

CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES OF POWER, IDENTITY, ACCESS AND LANGUAGE CHOICE IN MULTILINGUAL TEACHERS' VOICES

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Teachers in the Eastern Cape, South Africa teach mainly in English, which is not their home language. In order to elicit their inner voices about language conflicts and contradictions in their classrooms they were encouraged to write poetry about their perceptions of the impact of language in their lives. The most prevalent contradiction they expressed was the power and dominance of English juxtaposed against the subordination of their home languages. English gave them access to education and upward employment mobility, whereas they were excluded from various discourses when they used their home languages. Their home languages legitimised and defined their identities, but appeared to be negated in an educational and economic environment. Since the necessity for pupils to become fluent in English conflicted with the pupils' difficulties in understanding content knowledge expressed in English, the teachers faced a choice between teaching in English (for access to social goods) or their home language (for epistemological access), or both. The use of poetry evoked feelings and emotions that may not have been as obvious, or as evocative, if other data-gathering methods had been used. It appears that the self-reflection embodied in the poetry gave the teachers a sense of empowerment, self-realisation and solidarity.

Key words: multilingual teachers, language, power, access, identity, language choice, poetry

INTRODUCTION

In the Eastern Cape those who were disadvantaged during the apartheid era could still be marginalised – not because of their colour, but because of their lack of fluency in English. The struggle for language rights in South Africa is interconnected with the struggle for human rights and in the past language was used as a means of domination and separation (Setati, 2008; Webb, 2002). The majority of teachers in the Eastern Cape teach, and pupils learn, in a language that is not their home language. Although there are 11 official languages in South Africa the hegemonic position of English has resulted in English being the preferred language for schools and business, as it is a passport to social goods (Gee, 2008; Setati, 2008), tertiary education, fulfilling jobs and positions of influence and power. This implies that English may already have become a weapon in the struggle for power between the different socio-economic and political groups, regardless of colour.

Traditional views of power have negative connotations including oppression, control and authority, whereas the post-modern view is far more positive, since power is envisaged as being productive, creative, effective, active and part of everyday life (Albertyn, Kapp & Groenewald, 2001). Empowerment embodies the sense that power comes from within, where the locus of control is moved from powerful others to within the empowered people.

Empowered people would thus be intrinsically motivated and in control of their own lives. At a micro-level, empowerment refers to the way that an individual views identity including, among other aspects, issues of dignity and personal responsibility (Albertyn *et al.*, 2001).

The aim of this article is to uncover possible conflicts and contradictions that multilingual teachers in the Eastern Cape perceive as they teach through the medium of English, which is a foreign language to many of their pupils. In order to enable teachers to confront the realities of the language environments of their classrooms and to allow them to explore their own attitudes and emotions concerning the impact of language, it has been essential to create spaces in which teachers feel free to share their “language stories”, to reflect on the multilingual realities of their classrooms, to take cognisance of the power language wields over issues of their own cultural identity, to assess the access language affords to the realisation of their dreams, and to consider the effect the choice of language has on the effectiveness of their teaching.

In this article I report on research in which teachers from rural, peri-urban and urban schools in the Eastern Cape were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and write poetry in which they share their perceptions about the force language exerts on their lives. Their voices evocatively recreate episodes in their lives and the conflicts and contradictions they encounter. The main constructs that emerged from the poetry could be distilled down to issues of power, access, identity and language choice. Using poetry as a data collection method seemed to be an effective way of creating awareness and penetrating to the deepest levels where teachers felt valued, respected and empowered.

CURRENT LITERATURE

From the reading and analysis of the teachers’ poetry, I identified constructs that threaded through the poetic narratives. The most pervading constructs concerning language were that teachers are faced with conflicts concerning issues of power (dominant or subordinate), access (included or excluded), identity (legitimised or negated) and language choice (English or home language) in multilingual classrooms (Janks, 2010). It is necessary for teachers to recognise where their own perspectives lie on the four continua so that they can identify their own lived reality in order to orchestrate and effect change.

Power – dominant or subordinate

Fairclough (2001:39) states that power in discourse concerns “powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants”. He maintains that “the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power” and that one dimension of this power is the elevation of one social dialect to the position of a standard or “national” language (Fairclough, 2001:47). Gee (2008) warns that mainstream dominant discourses, and particularly school-based discourses, privilege those who have mastered them (mainstream/insiders) and do significant harm to those who have not (non-mainstream/outsideers). Lerman (2001) reinforces Gee’s (2008) standpoint that people are positioned in practices as powerful or powerless according to the structure of the discourse and the personal histories, including cultural backgrounds, of the participants.

