

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION¹

AIM:

To draw general conclusions from the research findings, to critically evaluate the research, and to derive implications for clinical practice and future research.

“Evidence based practice ... is in essence, the science part of the art and science of therapy” (Threats, 2002:xvii)

11.1 Introduction

The current strong trend toward evidence-based practice places strenuous demands on the collaborative therapist-teacher team in multilingual pre-schools. What was previously recognised as “best practice” is now required to be tested and evaluated. ECD practitioners have to follow the clinical research literature in order to evaluate the relevance of the findings and make informed decisions to the benefit of the families and communities they serve (Bothe, 2004:3). The current research in hand aimed to render results concerning language assessment that can provide a basis for decision-making in ECD once these results have been clinically tested in a systematic way.

Furthermore, language research and analysis has for several decades been an ongoing centre of activity for linguists, educators, and speech-language therapists (Hoff, 2005:5ff). The focus of these activities is now increasingly on multilingualism, which has become a global issue (Brown & Attardo, 2005:88). Although language in education will always be a highly politicised topic contextualised by past events and present policies (see for instance Peirce & Ridge, 1997:171, 172), the current research on multilingualism in South African schools and pre-schools, sparse as it is, is directed towards the future and has a decided emphasis on thoughtful application to the benefit of learners. One of the concerns addressed by South African researchers to date is the assessment of language in multilingual learners at various levels of education (Jordaan, 1993; Nxumalo, 1997; Pakendorf & Alant, 1997; Van der Walt, 2001; Van Dyk &

¹ I am indebted to Dr D.C. Swanepoel for the organisation and layout of this chapter.

Weideman, 2003). The link between the political dimensions of multilingualism and practice is often found in the notion of accountability.

The relationship between research and practice, therefore, which is implicit in evidence-based practice, also guides relevant research and accountable clinical practice for speech-language therapists in this uniquely South African framework. This is evinced in the Health Professions Council of South Africa's (HPCSA's) recent statement that "[a] number of the Council's Professional Boards have recognised the importance of quality and timeous research on issues relating to quality and the availability of services provided by the practitioners within their scope" (HPCSA, 2005a:9).

The current research aimed to contribute to accountable, research-directed clinical practice, the first step towards actual evidence-based practice, by investigating and reporting on *the feasibility of constructing a language profile for pre-school EAL learners in a circumscribed urban area*. This research was intended to meet the unique need of the local South African context in a socially and economically justifiable manner (Hugo, 1998:12; Swanepoel, 2005:298). The way in which the researcher set about achieving the stated aim, and the extent to which the task was accomplished, is discussed in the sections of this chapter that follow.

11.2 Conclusions

The aim of the study was achieved through the realisation of specific objectives. The resulting conclusions are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Objective 1 To analyse selected aspects of language data from a group of EAL pre-school learners in an urban setting in South Africa, relating to form, content and use

Analyses of language form, content and use were conducted on language samples elicited from three age groups of multilingual EAL pre-schoolers. Sufficient information could be obtained from approximately 20 minutes of conversational interaction between each pre-school participant and the adult research fieldworker to provide data relating to ten aspects of language form, eight aspects of language use, and nine aspects of language content. The results, presented in chapters 6, 7 and 8, were summarised in Table 6.38,

Table 7.14 and Table 8.30. The conclusion can be drawn that it is possible to utilise language data from one typical conversation interaction between a pre-school EAL learner and a speech-language therapist to obtain information on a wide spectrum of language behaviours. The speech-language therapist may then draw on this information either to assess the language of an individual learner, or to build a database of typical language behaviours for a particular group of EAL learners.

Objective 2 To identify typical language behaviours, if any, to be included in a language profile for these specific EAL pre-schoolers

Based on the analyses, certain typical language behaviours were identified. Two kinds of data were involved:

1. Categorical data describing phenomena that either occurred or did not occur
2. Quantitative data describing phenomena that occurred in a certain measure

