

## **'Unity in diversity' in South African education: inciting ideas from Europe**

**Hendrik Steyn**

Faculty of Education Sciences, North-West University  
Hennie.Steyn@nwu.ac.za

**M Alkan**

Department of Education Services, University of Amsterdam

**M Tupan**

ECHO, Experisecentrum Diversiteitsbeleid, Utrecht

**S Oeyen**

Department Teacher Education, Katolieke Hogeschool Limburg

### **Summary**

The motto of the South African Coat of Arms is 'Unity in Diversity'. Interest groups are of the opinion that the present situation in education constitutes the unity, ignoring the principle of diversity, and that it does not support the provision of quality education for all.

The aim of this article is to present some opinions from the Netherlands and Belgium regarding the education rights of minorities in South Africa. In-depth interviews, characteristic of qualitative research, as well as a literature study were employed as methods of research.

The advice may be summarised as follows:

- In terms of quality education provision, the general characteristics of education should be adhered to, especially regarding the usual differentiated support according to the unique needs of all learners.
- Mother-tongue education is an important prerequisite to achieve quality education. The need to acquire suitable competence in a lingua franca is emphasised.
- The concepts 'unity' and 'diversity' in education should not be regarded as opposing concepts.
- Do not force the issue of unity and diversity in education.
- Educators and school officials committed to the principles of unity and diversity, language rights of minority groups and equality of educational opportunities should play a more prominent role in the political process of educational policy and decision making.

### **Introduction**

The right of the youth to quality education is fully accepted by the international community and serves as a guiding principle for the theory and practice of education in all the countries of the world (UN, 1948; Wilson, 2002). However, the context and content of quality education in the best interest of our children are debatable. The 'best interest' is posed as the primary question. A thorough understanding of the scope of relevant literature and experience in international education provisioning reveals two major arguments. The one argument is that quality education implies that the youth should be prepared to function effectively according to the generally accepted rules of the community – the notion of unity. The second argument, sometimes in opposition to the first, maintains that education should assist the youth in preparing themselves to effectively fulfil their self-defined roles in life, within their local, national and international environments – the notion of diversity within unity.

For many years (1960-1992), South African education was the focal point of interest of the international community. The international community was of the opinion that the theory and practice of apartheid education, that is education segregated along racial, cultural and language lines, were not to the best interest of especially the non-white youth of South Africa, and did not support quality education to all. After 1994, upon the inception of the new government in South Africa, education was completely transformed. One National Education Department with provincial departments, as executive education authorities, was established and outcomes-based education was introduced at all levels of education. A central driving force was the elimination of racial segregation in education. In order to effect the elimination of segregation, a belief emerged that the learners and teachers in schools should represent the

composition of the broad multi-cultural community. The subsequent result is that English is (often and 'formally') selected as primary language of instruction and that every attempt to use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction is viewed as an attempt to re-introduce segregation in education (Sunday Times, 23/01/2005; Van Staaden, 2005: 10). However, the preference given to English implies that the principle of mother-tongue education (Heugh, 2001; Auerbach, 1993), as a basis of quality education, is undermined. Within the context of eleven recognised languages in South Africa, the preference given to English implies that the majority of learners have to receive their education through the medium of English, while these learners – as well as teachers – are clearly not proficient in the use of English as a second language in teaching and learning. An additional problem is that Afrikaans is the only indigenous language that has evolved to such an extent that it can be employed as a medium of teaching and learning at all levels of education (Heugh, 2001). These facts pose a political problem, namely that Afrikaans was previously regarded as the language of the oppressor, as well as a practical problem, namely that it proves rather complicated to implement education via two languages throughout the country.

In the context of the motto of the South African Coat of Arms, namely '!ke e: /xarra //ke', which means 'Unity in Diversity', many education interest groups are of the opinion that the present focus on English as a medium of teaching and learning constitutes the unity, ignoring the principle of diversity and, therefore, that it does not support the provision of quality education to all (FAK, 2007).

The aim of this article is, therefore, to present some citing opinions from the international community, and particularly from the Netherlands and Belgium, regarding the education rights of learners from minority communities. The opinions will be determined within the context of 'Unity in Diversity' in the South African community. In order to attain this objective, the international and national guidelines regarding the right of minorities to quality education will be explicated. Secondly, relevant views from educationists from Belgium and the Netherlands regarding the conditions for quality education in a diverse society, the realisation of 'unity in diversity' in education as well as their views concerning the way forward for South Africa, will be elucidated. The issue of mother-tongue education will obviously be a recurrent theme.

## **Research method**

The research findings conveyed in this article are a sub-project of a more encompassing project focussing on the way in which the motto of the country's Coat of Arms, namely '!ke e: /xarra //ke' or 'Unity in Diversity', should be realised in the context of South African education. For the purpose of this sub-project, in-depth interviews (characteristic of the tradition of qualitative research) as well as a literature study were employed as methods of research.

A research paradigm identified certain assumptions in the context of the paradigm. In particular, this context is concerned with the reality (ontology), knowledge about this reality (epistemology) and the manner (methodology) through which the knowledge can be obtained (Crabtree & Miller, 1999:8). Scientific research may be executed within three broad paradigms, namely the positivist/post-positivist, the interpretative or the ecological research paradigms. For the purpose of this study the interpretive research paradigm was selected, because it focuses particularly on the understanding of human behaviour and human reasoning (Schwant, 2000:191). Within the interpretive research paradigm, several research frameworks can be distinguished, one of which comprises the qualitative research framework (Neuman, 2003:76).

