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Introduction of a Wapishana-English bilingual education programme: an evaluation of the early stages

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

> *Article 13*
>
> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. […]
>
> *Article 14*
>
> 1. Indigenous people have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
> 2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the state without discrimination.
> 3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.
>
> (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007: 7)

Article 13.1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that Indigenous histories, languages, beliefs, and cultural practices are valid forms of self-expression, which Indigenous Peoples have the right to transmit to their children and future generations. Article 14.1, complementing the above, stresses that Indigenous children have the right to an education that provides them with continuity of personal development in their own language and culture. Article 14.2 further stresses that Indigenous children have the right to equality of access to the national education systems in their countries. Finally, Article 14.3 emphasizes that countries/states facilitate the Indigenous forms of cultural transmission by encouraging and supporting their implementation.

These articles of the United Nations Declaration the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, signed and ratified by states, recognize some of the fundamental human rights that all peoples have. According to Jansen and Jiménez (2017: 26), these articles of the declaration, based on moral and ethical principles together with social norms, "precede and transcend the letter of law". Essentially, the internationally recognized Human Rights have not only set the international standards by which Indigenous Peoples can affirm their collective rights in order to find solutions to their social problems, but also for legitimating the use of their native languages and cultures in education.

The UN declaration was not the first to recognize the importance of addressing the rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, it is the prime current example of an international document to which the Indigenous Peoples can refer to claim their fundamental rights and in turn transmit knowledge of such rights to others. The declaration may have been inspired and informed in part by the 169th agreement of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which was written eighteen years prior. This ILO instrument recognized the use of Indigenous Peoples' languages in their education. Specifically, article 28 states that the children who belonged to the Indigenous or Tribal Peoples should "be taught to read and write in their own language or in a language most commonly used by the group to which they belong" (Feiring 2013: 43). Based on these international standards, Indigenous Peoples may speak from a position of strength, claiming a fundamental human right while at the same time defending and dignifying their Indigenous languages and cultures. Should states take the responsibility for the ratification of the above-named articles of the 169th agreement of the ILO and the UN declaration, the Indigenous Peoples will be further facilitated in addressing their social problems connected with language and culture.

Indigenous people around the world are beset by both unique and systemic social and educational problems. A key example of such problems is that of educational underachievement by children, as expressed by Baker (1995: 185):

> … when bilingual children exhibit under-achievement, the attributed reason is sometimes a mismatch between home and school. Such a mismatch is seen as not just about language differences but also about dissimilarities in culture, values and beliefs.

Many Indigenous communities are the archetype of the link between home–school mismatch and educational underachievement by children. In the Wapishana communities in Guyana—the focus of this PhD research—the

Wapishana language is the mother tongue while the dominant and official language of Guyana is English. Despite the fact that the Wapishana children do not know or barely know English on their entry into nursery school, they find themselves primarily, though not exclusively, in an English-only instructional environment. This is because the head teacher and teachers, despite being Wapishana and often fluent in the Wapishana language, begin and continue the school's reading programme and other subjects in English, the norm in all government-run schools. Consequently, one head teacher shared that over a period of time an analysis of the National Grade Two Assessment revealed that a majority of children in Wapishana communities were not achieving the literacy and numeracy benchmarks set by the Ministry of Education. This academic underachievement by children led teachers to realize that the majority of Wapishana children have a lack of requisite second language experiences on entry to school. The realization that the children are at such a disadvantage is consistent with the "recognition of a social problem connected with language" (Fasoldd 1984: 250). This language-related challenge for children especially in their education is, however, not confined to the Wapishana and other Indigenous communities in the country. Similar challenges are encountered by Indigenous communities in other countries of South America, such as Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela. and El Salvador (Mora 2014: 16) and by culturally diverse communities elsewhere in the world such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, The Philippines, and Thailand (Kosonen et al. 2007: 18–37).[1] In fact, statistically speaking, nearly 40% of people around the world have no access to first-language or mother-tongue education (Walter and Benson 2012: 23). Returning to the Wapishana, the teachers' motivation was to address the dissimilarities in the language and culture experienced by the children. The most useful initial strategy for stakeholders who want to remedy this situation is the reintroduction of the children's first language and cultural context in the formal school setting, beginning at the kindergarten or the nursery level. This strategy will provide the young learners with continuity of their prior knowledge and experiences, since language is embedded in culture. Such continuity would be most beneficial for learners because it will lay the foundation for the literacy aspects of the learners' second language and future academic work in school.

