Observation 1 – 22/07/2004 Grade 5.1 (9:10 – 9:45)

I entered the class, watched from the door while the lessons swapped over and then sat at the back during the rest of the lesson and observation time.

The class was sitting in groups, some in groups of 6 and some in groups of 4. Two children were sitting on their own with their desks right up against the chalkboard in the front because they can't co operate in a group (Felicity (L2) and Nigel (L1)) Matsobane (L2) was outside the class because he “can't behave”. Although they were sitting in groups it was whole class teaching.

There were 2 groups with 3 children in each, 3 groups with 6 children, 1 group with 5 children, the 2 in the front and 1 outside giving a total of 32 children altogether. The cultural mix was 5 Indian boys, 7 white boys, 5 white girls, 7 black boys, 7 black girls, 1 coloured girl.

There are some motivational charts on the wall e.g. Good work chart

There is some of the children’s art work on Youth day and the theme of Egypt – drawings on A4 white paper dine with pencil and pencil crayons, some tangram diagrams again white paper, cut out and coloured in with pencil crayon and also some what looked like masks painted and decorated with stickers on the back wall. There is also a wall of achievement poster, but there is nothing on it.

The class was practicing Afrikaans spelling words at their desks using small chalkboards when I arrived. They also practiced the pronunciation of the words in unison after the teacher had modelled the word first. I was asked my opinion on their pronunciation and agreed with the teacher in front of the class that they had improved. They only did three examples and then the lesson changed to reading. It was a class reading lesson using the book Matilda by Roal Dahl. Each child had their own copy and had to follow in their books while one child read aloud. They had obviously done this before because they started in the middle of the book.

Felicity (L2) was the first to read. She read about half a page during which the teacher told her to “stop singing and to read louder”. The teacher prompted her with the word “doubting”. (I felt that Felicity read fairly well, she is a black girl and only read the word doubting incorrectly – her pace was fairly fast.) Most of the class followed quite attentively except for Ayanda (L2) who just sat staring in front of him, day dreaming and
Raymond (L1) who was looking around the class and rocking on his chair. When she was told to stop reading the class was asked to assess her reading technique and to give her a 4, 3, 2 or 1. This was done by a show of hands. e.g who thinks she should get a 4 etc. No one voted for her to get a 4, some voted 3 and others 2. Brian (L2) was asked why he thought a 3 he answered because “she’s singing” Ashley (L1) was asked why a 2 and she answered “because she ran her sentences into each other and her pronunciation wasn’t right”. Her final mark was a 2. (I thought she should have a 3, but the criteria were different to mine I guess.)

The next reader was Tshabi (L2). She read her portion and after the teacher thanked her, the class voted. Most voted 3 – Nisheel (L1) said when asked why a 3 “because she pronounces the words properly”. T- said her “reading was a bit soft and not a constant flow”. (I thought the constant flow description a bit odd but the children seemed to understand what she meant, she did read softly though, as I could hardly hear her.) T - Mbali (L2) was accused by the T of giving her a good mark because she was her friend.

The third reader was Kirshen (L1), T – corrected his reading of “rouse”. The class assessed him; he got a 4 because he “read loudly with expression”. (He did read very fluently with expression.)

The fourth reader was Lebo (L2), T – corrected “fact” and was interrupted by another teacher who came to ask a question. T – was momentarily out of the class and while the reading continued they became slightly restless. Lebo(L2) read with quite a few repetitions of phrases and words. T returned and the class were asked what she should get - a 4, no votes, a 3 a couple of votes, most voted for a 2 when asked why a child answered because “she was not fluent and kept stopping”. Another said “there was no constant flow but read one word at a time” yet another said “she was not loud enough” (this could be because of the slight restlessness when the teacher was distracted). T – said that she would give her a 2.

Thabang (L2) read next, he read 2 words then argued with another child. T – reprimanded him and told him to read, she corrected his reading of “experience” and “desperate” and picked him out for threatening another child during the voting. When the class was asked to assess his reading, some voted 4 because he “read loudly”, some voted 3 because “he skipped a paragraph”. T – said he “read clearly but he was rushing and that by tomorrow he should get a 4”. She also said to the class that there
should be a reason why they give a 4 or a 3 and that "you don't just give marks without a reason".