The qualitative research framework was selected due to its interpretative and holistic nature and because it primarily aims to comprehend social functioning and the meaning that humans attach to everyday life. The qualitative researcher will therefore rather comprehend than explain, prefers observation to controlled measurement and will rather subjectively explore the perspectives of informed people than the opinions of outsiders (Creswell, 2003:4-6; Fouché & Delpont, 2002:79; Schurink, 1998:243). Creswell (1994:70) argues that quantitative research is based upon hypotheses that are tested in using a sufficient number of respondents. Qualitative research, on the other hand, evolves from the

research questions and attempts to obtain from a limited sample group in-depth information regarding the issues contained in the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998:35). According to the features of qualitative research, the research for this article can be described as explorative and descriptive in nature (Fouché, 2002:109) and as being based on deductive reasoning, because the reasoning in this regard moves from the general to the specific (Babbie, 2004:25). The outcomes of qualitative research cannot be generalised as such, but rather serve as hypotheses that are testable by means of quantitative research.

The interview was employed as a technique to obtain the required information. The interview, according to a schedule of open questions, was selected for the following reasons (Ferreira, 1988: 34): it is a recognised technique in qualitative research to collect rich data; it provides the researcher with the opportunity to interact with the participant (interviewee) in order to obtain relevant data and to immediately clarify any uncertainty; and sub-questions can be asked to exhaust a particular issue, without intimidating the participant or presupposing the answers. In order to control one of the weak points of once-off, in-depth interviews, namely the tendency by some participants to justify negative issues or to omit important information, the data collected through the interviews was verified against the relevant literature and policies in the respective education systems. Furthermore, a purposeful sample group was chosen according to specific criteria. Data analysis comprised content analysis that was conducted concurrently with the data collection, data interpretation and report writing. Trustworthiness was established by means of triangulation and participants' verification of data (Creswell, 1994:155-157).

A literature study was conducted for the purpose of obtaining relevant information concerning the research question. Information was subsequently gleaned from available national and international literature. The literature was identified by for instance executing a DIALOGUE-search and by reviewing relevant scientific and popular literature in South Africa, the Netherlands and Belgium. The literature that was employed emphasises the international viewpoints on unity and diversity in education and on the specific situations in the Netherlands and Belgium. Nationally, the focal point constitutes literature concerning the policy and practice of unity and diversity in South African education. The literature was used to establish a basis for comprehending the education rights of minority groups, the situation regarding the experiences of minority groups – as far as the level to which their education rights are recognised is concerned – and to attain a better understanding of the answers provided by participants.

## **The context of unity and diversity in education**

### **The characteristics of quality education**

Bush and Satarelli (in Wilson, 2002: 5) correctly maintain that the social good of education is not only of intrinsic value, but is also dependent on its content and form and can be either socially constructive or destructive. More often than not, education is misapplied for some or other purpose, for example to rectify a particular societal problem such as poverty, to eliminate diseases such as HIV/Aids or to improve road safety. It is correct to regard education as a powerful instrument to support the achievement of such societal aims, but it cannot be viewed as the main instrument to solve societal problems or to affect societal change (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2000: 205).

Thus, quality education is determined by (Steyn, Steyn, De Waal & Wolhuter, 2002: 96-98):

- the extent to which learners are able to acquire the required competences, thus preparing themselves to function effectively and fulfil their roles in life;
- the abilities, aptitudes and interests of individual learners; as well as by
- the content and context of the roles the learners perform in a particular community.

Quality education is therefore contextually determined (Meijnen, 2003). Moreover, quality education for different individuals and groups in different countries will feature similarities and differences relating to the issue of 'unity and diversity'.

## **International guidelines regarding the rights of minorities to quality education**

The fact that quality education is contextually determined, which implies that different learners require contextually determined education according to their unique educational needs, lies at the core of the international recognition of the educational rights of minorities. These rights are entrenched in several internationally accepted conventions and declarations, such as the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of the United Nations (UN, 1996) and the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe (EU, 1990). In both these agreements the rights of learners from minority groups to quality education are recognised and it is expected of member states to support the realisation of this (Steyn, 1998: 3-8).

The education rights of minorities are further defined in the Convention against Discrimination in Education (Unesco, 1960) by Unesco and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990). The right of children to receive education in accordance with their religious or cultural needs and the protection of their own identities are reaffirmed as main focuses of these instruments (Detrick, 1992: ix). These rights pertaining to education should be interpreted in the context of the provision of education as stipulated in the International Bill of Human Rights (UN, 1948: art 13). Education will, according to these instruments, be directed at the full development of the human personality, enabling all persons to participate effectively in a free society, and at the promotion of good relationships among different groups. The right to establish and maintain schools, subject to the minimum standards of the education authorities, is acknowledged.