The theoretical basis for the aforementioned strategy is the transferability of children's knowledge and skills from the mother tongue to the second language and that children's second language learning is influenced considerably with respect to the development of their mother tongue (Malone 2016: 2). Such theoretical basis has been established in part through large-scale research in North America (Benson and Young 2016: 2) and substantiated in other countries, particularly through the Latin American experience of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) which is "one of the varieties of bilingual education aimed at finding answers not only to the problem of illiteracy but also such issues as social integration of Indigenous communities together with the preservation of their cultural and linguistic diversity" (Szelivánov 2015: 35). More evidence for the advantages of using a mother tongue-based approach to education in bilingual/multilingual contexts is briefly reviewed in Chapter 4. Indeed, even though such overwhelming evidence comes from countries where the dominant languages are English and Spanish, mother tongue-based education certainly has high relevance to a country like Guyana where the dominant and national language of education is English, but where smaller populations such as those in the indigenous communities still speak their own native languages robustly.

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[1] Culturally diverse communities are groups of people who (a) share cultures (or ethnicities) and/or languages of their own that distinguishes them from other groups of people; and (b) in terms of numbers, are fewer than the predominant groups in a given state (Kosonen et al. 2007: 1).

The term bilingual education "usually refers to the use of two (or more) languages of instruction at some point in the student's school career" (Cummins 1996: 99). More recently, bilingual education may be referred to as "the use of two languages in a formal education system" (Bühmann and Trudell (2008: 8) or "as a system that uses two languages in the instruction and in the curriculum, more or less in an equal manner" (Jiménez 2015: 5). However, bilingual education implies more than the above definitions. According to Cummins, the term bilingual education is generally defined in relation to how particular goals are achieved; therefore, proficiency in two languages is not necessarily a goal of bilingual education. As in the case of bilingual indigenous education in the rural environment in Mexico, "it has been common to teach… first in the L1 and then gradually introduce the L2, until gradually achieving the displacement of the L1" (Recendiz 2008: 115). This is an example of the most common model of bilingual education, in which children are transitioned from learning in the mother tongue to learning in the dominant or national language, promoting monolingualism as opposed to promoting bilingualism or "building multilingualism and multiliteracy" (Benson and Young 2016: 2). The routes to and models of bilingual education are further discussed in Chapter 4 (see Sections 4.3 and 4.5.1, respectively).

In this chapter, I share some of the major reasons, sources of inspiration and justification for the project that led to this thesis (Section 1.2). I then present the thesis statement together with the research questions that generate the core of the research data (Section 1.3). The significance and the limitations of the study are next considered in the context within which the study took place (Section 1.4), followed by a description of the variety of methods employed to collect data (Section 1.5). In the last section, I give an overview of the chapters to follow (Section 1.6).

