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Section 2: Language, literacy and education



Growing young readers and writers: underpinnings of the Nal'ibali National Reading-for-Enjoyment Campaign

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When someone reads aloud, they raise you to the level of the book. They give you reading as a gift.
(Pennac, 2006: 95)

It starts with a story

Since 1992, the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) has argued strongly for a focus on two interconnected educational priorities: the need to base our education system on the languages children and teachers speak, think and feel in; and the need for early literacy teaching approaches to be based in meaningful and exciting encounters with stories and books (Bloch, 1999, 2000; Bloch and Alexander, 2003; Bloch, 2009).

In 2006, PRAESA began working with communities to set up and support informal reading clubs to expose children to the desirable conditions that we believed should be in place for all children so that they can learn to read and write. These experiences over two decades informed the design of the Nal'ibali Reading-for-Enjoyment Campaign, which began in 2012 when we took up the challenge¹ to set in motion and drive a national children's literacy campaign.

Nal'ibali, now in its third year, means 'Here's the story' in isiXhosa. With its key message, 'It starts with a story', Nal'ibali aims to revive and deepen our appreciation of stories and narrative as being not only essential as the primary way that we as human beings remember and organise our thoughts and conceptual worlds, but also the basis for critical thinking and a meaningful education for all children (Krashen, 1993; Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

It does this by sparking connections between adults and children as they tell, read and talk about stories² in languages they understand as well as those they want to learn. This is a powerful way to sew seeds of curiosity and interest for reading and writing and the desire and motivation to know more. In so doing, we are helping to create the kinds of informally structured conditions for essential, but often invisible, literacy experiences to take place regularly in communities. By overtly (re)positioning oral and written stories as valuable in daily life, parents and other adults have the chance to experience for themselves how homes, community venues and after-school spaces, which are in fact places of learning, can contribute richly towards children's literacy development. Their role, even those who are not readers and writers themselves, is central for the growth of literate communities. Jonathan Gotschall describes human beings as storytelling animals:

Tens of thousands of years ago, when the human mind was young and our numbers were few, we were telling one another stories. And now, tens of thousands of years later ... we still thrill to an astonishing multitude of fiction on pages, on stages and on screens ... We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories. (2012: xii-xiv)

By working with this 'story addiction' wisely, from early childhood onwards, as research shows, we enhance learning capacity and output. Sensible as this may sound, such an understanding is not widely accepted as being central to supporting *all* children's initial literacy learning, although it is actually taken for granted, as 'normal' for the children of middle class English speakers. I will explain what I mean as I contextualise the work of Nal'ibali, by raising and discussing some major issues which affect and influence formal literacy education. I will then introduce the work of Nal'ibali.

1 Nal'ibali was initiated with support from the DG Murray Trust Foundation.

2 We do not exclude other genres or texts of any kinds, and indeed encourage these. But the core thread of Nal'ibali is about storytelling, reading and writing.

The hegemony of formal literacy education

A widespread and largely unchallenged assumption is that children need to, and will, learn to read and write at school. However, huge educational investment at many levels in South Africa since 1994 has not given rise yet to the kind of classroom environments that motivate children to learn to read and write with meaning, enjoyment and confidence (PRAESA, 2012; NEEDU, 2013). It is now widely accepted that there is a crisis in literacy education in South Africa. Huge numbers of children perform poorly in the Annual National Assessments³ in grades 3 and 6 as well as in the annual grade 12 National Senior Certificate. International comparative tests such as PIRLS 2006 (Howie et al., 2007) and SACMEQ 2007 confirm that most children cannot read at grade-appropriate levels, and perform worse than their counterparts in neighbouring countries in all but the 'least poor' quintile (20 per cent) of schools (Fleisch, 2008).

What is going on?

I believe that at the level of formal schooling, a wasteful tragedy is unfolding for millions of children who cannot learn to read and write well enough to learn effectively. The dominant but implicitly accepted view of literacy sees it as sets of skills taught separately from context with the intention to empower people once these skills have been taught to them (Street, 1984). This tends to result in widespread neglect to appreciate powerful culturally embedded aspects of reading and writing which have major significance for how to approach early (and later) literacy teaching. This view underpins teaching methods that do not systemically deal appropriately with early literacy pedagogy or with the major foundation of learning: oral language.

On social and cultural practices

An alternative and broader view of literacy is to see it as being embedded in people's social practices (*ibid.*) and as being learned at the same time as reading and writing happens in authentic ways. This view opens the way for meaning-based and holistic teaching approaches in school, but also points to the significance of home and community settings for informal learning. Across South Africa and Africa, children learn in and out of school in a range of very diverse linguistic and socio-cultural contexts. Barbara Rogoff, an anthropologist, describes children as cultural apprentices who learn the ways of their families and communities by joining into culturally valued activities. People around them do not have to overtly signal or praise particular activities for children to start appreciating their value relative to other activities within their particular setting. Rather, they experience and come to know these profoundly through the actual meaning activities have in the day-to-day rhythm of life. She explains how both individual participation and community traditions are dynamic, and how individuals both learn from and shape cultural traditions as they 'observe and pitch in', adapting them for use in their own lives (Rogoff, 1990, 1993). Put starkly, if people around you find reading and writing useful and powerful, you will start to engage and explore why this is so, and how to do it for yourself. If, on the other hand, they don't, the chances are that you won't either.

³ In February 2011 ANAs, the average score for grade 3 literacy was 35 per cent (numeracy: 28 per cent) and for grade 6 languages 28 per cent (mathematics: 30 per cent) (DBE, 2011: 20).

On the prevailing language policy

The assumption that African-language-speaking children need only three years of teaching through their mother tongue⁴ has disastrous implications for a meaningful education. Nothing of the transformative potential of a mother tongue-based bilingual system (Alexander, 2004) promised by the 1997 Language-in-Education Policy has yet been realised; after the first three years, the strange reality of an unsystematic 'abracadabra-style' linguistic mix prevails. In effect, this is the same 'subtractive bilingualism' system that has been in place since apartheid days, which in the fourth year should bring about a transition to English. To try to keep communicating and aid understanding, many teachers continue to speak to children in African languages. But all textbooks are in English and reading, writing and assessment has to happen in English. For many adults and children, understanding, critical thinking and making meaning are only possibilities, rather than the central tenets of education. Research by PRAESA and others over the years has pointed to the educational gains for African-language-speaking children of implementing mother-tongue-based bilingual approaches (Ouane and Glanz, 2010; PRAESA, 2012). These have not, to date, been considered systematically by the National Department of Education.

On the prevailing early literacy pedagogy

In South Africa (and across Africa) few early literacy experts have studied how young babies and young children learn to read and write or experienced for themselves the breathtaking learning capabilities of young children. Thus, there tends to be little appreciation of relevant international theory and research about how literacy emerges through informal and playful exploration and experimentation with print. The early literacy curriculum – molded often in large part by policy makers, linguists and textbook writers – contributes to a disastrous capping of children's potential because it is based in flawed theoretical assumptions that children are passive agents who have to be fed knowledge, instead of seeing them as active agents searching for meaning and understanding as they interact with the world around. Many children dutifully master the mechanics of reading but are often simply unable to comprehend and interrogate texts, or write communicatively.

Digging deeper: global forces reinforce inadequate approaches

Keen global interests in the potential fertile African literacy markets enabled the USA's Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to give birth to Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)⁵ for Africa, which began in 2006, with South African government involvement. It is now all over (Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Liberia, Mali) and uses African languages. But that is not enough; pedagogy counts too! The five 'essential' components of reading development are proposed to be taught and assessed in strict order:⁶ 1. the alphabetic principle; 2. phonemic awareness; 3. oral reading fluency; 4. vocabulary; and 5. comprehension. In African settings, sadly this reinforces many teachers' own early personal experiences as learners of 'ma me mi mo mu' and their later training which suggests that it is quite normal for initial literacy learning to be meaningless.

DIBELS has had large-scale support, but it has been criticised and discredited by many too, for perpetuating the (race and class) literacy gap it is supposed to eliminate. This is because of the different teaching methods arising from different definitions of literacy that are used for more and less affluent children:

For those school/districts which are neither high poverty nor low performing, children are less likely to be held to this narrow view of literacy. These children have a more balanced literacy environment that includes viewing, writing and other critical literacies. (Tierney and Thome, 2006: 53)

Children who are recipients of DIBELS, however, get a more restrictive curriculum, leading to the sad conclusion: 'Once again, the rich get richer and the poor are left only with the most basic of basics'. (*ibid.*)

The bias inherent in DIBELS arises in part because its proponents have based their arguments on literature concerning easily measured and fast-developing skills among young readers. It is easier to 'measure' and quantify decoding skills like letter knowledge, phonemic awareness and even 'fluency', than motivation, semantic knowledge and comprehension among beginning readers. However, the latter matter deeply, and are central to the beginning moments of literacy learning in most literate homes and many 'good' schools; the former are of course necessary components, but do not have to be taught first.

4 I am using the term mother tongue broadly – it is a familiar language or even languages that the child understands well enough to learn meaningfully in.

5 <https://www.eddataglobal.org/reading/>

6 <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/market/assessment/dibels>

The long-running 'reading wars' between skills-based and holistic views of reading development ultimately concern control of the instructional agenda and financial resources devoted to literacy teaching textbooks. Enormous financial gains are made by companies investing in 'essential' diagnostic tests and phonics workbooks. In the last 20 years, 'scientific evidence' has been used to bolster methods based on the primacy of teaching phonics (Strauss, 2004). However, the evidence and the methods need to be scrutinised if we are to make informed choices about what we offer children.

