

English for All: Repositioning English across the curriculum

Doreen Spiteri
University of Malta
doreen.spiteri@um.edu.mt

Abstract: The curricular reform underway is ostensibly aimed at providing an equitable education for all which acknowledges the different pathways learners may take and their different rates of development. Additional contenders for the reasons behind the reform lie in the acknowledgement that schools could be delivering more to improve results on international examinations and to increase the numbers of qualified school leavers as well as the numbers of those continuing into post-secondary and tertiary education. To achieve this, the discourse of teaching and learning is being reframed as one of outcomes of learning. While there are potential benefits in competency-based models of education, it is here argued that a part-solution to the problems that prompted the reform might lie in improving students' academic literacy skills. In an educational context where several school subjects are mediated through English, where classes are increasingly multilingual, where post-secondary and tertiary education is mediated through English, where mobility is a growing trend, focussing on academic literacy skills is a worthwhile goal.

Keywords: English; learning outcomes; academic literacy; secondary education.

Introduction

At the time of writing, the Maltese educational system is experiencing much reform – one ostensibly prompted by a desire to render education meaningful to all learners through different pathways, achieved by meeting learners where they are and taking them forward at their own pace. Alongside this discourse, another dominant discourse relates to the general state of health of education in the country (despite the above-EU average public expenditure on this sector). School absenteeism is still high, early leavers from education and training stands 8 percentage points higher than the EU average, and poor PISA, PIRLS and TIMMS results see around a third of Maltese students classed as underachieving in

Reading, Maths, and Science compared to the EU average of around a fifth. With this as a backdrop, Malta is introducing reforms to meet the targets of EU2020 which sets 15% as the acceptable level of low achievers. Reforms that seek to improve the quality of learning and provide equity are laudable and incontestable; the means, the accelerated pace, and the contextual requirements, however, are questionable.

The changes are two-pronged: on the one hand, there is an overarching curricular reform and a corresponding assessment reform. The curricular reform has generated a re-write of the existing curricula and a reconceptualization of learning and teaching based on outcomes or competencies – an approach to lesson planning long embraced on the initial teacher education courses at the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta.

Change is often anxiety-making and multiple changes in the span of a few years are stressful particularly when it is not teacher-initiated but a matter of compliance. ‘Initiative fatigue’ (Fullan & Quinn, 2015) could very well set in when too many changes happen at once.

A curriculum for English (and all other subjects) for Years 7 and 8 published in 2012 had been in existence for only a few years when the move toward a learning outcomes framework was started. That curriculum had seen the collaboration of subject coordinators and several teachers, led by the Education Officers, on a programme that revolved around differentiated attainment targets, and indicators of learning outcomes at eight levels. Requirements as to the pedagogical approach were laid down, and a choice of teaching and assessment materials provided while allowing for the use of teacher-made material. The next step was to have been a similarly-designed curriculum for the secondary years (Years 9, 10, and 11), however with a new framework in the offing, this step was put aside. The Learning Outcomes framework again necessitated considerable input from those leading English in state schools, namely the Education Officers, subject coordinators and teachers who strove to render the lists of learning outcomes more useful for differentiated teaching by breaking down each outcome into three levels of difficulty and adding lexical areas which were missing in the original document.

A curricular reform that puts learning and the learners at the centre of its operations is a worthwhile one, however, there is some cost not only in terms of change fatigue but also to curricular developments for the secondary years (Year 8, 9, and 10) whose curricula are still awaiting an overhaul.

Alongside the change to the curriculum is the reform in assessment. This marks a paradigm shift that raises classroom-based assessment to a formal level as now continuous assessment finds a place on the podium alongside formal, end-of-

year summative examinations. Described as School-Based Assessment, this sees teachers recording instances of student achievement of learning outcomes through a form of assessment carried out in class. Their judgement is formally recorded and it contributes to the end-of-year mark.