Typical language behaviours of the EAL pre-school participants (demonstrated more than once by 80%-100% of the participants in an age group) were identified for nine aspects of language form, one aspect of language content, and six aspects of language use. *Noteworthy behaviours* (demonstrated more than once by 50%-70% of the participants in an age group) were identified for nine aspects of language form, and seven aspects of language use. A *representative range* of behaviour was identified for one aspect of language content. For six aspects of language content and one aspect of language use, a true representative range (-2SD to +2SD) could not be determined as the scores were too widely scattered. For language form and language use, therefore, clinically useful results were obtained, while the results for language content were less useful. Overall, however, these results are valuable in that they demonstrate the feasibility of using language data collected from a small group of EAL pre-schoolers to construct a profile of typical English language behaviours. It is assumed that typical behaviours relating to language content can also be obtained by means of either a modified elicitation procedure or a modified processing procedure, or a combination of both. In principle, the conversation context was appropriate for the purpose of collecting data for a profile of typical language behaviours. The information organized in the form

of a profile can be utilised to plan an appropriate programme to facilitate language development. Such a programme can have two objectives: firstly, to provide activities within areas of strength, that will develop self-confidence and allow learners to enjoy activities in which they experience success; secondly, to encourage and facilitate the acquisition of additional language abilities in areas of relative weakness that are indicated by the profile.

Objective 3 To identify possible risk indicators for typical EAL learners in this particular context by comparing the constructed/created profile to the indicators for Specific Language Impairment found in the literature

A comprehensive pre-school profile (CPP) was constructed to provide an overview of the English language behaviours typically encountered in the three age groups of EAL pre-school participants from a circumscribed urban area. Since the language behaviours identified were very specific, and children with language impairment would clearly perform below children with typical language development (Bishop & Leonard, 2000:22; Nelson 1998:104), these language behaviours were then re-interpreted as a set of *risk indicators*, that is, if a child displays these characteristics, there is a possibility or risk that the child may manifest a specific language impairment. The *CPP*, therefore, was intended to provide information that would enable the researcher to construct the *PRI* (profile of risk indicators). The *CPP* and the derived more compact Essential Classroom Profile (*ECP*) were presented in Section 9.2.1 and Section 9.2.2. The selection of aspects of language behaviour for inclusion in these profiles was based on the characteristics of *SLI* discussed in the literature (as presented in chapter 4). It may be concluded, therefore, that it was possible to identify risk factors for language impairment from the lists of typical behaviours represented in the two profiles, the *CPP* and the *ECP*. Moreover, the *ECP* was developed specifically for the use of pre-school teachers who work in collaborative practice with speech-language therapists. It therefore not only meets the need of the teachers, but also provides the therapist with a tool to facilitate collaborative interaction with teachers.

Objective 4 To compile a set of profiled indicators for Specific Language Impairment and Language Learning Disorder in young (pre-school) EAL learners in a specific urban setting in South Africa

Developmental language indicators from the CPP together with additional indicators of specific language impairment (SLI) obtained from the literature were used to construct the Profile of Risk Indicators for EAL pre-schoolers in a specific multilingual urban setting. The PRI was presented as an example of an instrument to be utilised by the collaborative team of speech-language therapist and pre-school teacher in the designated setting, to enable them to distinguish between learners who display typical characteristics of EAL and learners who are at risk for language impairment and subsequent language learning disorders. The PRI can be described as a set of danger signals (Nelson, 1998:290) that are of special significance for early identification of language impairment and secondary prevention of language learning disorders. The study demonstrated, therefore, that language data from pre-schoolers could be applied to deliver utilisable outcomes for the collaborative practice between speech-language therapists and pre-school teachers.

In this way, the results of this research addressed the unique need of the local South African context in a manner that allows access by pre-schools regardless of their social and economic status (Hugo, 1998:12; Swanepoel, 2005:298). Moreover, a point of departure was created for the development of evidence-based collaborative practice between pre-school teachers and speech-language therapists who share the concern that the language of learning and teaching should be accessible to all learners in order to allow them to develop their full academic and personal potential.

The research results can only be optimally utilised, however, if both the strengths and the weaknesses of the study are carefully examined and considered. The accountable ECD professional can then make informed decisions about harnessing the information to the advantage of young children and their families.

11.3 Critical evaluation of the study

Critical reflection on both the process and the outcomes of completed research ensures the appropriate interpretation of the research results (Mouton, 2001:125) as well as meaningful continuation of the research endeavour, thus ensuring sustainable impact in the case of clinically related research. The current research is viewed as being the first step in an attempt to meet the need regarding locally relevant information on the development of English as additional language in multilingual pre-schoolers and related language impairment evidenced by this population.

Table 11.1 provides a critical evaluation of the study, based on the strengths, limitations and potential contribution of the research design, the nature of the data as well as data collection and processing, the participants in the study and their context (with acknowledgement to Swanepoel, 2005, for the format of the presentation).