The evidence base

It appears that the phonics 'approach' has been given a large boost via a remedial education route that uses phrenological neuroscientific brain imaging techniques, with dyslexia as the yardstick. Dyslexia came to be conflated with the notion of general reading difficulty and includes all low-performing readers, even very young ones, who have not yet had the chance to learn (Shaywitz, 2003). The claim is that normal as well as dyslexic students learn to read faster through methods that break down words into small segments (phonics):

... to attain high-level skills, learners must first master component tasks in small bits. To increase performance speed and accuracy, practice and feedback for error correction are necessary. Only with manageable tasks and feedback can learners progress to more complex skills. (Abadzi, 2006: 21)

This approach bases itself on panels of experts' reviews of reading research, such as *Preventing Reading Difficulties* (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998), the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (2000) and *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel* (2008). But it may well misinterpret the intention of these reports, and it arguably misunderstands the reading process because of a failure to take into account relevant factors relating to early learning, psycholinguistic and socio-cultural factors, and so on.

Shaywitz used evidence from NICHD 2000 research to recommend explicit phonological awareness and synthetic phonics training to promote effective dyslexia intervention and to promote reading instruction. She was supported in this by a remedial educationalist, Reid Lyons, adviser to President Bush at the start of *No Child Left Behind*. Her model of reading is that spoken language is instinctive and natural – you do not have to teach a baby to speak – but reading has to be taught, it's artificial, it's acquired.⁷

The problem

These are false arguments: learning to speak is not inbuilt, it is learned through the baby's early life experience that forms the background within which spoken language is understood (it is much more taught informally than formally). Learning to read and write is not essentially different: it is learned in a similar way, as a developing understanding growing from the child's ongoing experience of what reading and writing is about and how to do it.

The underlying view of the skills-based approach is that we decode print (unnatural language) into sounds and words (natural language), which are then comprehended by the brain. But oral language evolved too!

Just as money is a symbolically embodied social institution that arose historically from previously existing economic activities, natural language is a symbolically embodied social institution that arose historically from previously existing social-communicative activities (Tomasello, 1999).

Listening is a complex process, involving joint attention, understanding different roles and speakers' intention, and talking also involves physical skills development with relevant organs (tongue, lips, throat, breathing, and so on) (Hobson, 1993).

Don Holdaway says:

There seems a strong case for looking at initial language learning as a suggestive model – perhaps the basic model – for literacy learning. (1979: 21)

This 'special case' of developmental learning appears natural and happens with ease, and the prevailing conditions for learning are similar to those for visual perception, learning to crawl and walk, ride a bicycle, and so on.

We believe it is indeed the appropriate model for literacy learning, and this applies for ALL children, not just children of the elite despite claims that this is not so (Abadzi, *ibid.*; Heugh, 2009). Readers develop the ability to make the direct link from written language to meaning through experiencing this link in their lives. The aim needs to be to attain that direct comprehension and it does not first have to involve sounding out. This means we need to enable holistic engagement from the start, one where young learners are free to make and correct 'mistakes', as they did when learning to speak.

⁷ See www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/shaywitz.htm

In summary, when children learn to read and write, from the beginning they use their knowledge of spoken language, knowledge of the world and their experiences in it to bring meaning to and transact with texts. They use cueing systems for reading: grapho-phonetic, semantic and syntactic cues, aided by redundancy in text and the brain's inclination to guess or predict; that is unless they are discouraged or stopped from doing so, by being given decontextualised, low-level texts to read, by being forced to decode meaningless stuff, or being made to use a language they do not understand.

Putting theory to work: Nal'ibali in a nutshell

The Nal'ibali position is simple: because all children need similar nurturing and motivation to become literate, we urgently need to help to create spaces where voluntary and regular reading for enjoyment 'reading club' sessions can take place. Apart from the Nal'ibali mentors, whose task is to ignite community interest and involvement, then support and monitor the process, neither children nor the adults have to be there – they come because they choose to.

Nal'ibali has an ongoing national awareness and advocacy campaign about the power and value of stories and it provides guidance to an increasing number of people in homes, schools and through its network of reading clubs. We define a reading club loosely as a gathering of between five and 50 children who meet at an agreed time and place at least once a week, from 30 minutes to two hours, with one or more adult volunteers. Because the intention is communication around stories, the adult-child ratio is preferably no greater than 1:10 (it is even better if it can be 1:5). The programme can be as simple as 'just' telling and/or reading stories or can be made up of a mix of songs, games, acting, reading and writing activities. We have found that all of these fun activities bring about bonding and a keen sense of belonging. Everyone concerned is affirmed by the commitment to sharing playful, imaginative times together. Children in particular appreciate having their opinions and ideas listened and responded to. We appreciate storytelling for its role as a bridge to reading and writing, but we also value it in and of itself to provide adults and children with opportunities to connect with one another as a group as they remember and share old stories, and dream up new ones. Storytelling invites everyone in, whether they do or do not read and write themselves. However, some adults model reading and writing: choosing stories they like to read aloud to children, writing for, to and with them, and then allow children to choose their own books to look at, talk about and read, alone and with friends. In some reading clubs, children are of a similar age; in others, there are toddlers and teens together in the same space. Different strategies are worked out for dealing with opportunities and challenges that arise from such groupings.

What does it take?

Reading material

Libraries are few and far between, as are storybooks in African languages. So, each week, an eight-page bilingual supplement is created by PRAESA and is produced in partnership with Times Media, presently in combinations of English and Sesotho, Xhosa, Zulu and Afrikaans. Each supplement is designed as a scaffold for adults to use each week for a reading club session with a short article about any number of aspects relating to reading and writing development in children of all ages, stories to read aloud and to cut out and keep, a story star section about reading promoters and clubs, as well as other story and book events-related information.

Knowing how

The reading clubs are establishing themselves in many settings with a modicum of infrastructure and comfort: homes, community centres, schools, libraries, churches and mosques. Some adults are teachers, librarians and crèche workers, others are community members. Most require an orientation to this informally structured approach, so Nal'ibali offers a range of mentoring workshops on how to use the supplement and other materials for various aspects of reading, writing, storytelling and reading club set up and maintenance. For many, the supplement is the only source of reading material and guidance available and is, for this reason, invaluable. But it has another use too: we all become readers text by text, story by story and, without access to a constant flow of material, nobody can become a discerning reader who knows what she or he cares to read and share. The supplement offers a way for many people – both children and adults – to grow their personal repertoires of stories.

Nal'ibali produces a growing multilingual material base: 67 supplement editions with 30,000 a week distributed to the Nal'ibali network of clubs and a total of 15,732,400 supplements to date in newspapers in six provinces; 98 radio stories produced across nine different languages in partnership with SABC Education; while 48,980 Mxit subscribers receive a Nal'ibali literacy tip each week on their cell phone. All of the materials are freely available to download at www.nalibali.org or www.nalibali.mobi

The way forward

A wave of enthusiasm for reading is growing in hundreds of reading clubs.⁸ The feedback from participants is often extremely positive as the following quotes from some involved adults show:

A reading club leader in a remote part of Kwazulu Natal spends time with children and notes:

I love working with children, as they improve every day in their reading skills. I also love seeing how Nal'ibali helps our children, especially in rural areas. To work with them helps me see how important it is to read a story to your child every day and, ever since, I've started reading to my own children at home. We have even received positive feedback from teachers at some schools that we work with; who say children who attend reading clubs show better improvement in their schoolwork than those who don't.

A father has discovered the supplement:

I'm a 37 year old father of a seven year old girl. Every Wednesday evening we read and do fun activities instead of watching TV. I find your supplement very resourceful because it teaches her to read. I use the story theme to teach her values such as respect, discipline, love, sharing, etc. I would not know how to approach these subjects if it wasn't for your supplement.

A student spent time reading with children and now wants to carry on:

Just spent a meaningful four weekly sessions with a Nal'ibali reading group. I was part of a group of UCT teaching students who were welcomed during our service-learning project. The children are so enthusiastic to read and write and they eagerly grab every opportunity they are given, even when they struggle with these skills. On our last day, our session ended up being an extended time of us sitting together with the children outside and a bunch of books. The children read over and over to us and each other. Just a pure reading-for-enjoyment experience and a beautiful way to end our time with them. I am inspired to be a more permanent part of a reading club.

Yet without concerted ongoing and far-reaching collaborations and investment, the majority of children will remain strangers to the joy and power of print in their mother and other tongues. Involvement is the key. For this reason we are seeking supportive partnerships of all kinds to join in, join Nal'ibali and give all children in South Africa the chance of a meaningful, interesting and joyful educational experience.

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⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/nalibaliSA>

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A frame of reference on quality youth and adult literacy in multilingual contexts

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Improving the quality of educational services for youth and adults with regard to literacy is high on the agenda worldwide. UNESCO's evaluation of the United Nations Literacy Decade and the recommendations for future action underline the importance of 'providing alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school children, adolescents and adults; and enriching literate environments – with a particular focus on the marginalised and the quality of literacy teaching and learning'. (UNESCO, 2013). The frame of reference we propose here draws on theory and practice about quality education in multilingual and multicultural contexts and highlights a multilingual and multicultural ethos as a guiding principle for quality youth and adult literacy education. The influence of culture on the quality of education and its sustainability has often been underestimated in the past. In the context of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals underlines the significance of culture for our human being and calls for relating 'culture to all dimensions of sustainable development'. This corresponds to UNESCO's vision (Technical Support Team of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.).