Teachers in multilingual schools do not only engage in specialist content-based discourse where the pupils need access to particular ‘communities of practice’ to understand the academic content of the lesson (Wenger, 1998), but also where pupils need to make sense of the spoken and written words in which the content is presented to them – in English. The pupils are thus in a subordinate position as the “unknowing” in both content knowledge and English knowledge. This places them in a negative, unvalued space and they are excluded from access to fulfilling expectations of higher education goals.

Access – included or excluded

Gee (2008) maintains that cultural models exclude people (in this case English second language pupils) from participating comfortably in academic discourses as they do not know the “rites of passage” for entry to the “club” (Gee, 2008). This view is supported by Setati (2008) who posits that the political nature of language pressurises teachers to use English as they are faced with the conflict of providing access to English as well as to knowledge, in this instance mathematical knowledge. She maintains that the desire for access to English has the dominant role, so teachers teach in English (hoping that pupils will learn to communicate in English) with the result that procedural knowledge of skills and practices is foregrounded over conceptual, reasoning mathematical knowledge (Setati, 2008).

In South Africa the dominant mainstream cultural model in schools and business is expressed through the medium of English, which marginalises the non-mainstream teachers and pupils. The conflict that teachers in the Eastern Cape have to resolve is how to provide access to the dominant discourse (in this case English) while still valuing the discourses and diversity that the pupils bring to the classroom (Janks, 2010). Research has shown that in order to become fluent in a second or third language, pupils must have a strong foundation in their first language (Heugh, 2008; Westcott, 2004). The foundation includes verbal proficiency as well as vocabulary and grammar skills. Multilingual pupils who do not have a working knowledge of their first language could be prevented from accessing another language.

Identity - legitimised or negated

Da Ponte (2009) maintains that the intersection between three circles of teachers’ knowledge, teachers’ practice and teachers’ identity creates a common ground where optimum teaching takes place. He believes that teachers’ identity encompasses teachers’ perceptions, perspectives, values, norms and ways of being. If teachers do not have a strong sense of their own identity the balance among knowledge, practice and identity is tipped and the common ground for optimum teaching will be decreased. Janks (2010) maintains that African children’s sense of identity is compromised when having to learn through the medium of English, if it is not their home language. The pressure for English competence has resulted in a devaluing of pupils’ sense of identity. The majority of schools in the Eastern Cape choose English as the dominant language of learning and teaching (LoLT), with a resultant lack of literacy competence in the pupils’ home language. In this article it will be illustrated how teachers eloquently portray their dismay that their cultural identity is being diminished.

Language choices – English or home language

Janks (2010:129) describes an occasion where she asked pupils to draw their school playground and to describe the playground in written English text. One of the pupils' drawings is rich with visual representations of children playing and moving, whereas the written description is limited to one- or two-word phrases. She observes that the children are "mute, robbed of language"; however, if they are encouraged to discuss their reasoning in their vernacular "there is a flood of ideas as the children are rescued from the silence imposed by English". Neville Alexander, in an interview from the motion picture *Sink or Swim* (Westcott, 2004), maintains:

Because of the hegemonic position of English in the world today, because it is the key to social mobility, to upward social mobility, people understandably and justifiably want their children to learn English in South Africa. What most people don't understand is that it does not follow, therefore, that they will acquire the best command of English if they are taught from day one through the medium of English. That does happen, of course, but it happens only under very specific conditions, conditions which do not exist in most South African schools, certainly not in most black schools.

Research has shown that teachers hold strong views as to whether they should teach in English only, or in the pupils' home language, or whether to code-switch by using two languages in the course of a single utterance (Moschkovich, 2007). Code-switching is an accepted practice in Eastern Cape multilingual classrooms. Teachers could play the role of discourse guides to steer pupils on the winding path from informal communication in their home language to formal academic language in English in order to allow pupils access to the dominant academic discourse (Setati & Adler, 2002).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research reported in this article forms part of a larger mixed method study that was conducted in the field of mathematics education over a period of four years. The qualitative part of the study was based on the interpretive paradigm. The purpose of the study was to ascertain whether the introduction of structured dialogue (exploratory talk) in the pupils' home language could enhance multilingual pupils' reasoning and numeracy skills in the Eastern Cape. The first objective of the larger study was to identify Eastern Cape teachers' perceptions about language issues in their classes. In order to attain this objective a questionnaire elicited quantitative results, and reflective writing and the crafting of poetry triangulated these results qualitatively.