1.2 The motivation for the Wapishana–English bilingual education approach

Wapishana teachers have long recognized that part of the educational difficulties faced by their pupils was the language mismatch problem. Driven by a responsibility to be more resourceful in overcoming their children's underachievement, the head teacher and teachers in one Wapishana village sought a strategic intervention in 2014—together with the representatives of the village, the government, and some non-governmental organizations—in the conventional approach to their teaching. While the common historical convention has been to employ the children's second language (English) as the language of instruction, the teachers shifted their attention starting with the children's first language (Wapishana). This paradigm shift was influenced by a reflection on the successes of past Wapishana literacy efforts of which I was part (see Chapter 3 for more details). Besides being an Indigenous educator working in the community to which I belong, I was specifically contacted based on my experience as the coordinator of the Wapishana instruction programme that was run between 2000 and 2002 in schools of the South Rupununi (See Section 3.3.4). This work enabled me to gain experience on the successes and constraints of such a programme. As such, it was perceived that I might be able to give valuable input in the light of a proposed Wapishana-based bilingual education programme, that is, the integrating of Wapishana pre-reading and pre-writing instruction in nursery classes, leading further to Wapishana reading and writing instruction in the early grades of the primary school. Thus, as community members, we shared common interests to redressing the children's underachievement. In other words, our collective, locally initiated advocacy for teaching reading and writing in Wapishana first, as a foundation upon which academic development can be built in the schools, formed part of the motivation. In this way, the teachers' self-identification of their own challenge and self-determination of the related solution are in line with the key concept that "bottom-up practices are a good foundation for strong bilingual education programs" (Benson 2004: 7). Similarly, a mother tongue-based bilingual education programme tends to be successful when it "begins at the level of the local community itself" (Lewis and Simons 2014: 46).

My efforts in advancing initial literacy in Wapishana village schools can be traced back to planning the integration of Wapishana literacy in village schools in 2000. Several major activities/events associated with Wapishana literacy by year include the following: participating in a UNICEF-sponsored workshop entitled "Delivery of Improved Education in Region 9" in 2000; coordinating a Wapishana literacy instruction programme in nursery schools and grades 1 and 2 of primary schools in six villages from 2000 to 2003; participating in an international course entitled "Bridging mother tongue to the school language" in 2005; coordinating an adult literacy programme for Wapishana villages from 2011 to 2014; and collaborating with stakeholders for the advocacy of a Wapishana based-instruction in village schools from 2014 to 2016.

To begin with, one source of inspiration came from a recommendation of stakeholders of Region 9 at a UNICEF workshop that I attended in April 2000.[2] The stakeholders recommended that Indigenous languages be taught in schools. This recommendation was later documented in the Blueprint for the Delivery of Improved Education in Region 9 (2000: 6).

Although the teaching of reading and writing in Wapishana in at least six nursery and six primary schools has been tried over the years 2000 to 2003, it has not been incorporated into the formal educational system, partly because "there is no explicit policy that addresses any special education programme for Amerindian children in Guyana" (Amerindian Peoples Plan 2014: 4). Therefore, with the current government's support for a bilingual education approach in Wapishana communities, my interest in it was naturally reignited.

The opportunity to continue and finish the work I had discontinued in 2005—designing a Wapishana-based literacy programme as an initial literacy strategy for children—served as another inspiration to write this thesis. The abandonment of the work was due to a break in communication with some professionals who shared similar interests with me as well as an educational policy environment that implicitly emphasized English over mother tongue instruction in schools. Initially, I had begun the work based on the training I received through a one-month international course entitled "Bridging mother tongue to the school language". I had envisioned that the application of the knowledge gained would enable me to make a contribution to the enhancement of the Wapishana children's academic growth. Over the last two decades, successive governments had indicated their verbal support to have indigenous languages taught in schools of the predominantly indigenous communities.

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[2] The UNICEF Amazon Programme was a special international programme concerned with developmental projects in Guyana during the late 1990s. The workshop brought together stakeholders for discussions on a Blueprint for the Delivery of Improved Education in Region 9.

Recent developments in the communities in the context of Wapishana literacy have given me further encouragement. An adult literacy programme to teach reading and writing in Wapishana from 2011 to 2014, resulted in approximately 1,000 individuals now literate in their mother tongue. This result fostered the expectation that the increased number of mother tongue readers and writers would lead to fuller participation in parent–teacher meetings, as well as facilitating progress in the implementation of the project.

