

## CHAPTER 3

# MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL CONTEXT

*... young children are capable learners and suitable experiences during the preschool years can have a positive impact on school learning (RSA, 2001a:7).*

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Individual differences exist in the way that learners acquire English as an Additional Language (EAL), similar to the different rate at which learners learn and develop. Variables such as the quality and length of exposure to English appear to influence the levels of proficiency reached (Collier, 1989:509). For academic achievement, learners need to reach high levels of proficiency in English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT), including the necessary language and cognitive skills to construct knowledge and to have their learning tested (NAEYC, 1996:4).

The ability to converse in an additional language (L2) does not necessarily indicate that a learner has the language proficiency required to learn at school. The language proficiency required for school includes all language domains (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics), and all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), which have to be acquired in each domain. In addition, these domains and skills have to be mastered within each learning area (Collier, 1989:512).

Not only is language development essential for the development of cognitive skills and learning, but also for the learner's social development (NAEYC 1996:4). Similar to mother tongue (L1) acquisition, where interaction with the environment occurs because of the need to communicate (Owens, 2001:67;

Bunce, 1995:97; Makin et al., 1995:xxix), L2 acquisition also requires a social environment that provides opportunities to interact with other learners and adults who speak the target language (Green, 1997:150; Tabors, 1997:82; Bunce, 1995:96; Makin et al., 1995:45).

Social interaction, therefore, remains crucial to ELoLT acquisition. To acquire ELoLT, the learner needs to engage in verbal interactions, as these opportunities provide the appropriate input for the acquisition of additional languages. The acquisition occurs most naturally when the process closely resembles L1 acquisition. It is generally believed that preschool learners acquire an L2 through natural interaction, rather than learning the language through direct instruction. The latter approach may at times be appropriate for older learners and adults, but is usually not regarded as the manner of preference in which preschoolers acquire a language (Renton, 1998:32; Makin et al., 1995:xxxi; Nieman, 1995:303; Nieman, 1994:13).

Preschoolers' ability to acquire the proficiency in English that will allow them to follow instructions of school subjects through the medium of English (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:121) requires relationships with adults who can create a positive, non-threatening, language-learning environment (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:45). This implies that the adults involved with L2 learners carry the responsibility for meeting these learners' needs. Considering the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the South African population, this responsibility presents a daunting challenge to all the role-players.

Research indicated that parents or primary caregivers and the home environment are the main influences in a young learner's life, which means that parents or caregivers may be the major role-players in the preschooler's successful acquisition of ELoLT (Dunn, 1993:16). The achievements of learners who have support from their parents or caregivers often differ positively from those of learners whose parents or caregivers show little interest (Dunn, 1993:41). Although the concept of parental or caregiver involvement in education tasks is supported by educationalists, this practice is generally poor in South Africa (Smalle-Moodie, 1997:72; Lemmer & Squelch,

1993:98). Smalle-Moodie (1997:72) suggested that it may be attributed to some parents or caregivers being illiterate, whereas Lemmer and Squelch (1993:98) identified various obstacles to parental or caregiver involvement, such as cultural barriers, language barriers, feeling intimidated by teachers, not knowing what is expected, difficult working schedules, socio-economic barriers, and single parent issues. Cognisance of parental or caregivers' needs and the barriers that prevent them from getting involved in multilingual learners' ELoLT acquisition may initiate and improve communication lines between home and school.

Ideally, the needs of caregivers as role-players need to be addressed by schools. It may be in the multilingual preschool learner's interest if adult education and parental or caregiver enrichment programmes could be offered at preschools, providing information to parents or caregivers and training them as language facilitators. As L1 and L2 acquisition by learners, as well as literacy, cannot be taken for granted, parents or caregivers need to provide language experiences to learners prior to entering formal schooling, as these experiences are the foundation upon which school learning is based. Education begins before learners enter primary school and continues throughout adulthood. Parents or caregivers, therefore, have to establish an early relationship with the educational system. Through the support and guidance of parents or caregivers, interaction between them and the learners may be stimulated to create an L2 learning environment at home.

When learners reach the age of three, their worlds begin to expand and they may enter a preschool setting. Although parents or caregivers continue to serve a primary role, the role of the preschool teacher becomes dominant in the lives of preschool learners who are generally eager to build relationships with their teachers (Nelson, 1998:296). The preschool learner's experiences at school will impact on his or her social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic development. Interactions with the preschool teacher will influence the learner's values, outlook on society, perspectives on family, and connections to the community (NAEYC, 1996:6; Makin et al., 1995:58).

Teachers are viewed to be the most important link in the education of preschool learners and, at the same time, stand central to the difficulties created by new political developments in the South African society (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:124). The present education system places great demands on preschool teachers because of the variety of additional language-learning situations that they encounter in their classrooms. Learners with English as L1 may have to share a classroom with learners who have English as an L2, and with the same or a variety of mother tongues. Teachers are expected to meet the language needs of the group *and* the individual learner, as well as the social needs of each learner (Tabors, 1997:91; Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:146; Lemmer, 1993:89). In addition, teachers are expected to introduce learners to the complex culture of the school in which the learners have to comprehend, among others, computers, electricity, and emerging technology (Macdonald, 1993:18).

Teachers are required to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to language learning *and* teach curriculum content, creating a dual challenge (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:46). Apart from the learners' poor proficiency in English that hampers teaching, some teachers have to teach in English despite it being their own second or third language. Moreover, some well experienced and established African L1 teachers lack proficiency in English (Young, 1995:107). The standard of the majority of these teachers' English will have to be raised to meet the commitment to develop the upcoming generation of learners as proficient English speakers (Macdonald, 1991:19).

Societal expectations of teachers are high. Teachers are expected to implement the decisions of the Department of Education (DoE), among others Outcome-Based Education as teaching and learning philosophy. Other policies that have been introduced include Curriculum 2005, Early Childhood Education (ECE), Inclusive Education, and most recently the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Lewis, 2004:36). To deal with the unique South African multilingual preschool context, teachers are constantly seeking to improve their skills and develop appropriate strategies (Mafisa, 2001:36). It is of the utmost importance that teachers be supported in gaining the

expected knowledge and skills to ensure the scholastic success of multilingual learners.

In the spirit of *Tirisano*, which means working together in SeTswana, and which is also the motto of the DoE (RSA, 2001a:1), speech-language therapists are viewed to be important role-players in ELoLT acquisition by providing strategies and techniques for language learning within the classroom environment. They may add to the general environment for ELoLT learning already present in schools. Through language planning and facilitation with teachers, focused stimulation of specific language features in the classroom may be provided, and language learning activities may be embedded meaningfully within the activities of the classroom curriculum (Hadley, Simmerman, Long & Luna, 2000:281).

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the use of ELoLT in the South African multilingual, urban preschool context by describing the importance of language acquisition for learning in the early academic phases of schooling and the challenges faced by L2 learners; by exploring ways in which the respective role-players can facilitate ELoLT acquisition by multilingual preschoolers; and by providing insight into the specific role of the speech-language therapist in ELoLT learning.

### **3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FOR LEARNING**

An investigation into research on child development issues highlights the fact that language development is a complex process (Owens, 2001:233; Makin et al., 1995:xxi) that involves genetic, maturational, and social factors. This implies that children have a genetic heritage, a biological mechanism predisposing them to make cognitive sense of the world; needs for social interaction; and needs for the acquisition of linguistic rules that could be moulded through interaction with an external environment (Nelson, 1998:89; Makin et al., 1995:xxi). Language forms a part of the child's social and

cognitive profile, and difficulties with language will affect many other aspects of development.

Language acquisition is a lifelong process, but the first five years are the most important for optimal development. From birth to age five, all the rudiments of language are developed as children acquire a great deal of phonology, vocabulary, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics. The process continues when learners enter formal schooling, and a new kind of language development occurs when formal concepts are introduced through the school curriculum. However, if a learner has not acquired functional language by the age of eight, it becomes much more difficult to acquire proficiency in any language. It is generally believed that the cognitive development of L1 continues up to the age of twelve, when L1 acquisition is largely completed (Collier, 1989: 510; 511).

When learners shift from preschool to formal schooling, from oral to written modalities, increased decontextualisation occurs and a shift from situated meaning to lexicalised meaning takes place. According to Nelson (1998:298), the functions of the formal language of the classroom are to convey instruction on reading and writing, to talk about language, to use language to describe procedure, and to convey learning content. Learners who experience problems with the concrete language of the home and preschool will follow the abstract discussions in school with difficulty. It is clear that, without proficiency in the school's Medium of Instruction (Mol), multilingual learners will experience problems with learning.

Language is a set of resources for meaning making, as language, meaning, and thought are closely related (Makin et al., 1995:xxix). Since there is a strong link between comprehension, production, and cognition, the learner's conceptual development is the primary tool for comprehension of the language the learner hears (Owens, 2001:198). Evidence suggests that learners use language as a means of coding their experiences (Thurman & Widerstrom, 1990:97). This coding ability depends upon prior development of

cognitive abilities that enable the learner to organise or process information in verbal form (Thurman & Widerstrom, 1990:97).

Verbal communication or talking means to share information and ideas, to plan, to negotiate, and to create. Language provides a meaningful way by which to share ideas and obtain information – when teachers and learners speak the same language. As they share words and rules to combine words, they can communicate (Nelson, 1998:198). The importance of interactions between teachers and learners is emphasised by the *Whole Language* approach to language development (Schory, 1990:206), which refers to a philosophy about how learners learn language. Advocates of *Whole Language* recognise the importance of all areas of language in the acquisition of literacy. They acknowledge that the four basic communication skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – evolve interdependently and progressively with intellectual development, and that each skill aids in the development of the other skills (Norris & Damico, 1990:212; Schory, 1990:207). While listening and speaking are *the* basic communication skills, the language basis of reading and writing skills is being recognised (Westby, 1990:228).

Learners learn much about reading and writing while they are talking and listening. They learn about reading when they explore writing, and their oral language improves when they read and write. The development of these communication skills during preschool years prepares learners for their biggest challenge when entering school, namely the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Reading and writing are closely related and growth in one area will be reflected in the other. In addition, the skills acquired in the writing process will help the learner to master other areas of language (Schory, 1990:207). It is maintained that knowledge of reading and writing begins long before learners enter school, and critical literacy development takes place during the years from birth to age six. Reading and writing are tools for learning, and failure to acquire these skills renders education virtually impossible (Macdonald, 1991:44-50).