SAMPLE

I focused on 176 practising teachers who were registered off-campus students of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and travelled to lectures in Port Elizabeth (28), Queenstown (34), Mthatha (55), King William's Town (32) and Kokstad (29). The teachers were all from previously disadvantaged schools and spoke either Afrikaans or isiXhosa as their home language. This sample was chosen as the teachers taught at a range of schools in rural, peri-urban and urban locations situated throughout the Eastern Cape and were thus considered to be representative of the area.

METHOD

Hooijer and Fourie (2009) conducted a study using questionnaires to ascertain how multilingual teachers experience teaching in classrooms where the pupils' home language is not the LoLT. They concluded that teachers found their task difficult and required educational and emotional support. The questionnaire responses in this study were adequate but not rich. I endeavoured to use a triangulating data gathering instrument by encouraging the teachers to express their emotions serendipitously through poetry without question prompts. They could write in any language they preferred. Because a translation would lessen the impact of the poetry, an isiXhosa-speaking academic, Kazeka, was asked to read the poems aloud and reflect verbally on the emotions the poems evoked in her and the impact they made on her. The transcriptions of her commentaries are reported after the poems that are written in isiXhosa.

TEACHERS' VOICES

The constructs mentioned in the poems often represented two ends of a continuum. The main themes identified were power, access and identity; however, in addition, pride was pitted against feelings of inferiority and cultural capital was contrasted with cultural dissipation. In some poems a variety of constructs were mentioned, so it was a complex task to separate the poems into discrete topics. Perhaps the power of the teachers' voices is sufficient to convey their message and emotion.

One prevalent contradiction that was expressed was the disparity between the teachers' pride in their home language as opposed to their need for fluency in English. The pride and comfort their home language affords them is palpable, but also the sense that their home language is inferior and useless as a tool to access social goods. The following two poems express, differently, the same emotions:

Bilingualism

I think and dream in isiXhosa
 My home language
 I love isiXhosa
 Although I can't communicate worldwide
 It is my roots
 My culture
 My identity
 It is my *Ubuntu*, I love my home language.

I study in English
 Language international
 Recognised worldwide

Last Lesson on a Friday

Oh, it is English lesson again
 I don't like the lesson
 The tenses again?
 Is – was, go – went, write – wrote
 All in my head?
 Oh, it's very boring, especially on a
 Friday afternoon!

But, what can I do without it?
 Nothing ...
 It is the key to open the doors of life

Power, secret, comfort
Employment, status, relief
All represented in English
I respect my second language
It makes me feel literate.

Come, English, come!
I want to learn more!

Bilingualism, strange word,
Existing within one me.

The poems above echo Setati's (2008) point that teachers preferably align themselves with English rather than with epistemological access to content knowledge. Being literate seems to have value only if it relates to being English-literate.

The tone of some of the poetry calls to mind the praise poetry in Xhosa oral tradition, where the *imbongi*, or praise singer, spontaneously lauds a dignitary. Once again contradictions are foremost in the poet's mind. She wants to be fluent in English, but finds it an extremely difficult language to master. This results in a sense of inferiority and exclusion, an example of not knowing the "rites of passage" for entry to the "club" (Gee, 2008).

Our Foreign Language

Oh English, our medium of instruction
What a good language it is
What a bad language it is
It is difficult for us to speak it
It is difficult for us to write it
Because it is not our mother tongue

Without it, no jobs
Without it, no education
Without it, no tourism
It is the medium of communication

Some feel inferior to others
Some feel unhappy to talk to others
Some criticise us for using our mother tongue
But our benefits belong to it.

Officials, educators, learners and stakeholders come together
Draw up a language policy which could help every South African child!

When writing in their home language the teachers expressed themselves lyrically using metaphors to express passion, but the underlying theme of disempowerment prevails. The child's helplessness is rooted in not understanding English. Aspirations can only be achieved if the child is fluent in English as opposed to isiXhosa. The question is implicit: Is one only educated if one can speak English?

Isikhalo Somntwana

Isikhalo Somntwana

Ingaba ndinantoni?

Ndiva isikhalo,

Isikhalo somntwana,

Esithi andisiva 'isilungu'

Ndiva isiXhosa!

Ndiva isiXhosa!!

Kodwa mandifunde isiLungu

Mandifunde! Mandifunde!!

Ndoyaphi na?

Ndothini na?

