherwise you know they are
letting everybody down which I think is quite good because
some kids also the weaker learners that don’t understand
often they lose out on those marks they get the chance to
good marks with the help of the other people so you
know it sort of brings up or can bring up the weaker learners.

Q Did you have any training for this type of situation
that you met with when you walked into the classroom?
P: (laughs) Um word of mouth at varsity because I did the
degree and then the one year teaching diploma um there
was a lot of stuff sort of packed in and yes it was, was
spoken about and yes we did three weeks of multilingualism
but actual training actual this is how you deal with it not
really.

Q What did you do in your multilingualism three weeks?
P: Just sort of what to expect that there will be children in, in
different um you know obviously from different backgrounds
different languages and what have you um and xxx and um
and that was really about it in three lessons so it wasn't sort
of trial and error

Q Is it the same as what they told you it would be or is it
different?
P: Ja I think like everything in teaching its very different in in
actual practice because in theory its lovely and written
down and you can just you know kind of get those that are
talking together and tell them to go and sit down quietly in
the corner but you can't do that coz otherwise you have the
whole class wanting to sit in the corner talking to their friends
and, and it just doesn't you have to very closely monitor it
and make sure that it is only the people that really struggle
and maybe its not the same children in every lesson maybe
it can be three different children um you know maybe in, in
English its those three but in maths its different so it has to
be very carefully monitored and they, they don't or with us
they didn't tell us that they didn't you know tell us what going
into the class um and these will be your children and ja I
Q: What did they kind of lead you to expect?

P: That there would be children that don't speak English obviously not as their first language but not necessarily children that don't speak English and um don't understand English and can't read English and that also that come from families where their parents where you know they are not being exposed to the English language and often a lot of them don't necessarily have um television so they can't watch English TV and so its sort of like a vicious circle because they don't speak English and their parents don't speak English and they can't read it so they just not being exposed to it and that certainly was something that they didn't sort of say that you know you will have a certain amount of children that just can't speak it or read it or who don't have any exposure to it and in those cases those are the cases that you have to be the ones that expose those children to those things coz otherwise they never going to learn it they're going to sit in the class and be lost forever.

Q: And support, what kind of support do you think teachers should be entitled to in these kind of situations?

P: I think definitely like ongoing training, ongoing even if its not, not necessarily the training but maybe like cluster meetings or something where you get together all the different teachers from all the different schools and you can discuss how they deal with it and maybe swap notes or what have you so you have um different um different what's the word work that's not the word but anyway different work that you can use to, to keep these children going maybe they know they read a book or something that's so maybe once a month or once every two months or something maybe have a cluster meeting where the teachers can all just you know discuss what problems they've got and how they've dealt
with it and also um maybe we need to get I don't know
maybe the department needs to, to organize some kind of
booklet or something where you can give it to those children
that aren't exposed to the English language so they can, can
work through it um and also teachers to sit and talk to other
teachers helps them know that they not by themselves and
they not the only ones that are dealing with this problem um
coz you know the grass is always greener somewhere else
so I think no matter where you go you are going to have
these children so teachers need to, to sort of lean on each
other maybe not training is such a good word but just maybe
like support teams or something where you can um just
share ideas with each other and then maybe, maybe as first
year well obviously I'm not too sure what happens at JCE
but maybe as, as first or second year teachers that are
coming out of having a diploma they need to maybe go on
some kind of
training where they describe and say right well this is how
you deal with these things and this is how these are the
different routes you can take because not everybody ends
up xxx I mean Gail and Belinda are great when it comes to
that but I know people that who got to teach at schools you
know that that's your classroom deal with it and they have to
bumble through on their own and if they don't come up with
something some survival strategy then you know often its
those children that are the ones that are kind of pushed to
the side because you just don't have time to now, now deal
with the children that can't speak English and can't
understand English

Q When you talk about you don't have time you spoken
quite a lot about you don't have time what is the
problem with the time?
P: I think when, when you've got 33 children in the class and
45 minute lessons that's you know kind of a minute per child
to, to go round and make sure that they've all got and doing
or got what they need and are doing what they're supposed
to be doing and understanding what they’re supposed to be doing and often the weaker children need more than a minute because I mean in a 40, 45 minute lesson 33 children that only leaves you with you know not even 10 minutes to do your introduction and to, to end off the lessons at the end um to explain to them what they have to do so even 33 minutes you often don’t have half an hour in, in a lesson um and sometimes children get, get skipped I think and you know you try to, to make sure that okay I’ve seen that half of the class this week so next week I can see those that half but it doesn’t always work like that um and with other interruptions people calling down or people just need to be sent down or those children need to go down or um and to make sure that all the children are at the same level um you, you often find that the day is finished before you’ve got through everything you had to get through and obviously because we’ve only got so many weeks in the year you’ve got to get through so many so much of the work um but obviously to, to have the understanding of all the children you obviously can’t just carry on without them so ja