Our frame of reference builds on basic principles and foundational statements of UNESCO's mandate and those emerging from research on education and literacy. In this paper, we present an abridged version. The full and field-tested version will be available in a forthcoming guidebook (Alidou and Glanz, forthcoming). In the following, we introduce you firstly to the broader cross-cutting foundational statements and five basic guiding principles. In a second step, we outline the fields of action that should be considered when analysing quality while treating the basic guiding principles as transversal principles.

Promotion of justice and peace in a culturally and linguistically diverse world

UNESCO's vision and mission is to promote justice and peace in a culturally and linguistically diverse world. All modern concepts of justice share a common norm, which is that all human beings are equal and shall thus be treated with the same respect and regard. UNESCO's work with regard to justice (Ouane and Glanz, 2006) has two dimensions that correspond to the definition of social justice given by Nancy Fraser (2000): (i) recognition of diversity and non-discrimination, a 'difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect,' (Fraser, 2000: 48) and (ii) egalitarian redistribution of resources and goods. The core principles of social justice are parity of participation and equality. Participation stands here for social freedom as an aspect of human development and refers to 'the capability to participate in the life of the community, to join in public discussion, to participate in political decision making and even the elementary ability to appear in public without shame'. (UNDP, 2000: 19–20). This takes us to the democratic dimension of participatory social justice and the question of whether people's voices from local to transnational levels are heard and whether they feel as responsible agents, as 'makers and shapers' rather than 'users and choosers' (Kerfoot, 2009: nd). Democratic participation should lead to practices and spaces for education and learning that differ from the old ones that created a problem in the first place. We need to look at education for democracy and democracy in education (Schugurensky, 2013). There is no 'one-size fits all', quick fix single model of democracy that suits all societies and cultures.

There is no way around working with cultural diversity

The World Commission on Culture and Development mandated by UNESCO published its landmark report *Our Creative Diversity* in 1995, which highlights the importance of culture (Pérez de Cuéllar et al., 1995). The Commission perceived a liberal, tolerant attitude and pleasure in a multiplicity of visions of the world as a precondition for living together in a multicultural world. Hence, dialogue and negotiation have an important role to play as a bridge to understanding and figuring out the shared values of all ethnic groups, when nations build a civic community. As a result, new educational practices could emerge that are in tune with the diverse cultural contexts and could engender truly intercultural concepts of education. The findings of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (Delors et al., 1996) mandated by UNESCO correspond to this. They suggest that education policies and programmes need to work constructively and with curiosity with multilingualism and cultural diversity because they are a *normality* that should be treated as *resource* for enhancing learning and social cohesion (Carneiro, 1996; Geremek, 1996; Stavenhagen, 1996).

Five basic guiding principles

We see five basic guiding principles or values emerging from theory and practice, which are crucial, but not exhaustive. These are:

- inclusion
- lifelong learning
- literacy in a multilingual and multicultural perspective as an essential aspect of the human right to education
- multilingual ethos⁹
- sustainability.

Principle: Inclusion

Who attends adult literacy programmes? In general and in most contexts, whether in developed or developing countries, youth and adults that come to the programmes belong to linguistic or cultural minorities, are people with disabilities, people with low socio-economic backgrounds, or women – thus, they are the most vulnerable, underprivileged and often marginalised people. Contextually rooted literacy programmes can offer them an opportunity to develop new attitudes, skills and competences that enable them to overcome some of their challenges. Therefore, it is important to consider quality adult and youth programmes as learning opportunities that integrate strategies related to their motivation, engagement

and persistence (Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012). Persistence is built by taking into account motivation, interests and needs of the learners.

There are three factors that are crucial for an enabling learning environment that motivates, engages and allows for persistence:

1. Motivation is enhanced by engaging learners through using their interests and needs as the basis for organising responsive learning programmes.
2. An engaging context of learning that uses texts and tasks relevant to the youth and adult learners.
3. Systems and structures that support persistence and resilience. This means, for example, institutional and organisational arrangements that allow learners to attend educational programmes while they are carrying out other productive activities. In addition, the system and structures need to support learners in applying and developing their newly acquired skills.

Principle: Lifelong learning

Reading and writing competences in one or several languages and scripts are acquired through a lifelong learning process in the domains of life where literacy matters. Good quality literacy education therefore teaches literacy so that it relates to the ways literacy is used in everyday life outside the educational realm and for educational purposes.

Two core principles for an education that unfolds the treasure within people

The influential report *Learning, the Treasure Within* by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (Delors et al., 1996) sets out two principles for an education that supports the unfolding of the treasure within each person:

1. *Assisting people in learning throughout life.*
2. *Offering education which is composed of four foundational pillars: 'learning to know, that is acquiring the instruments of understanding; learning to do, so as to be able to act creatively on one's environment; learning to live together, so as to participate and co-operate with other people in all human activities;' (1996: 86, italics added by the authors) and 'learning to be, so as better to develop one's personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility.' (1996: 97, italics added by the authors)* These pillars intersect, influence each other and form a whole. Consequently, each educational programme needs to deal with all of them.

⁹ Definition: 'The multilingual ethos advocates for the acceptance and recognition of linguistic diversity in order to ensure social cohesion and avoid the disintegration of societies' (Ouane, 2009: 168). 'It takes into account the intermeshing of languages within multilingual individuals and in communities, across social domains and communicative practices. The multilingual ethos stresses the commonalities and the complementarity of languages, and heteroglossia across but also within communities and in a given situation. From this perspective, language ownership or fixed language boundaries cannot be claimed by any social group.' (Ouane and Glanz, 2010: 65) The multilingual ethos refers to all social domains.

These two are central aspects of the international 'Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning' (UIE, 1997) adopted in 1997 at the end of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V). The Declaration made visible at international level a major shift in the understanding of quality in adult education. The Declaration broadened the scope and vision from basic education to lifelong learning (UIE, 1997). It is important to note that inclusion and diversity are considered important principles promoted by the Declaration because the learners are not autonomous units, but social beings and part of societies that shape their lives considerably. This vision of adult learning and education goes beyond a human rights approach that promotes universal, individual human rights only; it is sensitive to the diversity of contexts that shape the environments in which adults live.

Principle: Literacy from a multilingual and multicultural perspective as an essential aspect of the human right to education

Literacy education is inherent in the human right to education because, firstly, the acquisition of literacy (including numeracy) skills and competences in all subjects are key learning objectives in formal and non-formal education at all levels and, secondly, literacy is used as a teaching and learning tool. Literacy is also considered as essential for lifelong learning from childhood to old age because, apart from learning in formal and non-formal education settings, people can benefit in their informal learning and knowledge-sharing activities from their reading and writing skills.

Written language carries social meaning and speaks for its authors

The use of literacy and written language, like any other medium of communication, is not a neutral tool, but a carrier of symbolic meaning which graphically represents a language (Street, 1995). Each language that we use in writing has its own literacy history that has been influenced by contact with other literacy cultures. Written language also carries the social value that is attached to this language and the people who use it. People use reading and writing in order to communicate, which involves the meaning that the author wants to express, and the meaning that those who read it attach to it. In a multilingual and multicultural world, the way we use literacy has been influenced by more than one culture. For example, if an Amharic woman from Ethiopia writes in Japanese, her writing carries both of these cultures, and maybe even other cultures as well, depending on the circumstances. She may be aware of this, but probably would not be. Literacy can thus only be fully understood

from the perspective of its users and the particular socio-cultural context in which it evolved historically.

A critical view on literacy with a focus on cultural fluency

The use of literacy can have positive and negative effects on people. This will depend on many factors such as the purpose it is used for, how well the meaning it carries is understood, etc. Ingrid Jung and Adama Ouane advocate for a critical view on literacy because:

... the analysis of the history of literacy as a socio-historical tool reveals it to be often a tool of control and oppression [rather than] a means of democratising knowledge and power. Consequently, we can no longer simply treat literacy as an input into the development process, producing as an output an increase in production, equality, democracy, and justice ... we must see literacy from the perspective of the user, how literacy enables persons and groups to achieve their own rights and goals ... Literacy is also part of cultural development. In every case we should analyse the role literacy may play in reflection on and the development of the indigenous cultural resources of a given community. (2001: 333–4)

This perspective is reflected in the work of the New Literacy Studies, which help us demystify 'literacy' by looking at 'how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and in thought, and its position in history, language and learning ... in a way which allows change ... studying literacy as a set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies.' (Barton, 2007: 32). When we talk about literacy as a *widely used* symbolic carrier of social meanings from a multilingual and multicultural perspective, we are talking about it as a resource for communication, for exercising power, for participation and building identity. Therefore, instead of looking primarily at language fluency in youth and adult literacy, we need to primarily focus on 'cultural fluency'¹⁰, of which 'written language fluency' is a component.

A human right has to be contextualised

Literacy education as a human right 'is concerned with the development of individuals to fulfil their potential and be involved in all levels of society as equal human beings'. (Eldred, 2013: 11) Literacy education cannot be universally the same because we live in different societies, have different potentials and use different languages at different levels of society. Consequently, good quality literacy education is rooted in the particular socio-cultural and linguistic context (see, for example, Fagerberg-Diallo, 2001; Gebre et al., 2009).