Table 11.1. Critical evaluation of the study.

Research design		
<p>Strength The descriptive design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:179) together with the clinical and constructivist perspective allowed the researcher to investigate and draw conclusions from all aspects of language that were encountered during the conversations between the pre-school participants and the research fieldworker.</p>	<p>Limitation The general design for a descriptive study of this nature should optimally include a qualitative dimension to allow for a detailed description of the context and all the role players in that context (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:134, 137-138). These role players were mentioned in chapter 5 (parents, principal, teachers, learners, speech-language therapist). However, it would be valuable to present the perspective of representative members from each group of role-players, in order to provide a better understanding of the specific context (Hammer, 1998; Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:139). Such an understanding would enable the researcher to ensure that the research meets the needs of the community (Hugo, 1998).</p>	<p>Potential contribution</p>
Nature of data		
<p>Strength The nature of the data that was collected ensured a comprehensive view of language as advocated by Damico (1991a) and subsequent authorities in the field of assessment of additional language.</p>	<p>Limitation</p>	<p>Potential contribution The encompassing approach to language provides a prototype for the development of locally relevant language assessment instruments. Although the various aspects of language are described separately, an integrated perspective is obtained when language form and language content aspects are interpreted against the background of language use, as advised by Damico(1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1993) and Owens (1999:5).</p>
Data collection		
<p>Strength Researchers have found that structured elicitation tasks produce more advanced child language than unstructured conversational sampling (Owens, 2001:433). The data collection procedures that were utilised in the current research (summarised in Table 9.1) included both structured conversation and direct elicitation. These procedures enabled the researcher to obtain comparable data for different ages, personalities, and cultures. The data collection was authentic and functional</p>	<p>Limitation The method of data collection may have been restrictive in that it could have included an unstructured conversation and, ideally, language samples should be collected in several different contexts (Damico, 1991b; Owens, 1999:121; Owens, 2001:442). In the present study, however, the data collection activities were planned to be non-intrusive and therefore were restricted to one context only. Moreover, the research fieldworker's clinical experience with young EAL pre-schoolers was that unstructured conversation settings produced very little output on the part of the learners. The learners in the Senior group (age 6-0 to 6-11) may have been</p>	<p>Potential contribution The procedures described in Table 5.2 and Table 9.1 provide a suggested set of procedures for collecting the types of data required in assessment of EAL in multilingual pre-schoolers. Speech-language therapists can utilise the research report as well as the results to plan for collecting representative language data from EAL pre-schoolers in a specific setting, drawing up a profile of typical language behaviours for that group of learners, and assessing the language behaviours of those learners about whom the teacher is particularly concerned. At present, there are neither appropriate tests available (SASLHA, 2003) nor any</p>

<p>(Damico, 1993) in that it took place in the typical pre-school setting, during the school day, with activities typically shared by an adult and a learner in this setting.</p>	<p>an exception, but it would not have been possible to compare their data to data from the two younger groups.</p>	<p>structured suggestions for a set of elicitation and analysis procedures.</p>
<p>Data processing</p>		
	<p>Limitation The processing of data for language content in particular, but also for MLU, produced a high level of variability in scores. Alternative data processing methods or procedures need to be investigated. For MLU, the measures <i>MLU50</i> and <i>MLU5 longest</i> to obtain parity for purposes of comparison suggested by Pan (1994:30 ff) may provide more useful information. Language content may be more profitably investigated by looking at the pre-schoolers' comprehension than at their language expression (Owens, 1999:183). In addition, the pre-schoolers' ability to learn a novel noun could provide valuable information on their knowledge of the category noun (Conti-Ramsden, 2002:253).</p>	
<p>Participants</p>		
<p>Strength The pre-school participants represent a typical section of the pre-school population for a specific geographical area with a great number of pre-schools, so that the results are applicable to a large number of pre-schools with comparable demographics (Naudé, Meyer, De Jongh & Du Plessis, 2000).</p>	<p>Limitation The relatively limited number of pre-school participants limited the potential number of typical behaviours that could be identified. However, the number of typical behaviours that were identified was sufficient to allow for a distinction between learners who exhibit language difference and those who are at risk for language disorder.</p>	
<p>Context</p>		
<p>Strength The pre-school context lends itself to collaborative practice between teachers and speech-language therapists (Du Plessis, Hugo & Soer, 2000), and results regarding typical language behaviours were presented in two forms (CPP and ECP) that would be accessible for both teachers and therapists.</p>	<p>Limitation The fact that data was collected from one pre-school context only limits the applicability of the findings to that context or contexts with similar characteristics. However, the detailed manner in which the research was described ensures that the procedures may be replicated in other contexts (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:88).</p>	<p>Potential contribution The results of this study can be utilised to provide a tool for ECD practice (early identification of language impairment and prevention of language learning disorder) as well as providing basic developmental data. The dearth of basic data as well as assessment instruments in the multilingual South African context has been pointed out by SASLHA (2003) and is experienced regularly by speech-language therapists in practice in all parts of the country. The research results, therefore, address a much-felt need in the local context (Hugo, 1998:12).</p>