Beginning in 2014, our communal advocacy for mother tongue-based instruction in the village schools received both national and international attention from national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL, international), Jesuit Missions (Guyana), Fe y Alegría (Bolivia), and the supranational organization, UNICEF, with an office in Guyana.[3] One of the implications of such attention is that, as partners or stakeholders of educational programmes in the country, these national/international NGOs are more likely to access external funding and appropriate technical personnel for projects that require additional capital spending on the part of the government. The emphasis on international assistance is of relevance given that the bilingual education programme may be the first of its kind to be piloted among communities in a country that has been accustomed to a conventional monolingual education system. Where multilingual literacy is concerned, it is significantly a "more complicated issue than a monolingual one; it requires more efforts, financial contribution and well-organized strategies" (Szelivánov 2015: 37). It is desirable that at some point such projects are eventually run independent of international funding. Another reason for taking international assistance into account may be on ideological grounds in the sense that some governments may need to change their perspectives on such programmes. In this respect, "International contacts or exchanges are important to overcome nationalist ideology" (Jiménez 2015: 7). International influence may come into play in cases, for example, where some governments (such as those of the Latin American countries of Peru, Mexico, and Guatemala) have actively participated in initiatives involving bilingual education policy, but which needs to be more of an academic or social justice concern rather than a political response (Escobar 2013; 741). This is consistent with the apt point made by Jiménez (2015: 7) with respect to more inclusive national, cultural, and educational environments for the Mixtec of Mexico: "In this way, education can be the "third space": an atmosphere of mutual respect, in which we can all communicate, learn and be creative." However, to create such an atmosphere is an immense challenge by itself. For new educational programmes in Indigenous contexts to succeed in this atmosphere, key stakeholders such as the community, the government, and the NGOs need to first of all agree to work in concert with one another.

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[3] The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is a faith-based organization. The Jesuit Missions is a religious-based Catholic body that has had a presence in what was formerly known as British Guiana, now Guyana, since early colonial times. Fe y Alegría is another religious-based Catholic organization that has been working in several Latin American countries (Mora 2014: 14). UNICEF is an international organization concerned with the development of children.

Returning to the above-named NGOs, we were inspired by Fe y Alegría (Faith and Joy), an education model that was successfully implemented in other South American countries and elsewhere in the world. Fe y Alegría aims to offer quality education to socially marginalized and impoverished populations and is present in 19 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Mora 2014: 14). After some fruitful discussions with partner NGOs, it became clear that teaching literacy first in Wapishana and incorporating aspects of Wapishana traditional customs and cultural practices was a viable and feasible approach. As it is with faith-based organizations working among Indigenous Peoples, although their earlier missionary practices are to use "native languages for the purposes of evangelization and teaching the bible" (Novo 2014: 111), they have nowadays pondered on how best to assist the Indigenous children in their overall development. The Jesuit Missions in Guyana, for example, acknowledged that Indigenous communities throughout Latin America and indeed other parts of the world face the same question: "How can we educate our children in such a way that helps them progress and develop in the modern world, yet at the same time hand on to them the wisdom contained in their culture?" (from a letter dated 11 May 2016 from the Regional Superior of the Jesuits in Guyana to the Ministry of Education Inquiry Secretariat, Ministry of Education). The Jesuit Missions in Guyana proffered that a new curriculum needs to be produced which not only uses Wapishana as the medium of schooling but which incorporates elements of the Wapishana culture as well. Further, such a curriculum would require all teachers in the schools be trained in a new pedagogy. In this sense, there was consensus among the representatives of the faith-based organizations that part of the information needed to develop the curriculum should be about the values held by most people in the community. These values are certain aspects of the people's traditional culture or beliefs that in their view are acceptable or unacceptable in the community. Therefore, stakeholders supported the idea that values shared by the community be incorporated into the programme. For their part, representatives of the Ministry of Education expressed their support verbally and through their presence at a meeting of stakeholders on 25 April 2016 in Maruranau. Further momentum was built up through an invitation from the Chief Education Officer of The Ministry of Education, for me to follow through with a presentation to other senior education officials in the capital city of Guyana, Georgetown. Thus, the willingness of the partner representatives to continually engage us in the project kept the momentum going.