Language exists for the formulation, comprehension, and transmission of meaning. All components of language are simultaneously present and interact when language is used (Norris & Damico, 1990:214). The traditional set of language components includes the five linguistic categories of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Nelson, 1998:26). Bloom and Lahey (1978) viewed the traditional linguistic categories from a different perspective and identified three components, namely language form (phonology, morphology, syntax), content (semantics), and use (pragmatics) (Tabors, 1997:7; Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:9). Language form, content, and use are acquired in a steplike fashion across a developmental continuum. Normal language development involves the ability to integrate these component areas (Owens, 2001:202; Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:7; Mills, 1993:80). To be in command of a language system, young learners need to develop language control, as it lays the foundation for the acquisition of skills such as reading and writing on which the formal school system is based and which are viewed to be important for learning.

The language demands on learners throughout their formal education are high. Failure to reach sufficient levels of language proficiency required for learning will negatively influence the learning process in school. The following section puts the specific language demands on the learner during the early academic phases into perspective.

### **3.3 LANGUAGE DEMANDS OF THE CURRICULUM IN THE EARLY ACADEMIC PHASES**

There is a difference between the language demands of an educational setting and the language demands of the child's home. The learner-to-adult ratio at home will afford the learner with more opportunities for one-on-one interaction with a communication partner. In addition, the emotional and personal involvement at home is much greater than the objective involvement of teachers (Makin et al., 1995:50). During the objective and more formal interactions in the classroom, power differences exist, with the teacher assuming the role of authority by controlling topics, allotting turns, asking



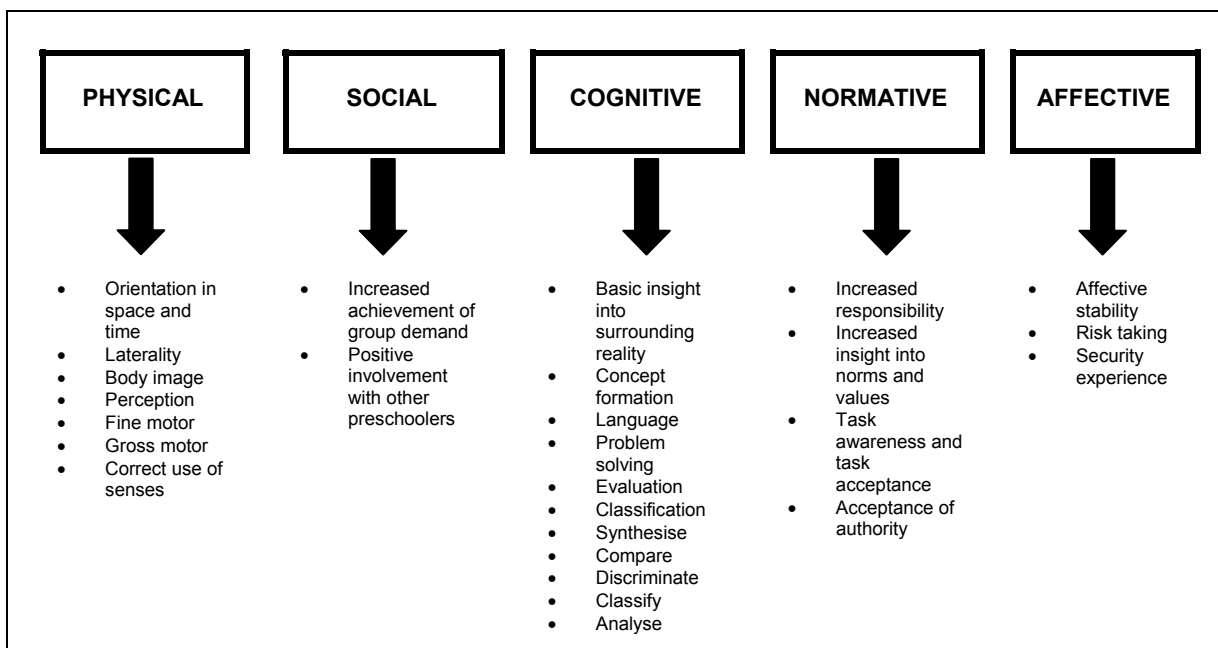
questions, and establishing communication rules (Nelson, 1998:297). As different teaching approaches to language acquisition distinguish the discerning academic phases, it becomes necessary to differentiate between curriculum expectations in the South African preschool context and in the Foundation Phase.

### **3.3.1 The preschool curriculum**

In South Africa, the teaching approach adopted for preschool education entails a partnership between teachers and parents or caregivers to accompany the preschool learner towards school readiness (Erasmus, 1991:116). This short-term goal of school readiness is linked to one of the main long-term goals of preschool education, namely the preparation of learners on affective and social levels for a stable transition to formal education (HSRC, 1988:38). The latter goal clearly indicates that school readiness encompasses much more than the correct chronological age, and that the emotional and social needs of learners must be taken into account when decisions on school readiness are taken.

Central to most preschool programmes are the components of social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development to ensure a holistic approach to the learner's development (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:365; Tabors, 1997:116; Erasmus, 1991:38). To clarify the learning content in each of these components, the structure of the preschool programme, incorporating the aims of preschool education, is depicted in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 shows that the preschool curriculum is developed mainly around the learning needs of learners. Through developmentally appropriate learning activities, learners actively explore and learn about their environment, with ample time for social interactions. (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:354; Tabors, 1997:116). These interactions can be teacher directed or peer directed (Tabors, 1997:117; 118; Erasmus, 1991:91). During social interactions, learners are actively involved in processing information based on patterns that



**FIGURE 3.1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME INCORPORATING THE GOALS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION**

Source: Le Roux (1987:97).

are observed in incoming language, and words are learned in social context (Owens, 2001:119).

Language abilities and concept formation are continuously expanded by teachers in the school's Mol, while preschool learners are involved in activities on a concrete level. The teacher's language stimulation is not limited to a specific lesson, but is totally integrated with the whole preschool day programme. In a similar, informal manner the learner's numeracy and preliteracy skills are developed (Erasmus, 1991:45; 106). Book-handling skills, among others, are encouraged as part of preliteracy development (Tabors, 1997:119), and numeracy development is supported through activities such as sorting, classification, comparing, and counting (Genesee & Cloud, 1998:64).

The holistic, individually focused, and interactive framework of the preschool presents the ideal setting for learners to acquire an L2. In the preschool

environment where learners are encouraged to engage in meaningful interactions with others, L2 acquisition may be facilitated. By including L2 stimulation, the L2 developmental needs of learners may be met and learners' preparation for formal schooling may be improved (Tabors, 1997:115; Nieman, 1995:302).

The acquisition of an L2 by preschoolers is considered to be one of the *Rights of Children* according to the White Paper on ECE (RSA, 2001a:39). However, L2 acquisition presents a challenge in the current South African preschool context, because some learners without any prior knowledge of, or proficiency in English are presently being taught in English (Calitz, 1990:20). As it is assumed that learners at preschool level would be proficient in the school's Mol and that instructions given in class would be comprehended, the learners' poor ELoLT proficiency complicates the teaching process (Diedricks, 1997:46). In the South African preschool context there is often an abrupt transfer to L2, rather than the ideal gradual introduction thereof (Lemmer, 1995:84).

Jordaan (1993:ii) identified the needs of young preschool learners in order for them to cope with ELoLT when starting their schooling. The multilingual nature of the preschool environment, among others, has compelled the current South African government to adopt a strategy of ECE to enhance learning at a younger age (Lewis, 2004:36). In White Paper 5, the current South African government proposed the ongoing development of the preschool curriculum to support and improve teaching practices in the preschool environment (RSA, 2001a:18). One might speculate that the revised curriculum would allow for the development of ELoLT in South African preschools, not only to improve the quality of Early Childhood Development (ECD), but also to reverse the effects of early deprivation and maximise the development of learners' potential.

It is imperative for the DoE to develop an action plan to address the early learning opportunities of preschool learners. While the curriculum for preschools is being formulated through strategic planning, a curriculum for

Grade R has been incorporated with the curriculum of the Foundation Phase (Curriculum 2005) and will be implemented as soon as Grade R becomes compulsory in 2010, as envisaged by the DoE (RSA, 2001a:24). In the following section the curriculum for the Foundation Phase is discussed.

### **3.3.2 The Foundation Phase curriculum**

Curriculum change in post-apartheid South Africa was initiated after the election in 1994, with the main aim of developing a national core syllabus. During 1998, Curriculum 2005 was introduced into schools, and in 2000 its implementation was reviewed by a Ministerial Committee. The Review Committee mainly recommended that the design features of Curriculum 2005 be streamlined and its language be simplified. The curriculum design features were reduced from eight to three - critical and developmental outcomes, learning outcomes, and assessment standards - and expressed the requirements and expectations of learners per grade. They should be viewed as the minimum knowledge, values, and skills required for progression through the school system, and are designed in accordance with Grade Nine requirements when learners conclude the General Education and Training (GET) phase. The Review Committee further recommended that the curriculum and assessment be aligned (what learners should know, demonstrate, and be able to do at each level, and the ways in which they demonstrate their achievement), and that implementation be reinforced by improving teacher orientation and training, learning support materials, and provincial support. In addition, it recommended the relaxation of time frames (RSA, 2002:1-7).

The revision of Curriculum 2005 resulted in a Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for Grades R to Nine and Grades Ten to Twelve (RSA, 2002:2). The principles of Outcome-Based Education (as a teaching and learning philosophy) of Curriculum 2005 were not changed, but the terminology was adapted to be more comprehensible to users. The terminology of the learning areas was changed as shown in Table 3.1.

**TABLE 3.1: THE LEARNING AREAS OF CURRICULUM 2005**

PREVIOUS LEARNING AREA	REVISED LEARNING AREA
Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics & Mathematical Sciences (MLMMS)	Mathematics
Language, Literacy & Communication (LLC)	Language
Human and Social Sciences (HSS)	Social Sciences
Economic and Management Sciences	Economic and Management Sciences
Natural Sciences	Natural Sciences
Technology	Technology
Life Orientation	Life Orientation
Arts & Culture	Arts & Culture

Source: RSA, 2004:4.