It can be argued that SBA came too close on the heels of the curricular reform. Teachers and schools need time to absorb change and develop confidence in new ways of doing things. Allowing a transition period that consolidates the handling of the new outcomes-based curriculum before formalising teacher assessment, was probably necessary. The speed of adjustment might see teachers turning continuous assessment into mini-tests, a practice that does not tally with the rationale for the reform which seeks to monitor student progression in diverse ways. This need to slow down the pace of change will become even more acute when the new system is phased in in Years 8, 9 and 10 when the most striking reform will take effect. The English examinations set by the MATSEC Examinations Board, broadly aimed at school leavers aged 16, will no longer be wholly external to schools as now a coursework component has been added to the examination. Furthermore, it will no longer be an exit examination measuring achievement at the end of compulsory secondary education since measurement of candidates' abilities will start to be collected from Year 9 – three years ahead of the formal examination sitting at the end of Year 11. It is curious, however, that while countries such as England, are reducing, if not outright eliminating, teacher assessment from formal examinations, in Malta we are embracing it.

A gap in the curriculum

The purpose of this article, however, is not to evaluate the new SEC examination system and the implications for reliability, credibility, gender differences in achievement, age-related competencies, cognitive and emotional preparedness, and other pertinent considerations. Neither is it an evaluation of the processes and procedures adopted in the writing of new examination curricula which seem to be characterised by a scramble against time and by decisions taken on the fly.

The purpose is to question whether this upheaval in curriculum and assessment has addressed the right issues that will 'raise the unacceptably high level of low achievers and ensure an increased participation rate in post-secondary and tertiary education' (www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/pages/about-the-framework).

A key phrase in the Learning Outcomes Framework is the reference to 'parallel initiatives in compulsory education' (ibid. p. 1). These initiatives are important national policy documents, strategy documents, language policies, a national country profile, curricular provisions such as Core Competencies Programme, the End of Secondary School Certificate and Profile, and others. However, these

documents seem to have remained parallel to and not embedded in the new curriculum framework. Importing lists of competencies from European recommendations does not make for an ecologically valid curriculum model relevant to local needs and the local context.

An aspect which should underpin any curriculum is the recognition of the role of language in all learning. Language is central to learning; some have even asserted that 'language is the curriculum' (Derewianka, 1990, p. 3; Derewianka & Jones, 2012). Before expounding on this, however, some aspects of the use of language in schools in Malta will be discussed.

Some background - language use in schools in Malta

There is a substantial amount of research that has sought to describe the use of language that goes on in classrooms in Malta. Broadly, it is known that in Independent schools, the language of schooling is predominantly English, and it is a school policy that is avidly adhered to. In both State and Church schools, the language of schooling is predominantly Maltese and teaching is driven by meaning-making, and the mixing of Maltese and English is common in content subject lessons. Teachers will typically use English for printed materials and slides and deliver the lesson in a mixture of Maltese and English in ways that maximise learning (Camilleri-Grima 2016, Mifsud and Farrugia, 2016).

The issue is a complex one weaving affective factors (as language and identity are hardly neutral factors) with pedagogical considerations (teachers want learners to learn). Good intentions, however, do not necessarily translate into best practice and teachers may not be using the two languages in a principled way (there are no guidelines that, for example, show how to gradually, over the span of a school year, withdraw codeswitching support).

In addition, a national seminar (Fenech, 2009) seems to have concluded that limited competence in English was a significant variable in the teaching and learning of content subjects and the 2012 National Curriculum Framework stepped back from the 1999 curriculum policy regarding which school subjects were to be taught in English and which in Maltese. The issue was postponed on the promise of a language policy which indeed materialised in 2016 for the Early Years. A policy addressing post-primary education will now need to factor in the remarkably changed linguistic landscape in Maltese schools which is now decidedly multilingual. At the end of the 2017 school year, one in every ten students was foreign, and the number had doubled over five years. The percentage is striking in itself and the exponential growth even more so as policy and provision had, and still have, an understandably difficult time keeping up. During this school year 2018-2019, 869 learners received language support at the

Migrants Unit alone (J. Farrugia-Buhagiar, personal communication 12 September, 2019).

