Q: At our school you are faced with children in class who speak different home languages and yet the medium of instruction is English – How do you and your colleagues cope with this?

P: Its difficult a… the ideal is to teach generally and then when you a… you set the class work to do that is the time you need to work with the language barrier children and um its difficult to set out a definite time everyday. (Tape stopped - lines 10 – 15 typed from memory right after interview) Sometimes you only get five minutes at a time to work with them and that is not enough as they need more or less one on one teaching. The ideal thing would be for a teacher to do language teaching as an extra mural after school and then help these children to catch up. You don’t have time in class.

Q: How do you and the other teachers experience teaching in multilingual classrooms?

P: It’s difficult because in today’s classrooms the, the classes are not homogenously, you know graded so you even if you don’t consider the language or the Multilanguage language children um they’re all at different levels, academic levels and emotional levels and you know to actually feel that the 32 children or what ever you have in your class you’re actually helping them all to grow at the same pace its, its impossible so I…. it is very difficult um and you have to, to work with the average you have to say alright unfortunately you can’t do as much for them as you’d like to do in the normal classroom periods.

Q: What teaching methods do you find work best?

P: As far as group work or… Any kind. Well for the, for the, language for the children who uh. are not English speaking at home that that’s not their mother tongue they, they will benefit so much from a one to one basis if that’s possible um obviously you can put them into a group as well but um I think the only way to do it is in groups really
Q: And what are the biggest problems that you face?

P: The biggest problem is that they don’t fully understand so they don’t understand the spoken word when you are teaching they don’t understand the written word when they’re reading so they’re not up to the level of the class and everything depends on language, your reading ability and your ability to understand, comprehend so but I do find that the children actually assist each other so if you’re working in groups and if you group your, if you group your pupils carefully enough um they the children walk the talk and they guide them along and um in that way the child also learns so it doesn’t only rest on the teacher you can use you know the pupils in the class themselves to actually assist. Its not that they are not learning anything you know, they do learn and they learn very quickly but I don’t believe they progress at a fast enough rate.

Q: And are there any other problems besides the language?

P: Yes I think that uh the biggest problem generally is the emotional yes I think that the children are very emotionally immature and a lot of them come from very unhappy disturbed family backgrounds so you’re not only dealing with children on a different academic level but um a lot of emotional problems um so you have learning difficulties, you have emotional problems and you have um you know maybe a language barrier.

Q: And how do these impact on your teaching?

P: Well its extremely difficult, its very stressful. Um and I only believe the only way that you can make it easier is to [retain?] these children out whether I mean its difficult during PE or whatever but they need to have work um out of the classroom situation on their own or in a group they definitely do I really believe that’s the only way you can improve the situation.
Q Are they any other better solutions rather than just
taking them out?
P: Um you know I, I know a lot of private schools to have a
bridging school where they’ll um have children from different
backgrounds uh that aren’t don’t speak English that’s not their
mother tongue and they work with them for a year and then
they’ll introduce them into the government schools or, the
normal school if you want to put it in inverted commas and I
think that is, that is also going to, to help and it will help to
raise the level of our education coz what’s happening is its
lowering our level we’re having to bring down our standards to
accommodate and we’re having to pass children that normally
wouldn’t pass um I you know whether it be for language
reasons or for any other reason and if they, they had bridging
schools I think that would really help.

Q: And this student failure do you attribute that only to
language or …
P: No, no its not I think that there are children with have
serious learning difficulties or a lack of emotional support at
home um I, I think children I don’t know if much happens at, at
this school but I, I really believe children need to, to attend
school after the normal school hours I mean there’s difficulty
with transport I know and it shouldn’t be seen as a punishment
um but, but I think in order to bring up the level there are
children whether its emotional, language learning difficulties or
whatever I mean you have a an Aid class who goes into the
Aid class? At the moment its only children from grade 1 to
grade 3 and they are not allowed to be older than ten And
are those, those are children that are not remedial children Um
they have to have a learning problem not a language
problem You see I think that its a multifaceted society that
we working in parents at this particular moment of our
development educational development there, there are a lot of
different reasons why, why a child is not uh doing as well as
they should do or as well as they could do in the classroom
and so I think that its very difficult as a teacher to actually accommodate all, all the different ranges of problems I think that the school has to decide what you aiming for I mean is it academic excellence or is it all round personal development or whatever it is so that's the ethos of the school but its very difficult for a teacher to actually really feel satisfied that she, she is um she's bringing about the results to her maximum capacity its very frustrating you leave the classroom at the end of the day feeling I, I've only done like two thirds of the job but you, but you've actually worked very hard you know. I think that, that there needs to be um uh actual maybe a syllabus or um a whole lot of structured work for the language barrier children so that a teacher coming in or whatever knows what level they progress because what's happening from what I see is that its like whoever, whoever can and does um will, will help with the reading or xxx there isn't any, any structure so maybe a child does better but maybe they don't its too airy fairy and I think that the school has to say this is the situation we're in um we are a multifaceted nation and the level at the moment and, and different languages and all that kind of thing what are we going to do about it? I mean whether a number of schools in the area combine I mean that's also a point so you using staff to the maximum and you not sort of overusing teachers and you say look on a Monday, Tuesday, Thursday whatever we have this, these classes and the children from various schools I mean I think that would be a very positive idea you know it doesn't only invest on one school we've all got the same problem.