As shown in Table 3.1, the eight learning areas originally incorporated in Curriculum 2005 were retained, but the terms for mathematics, languages, and social sciences were simplified. The dates of implementation of the RNCS will be as follows: Foundation Phase - 2004, Intermediate Phase - 2005, Grade Seven - 2006, Grade Eight – 2007, and Grade Nine - 2008 (RSA, 2004:4). The RNCS also gave an indication of teaching time allocations, and stipulated that the formal teaching time during the Foundation Phase should be divided into 40% of teaching time spent on literacy, 35% of teaching time on numeracy, and 25% of teaching time on life skills (RSA, 2002:9). A typical timetable for the Foundation Phase is presented in Table 3.2.

The time allocated to literacy in the Foundation Phase (Table 3.2) indicates its importance in the later academic phases. Literacy skills in L1 build onto listening and speaking skills, and most of the teaching taking place in Grade One depends on these two skills – the basic communication skills (Macdonald, 1991:51). For learning to take place it is, therefore, of the utmost importance to have proficient listening and speaking skills in the Mol. It is assumed that Grade One learners are able to understand and speak the Mol, as the language learning area builds on these skills (RSA, 2002:17).

**TABLE 3.2: TIMETABLE FOR THE FOUNDATION PHASE**

TIMETABLE		FOUNDATION PHASE					GRADES ONE AND TWO							
Weekdays	Period	1	2	3	4	Break	5	6	7	Break	8	9	10	
Monday	Time	7:30	7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13		10:01	10:32	11:03		11:52	12:23	12:54
		7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13	9:44		10:32	11:03	11:34		12:23	12:54	13:25
	Minutes	10	31	31	31	31	17	31	31	31	18	31	31	31
	Reg	Act	Numeracy	Activity	Numeracy			Literacy			Lit	Life Skills		Act
Tuesday	Time	7:30	7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13		10:01	10:32	11:03	11:34		12:30	13:00
		7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13	9:44		10:32	11:03	11:34	12:05		13:00	13:25
	Minutes	10	31	31	31	31	17	31	31	31	31	25	30	25
	Reg	Act	Act	Numeracy	Numeracy	Lit		Literacy			Life Skills		Life Skills	Act
Wednesday	Time	7:30	7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13		10:01	10:32	11:03		11:52	12:23	12:54
		7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13	9:44		10:32	11:03	11:34		12:23	12:54	13:25
	Minutes	10	31	31	31	31	17	31	31	31	18	31	31	31
	Reg	Act	Act	Numeracy	Numeracy	Lit		Literacy				Literacy		Act
Thursday	Time	7:30	7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13		10:01	10:32	11:03		11:52	12:23	12:54
		7:40	8:11	8:42	9:13	9:44		10:32	11:03	11:34		12:23	12:54	13:25
	Minutes	10	31	31	31	31	17	31	31	31	18	31	31	31
	Reg	Act	Act	Numeracy	Numeracy	Lit		Literacy				Literacy		Act
Friday	Time	7:30	7:40	8:10	8:45	9:20		10:12	10:47	11:22		12:15	12:50	
		7:40	8:10	8:45	9:20	9:55		10:47	11:22	11:57		12:50	13:25	
	Minutes	10	30	35	35	35	17	35	35	35	18	35	25	
	Reg	Act	Numeracy	Numeracy	Literacy			Literacy		Life Skills		Life Skills	Act	

Reg - Register  
Act - Activity

LEARNING PROGRAMMES	TIME
Literacy	9:03
Numeracy	7:34
Life Skills	5:46
<b>Total</b>	<b>22:23</b>
Break	3:02
Register	:50
Activities	3:20
<b>Total</b>	<b>7:12</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>29:35</b>

Analysis:	per day	per week
Literacy 40%	2x110=220min 1x99=99min 2x112=224min	543min
Numeracy 35%	1x94=94min 4x90=360min	454min
Life Skills 25%	1x51=51min 2x68=136min 1x74=74min 1x85=85min	346min

Source: Van der Merwe (2004).

In the language learning area, the DoE has specified six learning outcomes, namely listening, speaking, reading and viewing, writing, thinking and reasoning, as well as language structure and use (RSA, 2002:15). The learning area is divided into home language, first additional language, and second additional language (RSA, 2002:17). It is assumed that learners come to school able to understand and speak the Mol, and consequently an additive approach to multilingualism is followed, acknowledging that L1 needs to be maintained and developed while acquiring L2 (Lewis, 2004:37). L2 therefore builds on the common underlying proficiency (CUP) of L1.

The language curriculum further recognises the importance of preliteracy skills and builds on the knowledge acquired during the preschool years and in literate homes (RSA, 2002:22). According to Kriegler (1990:68), one of the most reliable predictors of scholastic success is the learner's literacy development prior to Grade One. Successful learners typically arrive at school with a set of prior experiences and well-established skills conducive to literacy (August & Hakuta, 1998:20). Learners from a reading culture, where caregivers introduced books from a young age, have six years of informal knowledge to build on when they start their schooling. The opposite is often true of learners from developing countries like South Africa, where they might enter school from a disadvantaged environment and where literacy development has to start at the development of basic book-handling skills (Macdonald, 1991:25, 42). The task of reading textbooks at Grade Four level seems almost impossible for these learners. It is known that on Grade Four level learners are expected to have a reading vocabulary of several thousand words (RSA, 2002:52). The cognitive demands of textbooks are high and learners have to use a whole range of thinking skills to comprehend the text. These include skills to match information from the text to life experiences, to predict what is to come, as well as to maintain a grasp on the meaning of the text (Macdonald, 1991:48). Throughout the curriculum, learners have to use language to acquire and demonstrate their knowledge in specific content areas and as a means of enquiry. Classroom tasks involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the school's Mol (Nunan, 1989:10). It is recognised that a language basis to learning exists

and that language proficiency will affect academic success (Meyers, 1993:33).

As language proficiency is an important predictor of scholastic success (Macdonald, 1991:51), language proficiency for school purposes needs to be on a level that will allow learners to create meaning and structure from new information and experiences presented at school. Language ability for academic progress needs to include the development of technical vocabulary and special uses of language required for each learning area, which would allow learners to comprehend the academic content at appropriate grade levels. For ELoLT learners, learning in their L2 may present an obstacle to the acquisition of the academic content at school, as discussed in the following section.

### **3.4 LEARNING IN AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE**

Multilingual learners in urban South Africa are often placed in English-medium preschools to acquire verbal communication skills in English as preparation for learning, reading, and writing (Sarinjeive, 1999:135). One of the purposes of these placements is learning to understand and speak English proficiently for academic success (De Klerk, 2002a:6-7). Multilingual learners who have acquired English by the time they enter Grade One, or, alternatively, when they transfer to ELoLT in Grade Four, will have an advantage over learners who have to transfer suddenly from L1 to ELoLT. In a sudden transfer situation learners will have to acquire Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) simultaneously with Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), presenting a challenge when they have to understand curriculum content (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:42).

Shifting to another language for learning purposes is a difficult task for some learners, as they may experience extreme problems comprehending instructions in class where they are required to have the ELoLT proficiency to use English on high levels of abstraction (Nelson, 1998:298). The high



density of unfamiliar words and their replacement by similarly unknown words usually aggravate these comprehension problems during explanations. Multilingual learners may be confronted with written and oral passages and questions they do not comprehend (Macdonald, 1991:13-17). During assessment, their poor comprehension and writing skills have a negative influence, because they may lack the language skills to comply with the expectations, finding it difficult to pay attention to language form and content simultaneously (Green, 1997:46).

Multilingualism also has an impact on literacy learning. Literary texts present problems as multilingual learners may not be able to apply themselves to literary texts without the basic communication skills (Sarinjeive, 1999:136). Reading or listening to English material may become a burdensome task if learners do not understand the text (Makin et al., 1997:119; Macdonald, 1991:45). Many ELoLT learners often develop skills to read in English without properly understanding the meaning of the text, in other words reading is degraded to a decoding skill without any enjoyment of the content (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:32). Reading for meaning in ELoLT, therefore, presents a challenge to ELoLT learners.

Learning to read and write in an additional language not related to L1 is generally known to be difficult, especially when the L2 writing system is complex and the orthography is deep (Geva, 2000:18). In South Africa where learners have to acquire ELoLT, it is particularly true that some learners experience problems acquiring skills in English because the African languages are not related to English, and English has a complex spelling system (Macdonald, 1991:32; 45). ELoLT learners often confuse the English short vowels /i/ and /e/, /a/ and /e/, as well as /a/ and /u/. Some consonant digraphs in English do not exist in other languages (e.g. /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /kʃ/ and /kw/) and will need special attention (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:32). English does not follow a one letter, one sound system, and learners have to learn the complex spelling pattern of English for growth in writing and the other language skills (Schory, 1990:207).

In contrast to L1 research that indicated the existence of a positive relationship between L1 proficiency and L1 reading comprehension, findings from available research on reading by multilingual learners showed that for some multilingual learners L2 proficiency does not necessarily precede L2 reading development. It appears that for some multilingual learners L2 acquisition and L2 reading are developing simultaneously. Multilingual learners will therefore be able to decode words even when their L2 proficiency is still developing (Geva, 2000:16; 18). Most recently, researchers have explained that through processes like *bootstrapping* (using what they already know to learn more advanced forms of language) and *scaffolding* (imitation of words not fully understood), L2 learners may acquire reading skills in L2 while acquiring verbal skills in L2 (Thurman & Widerstrom, 1990:102).

Kinberg (2000:61) reached a similar conclusion in her study on Immersion programmes, which indicated that multilingual Immersion programme learners exhibited good listening, comprehension, and reading skills in L2, and less well-developed writing and speaking skills (Kinberg, 2000:64). In Immersion programmes, as in many South African schools, learners are placed in schools where the target language to be acquired is also the Mol. The Conventional Immersion Model, where all instruction takes place in the target language and where the Mol is the teacher's L1 or L2, seems to fit the South African context in particular. Although the South African situation is more complex because of the eleven official languages, similar situations exist in countries like America and Canada in that many teachers teach in English (the Mol) which is their L1 (as often found in urban South Africa) or their L2 (as often found in urban or rural South Africa) (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003:123).