In modern terminology, justice consists of treating equals equally and the unequals unequally (Laforest, 1993: x), as well as the comprehension of the 'universality of particularism' (Taylor, 1993: 139). A well-developed individual personality is considered to be a necessary prerequisite for effective functioning in a diverse community, and for the diverse community to function effectively as a unit (Kirby, 2004: 1). Al-Issa (2004: 31) remarked: 'Understanding one's cultural system leads to greater skills in appreciating other cultures', which proves to be of paramount importance for the harmonious and coherent functioning within a diverse community (Campbell, 2000: 2). This coherence may, for example, be brought about by dominant values that can produce a degree of equity in the greater society (Kuehn, 1992: 4). The importance of specific provisioning for minority groups, also referring to mother tongue education, is generally recognised (Macedonia, 2007; NCLR, 2006).

The above exposition indicates that the right of individuals and groups to contribute to the unity of the whole should not be dismissed. Unity is not necessarily 'the opposite of diversity'. In fact, the whole (the community) consists of the diversity of cultural individuals. It is upon these diversities that unity should be constructed.

### **The challenges that have faced minority education in South Africa since 1994**

When the ANC took control of the government in 1994, one of the main focusses was to eliminate the wrongs of the apartheid era and to transform South Africa into a united, non-racist society under the guiding principle of 'unity in diversity'. This principle was accepted as the motto of the South African Coat of Arms. In the President's 2005 state of the nation address, the following goals – relevant to education – were reiterated (Dawie, 2005: 6):

- The country was transforming away from its racist past and from its colonialist and apartheid heritage and was not indulging in reverse racism.
- South Africans should be unified in their diversity and should be prepared to defend all languages, including Afrikaans.

The principle of 'unity in diversity' is especially challenged by the issue of language in education, and ambivalent (opposing) messages are conveyed by the government for the purpose of public debate. On the one hand, the president reaffirmed the government's view that supports the principle of 'unity in diversity' in education. In the Western Cape, the provincial minister of education announced that the provincial policy on language in education will be guided by the principles of a stronger focus on mother-tongue education and on the acquisition of multilingualism by learners (Dugmore, 27/07/2005). On the other hand, the actions performed by the Afrikaans-speaking community to ensure the

implementation of sound education principles, regarding their unique language needs, are suspiciously viewed as an attempt to re-instate apartheid. Such suspicion was expressed by Khumalu, presidential spokesperson, although in his personal capacity (Khumalo, 2005: 20). These views are obviously not in line with the principles as expressed in the president's address and many individuals and organisations are convinced that the government only pays lip-service to the principles of unity in diversity and that the final word on the issue of minority rights in South Africa has not yet been said (Geldenhuys, 2006; Meyer, 2006).

Notwithstanding the clear research outcomes regarding the advantages of mother-tongue education (cf. Heugh, 2001; Auerbach, 1993), the majority of black South Africans prefer English as a medium of teaching and learning for their youth. Many black parents intend to enrol their children at formerly white schools because they believe that their children will obtain better education at these schools. They particularly believe that a good command of the English language will secure an economic advantage and social mobility for their children (Van Staaden, 2005: 10).

It is clear that the challenges are big. The (obvious) solution concerning the context of South African education should be determined by the Bill of Human Rights, as stipulated in the South African Constitution, informed by sound educational principles, guided by international experiences and negotiated by the people of South Africa.

### **Responses based on experiences in the Netherlands and Belgium regarding 'unity in diversity' in South African education**

#### **Method of data collection**

As far as the previous explanation is concerned, tension evidently exists between two viewpoints in South Africa. The one viewpoint acknowledges the reality that the principle of 'unity in diversity' should be recognised and that unity should be built upon diversity. The other viewpoint emphasises unity (to eliminate segregation) and prefers, for example, integrated schools and classes, which implies the use of a single language medium, namely English.

In order to attain sustainable solutions, the negotiations and planning by representatives in South Africa should also be guided by the experiences and opinions of outside (objective) interest groups. To follow this method is typical of human and scientific endeavour. In the human sciences, and particularly Comparative Education, it is sound procedures to acquire the opinions of informed individuals, to consider and evaluate these opinions according to valid guidelines and to make applicable to one's own context that which one can or want to use. Thereafter the opinions can be implemented. The education community of Europe is a valuable outside partner in this regard. Moreover, the education community of Europe was actively involved in the dismantling of the segregated apartheid system and has gained, among themselves, valuable experience in developing the education rights of minorities and the provision of quality education to minority groups in Europe (Wilson, 2002).

Within the context of the necessity to provide quality education, and to accommodate unity and diversity as well as the issue of mother-tongue education, the following questions to the representatives of the education community of Europe, i.e. the education communities of the Netherlands and Belgium respectively, were therefore relevant:

- How do you define quality education?
- What does the concept 'unity and diversity' imply to you?
- What is the importance of mother-tongue education?
- What possible solutions to the issue of 'unity and diversity' in South Africa might be suggested?

The interviews were conducted within the context of these questions, at the premises of the participants, and lasted approximately an hour and a half.

Charmaz (2006: 6) refers to the development of grounded theory and mentions that participant sampling is not necessarily aimed at population representation. Therefore, the response group was selected using the following criteria:

- The participants were chosen to represent primarily the views from two European countries, namely the Netherlands and Belgium. The two countries were selected because they are recognised as important leaders in education in Europe, and because of the long-standing involvement of these two countries in the South African community and education.
- The participants should represent the different valid viewpoints regarding minority education in the respective countries.
- They should have proven (adequate) insight, understanding, knowledge and experience of education provision in general, and particularly to minorities in the respective countries.
- The participants should have attained a respected stature as educationists in the two countries.