T – asked Nisheel (L1) to read but he started justifying why Thabang (L2) should get a 3. She said “no I want you to read now” Nisheel (L1) began to read - he stumbled a lot, with a lot of repetitions. T – told him to put his finger on the words and prompted him with “poured” and “cupped”. The class was asked to assess – no votes for 4’s or 3’s most voted for a 2. When asked why one child said “he was reading one by one and pausing and reading slowly”. Felicity (L2) laughed and was immediately reprimanded and told that she could leave the class if she was going to be rude. T – told Nisheel(L2) to go home and practice. *(He was the weakest reader so far but still had the courage to try and to read in front of the class).*

Raymond (L1) was asked to read next and he asked “where are we?” T – said “show him”. He took awhile to be shown the place but eventually started to read. Class surprisingly patient while he found the place. T – corrected “tragedy” then she was interrupted by another teacher - different to the first one (T- is the grade co ordinator). Thabang (L2) stated to talk to another child while Raymond (L1) continued to read and make mistakes which the other children corrected. T’s – attention returned and told Raymond (L1) that he was actually reading very well and should just read a little louder. The class were again asked to assess the reading. Most of the class voted for a 3, except Brian (L2) who said he should get a 4. T -said to him “you would give your friend a 4, because if he’s not at school you get upset.” She then again told Raymond (L1) “you do read well but please follow”.

Next up was Sammy (L1) who read a couple of paragraphs. The class gave her a 4. One child explained because her “fluency was not that bad”. T- said she “read clearly, loudly and with a constant flow, well done”. During this discussion Mbali (L2) shouted out. T- said “how rude Mbali”. Mbali (L2) retorted “she keeps hitting me with a ruler” but T ignored this.

Sakhile (L2) read next. The class prompted him as the T was busy doing something at her desk and not following. She then sent a child on an errand and stopped Sakhile (L2) reading. The class voted and the majority vote was for a 2. One child justified his vote by saying “he was reading slowly and softly one by one”. T – said that his pronunciation was not very good and he needs to work on it and practice".
Boby (L2) read next. He started to read, the T told him to stop, told the class to follow and told him to start again. The class pays attention and follows. He read with a heavy Indian accent e.g. de man for demon class prompts him and T – corrected died when he read dead. Class was asked to vote. A couple of children voted for a 4, but most voted for a 3. Cody (L1) said a 3 because he never pronounced some words properly, another child agreed with this reason. T – said “remember he’s from another country isn’t it and he’s reading English for the first time isn’t it, what language do they speak in India?” she asks Mbali (L2) who laughs because she wasn’t listening.

Cody (L1) read next. The intercom interrupted his reading and asked for Thabang (L2) to be sent down to the office, he left the room. Most of the class voted for a 4. Raymond (L1) said a 4 because he “said nice expression. T – “he had nice expression, I also think he read very nicely”.

The last child to read was Sam (L1). While she was reading the T asked one of the children to fetch the tuck from the tuck shop. Sam (L1) was told to stop and the class voted. A couple of children voted for a 4 because she “had constant flowing”, some voted for a 3 because she read nicely. T – asked why not a 4? “I would give her a 4, she had very good pronunciation, very good fluency”. She was interrupted by a request for chalk. Then she told the class to close their books, we’ll read later and take out your lunch. The children took out their lunch and went to sit outside on the corridor to eat. The bell then rang for break.

The teacher made a couple of comments afterwards. She said “I try to do reading twice a day. This whole week I’m just doing English, Maths and Afrikaans to bring it up. They were very bad to start with. Nisheel’s reading is bad. They enjoy reading this book. I’ve promised them that on Friday after they have finished reading the book they can watch the movie. I told them about fluency. They stressed at the RNCS training that we must do reading and maths. I have been doing it from the change. Every afternoon I read 2/3 pages to the class with actions and expression, they love it. I told them I’m looking for the flow of words, when I said fluency they asked what is that. I explained to them.

I asked her what they told them at the RNCS training course.

She answered that they said that from Gr 4 the learning outcomes for first and second additional language fall away as there should no longer be a language barrier and it’s
just the language outcomes. They also said we must go back to teaching phonics and
drilling and rote learning especially for learning things like tables. They must drill them
you can show them what it means but they must drill it to learn it. That’s why you have
knowledge and skills as what the context is, is very important and why you must learn
it, where it’s coming from e.g. you must be able to write the numbers so you can write a
cheque etc. She also commented how can you teach children things if you don’t know it
yourself? And some teachers don’t know things.

I asked if they mentioned multilingualism at all.

She said they said that it must come in, especially multiculturalism, you must show
respect, e.g how do you do maths in your culture? The boertjie teachers on the course
were shocked they never realised that that is what they should be doing. The other
thing they emphasised was values – we must teach the children morals and manners
because there are no morals in our country at the moment.

I asked her if they got any notes on this.

She said yes, they are in the car. (I will borrow these to use for document analysis.)