Evidence from Immersion programmes further suggests that the exposure to English provided in the programmes may result in learners developing good receptive and expressive language skills in English (Kinberg, 2000:61). In addition, it appears that better L2 proficiency was acquired when Immersion started earlier rather than later in the learners' academic careers (Hoff,

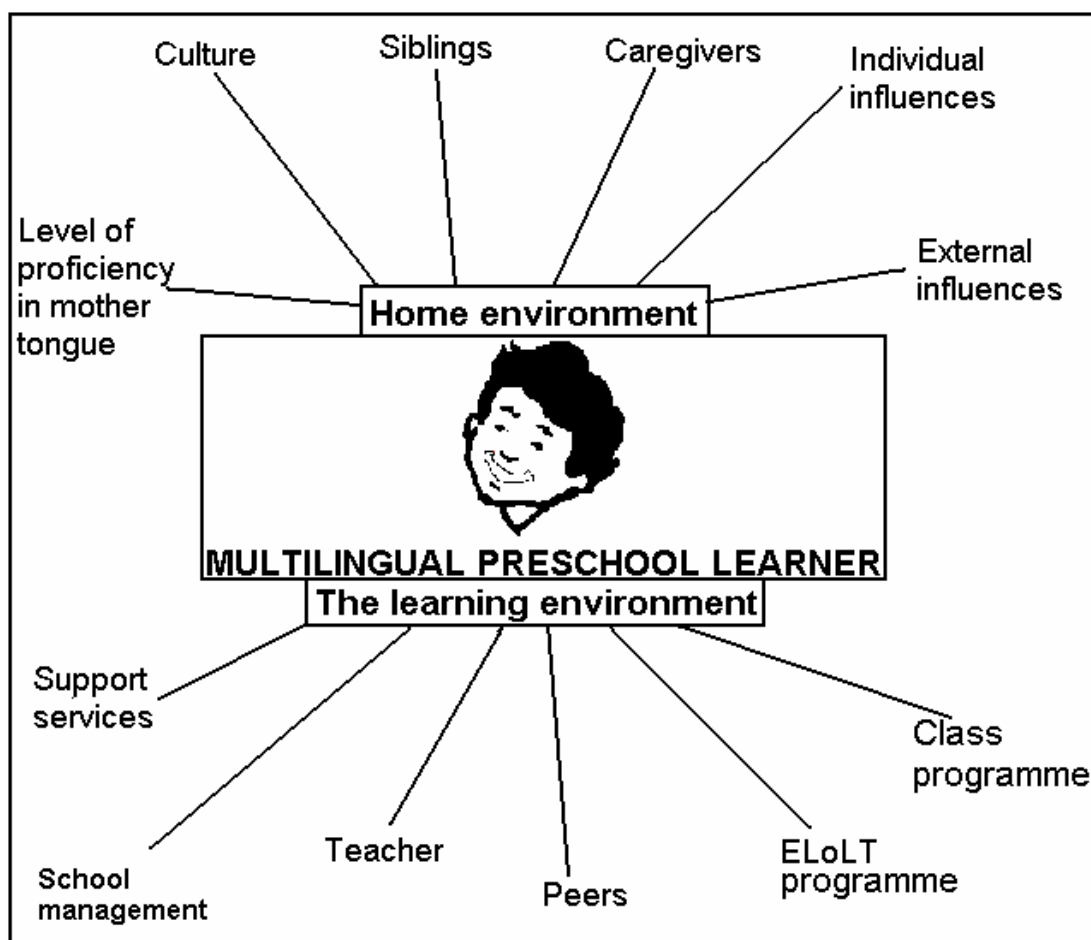
2004:358). When learners are successful in the acquisition of ELoLT through either simultaneous or successive acquisition processes, and cognitive development continues in both L1 and L2, they frequently outperform monolinguals in assessments of cognitive flexibility, linguistic and metalinguistic abilities, concept formation, divergent thinking skills, creativity, and diversity. Even high-functioning, five to six year old L2 learners may exhibit higher divergent thinking, imagination, and reading proficiency than monolingual learners (Owens, 2001:435; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:4; August & Hakuta, 1998:4).

Although learning in an additional language poses a challenge to the learner, proficiency in ELoLT can become a strength, a valuable resource, and an asset. If learners are supported from their preschool years, higher proficiency levels may be reached and their academic achievements may be positively influenced. From the above discussion, it follows that multilingual preschoolers and their specific needs within the multilingual preschool context need to be investigated.

### **3.5 MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS WITHIN THE PRESCHOOL CONTEXT**

Whereas L1 acquisition in learners occurs mostly in the context of social interactions within the family, young ELoLT learners are often placed in English preschools where they have to interact in a social setting as part of learning to communicate in English (Makin et al., 1997:116; Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:186). Figure 3.2 illustrates the home background and learning environment as factors that may influence the preschool learners' language acquisition.

As illustrated in Figure 3.2, ELoLT acquisition may be influenced by certain environmental factors. For Black South African learners, the distinction often lies between the traditional, informal home environment, and the formal Western-type schooling environment. This distinction may include different manners of task completion at school, as opposed to customary ways



**FIGURE 3.2: FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE ELoLT ACQUISITION**

associated with the learners' own culture (Macdonald, 1991:26). The multilingual learner may also experience changes in language demands between the home and school environments. Parents or caregivers provide natural communication situations at home, whereas teachers provide settings for both naturalistic and structured language acquisition at school (Bunce, 1995:97). ELoLT acquisition within the home and learning environment is possible if responsible and responsive adults provide input according to the learners' needs, as discussed forthwith.

### **3.5.1 The needs of the multilingual preschooler**

Although proficiency in English is important, preschool learners do not only have linguistic needs. For optimal development and learning, their diverse developmental (intellectual, emotional, social and moral, physical), cultural,

linguistic, and educational needs have to be addressed. It is postulated that the acquisition of language is an essential need in preschool learners, as it is important to learners' cognitive and social development (NAEYC, 1996:4). Most multilingual preschool learners in South Africa enter preschools with well-developed language skills and knowledge in their L1, as their L1 has been utilised since birth to establish meaningful relationships and acquire knowledge. When preschool learners, whose L1 is not English, transfer to ELoLT at preschool level, they may experience needs in the acquisition thereof. The following needs were identified as important in the process of ELoLT acquisition by multilingual preschool learners.

#### **3.5.1.1 The need for social interaction**

There is a strong social component to the ELoLT learner's adaptation to the preschool classroom (Tabors, 1997:105; Erasmus, 1991:41). Learning to interact and communicate in the classroom is the first step in this socialisation process. Interaction in the classroom may be initiated with single peer interaction and gradually progress to socialisation in the larger group (Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:205). Social interaction, as a source of stimulation and feedback, is viewed to be essential for language acquisition, based on an interpretation of Vygotsky's theories on cognitive development (Meyers, 1993:31).

Vygotsky's theories on cognitive development are particularly relevant to L2 teaching, as he proposed an explicit and fundamental relationship between social interaction and language, and the development of the learner's potential for thought and higher level thinking processes (Nelson, 1998:83). This theory explained language learning as the result of both internal and external factors, determined by the learner's needs and intention. Language learning is described as a process of interaction with the environment as determined by the learners' maturation *and* the input in the language learning situation. From this view, both learners and adults play active parts in language learning (Makin et al., 1995:xxviii; Meyers, 1993:30). Many current approaches to L2 acquisition have developed in response to Vygotsky's

theories. Such L2 acquisition programmes are often based on the importance of socialisation, among others, in language development (Meyers, 1993:30).

The preschool classroom environment is organised to facilitate social interaction (Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:206). In fact, the whole preschool context provides the physical environment for meaningful social experiences. Interaction with teachers and English-speaking peers is probably the most powerful way for ELoLT learners to acquire English (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:34). These interactions foster acceptance and friendship formation, and present opportunities to interact with peers who could provide excellent language models. The English L1 learners function as language facilitators and peer conversation partners as they interact and socialise with their L2 peers. By the age of three, a typical learner has already developed the social and language skills in L1 to fulfil this function (Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:204). Learners with ELoLT benefit greatly from positive interactions with peers, as this social experience is beneficial to the L2 acquisition process. It is through these daily interactions with peers that communicative competence is developed and supported. Under such ideal circumstances the minimum time frame to develop BICS may be two years (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5).

In the South African urban context, the situation is, however, not as clear-cut as described above. In some urban preschools, the English L1 learners are in the majority and, as peer conversation partners, may provide excellent opportunities for social communication with ELoLT learners. Some urban preschools are, however, more multilingual and English L1 learners are in the minority. August and Hakuta (1998:36) believe that, in such situations, language is often the basis for categorisation and the formation of groups where learners speak the same L1. De Klerk (2002b:21) provided insight into the South African situation in her study on language issues in South African schools. She interviewed principals of preschools, primary and secondary schools (private and governmental) to explore how these schools experienced the general conduct of multilingual learners. It transpired that learners with similar cultural backgrounds had a tendency to group together and revert to

their L1 (De Klerk, 2002b:21). Valuable opportunities to use ELoLT socially were therefore not utilised. Where English was the L1 of the majority of learners, English was spoken. The same conclusion was reached by Viljoen and Molefe (2001:121) who observed similar behaviour during their research. They further noted that some South African learners could cope with the informal English of the playground, but not with the more formal ELoLT of the classroom.

As preschool learners spend a fair amount of time on the playground, the social interaction with peers may provide valuable stimulation in ELoLT. The learners' social predisposition may therefore facilitate ELoLT development. Interaction on the playground is relatively free from adult direction and learners may communicate without being self-conscious, whereas some preschool learners may not participate in classroom communication, being too self-conscious of language mistakes in English (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:121). Such non-participation and withdrawal from classroom activities may, however, be indicative of negative influences on multilingual preschool learners' self-esteem (Robb, 1995:16), necessitating the consideration of which influences may hinder the development of a high self-esteem.