On the basis of four considerations therefore, it is proposed that there needs a clear intent to make English the medium of instruction. Firstly, the lack of clear guidelines in the new curriculum regarding the choice of language of instruction. Secondly, the sufficient evidence that in most State schools content subjects are taught via a mixture of Maltese and English and this not in a responsible way (Lewis et al, 2012). Thirdly, the findings regarding codeswitching and translanguaging, together with research on attitudes to Maltese (Vella, this journal) indicate that the Maltese language is not under threat, and finally, the multilingual composition of most classes in Maltese state schools. These considerations, among others, point to the need to reposition the English language more centrally in the curriculum.

The centrality of language in the curriculum and in learning

It was Halliday who in 1993 proposed a theory of learning based on language because learning language is the foundation of learning itself and all learning is mediated through language. Learning is “a process of making meaning” and ‘the prototypical form of human semiotic is language” asserts Halliday (1993, p.93) and a theory of learning must, therefore, be built around language because “educational knowledge is massively dependent on verbal learning” (ibid p. 93).

Throughout the school day, teachers and learners communicate through spoken and written language to perform a variety of tasks and achieve numerous communicative acts in the process of learning. Halliday’s description of the relationship between language and education as threefold: (1) learning language, (2) learning through language, and (3) learning about language, is an enduring one. In early years and primary level education, children embark on a process of learning both spoken and written language that gradually grows in complexity. Learning through language refers to the inalienable fact that learning school subjects is mediated through language. In their secondary and post-secondary education, they encounter subject-specific language and begin to learn language that has characteristics particular to the subject. The third category that Halliday proposed – learning about language – refers to the explicit study of a language or second and foreign languages. Language is central to learning because ‘language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge’ (ibid. p. 94).

The writings of Vygotsky (1987) on the developmental nature of language point to the scaffolding that learners require as they gradually master the academic language associated with subjects and disciplines. Similarly, Halliday (above) speaks about learning through language. Academic literacy refers to the oral,

written, auditory, and visual language proficiency required to learn effectively in schools. The term academic has been misinterpreted by some as a literacy associated with tertiary education, however, academic literacy is closely related to schools and the language of schooling. Vygotsky's influence on the work of Gibbons (2009), for example, translates into classroom practices that support the language development needed for learning and map out a trajectory that sees students moving from informal, conversational language to more academic, sophisticated and subject-specific language. The key is scaffolding that sees teachers not settling for one unchanging form (both in type and quantity) of language support, but choosing one that thoughtfully moves from considerable support to less, so that students gradually develop the required level of comprehension and skills acquisition associated with the content subject.

Theory of language

Language, however, has been conceptualized in different ways over time (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014) and the authors provide a review of these. However, for the purposes of this article, the emphasis will be on those perspectives that see language as *social action*, described as the most recent perspective by the same authors but one that respects antecedent theories of language which stressed the role that function and form have for successfully shaping speech and using language.

Language as Action views language as 'an expression of agency' that cannot be separated from all human action and 'can be defined as the ability to act' (van Lier & Walqui 2012, p. 4). When applied to language learning this view rests on the assumption that language is supported by social activity. I have chosen to focus on this as it resonates with recent local curricular reforms that place the learner and the learning that they will take away with them, at the centre. It is also connected to pedagogical approaches such as content-based, project-based, task-based and experiential teaching and learning – which are at times expressly stated and at others implicitly stated in the *Educators' Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment* (2015). Language as Action, when applied in a context where learners' home language is different from the school language, means that learners:

engage in meaningful activities (projects, presentations, investigations) that engage their interest and that encourage language growth through perception, interaction, planning, research, discussion, and co-construction of academic products of various kinds. During such action-based work, language development occurs when it is carefully scaffolded by the teacher, as well as by the students working together. The goals and outcomes specify academic and linguistic criteria for success, and the road to success requires a range of focused cognitive and linguistic work, while at the same time allowing for individual and group choices and creativity (van Lier & Walqui, 2012, p.4).