Q: And what role if any does culture play in your class?

P: Hmm .. Its extreme its, its very extreme I mean I think that the children on the whole have learnt and are learning to, to work together and to play together um but um I mean there are, there are enormous cultural differences its evening out in the last few years its definitely evened out but um I think that you have a lot of gangs forming and a lot of um not bullying but, but, but could, could build up to bullying but from one
cultural group to another and its not only a racial difference
there are definitely cultural differences within the races as well
but I think that is not so serious because I think children and
teachers need to accept the situation and not really make too
much of a case of it I think this is what we’re, we’re living in
and I think they’ve got to learn from the beginning to, to work
together but there are things you know that sort of xxx
dealing with loyalty and um caring for your classmates and um
a sense of pride in, in work and in your social relationships and
things like that is pretty, pretty bad there’s very little its, its
almost a survival thing they need to get a lot of recognition and
they don’t mind who they’ll stomp on and wipe out on the way
there although on the surface they may, may look like as if
they you know in groups and, and getting on with their peers
but there is, there is a lot of stress amongst themselves to, to
actually get recognition um its very sad actually because they
will easily tell on, report and, and try knock down one of their
classmates you know and their friends there’s a lot of
unhappiness generally I think the children are very unhappy
they don’t enjoy school at all, um whether that’s to do with the
age of the child or whether its to do with their background but
you’re fighting you got to fight all that before you actually start
teaching you know the unhappiness, the um the, the lack of
willingness to learn most of them are de-motivated to actually
achieve there, there’s not that need or necessity to actually
progress and yet you know when you talk to them about it
they, they understand that it’s a competitive world out there
and they’ve got to try hard and make an effort but on a day to
day basis they not interested and its, its very, very difficult.

Q: Can you give me an example of a cultural incident, an
actual example?
P: Ummm, I’ll have to think about that, I’ll think about it I’m
sure there is would you mean um because they come from
different backgrounds Yes an incident in your class that
was actually cultural related. Its hard to say whether its
cultural because I, I mean I did have, you know a blow up in
the class between the two boys but um whether its cultural or
whether it would be just antagonism you know between boys
or whatever it would be hard to say it didn’t they didn’t express
it themselves as being a cultural difference but if the children
uh sometimes they have said you know say I they, they feel
that there’s unfairness um you know that the teacher may
prefer certain culture groups and that if she’s disciplining or
angry with one child they, they can turn round and say you
know you’re being racist so I don’t think there’s too much with
the children although there’s not much love lost either but
(laughs) you know they, they kind of are handling it I
think fairly well.

Q: Now some people say that you should allow the
children to use their different languages in the classroom
while they are learning, what do you think about that?
P: I think that if they are talking publicly so to speak in the
class they must respect the school system and that its what
oh, that its you know that English is spoken and I think that
that’s a sign of respect um because its not as though they
can’t express themselves and there, there are very few that
Hong Ming is about the only one that basically battled to speak
English but the others could speak and could communicate
and I think if you insist on that it, it also encourages them
because if you allow them to speak in their own language you
actually not encouraging them to learn another and I mean
they unfortunately have to face reality that we, we are an
English speaking school but I, I do believe they should be
allowed to at times you know in a group or whatever because it
will give them confidence and, and reinforce them and
reassure them that they understand what the project or the
assignment is so I don’t think one should ban it completely but
what I found is that they very, very easily break out in to their
own language it gives them that privacy and, and I used to
actually be very strict about it because um I don’t believe its
right that children are allowed to be private and secretive in the
class um we speak English we all speak English together and
um its almost like a ganging up thing and they’d start
communicating in their language so no I don’t believe (coughs)
on the whole um I think they should have to speak English.

Q: Okay Um what do you know about second language
learners if anything and about how language acquisition
occurs?