### **3.5.1.2 The need for cultural recognition to develop self-esteem**

A high self-esteem needs to be a priority in the social and personal development of all preschool learners (Eloff, 2001:67). Self-esteem appears to be linked to the culture and L1 of the learner, and to deny the existence of cultural differences negates the learner's experiences and serves to undermine his or her self-concepts (Robb, 1995:17). There is an increasing awareness that multilingual preschool learners need to be viewed as a whole, and that a holistic approach - including cultural awareness - needs to be the basis of education for all ELoLT preschool learners (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:365; Tabors, 1997:116; Erasmus, 1991:38).

Upon entering preschool, multilingual learners have to adapt to the learning environment and the changing language demands of the environment, and

often also to a different culture. At this young age, preschool learners have to negotiate difficult transitions between their home and educational settings. For learners entering urban preschools in South Africa, it is often their first experience of schooling. With no prior exposure to institutional learning, the learner may be overwhelmed with the expectations and the routines. The home and school environments may have diverse sets of rules, values, expectations, and behaviours, requiring an adaptation between these settings from the preschooler.

Within the school environment, behaviour such as paying attention and persisting at tasks is valued (McLaughlin, 1992:8). In addition, the classroom curriculum has implicit and explicit rules, and learners have to act appropriately in class (Westby, 1997:274). For the culturally and linguistically diverse learners, the implicitness of how to behave may present an obstacle to their acquisition of the academic content of the school. Learners have to adapt to the school environment to learn, but also have to achieve a balance between the home and school environment to be able to function optimally (NAEYC, 1996:5; Meyers, 1993:6). Their needs may also differ from those of other students, for example they may prefer small group work, peer tutoring, individualised instruction, or visual presentations, or they may work at a slower pace or require explicit instructions (Westby, 1997:274-276).

Often Black learners in South Africa are faced with a sudden transfer from L1 at home to ELoLT when starting preschool (Lemmer, 1995:88). The ELoLT classroom presents a particularly challenging context to some learners with limited English proficiency, as most activities place considerable language demands on the learners who have to understand instructions and follow directions in English. The sudden transfer to English may also influence the learners' self-esteem if they wrongfully conclude that their L1 has no value as no reference is made to it in the classroom.

Under these circumstances, multilingual preschool learners attending English-medium preschools may feel alienated from their culture, as language is considered to be a bearer of culture (Smit, 1993:156). In addition, multilingual



learners lack the childhood heritage – fables, legends, nursery rhymes, proverbs, songs, and games – of the English L1 learners' cultural world which strongly features in the curriculum (Lemmer, 1995:93; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:42). As learners are emotionally connected to their culture, the emotional importance of this affiliation cannot be underestimated and needs to be recognised (Cline, 2000:7).

Cultural differences between the home and school may result in different expectations in terms of communication skills from teachers and learners (Louw, 2004:261). The learners' home experiences may affect patterns of language use and interpersonal styles. Differences in pragmatic behaviour such as talkativeness, the loudness of verbal interactions, the proximity to conversational partners, among others, may be perceived as problematic or disruptive behaviour in class, when, in fact, these behaviours may be part of a cultural communication pattern and are not intended to be disruptive or aggressive (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:123; Kamwangamalu, 1997:248). Verbal skills do not have the same value cross-culturally, and many language teaching approaches, based on studies of White middle-class families, may not match the interaction patterns of learners from other culture groups (Van Kleeck, 1994:67). Cultural differences in communication patterns between teachers and learners may predispose the teachers towards misunderstanding and misjudgement of both the academic and communicative competence of the learners.

Earlier research highlighted the fact that learners from cultural and linguistic backgrounds different to the school's culture and Mol are at risk of displaying behavioural problems. In comparison with typically developing learners studied by Fujiki, Brinton, Isaacson and Summers (2001:108), learners with limited English proficiency showed significantly more withdrawal and aggressive behaviour. Emotional problems caused by alienation from culture and L1 may therefore present as behavioural problems.

A study by Viljoen and Molefe (2001), reflecting the South African urban context, focused on the behavioural problems of young Black learners with

limited English proficiency in an English-medium school and produced similar results. Teachers' and parents' or caregivers' perceptions of the behaviour of learners were investigated, as well as the actual conduct of learners on the playground. Both parents or caregivers and teachers observed aggression, frustration, and swearing, and teachers also observed disruptive behaviour in the class owing to learners being unable to express themselves in English. The negative incidences are unfortunate as the early school years form the foundation for further learning, and negative experiences may adversely affect the rest of the learners' academic careers. The researchers also observed frustration, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms among learners who did not understand instructions given in English. The most important implication arising from the research is that the needs of multilingual learners need to be taken into account for multicultural education to succeed (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:26).

As multicultural education is, and always will be, a given in South Africa, a paradigm shift regarding ELoLT learners is overdue. A culture of tolerance and respect for diversity always needs to be part of the services provided. Diversity needs to be accepted to the benefit of all learners in the classroom. When learners feel accepted and appreciated as individuals, and behavioural problems are understood against the background of emotional uncertainty as a result of language and cultural differences, language learning, in particular ELoLT development, will largely benefit.

### **3.5.1.2 The need to develop language**

To become linguistically proficient and competent in any language requires time and input. Language acquisition occurs over a number of years and requires stimulation and feedback in the target language from communication partners (Collier, 1989:510). Linguistically and culturally diverse learners need to master BICS, which take two to three years to develop, and CALP, which is more dependent on the learning environment and takes five to seven years to develop under ideal conditions (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000:5). An appropriate learning environment is essential for the

development of spoken language abilities across both these spectrums (NAEYC, 1996:8). Language development follows a developmental continuum as children progress from single words to multiple word utterances in their expressive language. Although L1 development continues into pre-adolescence and adolescence, dramatic language acquisition occurs during the preschool and Foundation Phase years. Language develops in three areas, namely grammatical development (language form), expansion of concepts (language content), and appropriateness of communication in particular contexts (language use) (Nelson, 1998:288). As the same language developmental pattern is expected from L2 learners, a spoken language checklist was compiled by Mills (1993) to assess the development of spoken English in multilingual learners, and to provide information on the development of ELoLT over four stages. The checklist is presented in Table 3.3 to highlight normal language development in ELoLT learners.

The checklist summarised in Table 3.3 divides ELoLT development into four stages – for learners new to acquiring English, for learners becoming acquainted with English, for learners becoming confident as users of English, and for experienced and near fluent users of English. The checklist can be a valuable tool in assessing the ELoLT of learners when planning intervention, and opportunities to promote ELoLT development according to the developmental stages in the checklist could be created in an environment that allows learners to interact in English. Preschool learners need to interact, otherwise they are excluded from socialisation, estranged from group acceptance, and barred from learning and language activities.

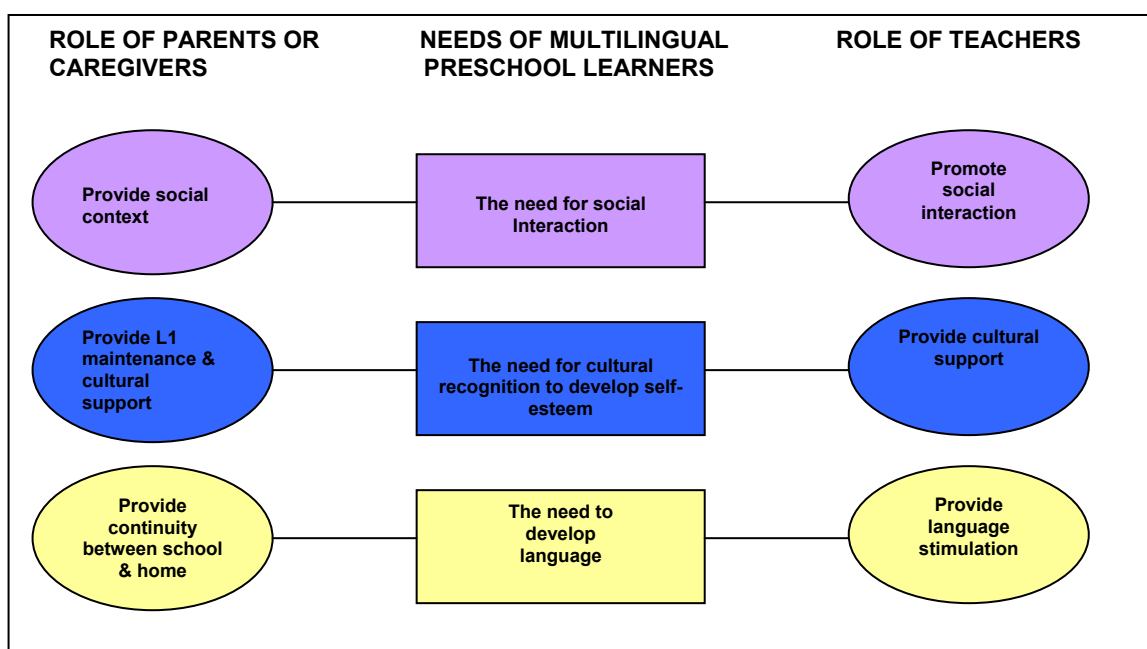
**TABLE 3.3: ELoLT DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST**