The pivotal role of language in education becomes critical and is tied to issues of equity and social justice in contexts where the language of the home and the school are different. All that has been said about the centrality of language to learning, becomes an even more complex matter where the meaning-making that is so central to learning takes place in a bi /multilingual setting. For all learners, but especially for those from a socially disadvantaged background, mastering the language of schooling and developing academic literacy becomes an issue of equity. 'Mastery of the language of schooling is essential for developing in learners those skills that are necessary for school success and for critical thinking. It is fundamental for participation in democratic societies, for social inclusion and cohesion.' (Council of Europe, 2015).

It is here argued that the roles of Maltese and English and that of English as a medium of instruction in Maltese schools deserved to be addressed far more visibly and thoughtfully integrated in the new curriculum framework for the reasons given above and by implication because of their relationship to learners' achievement, progression to post-secondary education, and preparedness for becoming global citizens and lifelong learners among others. The case will be made for embedding a focus on English literacy as a whole-school endeavour across the curriculum and not solely as the responsibility of teachers of English.

Literacy across the curriculum

Post-primary education is characterised by subject compartmentalisation. An entire culture is built around school subjects often viewed as domains of learning distinct from each other. The whole of education from teacher recruitment to timetables to professional development is often organized by school subject and demarcation lines are drawn around the various disciplines (mathematics, biology, general science, physics, chemistry, history, music, business studies, etc.). Traditional thinking in many educational contexts assumes that content subject teachers teach content and English teachers teach English.

However, literacy is essential for success in all subjects and cannot be the sole responsibility of the English teachers. This concept and practice can be found in diverse educational contexts ranging from those where the home language and the language of schooling are one, to those where the students come from a variety of home languages and English is the medium of instruction. There is a general consensus that literacy skills are vital in all school subjects and supporting students' literacy skills is an all-school concern. There is also no doubt that school subjects belong to disciplines, and each discipline has linguistic characteristics unique to itself, and it is precisely this uniqueness that requires all teachers to be teachers of academic literacy in their subject. Essentially, this

approach requires the addition of language learning outcomes alongside subject-specific learning outcomes.

It is widely accepted that academic language is fundamental to school learning and the definition below, provided by Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2014) brings together the views of several others: “In general terms, academic language refers to the language used in school to acquire new or deeper understanding of the content and communicate that understanding to others (Bailey & Heritage, 2008; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2013; Gottlieb, Katz, & Ernst-Slavit, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2004).”

There is also consensus on academic language as different from everyday language, that is, it is not a special use of everyday language, but a different one that also implies a different way of thinking. The notion of thinking like a mathematician or geographer or scientist arises from the particular characteristics of these and other disciplines, and success in these disciplines hinges on an ability to access and use the specific linguistic features associated with the disciplines. Developing these abilities and skills makes for academic literacy and encourages learners to make connections beyond the classroom and the school subject to the wider context outside the school. Furthermore, this notion of taking on personas almost (a mathematician, a historian) mitigates the issues with identity and attitude that sometimes arise when learners operate in a language that is not their home language and which is sometimes perceived as a barrier rather than an enabler.

Subject-specific literacy demands

A task that is sometimes used with students who are learning how to become language teachers, consists of putting them in the position of language learners themselves as they experience learning a language they are completely unfamiliar with. The purpose is clear; the unfamiliarity of the language, the demands on one’s concentration and the effort to learn are a sobering experience meant to place the student-teacher in the shoes of a learner. Subject teachers who have undergone several years of study and education in their discipline, might have difficulty gauging how hard the subject is for some learners, and an awareness of the linguistic demands of one’s subject and a conscious targeting of these is a first step towards supporting learners. The subject specific literacy and language demands are broadly presented below.

Subject-specific literacy and language demands

Most teaching and learning has recourse to coursebooks organised around topics or areas for learning using linear texts: the length of these texts, the particular genre (lab report) the structure of the texts - how they are organised, the cohesion

of the text and coherence of ideas; the type of text (factual [science] / abstract [democracy]/ informational, procedural [how to collect soil samples]); all contribute to the cognitive challenge of texts – both in reading and in producing them.