The participants were selected via the assistance of contact persons in the Netherlands and Belgium respectively, and according to the criteria agreed upon (the names and positions of the participants appear in the reference list). The contact persons both have a clear understanding of the relevant issues in education provision in the respective countries, as proven by their vocation and managerial position. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of the data was assured by requesting each participant to verify the written report of the particular interview, as well as by means of the literature review which was conducted upon completion of the independent analysis and synthesis of the opinions of participants (Charmaz, 2006: 6).

## Responses of participants

### 1. *How do you define quality education?*

The following aspects were identified and elucidated:

- Quality education is primarily determined by the level to which education assists the *individual learner* to prepare him/herself to effectively function in the world by knowing him/herself and his/her relation to and in the world. These focuses are incorporated, for example, in the basic competences ('basis competenties') or outcomes of the Flemish and Dutch education. The competences concern more than knowledge or content, but also focus on the skills, as well as the attitudes, to effectively deal with the different situations learners will experience in life. Quality education also provides the learners with the opportunity for lifelong learning in order to acquire the competences to creatively cope with continued change. Quality education should be relevant to life and relate closely to, for example, the labour market. Quality education provides sufficient choices to all learners, notwithstanding their cultural or economical background.
- Quality education is determined by the extent to which the educational needs of *all groups* are met. Moreover, quality education is determined by the extent to which the backgrounds of various groups and individuals are recognised. In quality education, the particular contexts of individual learners are clearly recognised in teaching and learning. In addition, it is recognised that the language differences, cultural characteristics and community experiences will determine the level of quality education that an individual learner receives. Education should differentiate to support learners in different contexts. Furthermore, education invests in human capital and the profits will be reaped at a later stage.
- Quality education is perceived as education that assists learners in becoming independent and responsible, teachers becoming facilitators and learners and teachers becoming process-orientated people. Quality education supports the simultaneous development of the *generalist and specialist*. A (negative?) result of these changes is that learners become 'doers' rather than 'thinkers'.

These responses of participants are in line with the general thoughts of the education community and the different policies in Belgium regarding the nature of quality education according to the competency-based education and the right of each child to quality education (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, 2004: 10-12, Vlaamse Fonds, 2004: 2).

The views of the research participants are also confirmed by an analysis by the Educational Council (Onderwijsraad) in the Netherlands. As far as the concept of quality education is concerned, it is

evident that preparing pupils for the labour market (qualifying) and participation in society (socialising) in the Netherlands are regarded as two coherent objectives of the educational system. Language differences, cultural characteristics and community experiences of the various groups are taken into account in responding to the educational needs of children (Onderwijsraad, 2005; Meijnen, 2003; SCP, 2005).

## 2. *What do the concepts 'unity and diversity' imply to you?*

The following was reported with regard to unity and diversity in education:

- The official practice of unity and diversity among the indigenous (white) inhabitants has been instituted to such an extent that it is no longer debated upon. In Belgium the unity has been instituted in the values as recognised by the Constitution as well as in relevant legislation, and it is supported by mutual understanding between the three regions and communities, namely Flanders, Wallonia and the German-speaking community. The diversity resides in the fact that the cultural and language differences between the three communities are recognised and that each is actively supported. Moreover, diversity is realised in education when the unique needs, aspirations and languages of the three communities and regions are applied in the provision of education. Similarly, in the Netherlands, for example, there is official recognition of different life-views in that differences are acknowledged via the implementation of so-called 'pillarisation'.
- However, the events of 11 September 2001 in New York have changed the world's viewpoints on multiculturalism. In the Netherlands and Belgium, a new tension has developed between the traditional (white) citizens and the newcomers ('allochtonen'), primarily the newcomers from African and Eastern origin. Both countries are considered very liberal and actively support minority groups to maintain their own cultures, religions and languages, even exceeding the needs of minorities. However, regarding diversity, it is now the general opinion of the majority of people in the Netherlands and Belgium that every newcomer can preserve his/her own language, culture, religion and values, but that it should not negatively influence the majority's way of life. Newcomers should accept the values, standards, culture and language of the indigenous communities and prepare themselves to live within the generally agreed-upon parameters. Therefore, in essence, diversity is currently regarded as a private issue.
- The result is that the so-called 'newcomers' are of the opinion that the concepts 'unity' and 'diversity' are not concerned with preferences and needs of the diverse community, but are primarily politically driven. The majority (the white indigenous people) feel threatened by the demands of newcomers/minorities regarding their privileges (as recognised in legislation). The concept 'unity and diversity' no longer informs the meaningful quality of life of minority groups in the larger society. The feeling is developing that the ministry of education protects the majority in many ways, and the climate is currently not at all conducive to diversity. Therefore, for example, the existence of 'white schools' and 'black schools' is a common feature. One may even refer to 'apartheid' in education. Upon complaining, minority groups are ridiculed. Evidently, the majority set the norms and the minority must obey.
- However, there is still a very strong consensus among educationists in the Netherlands and Belgium that in education one should recognise the diversity of individual learners, or else they might 'twyfele aan hun eigene kunnen' (doubt their own competence) because of their ethnical, social-economical, language or religious differences. Students in the minority ('newcomers') should be sufficiently supported, thus assuring each student of the fact that 'ik mag hier zijn en ik behoort ook hier' (I may and should be here). Therefore, the uniqueness of people and should not and cannot be negated or erased. If it is expected of someone to take on a new personality, that individual 'raakt as mens verschewd' (become unbalanced as an individual).
- An important viewpoint regarding diversity, as a solution in the context of education provision, is to recognise that an individual may have dual cultural backgrounds. The 'meerwaarde van een dubbele achtergrond' (the advantage of a dual cultural background) is that such individuals can really understand the uniqueness of different cultural groups and this understanding contributes to the

enrichment of the community and education. A further solution may ensue from the attitude: 'let people meet'. Diversity should be supported and all students should realise that diversity is accepted, recognised and practised. Educationists should therefore enhance the manner in which minorities are recognised and included in education.