P: That’s my point um I think that teachers if you’ve had sort
of any remedial education or if you’ve been involved in the
lower grades and they learn to read and phonics and all that
sort of thing then you’ll be able to but I don’t think we’ve many
teachers and especially if you taking sort of Std 3 and you
worked with that grade 5 all your life you don’t know what
you’re doing and then if there’s a structure (coughs) its not that
a teacher couldn’t cope with it but she needs to know about
the progression levels and how to go about it and I think if, if
that’s taking place after normal class that’s when they will
benefit and I think that all the teachers should be involved it
shouldn’t only be one teacher I don’t think you need to employ
a specialist teacher for that you know um but I think that
perhaps teachers need to go on course and everything uh
about teaching language or English as a second language.

Q: What kind of support do you think teachers should be
given so that they can cope in the kind of situation that
you’ve described?

P: Well I think they need to have a lot of support and if there is
a, a system in place that, that is the support I mean the
emotional support you know everybody needs (chuckles) so
its, its more the structure and the teacher knowing the level
that the child is at and uh and because they all have to be on
more or less an individual programme so she needs to know
how to progress what, where she’s going in a practical way
really.

Q: And in our particular school do you think there should
be greater support than what you are given at present?
P: Look I think that a person needs to ask if they need support
I think that I found that if, if you know um its up to you you've
got to ask for support and I'm sure if you do ask within
everyone's capabilities something will happen so it's the
teacher's responsibility in the first place but I do think what's
happening because the children are quite wild and because
you've got the different cultural groups and because and
because and because these language uh barrier children are
being left like last on the list which is disturbing.

Q: And do you think there is a connection between the
language barriers and the wildness?
P: No I wouldn't say so no. (shake head) They're two separate
issues, yes, ja. Because I mean you get you get a child who
wants to learn but, but I mean if the child is sitting there doing
nothing all day and nothing constructive obviously they're
going to be distracting and distracted and but um I mean
normally a teacher can control that but I, I and, and it obviously
does add because if, if your children are motivated, working
and x feeling good about themselves and all the blah blah
blahs you are going to have a productive class so but I don't
think behaviourally I haven't um noticed that really but it, it, it
could happen because those children are not occupied enough
and are not learning enough.

Q: And you personally have you received any kind of
training or read any books or gone on any courses
specifically to help you with this second language..
P: No I didn't no, no it's quite frightening actually.

Q: And how would you say your teaching has changed
over the years or has had to change over the years?
P: Hmm It has changed a lot but I think change is good I think
you need to I mean there are a lot of teachers who don't
change and um who just carry on the same system and I think
outcome-based has, has, has shaken that up a lot and you,
you probably find that you got a lot of teachers who have left
the system because maybe they can't cope with that and they
out of their comfort zone and I actually think that outcome-
based is, is, is pretty good for that reason um yes I definitely
have to be much more of a disciplinarian in, in teaching than I
ever was um my, my sort of my main um focus for many years
was to feel that if the child felt understood and happy in their
environment and feeling good about themselves they would
learn more or less naturally and in other words you create an
environment and its when a child is not feeling good about
themselves and are unhappy that, that they then need help
more help than the average and so that's what I've always
tried to create is that a child feels good about themselves but
now its not good enough it really isn't and I think a teacher has
to be a different person now you know with the children that
and let alone in the way you go about teaching um I think
because of um visual aids, computers and all that sort of thing
you can't just stand and sort of lecture your teaching you've
got to make the classes more interesting it's, it's a whole
different ball game.

Q: Okay now a tricky one what advice would you give
anyone considering teaching as a career now
P: As a young student you say? Yes Ummm I, I think the main
thing is that she really, or he has to understand children I
mean you, you can't go in with a hard and fast rule and say
this is my ethos or this is my manner or this is what I'm going
to do or you've actually got to try to put yourself in the child's
place and that I don't think is very different to before but I think
that you've got to be hard in a way hard and fair um gone are
the days when, when you could sort of just have a happy
atmosphere you know you got to actually work at it to create
that atmosphere and I, I think it also depends on where you're
teaching which school you're at um and I think that a young
teacher needs to be very sure about where he or she is going
um I mean if you’re going to a sort of a convent amongst upper
class people it is easier in certain ways but then you have a lot
of parental interference and you've got to actually know what
you are going in to so you don’t just go and accept a job uh
you know okay you know we’ll take you on, you’ve actually got
to find out what, what the environment is all about. I think that
um your teaching techniques and, and how you manage an….
you know your, your lessons and your group work you have to
really know what you are doing and I think they have to have
an assistant, have a teacher that is their mentor or whatever
that’s very experienced and that is good that’s recognized but
you work closely with them you can’t, you can’t walk in to a
situation where you’re the only class teacher or whatever
when you’re newly qualified.