More recently in 2016, during one of the quarterly meetings of a body of Indigenous leaders called the South Rupununi District Toshaos Council, the leaders reiterated the recommendation for the use of Wapishana language in the formal system via a letter to the Minister of Education. (In Guyana, an officially appointed Indigenous leader is called a toshao.) The letter represented a unified call for the government's support of the local initiative. The letter also reflected the communities' appreciation of and readiness to support such an initiative, thereby providing us with fresh impetus to pursue the project.

The reason to embark on this study is the fact that a clear majority of children entering formal schooling in the Wapishana communities are Wapishana-speaking. Based on my own experience of being a Wapishana and living in the community for over 50 years, approximately 95% of the children come from Wapishana-speaking homes whereas the remainder come from homes where their parents mainly speak English. While the Wapishana constitute only about 1% of the country's total population of approximately 800 000, they are in the majority in their villages. Moreover, the majority of the teachers employed in nursery and primary schools in the Wapishana communities are themselves Wapishana. For example, out of the nine female teachers in three pilot nursery schools, eight are Wapishana, while one is from the Makushi (another Indigenous People), married to a Wapishana. The eight teachers speak the language but some are still not literate in it. The evidence that Wapishana is indeed the stronger language used by both children and teachers served as a justification to lobby the government for the development of a first-language literacy first approach in the community schools.

Further motivation stemmed from ample research evidence regarding the educational validity of bilingual education, thereby providing a solid educational justification for mother tongue instruction. For example, the majority of research reports have found that developing competence and skills in the L1 can be transferred to the L2 (Baker 1995: 47 and Cummins 1996: 111).[4] Research also suggests that "the more developed the first language, the easier it will be to develop the second language" (Baker 2006: 173) and that "L1 academic proficiency is a strong predictor of L2 proficiency" (Cummins 1996: 133). These points of reference associated with North American and European contexts can guide us to adapt the form of bilingual education that suits the particular locality**.** Even in Latin America, seventeen countries have attempted to implement some kind of bilingual education, at least at the primary school level (López 2008: 44). In countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru that have Indigenous communities, one type of bilingual education, at its best, is "intercultural in that it recognizes and values understanding and dialogue across different lived experiences and cultural world views" (Hornberger 2009: 198). By vast experience, such practice of the bilingual and intercultural education processes is already well consolidated (Mora 2013: 18). Although the context in Latin American countries is different, the principles of intercultural education can be adapted in Guyana, the only English-speaking country within the continent.

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[4] First language (L1) refers to the learners' first language or mother tongue (Benson 2004: 19). This is the language they know best. Second language

There is also the social justice motivation, with its legal attendant repercussions for initially undertaking this study. That initial literacy should be in the language that children are most comfortable with is congruent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP 2007), adopted by Guyana. As stated in the beginning of Section 1.1, Article 14 recognizes the right of children to be educated in their first language. On this note, D' Emilio (2009: 1) asserts that it is not just about one particular right for one particular group of children, but about being able to offer the indigenous child exactly the same right that other children have to express themselves and communicate in their maternal language. This implies equality of treatment among children. Just as how children who speak the dominant language of a society at large have the right to be educated in that language, so do children who speak the non-dominant language at home have the right to be educated in theirs.

Finally, there were some personal motivations. I have had first-hand experience as a schoolteacher in both primary and secondary schools, seeing the struggles of the Wapishana children as they tried to fully understand their lessons in school. Based on these experiences, I was able to empathize and join with the teachers who sought assistance in reversing the pattern of school underachievement by their students. Another encouragement was the thought that the writing up of this research would be of some assistance to the studious readers who would like to follow a similar line of endeavour.