Ngaphandle kwesilungu

Ulwimi lwezwe lonke.

Sona sikuvulela

Iingcango eziya

Enkululekweni.

Mandifunde! Mandifunde!!

The sky is the limit.

Commentary from Kazeka:

Basically this poem is saying, the cry of a child. '*Isikhalo somntwana*' is the cry of a child and this young man, in the first paragraph, is saying 'What will I be?' I hear the cry of the child who is saying, This cry is I don't understand English. Everyone keeps on saying I don't understand English but I understand isiXhosa – this is what I hear, I don't hear English, I hear isiXhosa but everyone keeps on saying I must learn English because it will open the doors to opportunity, especially in a democratic situation. So when everyone is drumming in to him that he must be educated, be educated. Where will he go if he doesn't know this English? And then he says he must be educated, he must be educated and the sky is the limit. I would love to speak to this writer because ... does he

mean that being educated is only in English? It is quite a ... quite a ... it moves you to your essence. It is that type of poem.

The repetition of “The sky is the limit” in the previous poem and the next emphasises the contradiction between the power of English and the teachers’ pride in their home language. In the previous poem the teacher sees proficiency in English as a panacea for all ills, an “open sesame” for fame and fortune; whereas in the next poem the teacher sees his own language as a future force. The combination of English and isiXhosa in the poem emphasises the dual identity of many South Africans, and the language choices that they face daily.

My language – isiXhosa

Oh my beloved language

Oh my African language

Respected by the African speaking nation

amaXhosa, the sons of the African nation

I’m glad I’m black. I’m an African

I’m cheerful I can identify myself

I can write, read and speak isiXhosa

Awu axakekile amaXhosa ngengxoxo yakwaXhosa

My language, powerful, almighty language

You rose above whilst you were

Brutally murdered, tortured, destroyed

By those who were in power

Be strong my language, fear no one

Now is your time

The sky is the limit

IsiXhosa sama Xhosa – AkwaXhosana

Commentary from Kazeka:

Well, in ‘My Language isiXhosa’, this poet is using both languages, I think that it also represents the contemporary identity of South Africa right now. It is in the second paragraph where he says ‘*axakekile amaXhosa*’. He is saying the isiXhosa speaking nation is busy talking and negotiating all the issues of isiXhosa tradition . In the last paragraph where he says ‘*isiXhosa*’, he is saying the language isiXhosa; ‘*samaXhosa*’ meaning of the isiXhosa speaking people ‘*akwaXhosa*’ - it is just an expressive idiom to say ‘*akwaXhosa*’, meaning it belongs to you, it belongs to you.

Teachers identified their inner core of self with the spoken language, which legitimised their very being. Their essence, identity and pride are bound to their home language – “What am I without my mother tongue?”

Ulwimi lwam

Ndiyintoni na?

Ngaphandle kolwimi lwam?

Ndizingca ngani na?

Ngaphandle kolwimi lwam?

Ndakuziva njani na

Ngaphandle kolwimi lwam?

Ulwimi lwam ngundoqo kum.

Ndiyazingca ngalo.

Commentary from Kazeka:

In this poem, *Ulwimi lwam*, this poet is saying my tongue (my language). In the first line he asks this question, What am I? ‘*Ndiyintoni?*’ What am I without my mother tongue? And then in the third line he says ‘*Ndizingca ngani na*’, What am I? What is my pride? ‘*Ngaphandle kolwimi lwa*’, without my tongue, ‘*Ndizakuziva njani na?*’ How will I hear myself? And then he says in the last two lines ‘*Ulwimi lwam ngundoqo kum*’, meaning my tongue is the essence of who I am. I pride myself in my mother tongue.

It is not only the isiXhosa-speakers who feel that their language is being superseded by English. Afrikaans-speakers share a sense of loss of identity and betrayal. Their children do not feel any pride in their home language and, in fact, eschew it. The negation of their cultural identity is the net result.

My Verlore Taal

My ma het my leer praat

In ’n taal wat sy lief het.

In Afrikaans het sy gesê, “Staan op,”

Terwyl die polisieman sê, “Lê plat!”

My pa het jou gebruik om te leer sing.

“Slaap, my baba. Slaap soet,” het hy snags gesing.

Ek het dit vir my kind snags sag gesing,

Maar hy het “Tula, Tata, tula!” hard gesing.