The current study succeeded in demonstrating the feasibility of constructing a profile of typical English language behaviours, notably for language form and language use, for a specific group of multilingual EAL pre-schoolers. The information contained in this profile was implemented to propose a profile of risk indicators for language impairment in these pre-schoolers. The three profiles (CPP, ECP and PRI) that were put forward contribute toward developing accountable, evidence-based practice in ECD in South Africa's multilingual urban contexts.

11.4 The way forward

The potential contribution of the study in hand, as indicated in Table 11.1, refers mostly to collaborative practice between speech-language therapists and pre-school teachers in identifying young learners at risk for language impairment and potential language learning disorder. However, the application of the information obtained from the results of this study may be broader. The scope of the speech-language therapist's support services in the pre-school is not restricted to intervention for communication pathology, but extends to the facilitation of language development in all cases where such development is at risk (Wilcox & Shannon, 1999:216). In delivering these services the therapist acts as partner in a collaborative team with pre-school teachers and parents, performing functions of consultation, collaborative planning, shared decision making, and creative problem solving (Wilcox & Shannon, 1996:218; Throneburg, Calvert, Sturm, Paramboukas & Paul, 2000:10).

In all of these activities in the multilingual pre-school the therapist needs to maintain accountability, which depends to a large extent on evidence-based practice. Evidence-based practice, in turn, depends on researchers who provide clinicians with relevant research upon which to base their clinical decisions (Threats, 2002). The results of the current research will be relevant for speech-language therapists who practice in ECD settings, especially those involved in pre-schools in urban areas in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The current results are also intended to be the point of departure for further studies to increase the evidence base.

The implications of the research results for clinical practice and for continued research to support clinical practice are provided in the following sections.

11.4.1. Clinical implications

The research results showed that it was possible to obtain, for a specified group of multilingual EAL pre-school learners, a set of English language data in the form of profiles that

1. Can be used in collaborative practice by speech-language therapists and pre-school teachers
2. Can be implemented for the facilitation of language development as well as for the identification of SLI
3. Can be constructed from language samples elicited by means of methods and materials achievable in all settings and for all budgets
4. Can serve as point of departure for evidence-based practice in assessing the language behaviour of multilingual EAL pre-schoolers in settings where neither the teacher nor the therapist have access to the learner's primary language, and English is the language of mutual understanding.

Speech-language therapists and teachers may wish to follow the same procedures for obtaining language profiles for the learners in their particular setting, or those who work within the Pretoria inner city area may want to use the profiles in their ECD practice. However, they will need to bear in mind not only the materials and the procedures that were used in the current research, but also the conversational dyad. The language samples were obtained in conversations between pre-schoolers (the pre-school participants) and an adult (the research fieldworker). Speech-language therapists and pre-school teachers are often advised to obtain language samples from young children in natural settings and specifically in conversation with peers (Ehren, 2000:219, Kuder 2003:218). In a multilingual setting such as that typically found in the urban areas of Gauteng, however, it is highly unlikely that a conversation with peers will be conducted only, or even mainly, in English. Children often devise their own peer group communication strategies. For this reason, the researcher heeded

Kuder's (2003:218) advice: "The ideal of assessment in a natural setting must be balanced by the realities of the limitations".