The teaching of many content subjects contains non-linear texts such as diagrams, graphs, photos, charts, tree diagrams, symbols, timelines, cycles, flow charts – which not only need to be read in particular ways but also written about and spoken about using subject-specific language. The drive for multimodal texts nowadays sees teaching materials containing a mix of print, visual and digital modes.

There are also discourse functions that are achieved by texts and through discussions, such as: comparing, classifying, determining cause and effect, asserting, hedging, hypothesis formation, reporting, describing, naming, defining, explaining, exemplifying, arguing, supporting, assessing, evaluating, recounting. These and other functions capture the purpose that underpins texts and discussions and which is determined by the audience for whom the text is intended. At the level of the sentence, learners will find that sentences are often complex, made up of a main clause and subordinate clauses, held together by conjunctions that are not typically used in everyday language (*The energy of the electrons is converted to heat or light as the electrons make resistors run.*). Discourse markers such as *however, therefore, probably, as a result* also make up aspects of academic literacy.

Nominalisations occur frequently in most texts. Nominalisation refers to a way of expressing oneself in academic language in which rather than using a verb, one uses a noun or noun phrase (*This information enables us to formulate precise questions.* vs *This information enables the formulation of precise questions.*)

Also at the sentence level, particular grammatical constructions characterize particular disciplines: passive constructions, (*Hydrochloric acid was added to the mixture*); present tense, (*The earth revolves around the sun*); past tense, (*The Knights settled in Malta in 1530*); imperative, (*Pour 100 ml of distilled water into the beaker*).

Finally, the more obvious linguistic feature that stands out as being particularly specific to different disciplines is the vocabulary. There are three aspects to this; firstly, there are words and phrases used in the disciplines that have a different meaning to that understood in everyday life (e.g., *table, remains*); secondly, there is general academic vocabulary used across disciplines (e.g. *compare, analyse, evaluate*); and lastly technical terms and words closely relating to specific disciplines (*calibrate, erosion, algorithm, artefacts, values*).

Disciplines or content subjects therefore come with a language of their own and for students to make meaning out of their subjects, they need support in the

above areas as necessary. Developing the academic literacy required for deep learning will not happen by itself but will need the sustained, planned and principled support from the content subject teachers who in turn need support from the language specialists.

Support for content subject teachers to support their learners

Providing students with the necessary academic literacy support needs to become routine classroom practice. To achieve the learning outcomes, however learner-centric they are, and however multimodal the recommended teaching approach is, due attention needs to be paid to the language demands as all learning is mediated through language. In practice this translates into subject content teachers adopting strategies characteristic of (English) language teaching to explicitly address the language demands inherent in their discipline if students are to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to successfully complete their secondary school education and go beyond. It would be mistaken to conclude that a drive toward development academic literacy is an add-on due to students' limited competence in the language of schooling.

Although the problem of academic language may be particularly visible or acute for second-language speakers, in fact, we argue that academic language is intrinsically more difficult than other language registers and that thinking about the educational experiences that promote its development is a crucial task for educators of all students. (Snow and Uccelli, 2009, p.114)

The literature is replete with evidence-based practices that subject teachers can incorporate in their lessons to support students in developing the necessary thinking, reading, writing and oral communication skills, as well as lexical resources. To list them all here would be an unrealistic endeavour, however a broad brush statement would put scaffolding at the basis of this change to classroom practices.

The materials (old and new) employed in the teaching and learning of the content subjects are scrutinized for their linguistic demands using tools for analyses as indicated above, and adjusted in ways borrowed from practices in language teaching so that students' academic literacy is steadily developed. This modification and adaptation of materials is not intended to dilute the characteristics of the subject discipline; rather it is intended to add tasks that will lead students to recognise the distinguishing linguistic features of their content subject and to progressively support them on their journey to being and thinking like scientists, geographers, mathematicians, musicians, historians and so forth in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. In some ways, this modification of material is already taking place locally in some classes, although restricted to print material and not overtly directed at increasing academic

literacy. When dissatisfied with the textbook or when needing context-relevant material, several teachers will produce their versions of the text book topics in the form of handouts and worksheets.