Q: And this unhappiness that you talk about um in the
atmosphere in the class, what do you attribute that to?
P: I, I think parents don’t have the same um communication
uh, uh as they used to, family life is, is different to what it used
to be I, I think that um and also children its almost a sort of um
continuation, or let me say it’s the result of Spock who made
everybody child-centred so now what’s happened is that,
you’ve had, you’ve had a time of child centeredness which is,
is extreme and I think we going to swing back, to, to the
pendulum is definitely going to swing back but the children
nowadays have, have been brought up to, as in a child centred
environment and now they expect everything so you actually
working with a different philosophy the children expect
everything on a plate.
It’s the teacher or the parents that owe it to them its not that
they, they’ve got to strive and work for a situation you know
what I mean so, but I, I think that our children’s children will
probably be a lot better the, the discipline will swing back, the
respect, there is no respect. There’s no respect for authority
for you know they, they just don’t understand and I actually
can’t blame them umm and that’s what you fighting because
you’re standing there as an individual and they do not respect
you, they really do not and I don’t think they respect their
parents really either and what happens now are the parents
are resulting are, are becoming physical with their children
because they're so frustrated as well they've, they've got their frustrations in the work place and as far as finance is concerned they both working both of the parents usually these days and then the child is left on their own and when the child is not behaving they're just hitting them, their frustration, its I, I think its family life ja

Q: And would you say there is any effect or what are the effects of multilingualism on the children –positive effects and negative effects in the classroom?

P: (Sighs) you know I think eventually there won't be much as of a problem its because its relatively new. I think that uh some of the children before were educated with Afrikaans being the main language or their education language and not their home language and now um we've, we've standardized it to English I think in most of the schools its English now. And I think that generally children are going to be brought up speaking their mother tongue I hope they don't lose that but being taught English as well at home and I hope if that takes place I really don't think it's going to be much of a problem. In fact I think it makes, makes everything very interesting and it also teaches children to have respect for multicultural and multi-language groups you know I think that's healthy you know we shouldn't be dogmatic and or too dogmatic and, and expect everyone to drop their cultures and their languages just because we speak English I think you, you it adds, it adds sparkle and colour and its really good um so ja that's the problem though because we've been linking and bringing in children from very mixed backgrounds and, and languages and um they haven't learnt it at home we're having to teach it to them.

Q: Why do you think they have come into our schools?

P: Well I think that before uh a child who may have been x educated in the rural environment is, is now being brought into the towns either because their parents are living in, in a you know like domestics or whatever or working and, and before
there wasn’t the facility for that they were educated either you
know in the rural there was no option so the cities are now
taking the pressure um and having to, to educate the children
that are from rural backgrounds.

Q: Okay to sum up how would you describe your teaching
experience in a multilingual classroom what do you like
What don’t you like?
P: Umm Well I think what I don’t like let me start with that is the
frustration and not doing enough with them and that’s very
disturbing and I and I didn’t like, I didn’t feel good about that.
Umm I think that from a personal point of view as I said the
fact that they’re um multi-langual is its interesting um its
good to mix the cultures and um that’s it.