11.4.2. Research implications

The critical review of the research in Table 11.1 demonstrates that the current research opened up a large number of possibilities for continued research in a clinical context. Some of the proposed studies will entail revising, modifying, and improving various aspects of the findings reported in this study. Other studies may aim to answer questions raised by the current findings. There are also several ways in which the research can be followed up or expanded. Examples of these possibilities for further research are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Aspects that seem to require *further investigation in order to propose a more trustworthy set of profiles* include the following:

1. The validity of the norms for typical language behaviour at the various ages should be investigated by including larger numbers of participants (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2002:200). The descriptive research design utilised in the current study can be applied and participants from a number of pre-schools with corresponding demographic characteristics can be included to obtain a truly representative sample of the relevant population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:198).
2. The validity of the findings for the various age groups as developmental indicators should be tested by longitudinal developmental studies of one or more groups of participants over a long term (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:183). A particular group, or groups, of pre-school learners can be followed over the three years of their sojourn in the pre-school to determine a true developmental or "acquisitional" profile of language behaviours (Crystal, 1981:22).
3. Ideally, the risk indicators of language impairment should be subjected to stringent research to determine their sensitivity (the rate of identifying true cases of language impairment) and specificity (the rate of identifying true cases of typical language development), that is, the PRI should avoid false

identifications (Bishop & Leonard, 2000:22) Longitudinal studies and predictor analyses (Bishop & Leonard, 2000:24) would be an appropriate approach to investigating the validity (sensitivity and specificity) of the items on the PRI. These studies would, however, have to be conducted in every context where the specific language profile for pre-schools differs from the profile of the original sample population as described by Du Plessis and Naudé (2003).

4. Specific aspects of data analysis need to be investigated. As indicated in Table 11.1, alternative data processing methods need to be investigated for MLU. *MLU50* and *MLU5 longest* (mean length of 50 utterances, and mean length of the 5 longest utterances for each participant) have been suggested by various researchers to obtain parity for purposes of comparison (Pan, 1994:28, 30 ff). Language content, as suggested in Table 11.1, may be more profitably investigated by looking at the pre-schoolers' comprehension than at their language expression (Owens, 1999:183). However, comprehension is more easily investigated in specific structured tasks (tests) than in conversational contexts, as discussed in chapter 5. The pre-schoolers' ability to learn a novel noun could provide valuable information on their knowledge of the category noun, but knowledge of the category verb will probably not be measurable (Conti-Ramsden, 2002:253). Skill in word-learning can be measured by determining the number of presentations required for a learner to retain the new word (Cont-Ramsden, 2002:253).

Further research will provide answers to the following questions that were raised by the results of the study in hand:

1. Current views of the nature of language, which guide approaches to research on language development, include a view of language as a social behaviour (Hoff, 2005:12) and this places the focus on children's language use. The *PRI*, therefore, may engender some interest among researchers following this trend. The question raised by the results of the current research is: to what extent would the aspects of language use that the pre-school participants demonstrated have been influenced if other conversational partners had been introduced? The answer to this question can be obtained by rephrasing the problem as follows:

the purpose of the research would be to analyse the aspects of typical language produced in interaction with a specific conversation partner, in comparison to the aspects of typical language produced in interaction with an alternative conversation partner, in the context of the pre-school (De Vos *et al.*, 1998:101). A within-subjects experimental design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:237) would be appropriate in this case.

2. Conversational interactions between real parents and real children are regarded as “the empirical bedrock” of the study of child language acquisition (Sokolov & Snow 1994: 410). In the case of EAL, the interactions probably need to be between children and caregivers in the educational setting, but possibly also between children and peers. However, the latter dyad is difficult to study because of the effect of intrusion on the part of the researcher who records the conversations. There is also a higher probability of non-English conversation. No instances of code switching were recorded in the language samples obtained for the current study. The question to be answered is the following: what influence would the introduction of various conversation partners have on the nature of the language (with regard to code mixing or code switching) used by the pre-school participants? In this case, the research question could be answered by implementing a multiple baseline experimental design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:237) to show the effect of the different conversation settings for a single pre-school learner at different times or during different activities.
3. Research in other settings has shown that story retelling tasks, when presented orally and visually with pictures, yield the longest and most grammatically complete utterances (Gazella & Stockman, 2003; Schneider & Dubé, 2005). The question is: what influence would the introduction of pictures in a story map task have on the narratives produced by the pre-school participants? An alternating experimental design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:237) could be applied to compare the effect of the two conditions (story telling with and without accompanying pictures) on the narratives produced by a group of pre-school learners.