	<b>SOCIAL/LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE</b>	<b>LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS/PURPOSES</b>	<b>VOCABULARY/SYNTAX</b>
<b>STAGE 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observes others and imitates</li> <li>• Makes verbal (L1/L2) contact with another learner</li> <li>• Joins in activities</li> <li>• Uses L1 in some class activities</li> <li>• Uses body language to communicate</li> <li>• Approaches adult to make needs known</li> <li>• Follows a one-part simple instruction</li> <li>• Uses context clues to understand simple instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of use of different language functions in L1, e.g.                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) telling a story;</li> <li>b) holding a conversation;</li> <li>c) exploring a problem</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses single words</li> <li>• Uses two-word combinations</li> <li>• Imitates short phrases</li> <li>• Names personal possessions</li> <li>• Names classroom objects</li> <li>• Vocabulary of immediate family</li> <li>• Uses complete phrases</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strives to communicate regardless of correctness</li> <li>• Joins in activities using English</li> <li>• Initiates conversation with peers</li> <li>• Directs action of others</li> <li>• Evidence of understanding more English than can use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands simple stories and can retell a shortened version in English, with support</li> <li>• Takes/brings a simple oral message in English</li> <li>• Gives short report of a personal event, using simple tenses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing vocabulary; more extensive classroom vocabulary</li> <li>• Can put objects into simple categories</li> <li>• Asks simple questions</li> <li>• Uses some pronouns increasingly appropriately</li> <li>• Uses some adjectives</li> <li>• Uses simple adverbs</li> <li>• Combines/expands simple phrases</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses English confidently but still some inaccuracies</li> <li>• Requires support in subject areas</li> <li>• Interacts confidently with peers and adults</li> <li>• Contributes to large group discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can carry out simple role plays</li> <li>• Can give a simple description</li> <li>• Can sequence events using simple connectives</li> <li>• Can give reasons and predict events</li> <li>• Can make comparisons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English shows some features of L1</li> <li>• Increasing vocabulary to extended environment</li> <li>• Pronunciation generally accurate</li> <li>• Paraphrases/substitutes when English vocabulary unknown</li> <li>• Increasing use of preposition</li> <li>• Uses question words</li> <li>• Greater range of tenses: future, past, continuous</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses English with confidence in most social situations</li> <li>• Requires support in some subject areas with specialised vocabulary</li> <li>• Interacts confidently in group discussions</li> <li>• Moves easily between L1 and L2</li> <li>• Gaps in understanding extended monologue</li> <li>• Gaps in detail when hearing unfamiliar accents</li> <li>• Asks for clarification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can retell a story at length</li> <li>• Can describe accurately</li> <li>• Can explain a process</li> <li>• Can switch between functions with little difficulty, within the same oral comment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses many tenses appropriately</li> <li>• Uses greater variety of connectives</li> <li>• Uses some complex question structures</li> </ul>

Source: Mills (1993).

Preschoolers need communication partners and role-players striving to meet their needs for language acquisition. Learners do not acquire ELoLT through direct instruction or as an isolated subject, but through interaction in social

activities. Adults facilitate the language acquisition process through verbalising and input in language acquisition activities. The belief that interaction between adults and learners plays such an important role in helping learners to verbalise meaning can be seen as the practical side of Vygotsky’s theory, in which social relationships are considered important in higher mental functions (Makin et al., 1995:xxix; Meyers, 1993:31). Figure 3.3 shows how the two major role-players during the preschool years may be involved to support the specific needs of the multilingual learner, as discussed in the previous section. Figure 3.3 provides a point of departure for the following section.



**FIGURE 3.3: PRIMARY ROLE-PLAYERS AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN ELoLT ACQUISITION**

Figure 3.3 illustrates how the needs of the learners and the roles of parents or caregivers and teachers link. During the preschool years, parents or caregivers and teachers are the main role-players as a result of the amount of time that learners spend in either the home or school environment. As White Paper 5 (RSA, 2001a:4) stated that the responsibility for the care and upbringing of young children belongs to parents or families (caregivers), their involvement as primary role-players is directly implicated.

### 3.5.2 The role of parents or primary caregivers

Historically, formal education was deemed the domain of the teacher, resulting in limited involvement of parents or caregivers in education. Recently, the complete division between home and school has been questioned because of a growing awareness of the central role that parents or caregivers can play as equal partners in learners' education (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:96).

As a result of greater democratisation in South Africa, the role of parents or caregivers is currently being reviewed. Not only are Black parents or caregivers allowed to choose the MoI for their children, but caregivers' roles in the management of schools have also received greater recognition (Lemmer, 1995:85; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:96). Parental or caregiver involvement, however, needs to be broader than financial support and formal participation in school activities. Research has shown that learners succeed best when they observe their parents or caregivers being included in the school environment, and when parents or caregivers support learners' education (Heugh et al., 1995:18).

Although there is a great deal of support for parental or caregiver involvement, various barriers to effective and successful involvement were identified by Lemmer and Squelch (1993:99). These barriers are:

- *Feelings of intimidation:* parents or caregivers feel intimidated by teachers and the school environment if the school does not actively promote interaction with parents or caregivers;
- *parents or caregivers do not know how to get involved:* many parents or caregivers want to participate in learners' education, but are unsure of their rights and the activities they can be involved with;

- *parents or caregivers have negative feelings about the school:* negative attitudes may be present because of an unpleasant experience involving the school in the past. Such negative feelings can be transferred to learners, diminishing their motivation;
- *parents or caregivers have a negative view of teacher competence:* some parents or caregivers, for various reasons, may doubt the teacher's ability and professional competence. Such negative feelings can severely affect the home-school relations;
- *difficult work schedules:* many parents or caregivers cannot get involved as a result of occupations and the extended hours of working and travelling;
- *cultural barriers:* some parents or caregivers do not speak the language of the school and are excluded as they are unable to communicate with staff;
- *socio-economic barriers:* some parents or caregivers from lower income groups do not get involved in school activities because of financial restrictions. They cannot purchase books and educational material, pay for extra-curricular activities, or afford transportation to school activities;
- *single parent or caregiver families:* although single parents or caregivers may want to get involved with learners' education, circumstances might prevent them from attending and participating in school activities.

Parents or caregivers who start their involvement with learners' education during the preschool years may have a long-term impact on their future learning and academic success (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:362). Their supporting role in the preschool context is of dual nature, namely to provide support to the learner and to provide support to the school, as discussed under the following heading.

### **3.5.2.1 Provide social context**

The role of parents or caregivers in ELoLT acquisition is not completed when the decision on ELoLT has been taken. As primary role-players who will be constantly involved in the acquisition process, they are often the key to the successful acquisition of multilingualism. Parents or caregivers need to provide language stimulation in L1 and ELoLT at home. Although they are encouraged to speak L1 to preschoolers, opportunities to listen and interact in English may be created through television, radio, films, and contact with English-speaking peers. Language stimulation in L1 needs to include activities that involve descriptions, queries, and open-ended questions, that is who, what, where, why and when questions requiring metacognitive skills. Questions that require critical thinking and problem solving facilitate the conceptual development of the learner. Storytelling also needs to be incorporated in social interactions (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:34; Cheng, 1996:352). The aim of such interactions is to facilitate the learner's willingness to engage in spontaneous interactions. In an informal manner, parents or caregivers can utilise interaction to create a language learning environment at home. Such informal interactions may foster not only ELoLT acquisition, but also L1 development and maintenance.

### **3.5.2.2 Ensure L1 maintenance and cultural support**

Parents or caregivers are expected to support L1 and the learner's culture within the home environment. To understand the importance of L1 maintenance, parents or caregivers need to comprehend the dynamics of L2 acquisition, and how the CUP from L1 is transferred to ELoLT. Learners may demonstrate higher order thinking such as defining, generalising, hypothesising and abstraction in L1, but lack the CALP in English required to employ these same skills. High proficiency in L1, including the above-mentioned complex uses of language, will contribute to the development of L2. As role-players in ELoLT acquisition, it is generally believed that parents or caregivers should maintain and strengthen L1, thereby adding to the



learner's existing knowledge and cognitive skills (NAEYC, 1996:9; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:42).

In South Africa, significant numbers of Black preschool learners with an L1 other than English attend English-medium preschools (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003: 122; De Klerk, 2002b:21). These preschoolers distinguish between English, as language of the school, and L1, as language of the home. The attitude of parents or caregivers towards L1 and its usage is of central importance in this transition. Preschool learners need to perceive their L1 to be respected and valued, which may be ensured by observing their parents' or caregivers' identification with, and positive attitudes towards their L1 (Makin et al., 1995:46). Some parents or caregivers, however, are unsure which language to use and have the perception that maintaining L1 is less important than learning English. These parents or caregivers often discourage the use of L1 to offer the learners more opportunities for learning English at home. Such a far-reaching decision of parents or caregivers is often based on misinformation about multilingualism, as current research highlights the importance of L1 maintenance (Romaine, 1996:598; Makin et al., 1995:73).

The sentiment of L1 maintenance is echoed in the position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1996:9). It states that the use of English at home could hinder communication and result in limited and unnatural verbal interaction between the parent or caregiver and learner. The learner hears a restricted amount of language that may limit vocabulary increase and reduce overall verbal expression (NAEYC, 1996:9), again highlighting the importance of L1 maintenance.

In the past, teachers in South Africa often encouraged parents or caregivers with EAL to speak English at home to multilingual learners to accelerate the acquisition of ELoLT (De Klerk, 2002b:21). Currently, most teachers have discontinued this practice, as determined in a study by De Klerk (2002b). During her interviews with school principals, they disclosed that they discourage the constant use of English at home for two reasons, namely the poor proficiency in English of some parents or caregivers, and the importance

of L1 to the self-esteem of learners (De Klerk, 2002b:21; 22). Similar results were reported by Brits (1996:90), who explored the knowledge of teachers in urban South Africa on L2 acquisition. She established that 17% of teachers in the study recommended non-English parents or caregivers to speak English at home, even though the parents or caregivers indicated that they had poor proficiency in English (Brits, 1996:90). As these parents or caregivers would not have been able to provide appropriate language models in English, this recommendation was inappropriate and probably based on misinformation of the teachers, highlighting the need for informed teachers.

When L1 is not supported, learners are unable to remain connected to their L1 and culture (NAEYC, 1996:9), which may result in cultural and linguistic assimilation (the shift from non-English to English), or even a full language shift (August & Hakuta, 1998:17). A full language shift in the South African context was identified by De Klerk (2002a) while investigating why Black parents or caregivers sent their children to ELoLT schools. Parents or caregivers involved in the study actively promoted the shift from IsiXhosa to English in their children. The reason for their indifference towards IsiXhosa was seated in the legacy of apartheid, because they still regarded the Black government schools with IsiXhosa as Mol, as ineffective. Their negativity towards IsiXhosa stems from their personal experiences with an educational system where little was done to encourage respect or enthusiasm for IsiXhosa (De Klerk, 2002a:11; 12). The parents' or caregivers' attitudes towards L1 were thus the dominant reason for not supporting L1 maintenance.

By demonstrating cultural norms, beliefs, and value systems, parents or caregivers as role-players in ELoLT acquisition provide the cultural support that builds the good self-esteem preschool learners need to function successfully in a multilingual, multicultural learning environment. Through this support of L1 and culture, parents or caregivers are in fact supporting the learning environment. To support the learning environment even further, the role of parents or caregivers needs to be expanded to include the provision of continuity between home and school.