(L2) refers to the language that is not the mother tongue of a person, but she/he communicates with it (Kosonen et al. 2007: 1).

Thus far, I have shared a combination of factors that influenced my pursuit of the Wapishana–English bilingual education approach in the Wapishana communities. In the next section I give the thesis statement and present the research questions.

1.3 Thesis statement and research questions

In Section 1.1, I cited educational difficulties for Wapishana children when they are not taught literacy in their first language. Based on these concerns, the broad purpose of the present study is to evaluate the processes of the introduction of a Wapishana–English Bilingual Education Programme currently running in three Wapishana communities in Guyana.

The evaluation of the processes is to determine what practices promote children becoming biliterate, bilingual, intercultural, and academically oriented so as to improve the existing practices in the Wapishana–English Bilingual Programme, such that it is meaningfully integrated rather than peripherally added to the mainstream curriculum. Such piloting is in alignment with using bilingual pupils' home language and cultural context in the teaching/learning environment as an essential initial strategy (Nyakatawa and Siraj-Blatchford 1994: 114). In this study, I reinforce the argument that besides the teaching of English academic skills, the initial and continued utilization of children's linguistic, cultural, and experiential background plays a critical role in determining their language learning and academic development. The core of my analysis concerns determining whether or not the "ingredients" of educationally proven forms of bilingual education in similar contexts are present in the Wapishana–English Bilingual Education Programme currently being piloted among the Wapishana children. In addition, I explore to what extent the ingredients are maintained and make recommendations to improve the existing practices.

In view of the above-mentioned broad purpose of the study, the main research question is "What are the practices in mother tongue-based schooling that promote children becoming biliterate, bilingual, intercultural, and academically oriented?"

The specific research questions are as follows:

1 What are the perceptions about the contributions of stakeholder groups in the planning stages of the mother tongue-based bilingual education programme?

2 To what extent have the essential features, components, and best strategies for successful bilingual education programmes been implemented in the introduction of the current programme?

3 What changes can be made for the improvement of the current programme so that it meets the needs of the Wapishana children, their families and their communities?

1.4 Significance and limitations of the study

In light of the research questions, I note the significance and limitations of the study. This study will assist me in offering recommendations on the components of the Wapishana–English Bilingual Education Programme that needs to be maintained, strengthened, and modified. The modified programme may lead to the adoption of the model to other similar educational contexts in the country. The outcome of the study will also strengthen the existing efforts of Wapishana language maintenance by the grass roots organization, the Wapichannao Waudniinao Ati'o (WWA: Wapishana Literacy Association) (see Appendix A for details on the WWA.).

However, there are limitations to the study. Firstly, most of the data were collected during the planning process of the programme, which lasted for about two years (2016 to 2018). During this time, I made my first two field trips. This means that the data relate less to the implementation, of which only the first seven months were covered by this study. Secondly, my direct observation at the beginning of the implementation process, which began in September 2018, was not possible. Thus, for the first three months into implementation, data were gathered from reports of the teacher-participants and the local coordinator of the programme. For the remainder of the four months (December 2018 through March 2019), data were gathered during my final field study period. Thus, the data related to the early stages of the programme, plus the seven months into the implementation stage, represent only part of the overall two-year programme. However, since the project is a two-year programme, the preparation process is critical. As noted by Hinton (2001: 51), some donor agencies in the United States insist that for any language project, especially as it relates to revitalization, local communities must first apply for a planning grant "and only after carrying out a year of planning, can they apply for an "implementation grant'." Similarly critical was the two-year planning period for the Wapishana–English bilingual programme**.** In fact, the planning process was extended beyond a year mainly because the draft materials for the first year of the programme had to be reviewed and modified by the implementers. In the following section, I describe the methods employed in the study.