- It is evident that in education, the recognition of diversity is not a threat to unity. When differences are recognised, the different groups will not feel threatened and unity in the community will be supported.

Evidently, the responses of participants are concurrent with the literature regarding unity and diversity in education. The Belgian literature acknowledges the fact that education is a key instrument in the guidance of desired changes in the community (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, 2004:6). Moreover, it is recognised that a balance should be attained between rules to guide and support diversity and 'concrete menselijke engagementen op interpersoonlijk en collectief vlak (concrete human engagement on interpersonal level) ... Daarvoor heeft de humane samenleving nood aan bezieling en betrokkenheid, aan mensen die in verschil, in erkenning en in waardering met elkaar samenleven' (real interpersonal contact) (Kerckhoven, 2005: 9). The positive facet of diversity, i.e. the advantage of (an) ability in more than one language and the understanding of diverse norms in society, is also pointed out (Almaci & De Meester, 2005: 8). The Belgian education policy emphasises the paramount importance of diversity. In the 'Decreet – Aanpassing inschrijvingsrecht', the policy has been altered to encourage the enrolment of learners from deprived backgrounds in schools (Schooldirect, 2005: 1-4; Flemish Community, 2005). As far as higher education is concerned, specific measures were taken to increase the enrolment of 'newcomers' (Vandenbroucke, 2005). The Flemish Education Authority also supports and promotes cooperative learning in multicultural groups, content that relates to the interests and world of all learners and individual plans to support the education success of all learners (Vlaams Regering, 2005).

In view of the increased ethnic and cultural diversity in society, the Educational Council in the Netherlands observed that current social trends demand more attention to the socialising role of education. Upon considering the issues involved in unity and diversity, the Council suggested that schools should prepare learners for participation in a democratic, multi-ethnic society. However, more importantly, greater emphasis should be placed upon 'our cultural identity' (Onderwijsraad, 2005). This rather assimilationist position assumed by the Council can only be understood within the context of changes (having occurred during the course of time) in the policy and ideological orientation in the Netherlands, concerning the ethnic and cultural diversity in society. Until recently, the integration policy in the Netherlands was based upon a multicultural model of inclusion with the emancipation of migrant groups as objective (Entzinger, 2003). Consequently, and within the context of the Dutch tradition of pillarisation, the minority policies were identified with initiatives such as the promotion of community languages and mother-tongue education, as well as the establishment of ethnic-religious schools (Alkan, 1996; Koopmans & Statham, 2003). However, these policy initiatives and measures within the context of pillarisation were later seen to result in a segregated social order (Penninx, 2004). In 1994, a new policy – the Integration Policy – was introduced based on the idea that integration should now be understood as 'a process leading to full and equal participation of individuals and groups in society, for which mutual respect for identity is seen as a necessary condition' (Entzinger, 2003). However, the 1994 Integration Policy was based upon the idea of 'mainstreaming' with the intention of diverting from the ethnic identity model, and subsequently placing more emphasis on Dutch language courses, social orientation and vocational training. Thränhardt (2004) remarks that as far as the public discourse is concerned, there seems to be a tendency to blame minority groups for the lack of integration (Essed, 1991). According to Entzinger (2003), the earlier debate was concerned with the tensions between 'diversity and equality'. However, the current debate is concerned with the tensions between 'diversity and unity'.

### 3. *What is the importance of mother-tongue education?*

The following was opined:

- Mother-tongue education is of the utmost importance, because language is an important instrument of the individual to determine his/her place in the community and to support quality education.
- Minorities should obtain a good command of the language of the majority in order to function effectively within the community. A lingua franca is therefore of the essence.
- There is also general agreement that, in a globalising world, learners need a good (at least verbal) competence in languages other than the mother tongue.
- The language development of young children is important and, in this case, the development in the mother tongue should be a major focus. Mother-tongue education is important for the acquisition of multilingual competencies as well as novel languages. It is strongly supported that mother-tongue education should have a central place in education.

The viewpoints of the participants from Belgium were evidently also informed by the practise of mother-tongue education in Belgium (Joris, 2005) and the importance of multilingualism.

Similarly, the importance of mother-tongue education and bilingual development of minority children has been emphasised in Dutch literature (see, for example: Extra, Mol & De Ruiter, 2001; Extra & Yagmur, 2002; Extra & Gorter, 2001).