The following suggestions may act as guidelines for continuing the present line of research:

1. Different language groupings and different geographical areas in South Africa could yield different language data and therefore different profiles. It would be valuable to ECD professionals to have relevant information for various groups of EAL pre-schoolers, since it is not yet known what the characteristics of various groups may be. A possibility exists that different languages may exert different influences on the nature of the English language produced by EAL pre-schoolers (Owens, 2001:431). The current study could be duplicated in multilingual urban settings with different language profiles in the pre-schools, such as the Western Cape where isiXhosa would probably be represented more strongly than in Gauteng, and other languages may feature less prominently (see Census in Brief, 1998).
2. In addition to obtaining profiles of typical language behaviour for various geographical areas, researchers in South Africa could also use the data from the studies suggested above to investigate the possibility of language-specific indicators of risk for SLI. If various languages exert different influences on the English used by the multilingual pre-schoolers, the PRI that is intended to be used for early identification of learners at risk for language impairment will also differ. The research for the purpose of determining the possibility of language-specific indicators of risk for SLI would fall within the domain of applied linguistics, and would take the form of descriptive studies.
3. It would be a significant contribution to the development of evidence-based practice if researchers in South Africa could obtain group-specific norms for the general risk indicators listed in chapter 10, in the same way as for the indicators based on language behaviours. False positive identification of learners at risk for SLI as well as under-identification of these learners in a particular context could be avoided on the grounds of such group-specific norms. The norms could be obtained in descriptive studies of the same nature as the study in hand.
4. Child development overall is influenced not only by the child's physical characteristics and immediate environment, but also by the child's personality

characteristics, social factors that impinge on the family, and culturally determined attitudes toward child-rearing and related matters (Herbert, 2003:7). All of these factors could be investigated for different multicultural populations in South Africa, to provide ECD practitioners with potential explanations for learners' communicative behaviour and thus to enable them to plan appropriate intervention strategies. This research purpose places the proposed investigations within the domain of qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004:95). Researchers who plan these studies would need to select or develop appropriate qualitative research designs.

Based on the overview of the clinical and research implications, as well as the critical review of the study, an action plan for language assessment in multilingual EAL pre-schoolers can be proposed. In a situation that is less than ideal, where it is not viable to assess the language of a young child in his or her primary language because the speech-language therapist and/or pre-school teacher has no access to that language, where English is the language of mutual understanding but the child is still in the process of acquiring the basic English for interpersonal communication, it may yet be possible to conduct a language assessment.

By analysing the English language behaviour of the pre-schooler, the collaborative teacher-therapist team may be able to distinguish between language behaviour typical for that population and language behaviour indicative of risk for language impairment. In addition, the teacher-therapist team may be able to devise activities to facilitate the development of English in multilingual pre-schoolers, so that the prospects for the acquisition of cognitive academic language is improved and all learners may have access to the education curriculum.

11.5 A proposed action plan for facilitating language development and identifying learners at risk for language impairment in multilingual pre-schools

The results of the current study may be useful in providing a course of action to the collaborative team of speech-language therapist and pre-school teacher for language

assessment and the facilitation of language development according to the following guidelines.

1. Suggestions are offered for activities to elicit language samples that will provide the language data required for either constructing a set of norms for a particular population, or assessing the language of an individual or a group of children in the Pretoria inner-city area. These activities are listed in chapter 9, Table 9.1.
2. Procedures for analysing the language data obtained from pre-schoolers can be found in Table 5.5a, Table 5.5b and Table 5.5c.
3. The speech-language therapist may use the comprehensive pre-school profile (CPP) (chapter 9) to obtain an overview of typical English language behaviours relating to language form, language content and language use demonstrated by multilingual EAL pre-schoolers.
4. The speech-language therapist and teacher together may utilise the CPP and the essential classroom profile (ECP) (both described in chapter 9) to plan classroom-based language activities aimed at facilitating the development of English language in the pre-school learners.
5. The teacher-therapist team may structure collaboration with parents by
 - a. explaining their role in continuing to develop the primary language or languages in the home, and
 - b. providing them with particulars about the language development activities as well as the content of the classroom curriculum.
6. The speech-language therapist may act as consultant to support the teacher in using the profile of risk indicators (PRI) (chapter 10) for preliminary identification of learners to be referred for language assessment by the therapist.

The therapist may use the PRI to obtain suggestions for areas of focus in in-depth assessment of language behaviour, preferably dynamic assessment. The PRI, together with the CCP, would optimally form part of the speech-language therapist's equipment in the ongoing process of dynamic assessment, which has been found to increase the effectiveness of identification of potential language impairment in children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Jacobs, 2001:217). If an area of

difficulty were identified on the PRI, the CPP could be used to determine which task to teach to the child in order to measure the degree to which this training results in learning (Jacobs, 2001:218). If learning takes place, the presence of SLI is regarded as less likely.