¹⁰ We thank Alison Lazarus from South Africa for highlighting this issue. 'Initially, cultural fluency is simply a deeper understanding of cultures: their natures, how they work, and how they intertwine with our relationships in times of conflict and harmony. It is about recognising culture as an important site of struggle in bringing about social justice. Essentially, cultural fluency is about us being able to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. It is the ability to look 'critically' at social constructs, and to be able to acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills to understand them and to 'transform' them towards a more humane and inclusive society.' (Abeysekara, 2011: 7).

Research and practice shows that an adult literacy education that is detached from people's lives and alienates them, provokes, at best, healthy resistance. In places where education is developed from the bottom-up and people valorise their language and culture, youth and adult literacy education could make a positive contribution to society provided it widens the capabilities of individuals while respecting their dignity (Olson and Torrance, 2001; Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh, 2010).

Principle: Multilingual ethos (as part of a multicultural ethos)

We are in an era of multilingual and multiple media communication in all countries of the world and written language is widely used. Literacy, its uses and its social meanings, depends on the particular culture, language, technological means and other contextual factors. Yet, often, only literacy in the dominant language receives attention because it seems to be a direct way to upward social mobility. Or, only basic literacy in the mother tongue or local language is provided without taking into consideration the uses of literacy beyond the basics, and in other languages that are a gateway to participation in society and access to the resources they need. Caroline Kerfoot puts in a nutshell what is at stake:

The challenge for those concerned with conceptualising ABET [adult basic education and training] provision for development is to investigate which kind of semiotic resources might be important for whom, in what contexts and in which languages or combinations of languages, and to use these findings to reshape policy and pedagogical practices. If the goal of adult basic education is to expand capabilities and enable increased citizenship agency, then really useful knowledge will include language, literacies and other semiotic resources that allow learners to traverse multiple spaces and to engage with the discourses and processes engendered by new forms of governance and state/society/economy relations. (2009: 40)

Ignoring linguistic diversity and discriminating on the grounds of language can be considered as a form of violence because it violates the integrity and identity of a person and Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The spectrum of violence is very broad and the resulting anxiety and loss of self-worth affects learning in the educational setting negatively (for resources and exchange, see www.learningandviolence.net). Within the context of learning, for example in schools and learning centres, it is increasingly recognised that language is often used for psychological violence that affects the learner. However, 'to create a climate for learning it is important to create a space that is free of judgement of the self and the other'. (Strategic Support, SAQA 2009: 18) Adopting a

multilingual ethos will help us reposition ourselves, ask new questions and find new strategies for many of the problems that we face.

Accepting multilingualism as normality

Our understanding of a multilingual ethos is that it accepts complexity and is open for learning. Adopting a multilingual ethos challenges the mainstream social systems and pedagogical approaches but there is an exciting recent trend in policy, practice and research towards it. The good results of those who dare to put it into practice are appealing, and the research on multilingualism, education and learning follow it and push it further (Shoba and Chimbutane, 2013; Alidou, Glanz and Nikiéma, 2011; Martin-Jones, Blackledge and Creese, 2012; Cenoz and Gorter, 2011; Stroud and Heugh, 2011; Agnihotry, 2007).

The multilingual ethos as part of a multicultural ethos

We foreground language and the *multilingual* ethos here because literacy is a particular form of linguistic expression. A multilingual ethos is, however, part of a deep appreciation of cultural difference¹¹ because language is a vehicle of culture, and one of its means of expression. For this reason, we cannot speak about linguistic diversity without speaking about cultural diversity and we cannot speak about language fluency without speaking about cultural fluency. The multilingual ethos is part of a 'multicultural ethos'. Deeply appreciating cultural difference means searching for additive approaches that do not look at one culture and language as being naturally superior to the other, but that ask what are new, helpful and additional features for people in a specific context. For example, 'multicultural education tries to provide students with educational experiences that enable them to maintain commitments to their community cultures as well as acquire the knowledge, skills and cultural capital needed to function in the national civic culture and community'. (Banks, 2009: 14)

Cultures are heterogeneous and interlinked

We underline that a *culture* is not static and homogenous but *heterogeneous and interlinked*. It is not a realm where people just co-exist peacefully; it is a space of agreement and disagreement between generations and among the same age groups and where people form sub-cultures. The interplay of autonomy and closeness is normal in all human relationships and all individuals and groups need both of it. People can identify with aspects from different cultures, belong to several sub-groups, and agree with certain elements of a culture and reject others. The concept of culture is today discussed as something that is complex, not closed, reflects its historical development, and the influences from other cultures. It serves to describe a

¹¹ The term cultural difference has a different focus than the term cultural diversity. It expresses that we should not look at a gathering of cultures as many distinct objects which is the connotation of cultural diversity but as different ways of knowing and living (May, 2009).

group's beliefs, values and practices on the one hand, while on the other hand accommodates the diversity of identities and practices of its individual members (May, 2009).

Looking at multiculturalism from a critical perspective

We concur with Stephen May when he says that we need to understand multiculturalism from a critical perspective. The critical perspective acknowledges that people face unequal power relations, varying degrees of stigma, advantages and options. People cannot choose their identities freely because of the external social reality, which channels identity choices through, for example, 'class, ethnic and gender stratification, objective constraints and historical determination'. (May, 2009: 43) Yet these social pressures can be and are contested by people. Looking at ethnicity as a group's identity, 'a positive conception of ethnicity must begin with a recognition that all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, *without being contained by that position*'. (May, 2009: 44, referring to Hall, 1992) If we engage in such a critical, appreciative and reflective way with our own culture and identity and those of others, a withdrawal into fundamentalism, essentialism or traditionalism is unnecessary.

Principle: Sustainability

Sustainability is a multidimensional value. In the context of evaluating the quality of education, sustainability asks about whether what learners have learned is put to use and retained. It is hence tightly linked to lifelong learning as a process. Where there is no institutional structure or social space to apply what has been learned and to continue learning, lifelong learning is obstructed and sustainability is not possible. Secondly, sustainability asks whether educational programmes are seen as a collective, social investment and are managed and financed in a sustainable, long-term manner instead of short term and ad hoc. Thirdly, sustainability refers to the broad philosophy of sustainable development in which education shall enhance an ethical understanding of life that respects the limits of our ecosystem and aims at the wellbeing of human beings. Adult learning must be closely tied to the preservation and enhancement of the community and environment for ensuring the livelihood of people in the present and the future. Quality adult literacy programmes integrate local indigenous knowledge with new technologies in ways that foster sustainable development and inclusive growth. In that respect their mission is not just about poverty alleviation, it is also about the revalorisation of indigenous cultures, languages and people, and opening up to technology and modernity in a way that is additive and sustainable.

Central fields of analysis

The five basic guiding principles that guide our framework underline the importance of contextual factors. In 2010, Leon Tikly proposed a practical context-led model for the analysis of the quality of school education, which has social justice as a central concern and looks at how well education lifts 'institutional and wider structural barriers that can stand in the way of realising human capabilities in the context of globalization'. (Tikly, 2010: 12) The model's guiding principles correspond to essential ones in our frame of reference. Therefore, we build our approach on it and adapt it to non-formal education for youth and adults in multilingual and multicultural contexts. We view our frame of reference as an *approach* not a model because an approach leaves room for adaptation to the changing realities and contextual differences.

Striving to create enabling environments for education and learning

The policy, school and home/community environments have been identified by Tikly as crucial for good quality school education. For the purpose of our framework on youth and adult education in multilingual and multicultural contexts, we need to add first of all *the multilingual and multicultural context*. It is present in all social fields or environments at all levels. Therefore, no environment can be dealt with without analysing and working with the multilingual and multicultural social context and its specifics in any given environment. Secondly, the educational and policy environments of adults cut across social sectors. Education and training is offered to adults in many sectors such as the education sector, the economic sector, the health sector, cultural sector, religious sector, etc. Therefore we adopt a *multi-sectoral perspective of the educational and the policy environments*. Thirdly, an environment that is crucial in adulthood is the *work environment*. The *work, home and community environment* overlap in many instances and reinforce each other. It is therefore useful to consider them together.

From local to international level

In today's globalised world these environments encompass a large geographical space for many people, with family, friends and colleagues not being near them, but in different parts of the world. Therefore the home and community environment's scope can reach from the local to the international level. The same holds true for the educational and policy environments when we think about distance education, people moving geographically for educational and learning purposes, international influences and linkages on policies and educational research and practice. All these merge in the crucial environment, which is the one that surrounds us.

How is the literate environment related to all this?

The literate environment is an integral part of the multilingual and multicultural social context, and visible in each social environment where literacy is used. It is not a separate thing, because the literate environment is the material reflection of the reading and writing culture in the society at large.