At this point, it would be instructive to present a brief overview of the developments in the Netherlands concerning the practice of mother-tongue teaching. Mother-tongue education was available from 1974 to 2004. However, this mode of teaching suffered from a lack of support from school authorities and it functioned in isolation from the rest of the school curriculum. The dominant view was that students were frequently prevented from attending core classes. The relatively small funding for 'mother-tongue teaching' was abolished in 2004, and the 'Dutch-only' approach in teaching and learning was rendered a nation-wide norm, thus forbidding children to use their mother tongue even on the playground. Many influential policy-makers and researchers opined that the provision of mother-tongue teaching placed an additional burden on children, and that it constituted a barrier to their integration into the wider society. However, research has indicated that the poor academic performance of bilingual children is directly related to the schools' failure to recognise and develop the child's first language (Skuttnabb-Kangas, 1981; Cummins, 2000). Mother-tongue teaching in the Netherlands illustrates the fact that specific conditions must be adhered to, for instance system support and valuing, integration of mother-tongue teaching into the curriculum, a balanced approach to first and second language teaching with the employment of principles of bilingual education, curriculum development and teacher training.

#### *4. Advice regarding possible solutions as far as the issue of 'unity and diversity' in South Africa is concerned*

The following constitute the most salient suggestions provided by participants:

- Unity must be created via diversity, or else the oppressed will initiate different kinds of resistance. Both unity and diversity in the community are advantageous as far as the country is concerned. Unity does not imply the sameness of the whole community, and diversity does not imply the disintegration of the community.
- Keep identity alive by recognising all languages, heritage and culture. Support all languages and groups in South Africa to develop fully within their particular contexts.
- Enforced integration or mixing of cultures does not work.
- Use the commonalities as a point of departure. Develop a strong common vision and, upon departing from this vision, focus on diversities. The common focus might be the fact that almost all individuals in South Africa call themselves South Africans, although each one has a different background. The concept of dual cultural background has therefore already been strongly established in South Africa.
- Do not lower the standards of education. Provide good education to all, recognising the cultural and social background/context of individual learners.
- Emphasise the general framework/system for quality education – focus on the educational issues such as the cultural, social and emotional capital of each individual learner. Moreover, each learner

should be supported in achieving maximum success within his/her individual context. Focus on several aspects of diversity in education, such as issues regarding gender, age, intellectual differences, language and cultural differences as unique needs of learners. The focus on diversity is important to ensure quality education. Furthermore, acknowledge the differences of each learner – treat equals equally and un-equals unequally. Language forms a part of this: do not only focus on language and its role in education.

- Education should be provided in accordance with the world and world-views, languages and cultures of learners. However, education should also not be of an exclusive nature. When the learners become older or sufficiently developed ‘moet die ramen en deuren open’ (open the doors and windows) to enable them to interact with and learn about the world in its totality and equip themselves to evaluate the world, ‘geworteld in die eigen kultuur en lewensbeskouing’ (rooted in their own culture and world view).
- Planning, as far as education is concerned, should not be conducted in a paternalistic manner. Planning and implementation should be in the best interest of people, but decisions should not be made on their behalf.
- The minority groups should be informed concerning their rights and responsibilities, to prevent them from falling prey to unjust actions. The leaders in the particular minority groups play an important role in supporting that community to provide education according to their unique educational needs.
- Groups should learn to work together on the basis of shared values and meaningful contact. The existence of common, shared values is of the utmost importance.
- Empower teaching personnel to recognise differences and provide sufficient support to each learner.
- Do not force the issue.
- It will be an ongoing struggle to reach a situation where ‘unity in diversity’ is recognised in a positive, just and respectful manner. It might appear as if one needs to start from scratch almost every day.
- It is important to remember that modern society is characterised by differences. The challenge is how to respond to these differences and to constantly remind oneself that the differences are not necessarily opposing the unity and endangering the well-being of the community.
- There should be a continuous investment in ‘let people meet’. People should develop an inclusive (inclusion of differences) manner of thinking.

### **Findings and summary**

Participants’ responses relate positively to the literature regarding the international education rights of minorities and to the practices and different viewpoints in the respective countries. The advice that was proffered may serve as a hypothesis to be tested regarding applicability in the South African situation. The advice may be summarised as follows:

- In terms of quality education provision, the general characteristics of education should be adhered to, especially regarding the usual differentiated support according to the unique needs of all learners. As far as learner support is concerned, aptitude, interest and ability within the context of the needs of national and international society, as well as unique cultural, language and religious backgrounds, should be provided in order for learners to successfully acquire the relevant abilities to fulfil their roles in life. It was very strongly advised that the quality of education, in terms of achievement and outcomes, should not be lowered.
- Mother-tongue education is an important prerequisite to achieve quality education. The need to acquire suitable competence in a lingua franca is also emphasised.
- The concepts ‘unity’ and ‘diversity’ in education should not be regarded as opposing concepts. The point of departure might be the concept of ‘dual cultural background’ of learners. Thus, commence with the commonalities in teaching and learning and introduce the required diversity.