These guidelines may be summarised in the form of an action plan for language assessment and the identification of learners at risk for SLI in multilingual pre-schools in South Africa. The proposed action plan appears in Figure 11.1.

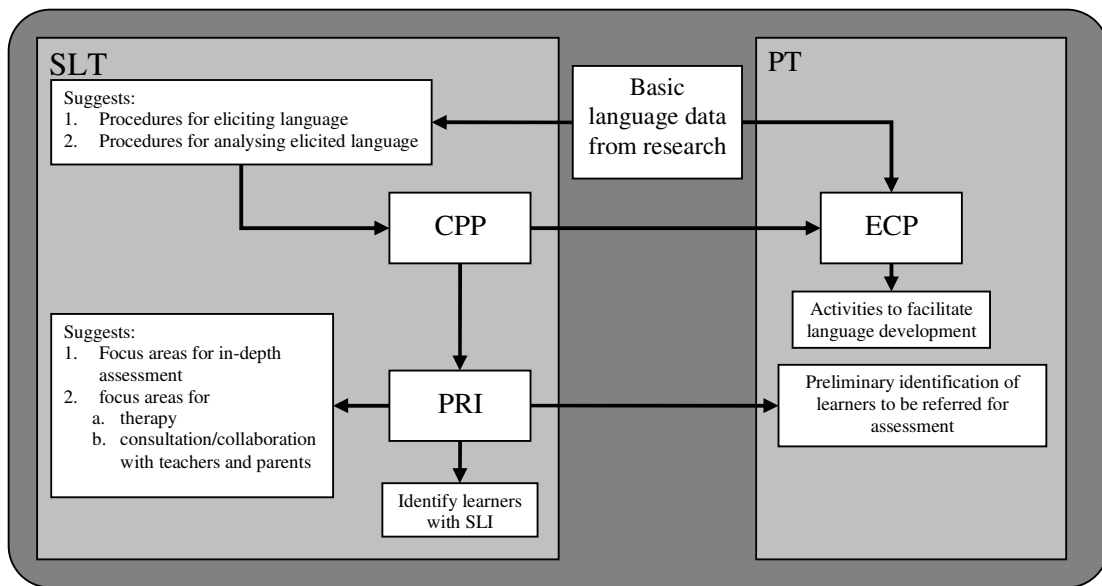


Figure 11.1. Action plan for facilitating language development and identifying learners at risk for language impairment in multilingual pre-schools

Key:

SLT = speech-language therapist

PT = pre-school teacher

Accurate record keeping of this process over a period of time could provide ECD professionals with evidence of effective procedures for their clinical practice. This is in keeping with the view of evidence-based practice as “a method of approaching clinical decision making by looking at relevant specific clinical research and/or by looking through systematic clinical observations” (Threats, 2002:xvii).

11.6 Final comments

Speech-language therapists who work in education settings in various countries have experienced three shifts in their service delivery: from the traditional pull-out model towards a collaborative classroom-based approach (Throneburg, Calvert, Sturm, Paramboukas & Paul, 2000:10), from serving a population with one main language to working in a multilingual setting (Brown & Attardo, 2005:88); and from assuming they were familiar with best practice to meeting the strenuous demand for evidence-based practice (Threats, 2002; Bothe, 2004:3-4).

These three influences – the necessity of collaborative practice, the reality of multilingualism, and the demands of evidence-based practice – have found echoes in the field of practice for speech-language therapists in South Africa (SASLHA, 2003). Bearing in mind Hoff's (2005:xv) caution that "the questions are likely to outlive the tentative answers that the field can provide at this time", some suggestions for assessing language in multilingual pre-schools and identifying learners at risk for language impairment are provided in this chapter. However, some of the suggestions that were put forward may seem to ECD professionals to place new or additional demands on them.

This study does, indeed, extend a challenge to ECD professionals in South Africa: They are challenged "to engage in a growth process prompted by an expanded research base ... coupled with appreciation of the expertise [they] have to offer" (Ehren & Ehren, 2001:234). Speech-language therapists and teachers in collaborative practice in multilingual South African pre-schools have at hand everything they need to provide the pre-schoolers in their care with the best possible opportunity for fulfilment of their academic and social potential. They can do this in an accountable and enjoyable way. This study is intended as a contribution toward that purpose.