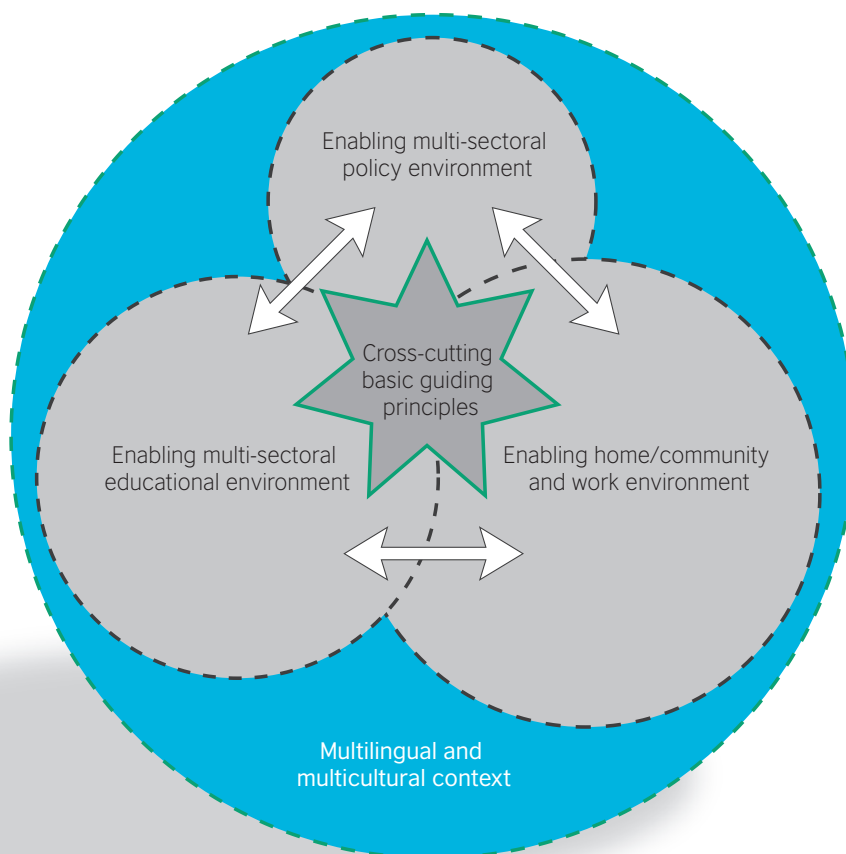
When is an environment enabling?

Each environment becomes an *enabling* environment when appropriate inputs are used in appropriate processes. Appropriate inputs and processes result in lifting barriers and creating a flow in the individual and collective learning processes within and across environments. In order to achieve this, the interplay between the environments and the multilingual and multicultural context has a big role to play. The five most prominent dimensions of international analytical frameworks of educational quality (Barrett et al., 2006), effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and

sustainability, all look at each environment individually and at their interplay. Synergy and coherence increases the flow between them because their contributions do not hinder but strengthen each other. How well the interplay works can be analysed when asking, for example: In what regard and how well does each environment and their interplay address the basic guiding principles (inclusion, lifelong learning, literacy from a multilingual and multicultural perspective as part of the human right to education, multilingual ethos and sustainability)?

We believe that the search for quality is a process in which many factors contribute to turning an environment into an enabling one and these factors feed into each other. We assume that we do not live in an ideal world where we can consider as 'enabling' only an ideal state where all the environments are fully enabling at the same time. Giving our best in striving for it is the way that offers the best possible education and learning opportunities. The figure below illustrates our approach.

Figure 1: Context-led approach to the analysis of the quality of adult and youth literacy provision in multilingual and multicultural contexts (adapted from Tikly, 2010)



The frames in dashes around the environments symbolise that the environments are not separate, but highlighted parts of the multilingual and multicultural context in which people live. And even the outer circle of the multilingual and multicultural context is not a fixed border, but permeable because all societies influence each other from the local to the international level. The shadow represents the connection of the present to the past. Every human being and society embodies its past and present.

In this paper we outlined core elements of a frame of reference for youth and adult literacy in multilingual and multicultural contexts. The philosophical foundation rests on the global commitment to social justice and peace of all UNESCO Member States. Five basic guiding principles emerge from theory and practice and respond to this commitment. Quality as individual, collective and systemic improvement entails the involvement of all stakeholders in collective and individual learning processes. Therefore, the improvement of the quality of education systems (policies, learning environment and programmes) should be a shared and democratic process linking both bottom-up and top-down approaches.

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Literacy, language and development: a social practices perspective

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Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and discussions of these at the recent Language and Development conference (Cape Town, November 2013) have a particular focus on schooling, but we would like to take a broader focus in this paper that encompasses adult education as well as attention to aspects of language and literacy in everyday practices. Literacy and language of the everyday takes place in people's homes and neighbourhoods, but also in workplaces, places of trade, local government offices, religious institutional settings, community centres, sports, leisure and entertainment venues, as well as at a number of other sites and settings. While these various and diverse language and literacy-linked activities occur outside of schooling, we argue that they have an important effect on children's and youths' successes and failures in schools as well as on adult literacy interventions.

For a variety of reasons, including the pressures of political imperatives, educational planners have often ignored the variability and complexity of the language and literacy resources that they encounter outside of educational provision (Errington, 2008; Rogers 2013; Street, forthcoming). It has been common for approaches to literacy and language in developmental goal-setting to see language as a standardised resource and literacy as something which individuals acquire through instruction, a unified 'autonomous' set of neutral skills that can be applied across all contexts. Policy, curriculum and teaching methods in schooling as well as in adult education have, as a result, sometimes ignored the situated and variable nature of language and literacy practices and have not grappled closely with what it is that children, youths and adults bring with them to literacy learning in educational settings and to the use of language in those settings (see Rogers and Street, 2012). This gap has led to a flawed set of assumptions about language, literacy and society in much of the developmental literature, leading to assessments of language and literacy situations that are empirically not sustainable. Our starting point is that effective policy making should be based on a close understanding of what language and literacy are and how they are practised, not what we project on to them.

In this paper we discuss how approaches from research and theory relate to those approaches widely evident in policy accounts. We bring together approaches to literacy in theory and in practice that have been developed and applied over a number of decades. We start with Brian Street's work in Iran, where he developed a grounded approach to the study of literacy as situated practices in specific contexts, distributed among co-participants and embedded within relations of culture and power (Street, 1984, 1995, 2001). This work, along with that of Scribner and Cole (1981), Scollon and Scollon (1981) and Heath (1983) led to a rethinking of what literacy is and how social inequalities are produced and reproduced by way of literacy and language, in schools, in adult literacy provision and in the wider society.

Studies of literacies

Street's early work among the mountain fruit-growers in a village in north-eastern Iran identified three kinds of literacies that were prevalent in the village where he was based as a researcher: a *maktab* literacy associated with Islam and Qu'ranic (or *maktab*) religious schools; a commercial literacy involved in village fruit sales (and based on prior development of *maktab* literacy); and literacy acquired in the secular and modernising context of the state school system. Street identified each of these as distinct practices associated with particular social activities and identities: the uses and meanings of literacy that characterised the *maktab* literacy were practices associated with the primary Qur'anic school and religious practices; school literacy practices took place in the secular and modernising context of the state school; and the commercial literacy practices took place in the context of buying and selling fruit for transport to the city and the market. *Maktab* literacy was associated with older authority traditions in the village, located in Qur'anic learning and located in a social hierarchy dominated by men. The stereotypical view of Qu'ranic literacy instruction that is sometimes presented is that it is not proper literacy because it is simply memorisation of passages. But Street found interesting variety and complexity instead. The texts

were differently organised on the page compared to Western linear writing, the writing was inserted in different forms, angles and in varying relationships with other units of text, so that students learned that reading is not just about language written down, but that organisation of text also carried meaning in particular ways. The distinct commercial literacy practices that had emerged in response to the economic activity of selling fruit to the nearby cities at a time of economic boom involved writing notes, cheques, lists, names on crates, and so on, to facilitate the purchase and sale of quantities of fruit.

Street studied these different literacies through a focus on literacy events and practices, where events were any social interaction or exchange where reading and writing were part of the activity or were spoken of; and practices were the particular socio-cultural ways of acting, interacting and attaching value that characterised distinct domains of activity. These resources helped provide an explanation for why commercial literacy was mainly undertaken by those who had been taught at the Qur'anic school rather than those from the modern state school, even though at first sight one might expect the literacy skills of the formal school to be more functionally oriented to commercial practices. Those with Qur'anic literacy had the status and authority within the village to carry on these commercial practices, while those trained in the state school were seen to be oriented outwards and lacked the integral relations to everyday village life that underpinned the trust necessary for such transactions.

In this village context, then, literacy was not simply a set of functional skills, as much modern schooling and many literacy agencies represent it, but rather it was a set of social practices deeply associated with identity and social position. Approaching literacy as a social practice provides a way of making sense of variations in the uses and meanings of literacy in such contexts rather than reliance on the problematic notions of literacy skills, rates and levels that dominate much contemporary discussion of literacy.

Street, along with Graff (1979), identified what they called the 'literacy myth' and its influences on educators and planners, as being a prevalent but problematic view that literacy is the highest form of language use, and where literacy is seen to lead to and is linked to a whole lot of social positives – objectivity, abstract thinking, analytical thinking, logic, scientific reasoning, etc. Street also identified the prevalence in views of literacy and language of what he called *scriptism* – a view of the influence of writing on the conceptualisation of speech – a belief in the superiority in various respects of written languages over spoken languages and the view that some forms or uses of language are more 'context-dependent' or 'objective' than others.