- Do not force the issue of unity and diversity in education. ‘Let people meet’ in a spontaneous manner. All stakeholders should avidly contribute to the improvement instead of the complication of the situation. It will be an ongoing struggle to realise a situation where ‘unity in diversity’ is recognised in a positive, just and respectful manner.
- Some attention was paid to the political and ideological positions involved in the consideration of the concepts of unity and diversity, especially with respect to the developments in the Netherlands and Belgium. It is evident from the analysis that initiatives in education, concerning the principle of unity and diversity and mother-tongue education are possible at different levels of the educational hierarchy. However, these initiatives are likely to be successful only when they represent a challenge to societal power structure. Given the commitment by many people in society to maintain the unequal power relations between the dominant and dominated groups, it can be predicted that educational change, which threatens this power structure, will be fiercely resisted. Therefore, educators and school officials committed to the principles of unity and diversity, language rights of minority groups and equality of educational opportunities should play a more prominent role in the political process of educational policy and decision-making.

## References

- AL-ISSA & AHMAD 2002. Global nomads and the search for cultural identity. *College Teaching*: 52(1).
- ALKAN, M. 1996. Ethnicity and underachievement in the Netherlands: A curricular analysis. (In Wulf, C. ed.. *Education for the Twenty First Century*. Munster: Waxmann.)
- ALMACI, A & DE MEESTER, K. 2005. Van de strijd tegen waste of talent naar talent search. Leuven: Edubron.
- AUERBACH, E.R. 1993. Re-examining English only in the classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(1).
- BABBIE, E. 2004. The practice of social research. Belmont: Wadsworth Thompson.
- CAMPBELL, ANNE. 2000. Cultural identity as a social construct. *Intercultural Education*. 11(1)
- CRESWELL, J. W. 1994. Research design: qualitative and quantitative approaches. London: Sage.
- CRESWELL, J.W. 2003. Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- CHARMAZ, K. 2006. Constructing grounded theory. London: Sage.
- CRABTREE, BF & MILLER, WL. 1999. Clinical research: a multimethod typology and qualitative roadmap. (In Crabtree, BF & Miller, WL. *Doing qualitative research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.)
- CUMMINS, J. 2000. Language, power, and pedagogy: bilingual children in the crossfire. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- DAWIE, B. 2005. Knap bestuursrede – maar waar was die visie? Kaapstad. *Die Burger*, 12 Feb.
- DETRICK, SHARON. 1992. The United Nations conventions on the rights of the child. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff.
- DUGMORE, K. 2005. Praat Saam. RSG (Radio sonder grense), 27 Jul.
- EC *see* EUROPEAN COMMUNITY. 1990. Charter of Paris for a New Europe. London: HMSO.
- ENTZINGER, H. 2003. The rise and fall of multiculturalism: the case of the Netherlands. (In Joppke, C. & Morawaska, E. eds. *Toward assimilation and citizenship: immigrants in liberal nation-states*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.)
- ESSED, P. 1991. Understanding everyday racism. Newbury Park: Sage.
- EXTRA, G. & GORTER, D. eds. 2001. The other languages of Europe. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- EXTRA, G, MOL, T. & DE RUITER, J.J. 2001. The Status van Allochtone talen thuis en op school. Tilburg: Babylon.
- EXTRA, G. & YAGMUR, K. 2002. *Language diversity in multicultural Europe*. MOST, UNESCO. FAK *see* Federasie vir Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings

- FEDERASIE VIR AFRIKAANSE KULTUURVERENIGINGS. 2007. FAK vra Pandor vir nasionale veldtog oor moedertaalonderrig. Persvystelling. 13 Mar.
- FERREIRA, M. 1988. Introduction to qualitative research methods. Pretoria: Human Science Research Council.
- FLEMISH COMMUNITY (MINISTRY). 2005. Equal educational opportunities for every child. Brussels: Ludy van Buyten.
- FOUCHÉ, C.B. 2002. Research strategies. (In De Vos, A.S., ed. Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human services professions. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik.)
- FOUCHÉ, C.B. & DELPORT, C.S.L. 2002. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- GELDENHUYS, D. 2006. Die internasionalisering van Afrikaans se situasie. *Vrye Afrikaan*, 19 Mei.
- GILIOMEE, H; HEESE, C & SCHLEMMER, L. 2005. Afrikaansmedium onderrig op skool en van die menings van ouers in alle gemeenskappe oor die huidige stand van skoolonderwys. Stellenbosch.
- HEUGH, K. 2001. Mother tongue and bilingual education for development – A necessity not a luxury in South Africa. PRAESA.
- JORIS, M. 2005. Onderwijstaal. Diepenbeek: Katolieke Hogeschool Limburg.
- KERCKHOVEN, D. 2005. Diversiteit als meerwaarde' *Hogelijn*, 13:2. Jun.
- Khumalo, B 2005. Historical hangovers make a mockery of equal education. *Sunday Times* 25 January. p. 20.
- KIRBY, KATHE. 2004. I am the future's child. Primary and middle years. *Educator*, 2:3, Nov.
- KOOPMANS, R. & STATHAM, P. 2003. How national citizenship shapes transnationalism – Migrant and minority claims-making in Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands. (In Joppke, C. & Morawaska E., eds. Toward assimilation and citizenship – Immigrants in liberal nation-states. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.)
- KUEHN, LARRY. 1992. 'Education – Mosaic vs melting pot'. *Social Policy*, 23:1, Summer.
- LAFORREST, G. 1993. Introduction. (In Taylor, C., 1993. Reconciling the Solitudes. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.)
- MACEDONIA. 2007. Debates highlight language education and local participation. <http://www.dianet.org/index.php> Date of access: 13 Jun. 2007.
- MEIJNEN, W. ed. 2003. Onderwijsachterstanden in basisscholen. Antwerpen-Apeldoorn: Garant.
- NEUMAN, W.L. 2003. Social Research Methods – Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- NLCR *see* National Council of La Raza
- NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA. 2006. NLCR addresses NCLB impact on Latino children in meeting with President Bush. [http://www.ndr.org/content/browse/news/details/45602 & 45301](http://www.ndr.org/content/browse/news/details/45602&45301). Date of access: 13 Jun. 2007.
- ONDERWIJSRAAD. 2005. De stand van educatief Nederland. 's-Gravenhage: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap.
- PENNINX, R. 2004. Contradictory developments in local, national and EU-level integration policies – The Dutch Case. Visitors Lecture Series: Migration policies and processes in Europe. Washington: Migration Policy Institute.
- SCHOOLDIRECT. 2005. Inschrijvingsrecht word bijgestuurd. <http://ond.vlaanderen.be/schooldirect/PR502/> Date of access: 15 Oct. 2005.
- SCHURINK, E.M. 1998. The methodology of unstructured face-to-face interviewing. (In De Vos, A.S. ed. Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Poggenpoel, Schurink E. & W. Research at Grass Roots: A primer for the caring professions. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik.
- SCP *see* Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau
- SCHWANT, T.A. 2000. Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry. (In Denzin, NK & Lincoln, Y.S. eds. Handbook of Qualitative Research. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.)