*Afrikaans, jy is in my bloed en siel.
Vir jou sal ek my lewe af baklei.
Ek het jou van my voorvaders gekry
En aan my kinders probeer oordra. Tog onsuksesvol.*

My commentary:

The poet confides that his mother, who loved the language, taught him Afrikaans. He graphically mentions the political struggle in South Africa where his mother was metaphorically holding her head high while policemen were harassing her (“Lie down flat on the ground”). His own father sang him to sleep in Afrikaans, but when he sings to his son he is told to be quiet (“*Tula*”, ironically an isiXhosa word). Afrikaans is in his soul and he will fight to defend the language, as it comes from his ancestors, but he is unsuccessful in passing this pride on to his children.

The personification of a language indicates that the poet felt a kinship, tantamount to a friendship, with the language. The loss of a language is like experiencing the loss of a friend; it is keenly felt:

Afrikaans, my taal

*Afrikaans praat met my,
Sing met my,
Dans met my,
Afrikaans waar is jy?*

*Jou stem is stil.
Jou kinders veg.
Weggeneem teen jou wil.
Ek’s reg ... jy’s weg!*

My commentary:

The poet compares Afrikaans with a friend and asks the language to sing and dance with him, but is bewildered as the friend’s voice is quiet and he seems to have gone away. He concedes that there is strife in the friend’s family and that Afrikaans has been forcibly taken away. He ends, ‘I am right ... you are gone!’

Teachers feel that the emphasis on English dissipates the eloquence with which pupils speak, read and write their home language. The effect thereof is not constrained to language only, as it insidiously seeps into a dissipation of history, cultural capital and traditions. Janks (2010:116) expresses this same sentiment in prose. She maintains that proficiency in

English increases children's linguistic capital but collaborates "in the destruction of their own instruments of expression". This sentiment is echoed in another of the teacher's poems:

Ulwimi LwakwaNtu

Yintoni midaka yakuthi ningalunakanga nje ulwimi lwenu

Ningasoze nisigqibe isivakalisi ningaphawulanga

kulwimi lwesiNgesi

Abantwana abakwazi ukufunda ulwimi lwabo

Andisathethi ke ngokulubhala, kunzima

Ningakhe nijonge kwezinye iintlanga nje?

Kuba zona zineqhayiya ngeelwimi zazo.

Sesiyilahlile nemveli yethu

Kuba kaloku sisityeshele isiXhosa sethu.

Commentary from Kazeka:

Ah, beautiful! This poet is saying 'Ulwimi lakwaNtu'. 'kwaNtu' is Bantu-speaking people. He is basically saying in the first stanza, Why have we let this language go? Then, he says in our days it is difficult for even isiXhosa speaking people, basically traditional people to even finish a sentence without including English, and then he says in the third line, the children can't even read their own language, never mind write it. He is saying in exasperation, You know it is difficult – 'kuzima'. And then in the second paragraph he says, Why not look at other languages, 'kuba zona zineqhayiya ngamalwimi alo', which means people from other languages, like German societies, for example. They pride themselves on their languages and he says that we have lost even our traditions, and our culture and our history because we are looking down on 'isiXhosa sethu' (our Xhosa). We are looking down on our language. Very powerful, very powerful ...

Reiterating the sense of language being intertwined with one's identity, the next poem metaphorically equates mother tongue to the evocation of memories of comfort, satiation and smoky safety when recalling times when one's mother cooked mealie-meal porridge for breakfast on the family hearth.

Umbongo Ngolwimi

Ulwimi lwenkobe sisiXhosa

Sinxibelelana ngolwimi

Isizwe ngasinye siyazingca

Webb

Ngolwimi lwaso

Zilishumi elinanye iilwimi

Ezisemthethweni apha eMzantsi Afrika.

Sifunda ngolwimi

Lwazi ulwimi lwakho!

Luxabise ulwimi lwakho

Luthethe ungagwidizi!

Commentary from Kazeka:

'*Ulwimi inkobe*' is your mother tongue. If you had to translate 'mother tongue' from direct English to direct Xhosa, it would actually mean '*ulwimi lwakwamamakho*', but it is not said like that. That is the wonderful thing about the Xhosa language, it is more experiential. They describe the experience and come up with the language. So when they say '*ulwimi lwenkobe*', '*lwenkobe*' is that corn that your mother makes usually in traditional society. So it refers to that mealie-meal, that corn, that your mother makes, that is why it is '*ulwimi lwenkobe*' meaning your mother tongue. It is attaching the experience of making your corn with your mother. Isn't it beautiful? And then he goes on to say, she or he, goes on to say '*lwimi lwenkobe sisiXhosa*' is how we come to understand each other. It is how we come to communicate with one another and languages and nations. '*Ngasinye Ngolwimi lwabo*', meaning nations take pride in their languages and then he says in the second paragraph '*Zilishumi elinanye*', meaning there are eleven languages under the constitution, under the law of South Africa. So language is part of our identity in that we study in language. Then it goes in the last paragraph to just encourage you to know your language, value your language, speak it without shame.