Modifying materials cannot but be a collaborative undertaking between content subject specialists conversant in their discipline and language specialists, conversant in theirs. I envisage this as a coming together of subject content teachers and English language teachers who pore over teaching and learning materials and identify points where tasks are added or existing ones modified, to sensitise the learners to the particular linguistic features of their content subject.

Similarly, there are ways in which content subject teachers can adjust their teacher talk. The teacher is often the only source of exposure to specialised language for many students, particularly those who speak another language at home. By modelling the language that is typical of the subject or discipline being taught, teachers can function as a vital model support for academic literacy (Ernst-Slavit & Mason, 2011).

The dominant mode common in Maltese schools during subject content lessons has been to codeswitch between English and Maltese to explain concepts and to elicit answers (Camilleri Grima, 2016). With ever-growing multilingual classes, some of whom speak only a little Maltese and English, the strategy of codeswitching can no longer serve a purpose for all students. Moreover, the research that has found that teachers of content subjects codeswitch during the explanation part of the lesson strongly suggests a reliance on teacher talk to communicate the concepts or learning of the day, when alternative modes could be used. If handled well, with a conscious understanding of its criticality to student learning, teacher talk can be a powerful part of the learning; if handled badly, it can be cognitively challenging and potentially alienating. Once again, it goes beyond the purpose of this article to describe the measures that teachers can take to modify their talk to gradually develop students' academic literacy skills, suffice to say that a methodical approach recorded in a study (Mifsud and Farrugia, 2016) in which a teacher of science gradually increased her use of English in the classroom, was reported as having been well-received by the students.

Co-planning – dovetailing across the curriculum

The collaborative undertaking described above comes with challenges, however, these pale into insignificance when compared to another level of collaboration in the interest of learners' academic literacy: co-planning between the subject content teacher and the English language teacher. I say it is challenging not per se, but because most practitioners at most levels of organisations tend to work

independently, and yet there is so much to be gained through cooperation with colleagues.

The linguistic features of content subjects materials described above (textual analysis, genre-writing, vocabulary learning, discourse functions etc.) appear also in general English lessons though clearly qualitatively different. The English curriculum contains some learning outcomes that are similar to those found in the subject content curriculum. Whether it is in semantic areas (the environment; the world of work; healthy living), or skills (writing a report, writing an account, presenting a point of view in a debate, giving instructions for carrying a process, reading articles and reports, listening to a geographer talking about rain forests), or grammatical constructions (noticing and practising the use of passive tenses in newspaper reports, or the first conditional to practise talking about what will happen if we continue to burn fossil fuels) there is some common ground and potential for dovetailing general English lessons and content subject lessons. For this to happen, some co-planning is necessary. At a basic level of co-planning, content subject teachers will share their plans for the year (their schemes of work) with the teachers of English who, within the realms of possibility, will adjust the timing of their own scheme of work to match that of the content subject teachers. In this scenario, the teacher of English will tackle the language of reports (factual/ using of passive / nominalisations / formal) before, for instance, the Chemistry teacher broaches the task of writing laboratory reports. Similarly, before the Geography teacher embarks on the topic of 'world water shortage in fifty years' time', the English teacher will be tackling the form and meaning of 'will' and 'going to'.

Benefits of this level of collaboration are to be had on the linguistic level and also on the cognitive level. The more bridges that students can build between subjects and the more cross-curricular links there are, the more coherent and connected the learning. Indeed, one of the ways of working towards academic literacy requires that students encounter the same topic in their general English lesson before dealing with it in their content subject lesson. For example, students could be reading about and listening to and debating global warming in the English language class followed by a lesson on global warming in the Science class.