1.5 Methods

This study follows mainly qualitative research which may be described as multi-method, engaging the subject matter in an interpretive and a naturalistic approach (Wilson 2008: 39). I give a more detailed account of the methodology used in Chapter 5.

For part of this qualitative research, I asked Indigenous elders to tell stories about their histories and culture. The reason is that stories are culturally appropriate methods for the transmission of knowledge and skills, reflective of Indigenous communities. This is in line with Smith's (1999: 144) affirmation that "[s]torytelling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research." Other researchers have likewise affirmed that storytelling plays an important role in Indigenous methodologies. For example, methodologies such as storytelling methods emanate from the values and cultures of the peoples researched (Chilisa 2012: 306), and research stories reveal the deep purpose of our enquires (Kovach 2009: 108). In addition to the stories from elders, my research data stemmed from participant-observation of the people's activities, responses, or comments from people interviewed, information from documents, and observations from classroom teaching. Therefore, I employed a combination of methods to collect information on the context of the Wapishana and the actual pilot programme.

Firstly, the information on Wapishana history and the impact of colonization on the Wapishana is based primarily on my own knowledge and experience as a Wapishana insider and supplemented by some informal interviews that I conducted during the first fieldwork trip between December 2016 and March 2017. Secondly, the information on the preparatory stages of the pilot programme is based on the written documents, which I perused during the first fieldwork trip and during the second trip between December 2017 and March 2018. I also conducted additional interviews during this second trip. Thirdly, the information on teacher–pupil interactions is based on classroom observations that I conducted during the third fieldwork trip between February and March 2019. The information from the observations is primarily to supplement information obtained from the interviews. In the next section, I offer an overview of the contents of this thesis.

1.6 Overview of thesis

This chapter began with a consideration of the reasons, inspiration, and factors that motivated me to conduct this study. I then presented the thesis statement and research questions, followed by the significance and limitations of the study. I subsequently briefly described the methods used in the collection of the data. The remainder of this section concerns the organization of the subsequent chapters.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide the context for the present study. Chapter 2 offers a description of where Wapishana communities are located and their territories and of the Wapishana people that inhabit the communities, followed by a brief overview of their history. This chapter then sketches the impact of colonization on the Wapishana people and outlines elements/activities that embed values that could form the foundation upon which an interculturally and educationally relevant curriculum for the children could be built. Chapter 3 analyses the previous attempts at teaching Wapishana literacy in some schools and the role that the grassroots organization WWA played in these efforts. Some Wapishana orthography issues are further highlighted so that local decisions may be made to standardize the spelling system.

Chapter 4 reviews the literature study on bilingual education programmes associated with second language learners in culturally diverse contexts. The chapter then focuses on the arguments for and against bilingual education, the approaches to bilingual education and circumstances that determine types of programmes. A sketch of the essential features or components for planning a bilingual education programme are then presented, followed by a consideration of pedagogical strategies and materials employed in bilingual education programmes.

In Chapter 5 research participants are first described, followed by sources of information: elders of the community and documents relevant to the pilot programme. This is followed by a description of the procedure of interviews and classroom observations.

In Chapter 6, an evaluation of the introduction of the bilingual education programme begins with an overview of the problems and need of the Wapishana community. Perceptions about the contributions of stakeholder groups towards the planning of the programme are drawn from the interviews. Essential features and components and ingredients identified in Chapter 4 are compared with what is currently practised in the Wapishana–English Bilingual Education Programme by way of the interviews and classroom observations. The findings lead to a thematic analysis that could be used to improve the existing practices, which in turn lead to the creation of a conceptual framework to work with. Overall, the analysis ascertains what practices suggested by research and experience promote biliterate, bilingual, intercultural, and academically oriented children.

In the final chapter (Chapter 7), I begin with some limitations of the study. I then present some insights into the potential contributions towards the wider study and success of bilingual education and recommendations for improvement of the current programme, followed by suggestions for future research in similar contexts and some final words.