The following poet intrinsically suggests the political nature of language and the rallying cry that it can evoke. This reiterates Setati's (2008) supposition that language is always political.

isiXhosa

Lulwimi lwam lwenkobe

Luyandonwabisa ndakulila

Lundinika yonke endiyifunayo

Luyandithuthezele ndakuxakwa

Phambili ngesiXhosa phambili!

Commentary from Kazeka:

Well in this poem she is saying (it is a lovely short poem and to the point) ‘*Lulwimi lwam lwenkobe.*’ This is my mother-tongue. It comforts me when I am crying. It gives me everything that I need, I take it spiritually. It, *ja*, it paves the way of wisdom when I am lost in my way And then it says ‘*phambili ngesiXhosa phambili!*’ Forward with this Xhosa forward! That sounds like an ANC rally. Well it goes to show that even language is politicized. It is a political discourse also ...

The following poem describes the challenges of language in the classroom vividly and addresses the issues and difficulties prevalent in multilingual classes. The teacher shows how pupils are excluded from the dominant educational discourse, not because they do not understand the concepts, but because they do not understand the vocabulary of the question.

What do you see in the picture?

What do you see in the picture?

No one answered

No one understands the question

What do you see in the picture?

Punish those blind fools, who do not answer,

Give them six lashes on the buttocks

Punish them again and again and again,

What do you see in the picture?

All books are wide open,

All eyes are looking at the book,

All minds know what is in the picture.

No one understands the question,

No one answers the question.

No one would have been punished

Had the question been phrased in Xhosa,

Had the answer been said in Xhosa!

Ubona ntoni emfanekisweni?

If the question, “What do you see in the picture?” had been translated into isiXhosa, “*Ubona ntoni emfanekisweni?*” the poet maintains that the frustration and angst in classrooms would dissipate. The sense in the poem echoes Gee (2008) who notes that cultural models, including language choice, exclude certain pupils from participating in academic discourse.

CONCLUSION

Teachers in the Eastern Cape are doubly challenged in school classrooms. Firstly they have to grapple with their pupils' lack of competence in English (the LoLT) and secondly they have to impart content knowledge. The power of language in this instance leaves the pupils in the position of the disenfranchised as they are denied access not only to English (and all the glittering possibilities of advancement the language proffers) but also to sense-making opportunities for learning, as they are not the insiders in the communities of practice of academic discourse.

The aim of this study was to enable multilingual teachers to reflect on their lived realities and to expose possible conflicts and contradictions that they face when teaching in a language that is not the pupils' home language. The poetry unlocked emotions that the teachers had not necessarily dealt with in an open platform. By writing their own poems, and by reading poems written by other teachers, the teachers came to the self-realisation that their thoughts and feelings were valued. They were able to create a common ground among them where there was a sense of safety, trust and solidarity. Through self-reflection they realised that their conflicting perceptions were shared, so they were intrinsically motivated to take responsibility of their own situations and could shift from being controlled to being in control.

Poetry has a unique quality in that it can convert feeling into form through the evocative role of language. The multilingual teachers wrote of the conflicts and contradictions that they experience in their lives and in their classrooms. The themes of power, identity, access and language usage were inextricably interwoven in the poems. The urgency for pupils to gain proficiency in English was considered to be of paramount importance. In contrast, some poems revealed the deeply suppressed suffering which the marginalisation and disempowering of their mother-tongue, both isiXhosa and Afrikaans, has had on their cultural identities. With this came the realisation of how they were colluding in the distancing of pupils from their own identities and vernacular competence, as well as from access to the learning process through their insistence on English and denial of the academic value of isiXhosa. Perhaps the most passionate calls were to retain pride in their cultural heritage. By writing poems in isiXhosa and Afrikaans the teachers demonstrated that they felt they could express emotions in their home languages more eloquently than they could in English, and implicitly realised the constrictions experienced by their pupils in class.

Once teachers acknowledge the conflicts and contradictions they face in multilingual teaching and learning, the next step is to research language choices and strategies that could creatively utilise the power and impact of languages, both English and their home languages, so that access is enabled and identity retained and celebrated.

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