### **3.5.2.3 Provide continuity between school and home**

It is generally accepted that parents or caregivers need to be involved in learning activities at home, in support of the school with its limited teaching hours. Their alliance and educational support are critical for establishing a culture of learning at home. As one of the main objectives of education is literacy (RSA, 1997:11), and preliteracy skills are predictors of future academic success (Kriegler, 1990:68), parents or caregivers play a crucial role in the provision of literacy support to preschool learners (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:34).

Research suggests that a positive relationship exists between reading to learners and the development of language and literacy abilities (Hammer, Miccio & Wagstaff, 2003:21), therefore literacy activities at home, which include reading to learners, support the school towards raising educational standards (Locke, Ginsberg & Peers, 2002:3). There is evidence that reading partnerships of various kinds at home and at school can make a significant contribution to enhancing reading achievement (Cline, 2000:9). Even parents or caregivers who are not fluent in English could read to preschoolers in English, as the text in the book will contain linguistically correct sentences. Literate non-English parents or caregivers may read stories in their L1, whereas illiterate parents or caregivers may enlist other caregivers to read to the learners. All parents or caregivers, irrespective of social, economic, or cultural circumstances, need to expose preschoolers to books (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:34; Cheng, 1996:352; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:47; Macdonald, 1991:42). Pflaum (as cited by Thurman & Widerstrom, 1990:111) suggested the following activities to promote literacy development, including the development of print awareness, in preschool learners:

- The learner needs to be encouraged by parents or caregivers to look at picture books;

- the learner may be supported by parents or caregivers to tell the story from the pictures in storybooks;
- parents or caregivers may read stories to the learner, showing him or her the pictures;
- parents or caregivers may show the learner the printed words and explain their meanings in the story;
- the learner needs to be supported to understand that print and pictures have different functions;
- the learner may be asked to help predict what will happen next in the story;
- parents or caregivers may ask the learner to identify letters in the words found in the stories;
- parents or caregivers need to indicate to learners that some letters may be used repetitively in different words;
- parents or caregivers may encourage the learner to trace the words while they read aloud, moving in a left-right direction;
- parents or caregivers may teach the learner to recognise his or her own name and may indicate the different sounds represented by the letters in the name;
- parents or caregivers may explain punctuation and question marks in written examples and explain their use in writing and in texts;
- parents or caregivers may stress the letters in the words and the sound they represent when reading to a preschool learner.

Literacy development in English is vital for educational achievement as reading and writing are the basic tools for lifelong learning (Harris; 2003a:80). Reading and writing are based in language and the development thereof is a process that starts even before learners attend school, in the home environment (Harris, 2003a:81; Westby, 1990:228). Although there is an inextricable link between the development of spoken and written language in L1, as discussed earlier (Hammer et al., 2003:20), acquiring literacy is more complex when the L1 of learners differs from the school's Mol.

Parents or caregivers who support learners to acquire preliteracy skills in a spontaneous manner, not only support educational goals, but also the learners' needs. As they work together with the school to achieve the greatest benefit for all learners, parents or caregivers need to respect and reinforce preschool programmes. However, they cannot support the multilingual learner on their own, but also need the teacher's involvement to achieve the desired outcome of proficiency in ELoLT.

### **3.5.3 The role of preschool teachers**

Preschool teachers are viewed to be the second major role-players in the acquisition of ELoLT by preschool learners. As learners spend many of their waking hours with teachers, their experiences under the guidance of the teachers will have an impact on the learners' social, emotional, cognitive, and ELoLT development (NAEYC, 1996:6).

Preschool teachers have special knowledge, acquired through training, of education in early childhood (preschool phase). They are also knowledgeable about preschool learners as a result of continuous observation of these learners and can assess learners in natural situations (Du Plessis, 1998b:53). Bredenkamp (as cited by Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:29) described the competencies of preschool teachers as follows:

- Teachers need to demonstrate and apply a basic understanding of learner development, including the observation and assessment of individual learners;
- teachers need to plan and implement developmentally appropriate curricula;
- teachers need to establish supportive relationships with learners and implement appropriate guidance and group management;
- teachers need to establish positive and productive relationships with parents or caregivers;
- teachers need to support the individuality of each learner and recognise that learners are best understood in the context of family, culture, and society;
- teachers need to demonstrate basic understanding of the early childhood profession and make a commitment to the profession.

The question arises whether these abilities are sufficient to teach in the current South African situation, where schools have become multilingual and English L1 learners attend school with ELoLT learners (Barkhuizen, 1993:269). Preschool teachers are placed in the predicament of teaching in English, knowing that all learners will not comprehend the content of their teaching (Macdonald, 1991:19).

Currently, South African preschool teachers are faced with more and more demands at all levels (Cunningham, 2001:213). Preschool teachers are expected to have sophisticated knowledge of subject matter and a wide repertoire of teaching strategies. Moreover, they need to be familiar with learning theory, cognition, pedagogy, curriculum, technology, assessment, and programmes. The South African context further requires preschool

teachers to understand multiple languages, and socio-cultural and developmental backgrounds (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:124). It is clear that multilingual classrooms present a challenge to teachers.

Diedricks (1997) interviewed teachers to determine their perspectives on multilingualism in South African classrooms, and found that the educational situation described by the teachers hampered both their learners and themselves. Teachers reported that multilingualism in the classroom was stressful, as they felt isolated and untrained for the situation. They also stated that multilingual learners hindered the effective flow of activities in the classroom. Barkhuizen (1993:271) reported that teachers felt frustrated and even resentful towards multilingual learners, as they were unable to cope with the situation in their classes. These two reports indicate the urgent need for teacher guidance on the management of multilingual classrooms. The motivation of teachers needs to be restored, as they are important role-players and are required to support ELoLT learners. Although solutions were not evident, the teachers interviewed by Diedricks (1997) considered these challenges as opportunities to respond to the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Diedricks, 1997:viv). If teachers are familiar with the unique characteristics and needs of learners, they may construct a classroom context accommodating these needs (Cele, 2001:189; NAEYC, 1996:7; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:42). Preschool teachers may therefore create a learning environment which provides conditions for support and creates a challenge to their learners – a positive learning environment for education and learner motivation.

### **3.5.3.1 Promote social interaction**

As social interaction is central to language learning (Makin et al., 1995:xxxix) and is one of the identified needs of multilingual preschool learners, it is an important aspect to consider in the acquisition of ELoLT in the South African preschool. Learners absorb and process language input better in an encouraging atmosphere (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999:21; Turner, 1993:79). The role of the preschool teacher is, therefore, to create a positive, non-

threatening environment for ELoLT learning (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:45). A sympathetic, warm, secure environment provides the foundation from which preschool learners can move into communication participation when they are ready (Tabors, 1997:105; Mills & Mills; 1993:79).

Preschool teachers may utilise the preschool classroom to facilitate ELoLT development through social interaction among preschoolers. In this way, peer interaction is facilitated, which may vary from single peer interaction to integration and socialisation in a larger group of learners (Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:147; 205). Smalle-Moodie (1997) strongly recommends peer-tutoring as teaching strategy in the classroom (as described in Section 2.3.4). Through peer-tutoring, multilingual learners may practise ELoLT skills and actively participate in the learning process (Smalle-Moodie, 1997:70). Peer interaction may take a variety of forms depending on the cultural background of the learners. As interactions may vary from highly verbal to a great deal of non-verbal physical contact, teachers' tolerance of such behaviour needs to be taken into account. Teachers who see their role as authoritarian and controlling are less likely to allow such interaction, whereas teachers who interpret their role as facilitators may incorporate this in the learning situation.

Adult-learner interactions form a large part of the preschool programme. For ELoLT acquisition, the interactions need to be participating, democratic, and activity based (Heugh et al., 1995:16). The needs of ELoLT learners may be met within the environment of the preschool classroom by teachers who provide them with activities and material to lead them towards understanding and speaking English (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:125). Such principles of natural language learning are also embraced in the Whole Language approach. The informal, concrete, play environment of the preschool is used by the learner to scout and discover, and ELoLT acquisition is promoted through social interaction (Calitz, 1993:110).



### **3.5.3.2 Provide cultural support**

As mentioned previously, South Africa is a multicultural society evolving from a history where multiculturalism could not be celebrated because of the separation of cultures. With schools currently being integrated, teachers need to be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of their learners, as the learners' development may be negatively affected if cultural habits are not further developed in school (Gumba, 2001:233-236; Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:125; Macdonald, 1993:26). The teachers' attitudes, knowledge base, and cultural competence may be crucial when setting educational goals of acceptance and appreciation of diversity.

In future, teachers' sensitivity towards cultural diversity in multilingual classes may be promoted by the introduction of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) by the DoE (RSA, 2003:3). The main objective of this document is to improve the quality of learning and teaching by setting certain performance standards expected from teachers, including inclusive strategies and the promotion of respect for diversity. Individual teachers will be appraised according to the IQMS standards to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses and to draw up programmes for individual development (RSA, 2003:3).

In the multilingual education of post-apartheid South Africa, the challenge is to introduce the school's culture, while preserving and respecting the diverse mother tongues and cultures of its learners. Preschools therefore need to strive towards achieving an equilibrium between the school and home cultures. Cultivating and developing a multicultural approach to teaching require a change of attitude and a commitment from teachers to adapt curriculum content thus that it is culturally relevant and appropriate (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:78).

The recognition that multilingual preschool learners are emotionally connected to their languages and cultures is important (NAEYC, 1996:7). From such recognition flows respect through the modelling of the appreciation of diversity

(Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:513; NAEYC, 1996:4). References in class to the heritage of other cultures make ELoLT learners feel appreciated (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001:121). Teachers who can code-switch to learners' L1 (although complex in South Africa as teachers may theoretically have eleven languages represented in one class) may communicate to the learners that the teachers are aware of them as persons, that the worth of their L1 is acknowledged, and that value is ascribed to their culture (Viljoen & Molefe 2001:125). By incorporating the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the nation in preschool programmes, preschool learners will feel valued, and prejudice and stereotyping, created by simply ignoring differences, may be prevented (Combrink, 1996:9). In this way, a society tolerant of other cultures in a multilingual, multicultural country like South Africa may be created (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995:83).