A literature has emerged that builds upon these critical insights and a growing body of ethnographic research describes and explains variation in literacy practices across settings. Examples from a wider literature include Papen's (2005) study of tourism, governmentality and literacy in Namibia; Robinson-Pant's (1997) account of literacy and development among women in Nepal, which focuses on the processes by which women in Nepal acquire literacy and deploy its use for their own purposes; Kalman's (1999) study of mediated literacy practices in Mexico City; Maddox and Esposito's (2012) research around literacy inequalities and social distance in Nepal; Achen and Openjuru's (2012) research on language and literacy as globalised practices in the poorer residential areas of Kampala, Uganda; Pahl and Rowsell's application of these insights to classroom work (2012); Kell's (2008) study of literacy and housing disputes near Cape Town; and Prinsloo and Breier's (1996) study of the everyday literacy practices of persons without schooling across multiple settings in South Africa.

These studies have shown us particular things about language and literacy: that they are not practised in a vacuum; language and literacy are always embedded within some socio-cultural set of activities, and it is these activities, not the literacy itself that provide the material for the analysis of literacy practices. What is often taken to be a problem with the abilities or language resources on the part of underclass or minority children and adults, it often turns out, is primarily one of lack of familiarity with particular ways of doing literacy. If teachers and testers make deficit assumptions about what it is children have and what they bring to school or what adults bring to their learning activities, they fail to identify what language and literacy resources children or adults do have and how they might be engaged with and built upon.

With regard to adult literacy concerns, particularly as regards gender disparities, the recently published OECD Skills Outlook (2013) Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), points out there is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship between gender and literacy levels. Rather, that relationship is mediated by social factors. For instance, if part-time work and low-level jobs are associated with lower literacy skills and women are more likely to be found in such work, then gender inequality in literacy levels follows. Other policy debates (see Street, forthcoming), such as those associated with the recent PISA and GMR reports which remain more 'traditional' in their view of literacy, will need to take on board such complexity in addressing the concern that women's literacy remains one of the most neglected areas of the Education for All agenda. Educational interventions that do not take into account the social dynamics that produce inequalities of particular sorts are most likely just to repeat previous failures.

The distinction between an 'autonomous' model and an 'ideological' model of literacy (Street, 1984, 1995) has been widely used in literacy studies (see Prinsloo and Baynham, 2013 for a five-volume selection of a representative literature). The 'autonomous' model of literacy works from the assumption that literacy in itself – autonomously – will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. Street argued that this model disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it and that can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal. Research in the social practices approach challenges this view and suggests that dominant approaches based on the autonomous model simply impose Western, urban or class-based conceptions of literacy onto other socio-cultural settings; the autonomous model is, in fact, 'ideological' but this remains hidden (Street, 2000).

The explicit ideological model of literacy offers a view that literacy is always embedded in particular views of the world, of knowledge and of values, and is shaped by relations of power. The ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being. Literacy, therefore, is always contested, both in its meanings and its practices. The ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants, especially the new learners and their position in relations of power (Cook-Gumperz, 2006). It is not valid to suggest that 'literacy' can be 'given' neutrally and then its 'social' effects only experienced or 'added on' afterwards. Because of the failure of many traditional literacy programmes (Rogers and Street, 2012; Street, 2001), academics, researchers and practitioners working in literacy in different parts of the world are beginning to come to the conclusion that the autonomous model of literacy on which much of the practice and programmes have been based is not an appropriate intellectual tool, either for understanding the diversity of reading and writing around the world or for designing the practical programmes this requires, which may be better suited to an ideological model (Robinson-Pant, 1997; Wagner, 1993).

Many people labelled 'illiterate' within the autonomous model of literacy may, from a more culturally sensitive viewpoint, be seen to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes and in specific contexts. For instance, studies suggest that non-literate persons find themselves engaged in literacy activities, so the boundary between literate and non-literate is less obvious than individual 'measures' of literacy suggest (Prinsloo and

Breier, 1996). Street's more recent work with Alan Rogers in adult education attempts to bring together the principles outlined above regarding literacy as social practice, rejecting the autonomous model and drawing upon ethnographic perspectives (Rogers and Street, 2012; Rogers, 2002). Their LETTER project (Learning for Empowerment Through Training in Ethnographic Research) started in India from discussions with a local women's NGO dedicated to women's empowerment through education. The programme commenced in 2005 with a series of workshops held with participants from Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India, with a main focus on approaches to exploring everyday literacy and numeracy in local communities, using ethnographic-style methodologies. A book was published, based on the workshops, titled *Exploring the Everyday: ethnographic studies of literacy and numeracy* (Nirantar, 2007) and since then, the local non-government agency has been developing new teaching-learning approaches based on the findings of surveys and studies of everyday literacies and practices. The key element in this approach is to help teachers and community activists to learn about the existing community literacy and numeracy activities of each particular learning group; indeed, to help the learners themselves to become more aware of what they do with and what they feel about literacy and numeracy.

The project has since moved on to Ethiopia, where a group of about 20 trainers of literacy facilitators from around the country participated in a series of three workshops. The first was devoted to ethnographic approaches, with a field visit during the workshop; then each participant, individually or in small groups, undertook a more detailed case study in their home context. The second workshop finalised these case studies and began work on curriculum development for adult learning programmes. The third workshop finalised both strands, and again a book was written locally and published, *Everyday Literacies in Africa: ethnographic studies of literacy and numeracy in Ethiopia* (Gebre et al., 2009). Currently a programme is being held in Uganda with the involvement of some of those engaged on the Ethiopia and India programmes to ensure that LETTER is a rolling programme in which both the trainers and the participant learners build on previous workshops. Ethnographic studies are being completed; curriculum building has been started. Two new features are the writing of reading material for learners, using ethnographic approaches to explore original (oral) material such as local stories (cf Touray et al., 2010) and practices, and, secondly, each of the participants has been asked to develop and teach a short training programme in literacy for adults using ethnographic material.

Language as variable social practice

The focus in literacy work, outlined above, on practices and local accounts confronts 'great divide' assumptions, which have seen literacy as a pivotal and uniform social technology that distinguishes 'modern' from 'other' cultures. This focus has made this work compatible with recent shifts to a social view of language and its functions, which regards language as located in social practice (Heller, 2007) and which helps us to make sense of some of the challenges of societal multilingualism and policy responses. The social practices view of language that has been developed by sociolinguistics (e.g. Makoni and Pennycook, 2007; Bailey, 2007; Blommaert, 2010) is that users draw on linguistic resources that are organised in ways that make sense under specific conditions.

From this perspective the term 'English', or any other named language, is shorthand for a diverse range of language varieties, genres, registers and practices (see Leung and Street, in press). Such a social practices view of language contrasts with widely held systemic views of language, where a named language, English for example, is seen to have certain stable, bounded, systemic features (syntactic, lexical and orthographic) which should be the focus of language instruction. This systemic view of languages as standard forms with generic functions appears increasingly problematic under conditions of linguistic diversity and language shifts and changes, common in most African settings, as well as increasingly a feature elsewhere, including European cities (Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Leung and Street, 2012).

Migrants and mobile persons are a striking feature of the globalised world and raise particular questions for literacy, language and education. While school-based standardised testing often labels youths from minority backgrounds as failing or at risk, language and literacy researchers who pay attention to social practices examine the multilingual resources of both youths and adults from minority backgrounds, and the transnational or cross-border practices they engage in, involving both print and digital literacies (cf Rowsell et al., 2012). Policy and practice in educational provision that approach language and literacy as standardised and decontextualised or autonomous resources offer an inadequate response to the dynamic nature of language and literacy in everyday life under conditions of social diversity. They pay inadequate attention to the social complexity of speakers or to the social uses of language and literacy and can thus have the effect of excluding and marginalising minorities or mobile people whose identity is not defined through older categories of ethnicity or speech community. A social practices approach with regard to language and literacy policies offers a more complex but more relevant view of languages and literacies, where they are situated in particular socio-cultural, historical and economic environments. In this view people draw on linguistic and literacy resources that are organised

in ways that make sense under specific social conditions and which are socially and politically embedded. Speakers are social actors and the boundaries between particular resources are products of social action. There is a recognition of the potential fluidity of language and literacy resources and attention to their often more rigid construction in educational policy and practice. This draws our attention to the ways in which schools function as spaces to select and categorise students, for assessing performance (including linguistic performance) and providing credentials tied to positioning in the world of work. Approaches to language instruction in schooling and in policy development in circumstances of linguistic diversity often work with constructs such as 'home language', 'mother tongue', 'additional language', 'additive' and 'subtractive' multilingualism without attention to local and regional variations within and across designated languages and with little attention to their contexts of use. Such approaches draw on what Heller (2007) identified as a 'common-sense' but in fact highly ideologised view of bilingualism, where the conception is that of the co-existence of two (or more) linguistic systems. Heller (1999) coined the term parallel monolingualism, to describe 'bilingual' language teaching strategies in schools where two or more standard languages are taught as if in separate silos.

In a review of debates about bilingual education Martin-Jones (2007: 167) points out that a good deal of the policy-driven research has shown a strong preference for the construction of parallel monolingual spaces for learning, with strict monitoring of those spaces for their monolingualism. Martin-Jones (2007) points to what she calls a 'container metaphor of competence' manifest in terms like 'full bilingual competence', 'balanced bilingualism', 'additive bilingualism' and 'subtractive bilingualism', in effect all conceiving of languages and linguistic competencies as separate containers, side by side, that are more or less full or empty. Creese and Blackledge (2010) similarly describe prevalent approaches to bilingual pedagogy, where languages are kept rigidly separate as a 'two solitudes' approach, and call for a flexible bilingual approach to language teaching and learning in which two or more languages are used alongside each other.