- SKUTTNABB-KANGAS, T. 1981 . Bilingualism or not – the education of minorities. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- SOCIAAL CULTUREEL PLANBUREAU. 2005. Jaarrapport minderheden. Den Haag: Staatsuitgeverij.
- STEYN, H.J. 1998. The perceptions of the national education system by minority groups. Potchefstroom: Keurkopié.
- STEYN, H.J. & WOLHUTER, C.C. 2000. Education systems of the emerging countries: Challenges of the 21st century. Potchefstroom: Keurkopié.
- STEYN, H.J.; STEYN, SC; WOLHUTER, C.C. & DE WAAL, E.A.S. 2002. Die onderwysstelsel: struktuur en tendense. Potchefstroom: Keurkopié.
- STRAUSS, A. & CORBIN, J. 1998. Basic qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. London: Sage.
- TAYLOR, C. 1993. Reconciling the solitudes. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.
- THRÄNHARDT, D. 2004. Turkish immigrants in Germany and the Netherlands: Fact and perceptions. Integration of Turkish immigrants in Australia, Holland and Germany. Istanbul: Bogazici University.
- UN *see* United Nations.
- UNITED NATIONS. 1948. International Bill of Human Rights. (*In* United Nations: Human Rights – A compilation of international instruments. New York: United Nations.)
- UNITED NATIONS. 1966. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (*In* United Nations: Human Rights – A Compilation of international instruments. New York: United Nations.)
- UNITED NATIONS. 1990. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (*In* Detrick, Sharon. 1992. The United Nations conventions on the rights of the child. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff.)
- Unesco *see* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
- UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION. 1960. Convention against discrimination in education. (*In* United Nations. Human Rights: A compilation of international instrument. New York: United Nations.)
- VANDENBROUCKE, F. 2005. Engagementsverklaring: Diversiteit als meerwaarde in het Hoger Onderwijs. (Adress delivered on 31 May 2005.)
- VAN STAADEN, H. 2005. Pupils township exodus in spotlight. *The Herald*:10, 4 Feb. Also cf. Van Staaden, H. 2005. Township pupils move to former Model C Schools. *The Herald*:12, 3 Feb.
- VLAAMSE FONDS (DEPARTEMENT ONDERWIJS). 2004. Ruimte voor inclusief onderwijs. Opgesteld naar aanleiding van het symposium over inclusief Onderwijs, 16 Januari 2004.
- Vlaamse Onderwijsraad. 2004. Memorandum: Krachtlijnen voor een toekomstig onderwijsbeleid. Brussel: Onderwijsraad.
- VLAAMSE REGERING. 2005. Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering betreffende het geïntegreerd ondersteuningsaanbod in het gewoon basisonderwijs. Brussel.
- WILSON, D. 2002. Minority rights in education. Elanders Novum AB.

### **Participants in Belgium**

- Prof. Dirk van Damme, Kabinetschef for Education in Flanders, Brussels, Belgium.
- Drs Jan Geens, Coordinator of Internationalisation and Quality Support, VLHORA, Brussels, Belgium.
- Mr Johan Vanderhoeven, Dean, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, KHBO-University for Professional and Academic Education, Brugge, Belgium.
- Ms Josette Daniels, Training Coordinator, Department of Lerarenopleiding, Katolieke Hogeschool Limburg, Diepenbeek, Belgium.

### **Participants in the Netherlands**

- Ms Lous 'd Aritillac Brill, Advisor and Consultant to Department of Education, Netherlands.
- Dr M. Alkan, Department of Education Services, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Ms Anna-Maria Andriol, Senior Advisor on Diversity Issues, Haagse Hogeschool, The Hague, Netherlands.
- Ms Rubina Boasman, Projectleider, Sectorbestuur, Onderwijsarbeidsmarkt, The Hague, Netherlands.

Drs L.N. Rottier, Algemeen Directeur, Driestar Educatief, Gouda, Netherlands.