### **3.5.3.3. Provide language stimulation**

In the responsive environment of the preschool, the role of preschool teachers in ELoLT acquisition is not only to provide language *input*, but also to provide appropriate *feedback*. Feedback usually entails, among others, the repetition, expansion, and modification of the learners' utterances (Tabors, 1997:128; Brits, 1996:17; Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:193; Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:45). To provide focused stimulation and feedback on a particular language feature, teachers need to be aware of the specific language abilities in L1 and L2 of each learner. This implies that preschool teachers require knowledge of L1 and L2 acquisition.

All preschool teachers, however, have not been trained in the theories of additional language acquisition (Green, 1997:147). As teacher training may not currently equip preschool teachers with the principles of language *acquisition*, some teachers may lack the skills to support ELoLT acquisition (Lemmer, 1995:88; Nieman, 1995:297). As coping strategy, teachers often resort to rote learning and drill to teach ELoLT (De Klerk, 2002b, 18; Brits, 1996:101; Lemmer, 1995:88). This was confirmed in a study by Brits (1996) who explored teachers' knowledge of additional language acquisition in the

South African urban context. Brits (1996) found that teachers viewed language drill to be a technique to improve the communication abilities of ELoLT learners, and admitted to using drill quite often for the same reason (Brits, 1996:101). In the literature, inappropriate drill and skills approaches are, however, regarded as the least effective programmes for ELoLT acquisition, as such practices may confuse learners and intervene with the natural developmental progression of L2 acquisition (Tabors, 1997:147; Soto, 1991:33). Brits (1996:101) reached the conclusion that teachers need to be encouraged to facilitate ELoLT acquisition through more indirect techniques and incidental learning.

Preschool teachers may facilitate ELoLT proficiency in preschool learners with innovative L2 teaching skills, and may manipulate the learning structure by organising activities to target specific responses and language behaviour. Teachers provide a language model, and may regulate their input to learners in order to increase the probability of reciprocal communication. They may provide a hierarchy of prompt levels by modelling, physical support, and verbal elicitations (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:45).

The naturalistic setting of the preschool provides the best opportunities to facilitate the development of language content, form, and use (Tiegerman-Farber, 1995:189-192). To incorporate all three of these components when planning a lesson, may, however, be difficult for preschool teachers, as shown by Du Plessis (1998b). It was indicated that preschool teachers could plan language content rather well, but language form and use were not adequately planned in language lessons. The conclusion was reached that preschool teachers may require support in planning all three components of language development (Du Plessis, 1998b; 134). A similar sentiment was expressed by Nieman (1994:15), who advocates that lessons for ELoLT acquisition in South African preschools need to be planned with the support of knowledgeable professionals with specific skills in language acquisition.

When planning individual language goals for learners, teachers require individual language profiles to indicate the current linguistic abilities of

learners and to note progress (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002:357). This implies that the ELoLT skills of preschool learners need to be assessed to assist preschool teachers in planning their language goals. Although the assessment of language is a complex endeavour that requires relevant knowledge from the assessor, the informal observations and documentation by teachers may be extremely useful in the assessment of preschool learners. Teachers often apply the model of Dynamic Assessment where learners are assessed while performing tasks taken directly from the classroom content, and where teachers observe the learners' progress during intervention (Lidz & Peña, 1996:368). The model agrees with the recommendations in the RNCS that curriculum and assessment be aligned (RSA, 2002:1-7).

The recognition of specific patterns of linguistic errors in ELoLT by multilingual preschoolers may provide teachers with information to plan appropriate language stimulation in their lessons. Speech-language therapists may assist preschool teachers in the analysis of language errors and may assume responsibility for collecting, analysing, and synthesising language assessment information, as well as presenting the results to the teachers. The relevance of insight into learners' linguistic errors lies in the potential that knowledge of the nature of errors may enable the teacher to plan input to diminish or prevent them (Nxumalo, 1997:1). In addition, knowledge of the specific characteristics of linguistic errors by ELoLT learners may assist preschool teachers to distinguish between normal ELoLT development (language difference), as opposed to pathological development (language deficiency), which might warrant intervention.

The preschool teacher plays a critical role in the lives of the multilingual preschool learner and has as primary focus the needs of the learner. Since ELoLT acquisition was identified as an important educational need in multilingual preschool learners in preparation for formal schooling, the preschool teachers need to foster this goal of ELoLT development. Although teachers and parents or caregivers may assist each other in support of the learners, they may require assistance in planning, developing, and implementing learning activities to enhance ELoLT acquisition. The next

section describes how speech-language therapists may employ their skills to support teachers in fulfilling their role with ELoLT preschoolers in South Africa.

#### **3.5.4 The role of speech-language therapists**

As the client population of speech-language therapists in a democratic South Africa is increasingly diverse, it compelled them to reflect on their role in the changing context. Apart from the changing working environment, changes within the discipline have also occurred that necessitate continuous adaptation (Seymour, 1998:108). There is a rapid rate of growth in knowledge and technique, and a better and broader understanding of the human communication process has developed (Apel, 2001a:149). The advances in the discipline of Communication Pathology opened the door for interdisciplinary cross fertilisation in research, test formulation, and intervention procedures, as an awareness developed that more can be achieved together (Seymour, 1998:103;104).

In the discipline of Communication Pathology, the concept of speech pathology has remained fairly constant and includes articulation, phonology, voice, and fluency. The understanding of what constitutes language, however, has expanded since the 1970's, and the concept of language development in preschoolers has broadened from vocabulary and grammar development to include pragmatics, discourse, preliteracy, phonemic awareness, and print concepts (Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003:284; 285). Theoretically, a wide scope exists for speech-language therapists in schools as they are able to support learners' language needs. Language forms part of almost every learning area, and the curriculum statements require learners to use language to gain knowledge, to demonstrate their knowledge in specific content areas, and as a means of enquiry (Lewis, 2004:37; 38). Multilingual learners with potential linguistic barriers to learning and development may therefore be particularly challenged across the curriculum.

The multilingualism of learners in South African schools prompted teachers to express the need for support (Soto, 1991:32). Despite speech-language

therapists' comprehensive knowledge of language development, they first had to request clarification of their role in working with these learners (ASHA, 1998:24) to ensure their compliance with the Code of Ethics, composed by international and national professional associations. In this regard, ASHA leads the way by setting standards and defining the Code of Ethics for professionals in the field of human communications (ASHA, 1998:24; Seymour, 1998:104). In a Position Statement in 1998 (ASHA, 1998:24), ASHA expanded the scope of speech-language therapists to include populations who are linguistically diverse in their practice. The South African Speech-Language and Hearing Association (SASLHA) followed suit and, in 2003, issued guidelines regulating local intervention with multilingual populations (SASLHA, 2003). These guidelines clarified the current role of therapists in South Africa serving multilingual clients. This role definition stipulated that speech-language therapists may work within the scope of their knowledge base, skills, competencies, and education in service delivery to multilingual learners.

To fulfil their role appropriately, a different service delivery model – as opposed to the individual, direct, specialised support speech-language therapists currently provide to learners - may have to be adopted because of the enormous need of multilingual learners (Lewis, 2004:37). The traditional role of the speech-language therapist to assess, intervene, and monitor change in learners' language development in isolation may have to be extended to support a wider group of learners experiencing barriers in ELoLT development. The move towards *Inclusive education* as an educational model, based on the principle that all learners have the right to learn and that all learners need support in order to learn, highlights the need for change in the nature of speech-language services to include all learners (Lewis, 2004:36). As speech-language therapists redefine their role to interventionists serving learners with needs in acquiring additional languages, intervention moves closer to the classroom context, as described in Chapter Four.

It is concluded that role-players are decision makers who need to make informed decisions on behalf of ELoLT preschool learners. Relevant

knowledge about varying policies and practices for the acquisition of language in the early childhood needs to form the basis for the decision-making and planning of appropriate support to multilingual preschool learners.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

The need of the multilingual preschooler in urban South Africa to acquire proficiency in ELoLT needs to be addressed urgently by all role-players involved. Such proficiency would enable the learners to increase their communication skills and cognitive flexibility in a multilingual environment. However, learners do not acquire an L2 effortlessly (Robb, 1995:22). Role-players need to intervene in ways that stimulate and support language development, always taking into account the specific and unique needs of the preschool learner acquiring ELoLT.

Many parents in South Africa rely on educators to teach their children English. They also expect teachers to support the cultural values and norms of the home. Cultural diversity is, however, often viewed by teachers as a challenge rather than an opportunity, as they had no professional preparation in the areas of culture and diversity (NAEYC, 1996:9-10). It is clear that learner diversity challenges the educational system, and teachers feel overwhelmed by the complex educational problems arising in multilingual schools. As excellently prepared teachers are pivotal to the success of education, their needs for support and knowledge should be addressed.

Traditionally, role-players and decision makers in multilingual education in South Africa *did not* support teachers. This resulted in teachers often feeling demotivated by the excessive demands they are expected to meet. Some teachers believe that the multidimensional nature of multilingualism may have been oversimplified, underestimated, and obscured by ideological rhetoric (Lemmer, 1995:94). While changes have been made to the political system in South Africa, educational problems have not been solved automatically (Macdonald, 1991:27).

The South African educational system needs to be transformed to positively change the perceived inferior status of the teaching corps. Teacher empowerment needs to include appropriate training programmes, as well as adapted school language policies in which management, parents or caregivers, and all teaching and educational support staff assume responsibility for creating a school environment that supports ELoLT learning. Such programmes offer shared ownership of problems and solutions and need to be initiated to replace the current situation of crises management in some schools. Educational reform in the spirit of *Tirisano* needs to be promoted, thereby meeting the challenge of educating all South African multilingual learners.

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter described the importance of language acquisition for learning in the early academic phases of school, and the way in which role-players could facilitate ELoLT acquisition during the preschool years. Parents or caregivers and preschool teachers were identified as primary role-players. The needs of the learners were placed central to the discussion, and the support that parents or caregivers and teachers are required to offer in acquiring ELoLT was discussed. Speech-language therapists were identified as role-players in intervention. The aim of the chapter was to establish the individual roles and the specific support needed by the role-players to form a basis for the next chapter in which collaborative partnerships to ELoLT acquisition are explored.