Q: Okay And any negative effects on the kids themselves?
P: Um you mean generally? Yes generally. Ja No I don’t think
so I think that children are pretty accepting on the whole um, er
the perhaps there’s a stigma but I, it didn’t come across to me
I, I think that the differences that the children have are almost,
almost what you’d expect of children you know generally,
whether you have them in the same language you know you
probably going to have those I didn’t find any sort of
blacklisting or any vindictiveness because of their language
um I found them pretty accepting.
Okay thanks very much. Okay
(Carried on talking after the tape was switched off so I
switched the tape back on again)
P: ….. The moment you try to .. okay so you asked me how
you would go about teaching the multilanguage so just
generally you need to, to, to get the children interested and like
what you are doing but the moment you raise your, your level
of, of not being sort of teacher/pupil and you, you lighten up
and you have a bit of fun you just lose control completely and
they just, they just become hooligans and its very difficult
because a lot of the interest sort of type work that you have to
do with children they must know how to control themselves coz
it is freer it is more boisterous it is louder and less rigid so but, but I just find that I couldn’t, couldn’t do it I had to go back to the formal, formal teaching you know I just found it frustrating I also found some times that if you play a game or do anything out of the ordinary I’ve lost them. Ja no you have. You have to rein them in the whole time. I know the course she’s talking about its for teaching English as a foreign language. That’s right ja and apparently there’s something in Braamfontein I, I must look into it I just haven’t had a chance I don’t know if there’s more than one I’m sure there are I’m sure there are and then that’s the course you need if you’re going to go particularly over to Asia or Korea Juanita did it. Oh did she? Ja she went and she taught in Korea last year. Ja, so I must I must find out about it because I think it would benefit me you know because what you’re doing in language actually you are teaching you know its attractive and you can, you can pick the bones of it and bring it into your teaching. And whole language. Have you ever done anything with whole language? No because that’s a new way we’ve tried to introduce it. What is that Liz? It’s a, it’s a where you actually use reading as the basis. Oh okay. And you use um books but not reading books and you teach kids to enjoy reading first and then from the reading comes the writing and everything else and we’ve seen quite we’ve seen a number of people who’ve come to speak to us about it and we tried to introduce it last year but the teachers didn’t want to. Oh really. But they say that that seems to work quite nicely. I know they do it at St Johns. Oh okay. I must say that the children enjoy reading but you don’t often have the right level or the right type of book to you know for, for each of them and I found that the language they, they will come to you and say they don’t understand which is very good so I think you do have their interest there so if you could go on that ja it will be amazing. I, I’m amazed that they do manage to learn as much as they do or cope with what they do. Ja because that’s what they reckon that whole language would be very good
because you're actually teaching the language as it, as it happens. Yes. You let them, you need to let them um choose their own books that they are interested in and you have like a reading room where they can go and choose. You just grade the books slightly but let the child choose on any topic and then from what they are reading and doing you actually create a class story or a class theme and you let them go off on tangents on it and incidentally you that's very nice teaching um your punctuation your capital letters and the spelling that they need at that time that that's exactly how Alana they have that's how they learnt their language at St Andrews the headmistress Mrs Bolton? was very good. She'd, she would have books uh whatever I remember one with Joey in Australia or whatever and then she brought in everything that she could, actually very thorough, amazing. It is amazing coz this, this lady that came to speak to us she only spoke to the junior teachers, but Logie and I brought her in and she talks about how you, you choose a theme of what the kids are interested in and then you'll start off with a poem and you get the sounds going and then you get the children to rewrite their own poems with different sounds so that and then you can go off like if its dinosaurs you can go off onto the scientific facts you can go off onto the fantasy you get the children writing their own stories you make a whole class story and you reading, reading, reading all the time. No, no I, I agree with that. And, and we tried. And you know what other things Liz I think the media centre x needs to be a vital part of the school because I used to say to the children you know I mean I, I tried from the day I walked in there to say let's have a little book with them to read all the time x but then at home they want to read something else they must have it at home but in class that book must go everywhere with them and they would say to me oh but where do I get one from and I said you go down to the media centre and you get one and I mean to this day there was still half the class that didn’t have them and if that was a place where they...
felt they could go and sit and read and have language laboratory uh stories and I mean it has to be controlled obviously they can't just go there willy nilly but I think the language then would improve a lot very much so and the books aren't really exciting No its not and they don't know when to go there yet there isn't enough vibrance you know what I mean There wasn't much vibrance there before with the previous media teacher it was a bit messy and untidy Ja you see, ja so that's a thing to remember I mean it can’t be that difficult. It's not that difficult it just needs, so instead of setting your, your theme like you know all the grade 5 classes, the one grade 5 class might be on dinosaurs the other one might be on space and it actually doesn’t matter. No, no it doesn’t. Whereas now of course its all got to be Ja, the only thing is that assessment might be a bit of a problem that way unless you say look [one language or three language assessments?] yes you see what’s happening now is that everything is being assessed the, the same but I mean if they said well x you have got to have three creative writing, three languages, three whatever it doesn’t have to be on the same theme and you see you could still do your grammar ja but it doesn't have to, it wouldn’t be on the same theme so if you were doing nouns and adjectives, if this one was doing dinosaurs you would assess them on dinosaurs and that one would do the space. And, it would be actually fine because you could actually change I mean if the one does dinosaurs the other teacher could use dinosaurs later in the year so you actually work together. And what we wanted to do because the, the lady that came was from a book publishing company and Shortland publications they bring a lot of books in from Australia and New Zealand lovely, lovely stuff and on all different levels so you.. I think that would be fantastic. Ja it would really be nice. sho that is a pity and what about xxx Well I think that would be a great idea coz then you, you could have children, there, there would be children working in groups, and there’d be children working in pairs and there’d be children working
on their own and it didn’t matter because everybody was learning at their, their own pace.