While classrooms commonly maintain clear borders between the languages and learnings of school and the out-of-school languages and literacy practices of bilingual youths, as described above, researchers such as Garcia (2009) have called for 'translanguaging' and situated literacies in the classroom, based on the argument that all language and literacy pedagogical approaches should be contextualised and start with the language and literacy resources that children bring to school. Canagarajah (2006: 58) advocates for a similar strategy of 'code-meshing' where 'students bring in their preferred varieties' of a language into a conventional text in 'rhetorically strategic ways, resulting in a hybrid text'.

Conclusion

Our conclusion, then, is this: The social relationships around language and literacy are key to identifying what their uses and values are. Policy discussions, for example, around language and literacy in relation to the Millennium Development Goals that were foregrounded at the Language and Development conference, are not best served by models of language and literacy that don't match their actual uses. The ways people take hold of language and literacy resources, or bypass them, is contingent on social and cultural practices, opportunities and constraints. This raises questions that need to be addressed in any language and literacy programme, for children as well as adults: what is the power relation between the participants? What are the resources? Where are people going if they take on one set of language and literacy practices rather than another? How do recipients challenge the dominant conceptions of language and literacy? We suggest that such questions need also to become part of policy considerations regarding language, literacy and development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Measuring literacy post-2015: some social justice issues

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Introduction

As we approach 2015, much of the debate about a successor development goal to replace the current education Millennium Development Goal involves proposing the inclusion of targets for learning outcomes. Bodies calling for learning targets include the UN's High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (High-Level Panel, 2013), the EFA Global Monitoring Report team (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2013) and Commonwealth Education Ministers (Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group on the Post-2015 Development Framework for Education, 2012). The new UN development goals will not be decided until late 2015, so at the time of writing they are still a matter of speculation. Nonetheless, it is evident that the momentum that has built around the learning outcomes agenda looks set to continue. When it comes to learning, literacy is the domain considered to be the most fundamental to social participation.

It follows that measures will have to be found for monitoring progress towards these targets. Two broad types of survey are currently used internationally to monitor learning. These are large-scale educational assessments (LSEAs) such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and hybrid assessments such as Uwezo or Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) (Wagner, 2010). LSEAs may be cross-continental in their reach (for example, PISA) or regional (such as the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ]). As well as assessing learning outcomes through standardised tests, LSEAs collect information on learners' home background, school characteristics, classroom practices and system-level curriculum and policy. The purpose of cross-national comparison demands that they are methodologically rigorous and makes them technically complex, so they are expensive in terms of cost and expertise (Wagner, 2010). They are administered in the official language of instruction for the targeted grade level. Hybrid assessments are designed to be 'just big enough, faster at capturing and analysing data, and cheaper in terms of time and effort'. (Wagner, 2010: 747) They are flexible enough to be adapted into alphabet-based local languages (Gove and Wetterberg, 2011; Piper and Miksc, 2011), but more limited when it comes to comparing across education systems, a purpose for which they are not usually designed.

A third type of assessment has been proposed for setting learning targets, which is not discussed within this paper. The Commonwealth Education Ministers have proposed that a new education development goal framework measures learning against national curricula framework using national assessments. In this paper I focus only on sample surveys that do not serve a selective or positioning function, which can distort reliability as an indicator of quality. I discuss measures of literacy that are used internationally from the perspective of social justice. Social justice with respect to learning is understood as having three dimensions: inclusion in opportunities to learn, relevance of learning, and participation in decision making related to inclusion and relevance (Barrett, 2011). I mainly focus on this last political dimension, primarily through inspecting who owns learning surveys. I start, however, by overviewing the role of learning surveys in identifying inequalities in learning outcomes as an urgent social justice issue.

A social justice perspective on reading assessments

The EFA Global Monitoring Report has been instrumental in promoting awareness of inequalities in learning through marshalling evidence from various LSEAs and hybrid assessments. The latest report (UNESCO, 2014) references PIRLS, SACMEQ, *Programme d'analyse des systemes educatifs de la CONFEMEN* (PASEC), the most recent *Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación* (LLECE) survey and the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for India and for Pakistan. The figures are stark. While 96 per cent of children in North America and Europe reach grade 4 and achieve the minimum benchmark for reading, the figure is only 40 per cent for Sub-Saharan Africa and less than this for south and west Asia (UNESCO, 2014). PISA analysis of data from its 2009 survey of 15 year olds in 75 countries shows strong associations between national economic wealth and learning performance as well as in-country disparities related to students' socio-economic status (OECD, 2010; Bloem, 2013). Hybrid assessments, such as EGRA, have recently been effective in drawing attention to disappointing learning outcomes in the lower years of primary (Trudell et al., 2012). The effective publicising of these findings has started to rebalance the investment priority schools and governments tend to give to the upper years, when students are approaching high-stakes national examinations.

The disadvantage associated with not speaking the language of instruction at home, which is nearly always also the language of the test, is a finding across learning surveys. The latest EFA Global Monitoring Report, for example, tells us that in Benin:

... over 80 per cent of grade 5 students who speak the test language at home achieve minimum learning in reading, compared with less than 60 per cent of the nine out of 10 students who speak another language. (UNESCO, 2014: 198)

It presents comparable statistics for countries in Latin America and Asia. Hybrid assessments have offered some insights into how language disadvantages can be addressed. For example, research in East and West Africa using EGRA tests has shown that putting in place mother tongue or bilingual language policies is not enough but that resourcing and implementation also matter (Piper and Miksc, 2011). Implementation of language policies is an area in which much more research is needed, including policies related to assessment of learning (Rea-Dickins et al., 2009).

Learning surveys have been instrumental in highlighting inequalities in accessing learning opportunities. Social justice, however, also concerns the relevance of learning to students' livelihood opportunities and to their socio-cultural identities (Barrett, 2011). A social justice perspective on learning, therefore, expects children to learn in school languages that will be socio-economically useful in their local environment and other environments they are likely to move into. It also expects schools to recognise the knowledge children bring from home and support the languages in which they express that knowledge. Trudell (2013), at the Juba Language-in-Education conference, questioned the relevance to African contexts of reading benchmarks, which are defined with reference to Western countries. She points out that African educators expect their pupils to read by grade 4 and 5, compared with grade 2 in the US, and one reason is because many children have little exposure to the language of instruction outside of school. She also points out that the print environment of many African children is very different from the rich print environment of Western societies and Western schools. Trudell (*Ibid.*) looks behind the kind of statistics cited in the EFA Global Monitoring Report to ask questions about the assumptions and values that inform how literacy is measured. In other words, she brings into focus the political dimension of social justice, which is concerned with who participates in educational decision making (Barrett, 2011). The political dimension also requires us to ask questions about how surveys of learning outcomes influence policy debates and whose voice they tend to privilege. In the remainder of this paper, therefore, I will identify the organisations behind LSEAs and hybrid assessments and the ideas about literacy that inform test design.

Political decision making and LSEAs

PISA

PISA, conducted by the OECD, is perhaps the most well known and politically influential of the LSEAs. It started in 1997 as a study of OECD countries, but the last survey in 2012 also included 30 non-OECD countries. PISA assesses 15 year olds across all participating countries. Its concept of literacy relates to the capacity to problem solve and apply knowledge and skills in key subject areas. PISA aims to inform policy through identifying the features of high-performing students, schools and education systems. A pilot project, *PISA for Development*, explicitly anticipates a post-2015 learning agenda. The project 'aims to increase developing countries' use of PISA assessments for monitoring progress towards nationally-set targets for improvement' by developing 'enhanced instruments that are more relevant for the contexts found in developing countries' and through piloting a methodology for including out-of-school children in its surveys (OECD, 2013). It is described on the PISA website as a three-way partnership involving five to seven countries, members of the OECD's Development Assistant Committee, the World Bank, UN bodies and regional organisations. Language diversity and the fact that many students are not instructed in their mother tongue present a challenge to extending PISA to lower income countries (Bloem, 2013). They present a challenge also for the governments of participating countries who shoulder the responsibility for translating test instruments although PISA does linguistic quality control of translated materials. While PISA for Development has an eye to setting a single international measure for learning outcomes, it is envisaged that countries could set their own targets (Davidson and Ward, c. 2013).

The political deployment of PISA results within various countries (UNESCO, 2014), including by the OECD itself, is instructive. Despite the carefully phrased provisos of researchers, the facility for comparing countries' results is seductive. PISA supplies politicians and the media with an arsenal of statistics, which can be selectively deployed in the support of ideologically motivated reform agendas (Takayama, 2008). Policy researchers claim that the OECD has been able to use PISA to expand its influence on education governance, particularly within Europe, through the authority assumed to be invested in quantitative indicators (Takayama, 2008; Grek, 2009; Sellar and Lingard, 2013). Grek (2009: 23) dubs this influence 'governing by numbers' and cites Nóvoa, 'comparing must not be seen as a method, but as a policy ... the expert discourse builds its proposals through 'comparative' strategies that tend to impose 'naturally' similar answers in the different national settings'. (Nóvoa, 2002: 144 in Grek, 2009: 25). A scan of headlines in the media of OECD countries upon the release of PISA results shows how international comparisons engender competitiveness that can feed into 'the audit culture of neo-liberal governance'. (Lingard, 2011: 357).