Q And have you found that with the different languages culture and cultural issues have become..
P: Ja um I think a lot of the children particularly the girls not so much the boys but the girls they’ll one culture will do something and the other particularly the white girls will take what they have done as insulting but what they’re doing is really not you know they don’t see it as that um and also just the way that they, they act in class um some of the things that they do they I mean I, I know last year when I started teaching I actually went and, and got a book (chuckles) on culture differences because just the just the different way that that the different cultures do things um you know for instance they talk much louder than, than we do and you can’t sit and say to them just talk, talk quietly and they don’t understand why and you xxx you don’t, don’t say why don’t shout at each other but it means they’re not actually fighting
they just talking and that’s just the way their culture does it
um but often I know I try particularly in LO try and discuss
different cultural topics so the children can understand that
what’s somebody’s doing is not necessarily something bad
it’s just what their culture, how their culture does it and they
have to understand that there are different cultures and
different people do, do things differently so before they start
getting very upset they, they need to either ask their teacher
or ask the child if what they’ve done or said or what have
you is directed towards them or is it just something that their
culture does you know are you not looking at me because
um you’re lying or are you not looking at me because you
respect what you know I’m elder than you and therefore you
don’t look directly at me when you speak but that kind of
thing.

Q Can you give me an instance of when this happened?
P: Ja one of the they I don’t know they were playing some
game with, with their hands and things and they just been
talking to the people of girls and um one of them turned
around and saw them flapping you know playing with their
hands and she thought that they were pointing and, and
talking about them because they were playing this game and
laughing and, and she thought that they were um being
nasty to her and then laughing at her and in the mean time
they were just playing the game that they were you know
that they were playing but because it was all a group of
black children playing a game she thought that they were
you know being nasty to her so ja um and another, another
time well its not a I suppose it is cultural they were talking
with a little group of boys all talking together and speaking
Zulu and some of the girls walked past and again the boys
started laughing and they thought that they were laughing at
them okay but they weren’t they were just talking in their
own language (laughs and clears throat)
Q This whole experience is it what you expected to find when you became a teacher or did you not realise this is what you would

P: No (laughs) Like I said varsity makes it seem a lot easier and, and again because we were I did mine as a diploma and not as a degree um and only had the one year we only had 4 weeks teaching prac so of course what you see on teaching prac and what see when you are actually on your own are very, very different and u ja I find that at varsity they didn’t actually tell us how difficult it really was and how difficult all these different things all these different cultures and languages and different levels of children and you know and how difficult it all really is to kind of put together and keep control of.

Q To sum up how would you describe your teaching experiences in a multilingual classroom?

P: I think it’s very rewarding when, when you um see that the child’s moving to the next level, to the next level and when you, when you know just for instance the other day a little boy who finally clicked to long division and he’d sat for hours and hours trying to and he had everybody explaining to him in different ways and in different languages and eventually he got it and I think that was very rewarding because you know that shows you that your hard work has paid off. um I think its very difficult its very you have to have ways and you have to be able to say well that’s not working so we need to try something else not be stuck to this because one thing might work for one child but its not going to work for another one so you have to be flexible you have to be able to say right that didn’t work let’s try something else, that didn’t work let’s try something else um and also very understanding you have to understand that that child doesn’t necessarily speak English so therefore he must be able to be given a chance to have it explained to him in his own language um overall it, it is quite difficult um at the beginning once you once you’ve got um the understanding
of the children and you've got um you've got your things in
place then it becomes a little bit easier um but obviously it is
hard work as well you have to be able to have all those
different levels, levels of the different worksheets for those
children to do to keep them busy and that kind of thing um
so you have to, you have to be prepared to work for those
children and often not see anything for a very long time um
but just know that what you’re doing hopefully is helping
them you just keep going

Okay thanks very much

(More comments made after the tape was switched off)

Teachers should be made to do a course instead of
Afrikaans at varsity a year's course in a black language like
Cyril he gets his words all muddled up and it took me a while
to understand him it needs to be because a lot of them get
left behind and to facilitate more and be more approachable
and communicate with the parents cause that’s also a
problem. To go back to the multicultural question...

(switched the tape back on) um I find another cultural issue
um is particularly with the black boys um they're not very
respectful if that’s the right word towards white women or
towards women at all um and there’s been a couple of times
where I’ve had to call Rosie (our tea lady) to come and you
know sort out what the problem is because okay she can
obviously understand what they, what they’re talking about
um and they just not I mean if Ashton comes or even Henk
or now Craig they find it much easier than any of the female
teachers because they have very little respect towards,
towards women in general um and that again is a cultural
definitely a cultural thing. Thanks very much.

(Participant used hand gestures extensively throughout the
interview)