This kind of co-planning is not complicated as it entails shifting around teaching blocks that are already planned for and it does not require neither the subject content teacher nor the English language teacher to effect any changes to the planned lessons or materials. It does require a meeting at the start of the year to co-plan the timing of some units of learning, and this is a form of cooperation that entails a new way of doing things and possibly a cultural shift.

ITE and COPE

The compartmentalisation of subjects and disciplines described above is a feature not only of post-primary education but also of initial teacher education courses all over the world. The various disciplines are, invariably, organised in distinct strands representing school subjects. It is hard to move away from a paradigm that has been practised for decades in a great many educational settings. However, the Master's in Teaching and Learning offered by the Faculty of Education – a two-year initial teacher education course – has factored into the programme a series of issues that bring together all student teachers. This part of the MTL course seeks to cut across subjects and tackle issues that are of whole school concern and one of the themes tackled is Language Across the Curriculum. This term is very similar conceptually to Academic Literacy (it preceded it) and as the theme unfolds through lectures and tutorials, student-teachers learn about academic literacy and content subject specific demands. They also go through an activity meant to raise their awareness of the language issues surrounding the teaching and learning of content subjects and they are introduced to a few simple strategies that content subject teachers can adopt when planning their lessons.

Moreover, science student teachers are encouraged by their lecturers to factor in the language objectives when designing their lesson plans. Some lecturers recommend inserting a column in the scheme of work for a particular class in which, following an assessment of their learners' language competence, the student teachers plan to scaffold the spoken and written English to be employed in their science classroom and also plan how this will be reduced over time. The scaffolding approach may include extent, type of, as well as support for writing science experiment reports (such as by progressing from putting jumbled sentences in order, to filling-in-the-blanks, etc.) (J. Farrugia, personal communication, July 2019).

Further work in this area is needed if beginning teachers are to become aware of the linguistic demands of the subject they will be teaching. This should then be followed up in professional development sessions in the schools where far more targeted and specific work can be done to address the particular literacy needs of the learners. The Communities of Professional Educators' sessions are the perfect ground on which English language teachers and subject content teachers can meet to devise professional development sessions that cater for their needs. It would be mistaken to think that a focus on academic literacy benefits students only in their content subject lessons; any gains they make will feed back into their English competence.

There are many instances of such collaboration in schools documented in the literature and any such endeavour would do well to learn from the processes and

procedures that other teachers have adopted and then adapt them into our own culture and way of doing things. I have found over the years from my work with student teachers and teachers that there is a tendency to expect fool proof and watertight solutions to problems or that innovative ways of teaching must work well, if not, then discard them. In the complex world of schools that we operate in, not least because we work with adolescents, there are some central principles that guide us but there are many others regarding which we need to be flexible. What works with one group of learners might not work with another; and what went down well one year, might no longer be valid another year. I believe that for the collaboration that I am suggesting between the English specialists and the subject content teachers to be successful and satisfying, our expectations need to be realistic, the workload must be sustainable, and above all the process must not be rushed.

Conclusion

The discussion has revolved around pedagogies in the secondary school sector, however, the pivotal role that Primary school teachers have cannot be understated. They are key to exposing learners to English throughout the school day, however this role is compromised if they themselves are outside their comfort zone when speaking English and consequently relegate the language to a subject on the curriculum. There is some evidence that the limited English language skills of some Primary school teachers is of concern. When schools replace the class teacher with a subject specialist for English lessons, it is indicative of alarm bells ringing but unfortunately, the measure is not a solution. The essence of Primary education is the holistic approach afforded the class teacher who can make connections across the curriculum virtually seamlessly. For instance, the scientific concept of weight cannot be divorced from language (heavier, heaviest) and to teach them separately would be misguided.

Writing this paper arose from a concern that the massive overhaul in education that is currently underway has not addressed a crucial factor underpinning all learning – language. It has been argued that a contextually sensitive reform will not only acknowledge the centrality of language as the basis of learning but also tackle it frontally by embedding it in the Learning Outcomes Framework and laying out the conditions that will make it possible for teachers of all subjects to support their learners’ academic literacy needs. This is still feasible and achievable if we wish to offer a culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum.

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