Not all commentators, however, associate the influence of PISA to the agency of OECD. For example, Ringarp and Rothland (2010) point out that reactions to PISA took policy debate in Sweden and Germany in contradictory directions.

PIRLS

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), a non-governmental, non-profit association of nearly 70 governmental and non-governmental organisations. IEA aims to provide international benchmarks and high quality data that identify strengths and weaknesses in educational systems. IEA's secretariat is located in Amsterdam and it has a data processing and research center in Hamburg. However, each IEA study is co-ordinated by a study centre, which has overall international responsibility for that study. The PIRLS International Study Center is currently housed within Boston College, Massachusetts, which also houses IEA's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). IEA includes among its partners UNESCO's Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO IIEP), Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL), PASEC and SACMEQ. The latest PIRLS in 2011 covered 48 countries. PIRLS tends to receive less public attention and hence less controversy than PISA, possibly because it measures learning earlier in the basic education cycle and is not owned by a single international agency.

PIRLS assesses reading comprehension in grade 4, when most children in OECD countries have become independent readers. Its assessment framework is founded on a definition of literacy, which, in its focus on utility and meaningfulness, sits comfortably with the social justice understanding of relevance presented above:

Reading literacy is the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Readers can construct meaning from texts in a variety of forms. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment. (Mullis and Martin, 2013: 14)

As the number of participating countries has expanded, IEA has sought to adapt PIRLS to systems, where many children in grade 4 are still developing literacy. Hence, PIRLS 2011 offered countries the option of assessing students in grades 5 or 6. There is also a less difficult assessment called prePIRLS based on the same concept of reading literacy. Three countries (South Africa, Colombia and Botswana) used the prePIRLS assessment in 2011. Alongside reading tests, PIRLS collects background data on national policies for supporting learning to read, school climate and resources, classroom instruction and students' home environment.

Regional LSEAs

The 15 African ministries of education within the SACMEQ consortium receive technical assistance from UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), which the SACMEQ website claims has, since 1989, withdrawn from a position of initiator to being one of several 'external friends'. Besides IEA, other 'external friends' include the Aga Khan Foundation (Kenya Office), the National Centre for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in Malawi, and the Australian Council for Educational Research, which in the past has co-ordinated IEA surveys. SACMEQ has a strong capacity-building rationale embodied within its mission:

To undertake integrated research and training activities that will expand opportunities for educational planners and researchers to: (a) receive training in the technical skills required to monitor, evaluate, and compare the general conditions of schooling and the quality of basic education; and (b) generate information that can be used by decision-makers to plan the quality of education. (SACMEQ, 2010)

In West Africa, PASEC was instigated by Conference of Education Ministers of 44 francophone countries (CONFEMEN) ministers shortly after the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, 1990, at the suggestion of Alain Mingat and Jean-Pierre Jarousse (CONFEMEN, 2013). It is headquartered in Dakar, Senegal and has made use of technical and financial assistance from a range of partners including the World Bank, the French Ministry of National Education, the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa, ADEA and UNICEF. Since 2011, SACMEQ and PASEC have been sharing information on methodology and developing common test items (International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), 2011; SACMEQ, 2013).

The Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education, LLECE, is more closely linked with UNESCO, being co-ordinated by UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC), which is headquartered in Santiago, Chile. It is described on the UNESCO website as a network of quality assessment units in different countries (UNESCO, c. 2013). LLECE members under the co-ordination of OREALC have so far conducted two 'regional and comparative explanatory studies' and are currently implementing a third. This third survey will assess student performance in reading and writing in the third and sixth grade of primary school. Like the other LSEAs reviewed here, LLECE uses questionnaires to collect contextual information.

Regional LSEAs are designed to allow comparison of learning outcomes across countries taking into account curricular differences. They are technically complex and draw on technical expertise from a small number of research institutions, mainly in North America and Australia, which are also associated with IEA and PISA. Nonetheless, they claim a high degree of ownership by national governments in the participating countries. Wagner (2010) points out that regional LSEA tests are closer to national curricula than international LSEAs and pay more attention to local policy concerns. The education economists, who first put forward the idea of a learning goal (Filmer et al., 2006; Beatty and Pritchett, 2012) assumed learning targets would be set at the national or regional level precisely so that they would be closer to the curricula and learning outcomes valued within national education systems. Regional measures of learning have the potential to be more supportive of the relevance dimension of social justice in learning than international measures as well as allowing national-level policy makers to have greater participation in determining the learning outcomes to be measured.

Political decision making and hybrid assessments

Proposals for a learning goal or target discussed have not explicitly suggested the use of a hybrid study, but given their growth in recent years they should not be ruled out of the picture. The current popularity of hybrid assessments of literacy, such as Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Uwezo, lie in their being designed to assess foundational skills in literacy and numeracy in the early years of primary schooling. In this section I look first at EGRA before considering Uwezo and ASER.

The EGRA tools were developed and promoted by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) with funding from USAID (Gove and Wetterberg, 2011). RTI is an independent research institute with its headquarters in North Carolina funded through research contracts. RTI have also developed Early Grade Mathematics Assessments (EGMA). Adapted versions of EGRA and EGMA have been used in a range of countries (Gove, 2012), many within Africa, usually administered to pupils in grades 1 to 3 of primary school. RTI presents EGRA as a rigorous, comprehensive value-neutral tool that can be adapted to purposes including diagnosing education systems, screening students or monitoring pupil progress (RTI International, 2009).

EGRA is based on theories of learning from cognitive psychology, within which the process of literacy acquisition is broken down into sequential steps associated with cognitive stages of development between birth and grade 3. Sub-tasks are designed to measure emergent literacy, decoding and fluency and include reading out letter sounds, reading nonsense words phonetically and reading and answering literal and inferential questions on a short piece of text. The theory and approach contrasts with the PIRLS focus on comprehension.

EGRA was informed by tests formerly developed for the US context, foremost of which is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). DIBELS itself has been controversial among practitioners, who in the US tend to hold social constructivist views of learning (Kamii and Manning, 2005). Some research has questioned DIBELS' validity and utility (Shelton et al., 2009), while others have suggested validity for at least some of its indicators (Pedersen, 2009). Graham and van Ginkel (2013) have pointed out that one EGRA measure, the number of words a child can read in a minute, cannot be compared between groups being tested in different languages because of the different challenges those languages present. Their research suggests that we should be cautious about using early years assessment of reading to compare across systems using different languages of instruction and having different language policies.

Hybrid tests have been developed in India and East Africa. These are driven by a public accountability agenda, aiming to make visible the poor quality of primary education at the local and national level. In India, a non-governmental organisation, Pratham, developed the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). This initiative has travelled to Pakistan and inspired Uwezo in East Africa. Uwezo has support from donors, including aid agencies of the United Kingdom and Sweden. Costs are kept low through recruiting local volunteers to collect data. The assessments used are similar, but simpler than the EGRA tests and hence less costly to develop and implement. This makes them less dependent on the kind of technical expertise that is concentrated in Western research institutions.

From a social justice perspective, hybrid assessments have the potential to support linguistic relevance, particularly in primary education, through their adaptability to diverse alphabet-based languages. However, they do not address and are not intended to address questions related to what knowledge is valued and measured. Learning to read is treated as an activity that is very similar across different contexts and languages. Uwezo and ASER do have an explicit social justice agenda as they set out to extend participation in debates on education quality through disseminating results locally to schools and parents, and nationally through inserting themselves in media debates. However, they are not designed for cross-national comparison and are not therefore suited for incorporation into a UN development goal. They could, however, be part of a national framework for monitoring learning in the lower grades and at local levels.

Conclusion

Development goals are about headlines; they gain traction because they set targets that are simple and measurable. Measurement of learning, however, is technically complex and founded on assumptions about learning – what learning is valued, how it happens and how it can be measured – that generally do not attract as much attention as the assessment results. A single international PISA-like measure for learning outcomes fits well with the headline logic of development goals. It is likely to lead to prioritisation of the literacy skills, which it measures in the official national languages used in secondary education. It will make learning inequalities visible, but may be seen as associated with the international organisation or organisations that own the assessment. Regional LSEAs would create a patchwork quilt of measures across the globe, which make monitoring progress against a single international goal more complex. However, it would be possible, given their intersecting affiliations and their sharing of expertise, as the EFA Global Monitoring Report demonstrates. Regional LSEAs are likely to be more attuned to the learning outcomes valued at the national level and national-level actors may have a greater sense of ownership. For both international and regional LSEAs, translating tools into diverse languages would be expensive and so assessment in an official national language is likely to be favoured. Privileging these assessments may also lead to more investment in developing technical expertise in research assessments across the world. Hybrid assessments provide a mosaic of information within which information can be read at different levels of an education system, but it would be difficult and possibly erroneous to interpret and aggregate across educational systems.

Different assessments serve different purposes. In reality, policy making and educational debate need to be informed by different types of assessment together with sources of information on resourcing, staffing and educational processes (Kanjee, 2012). An international learning goal cannot refer to the array of information that properly monitors education quality. A development goal that targets learning should, however, be a stronger tool than the current education Millennium Development Goal for ensuring inclusion in opportunities to achieve learning outcomes. However, as the 2015 debate focuses almost exclusively on how to measure learning outcomes, the political implications of a new measurement regime are being neglected. This means that the two other dimensions of social justice, relevance and participation, are not addressed. Working towards social justice requires attention to a range of assessments as well as attention to processes within and not just the outcomes of our education systems.

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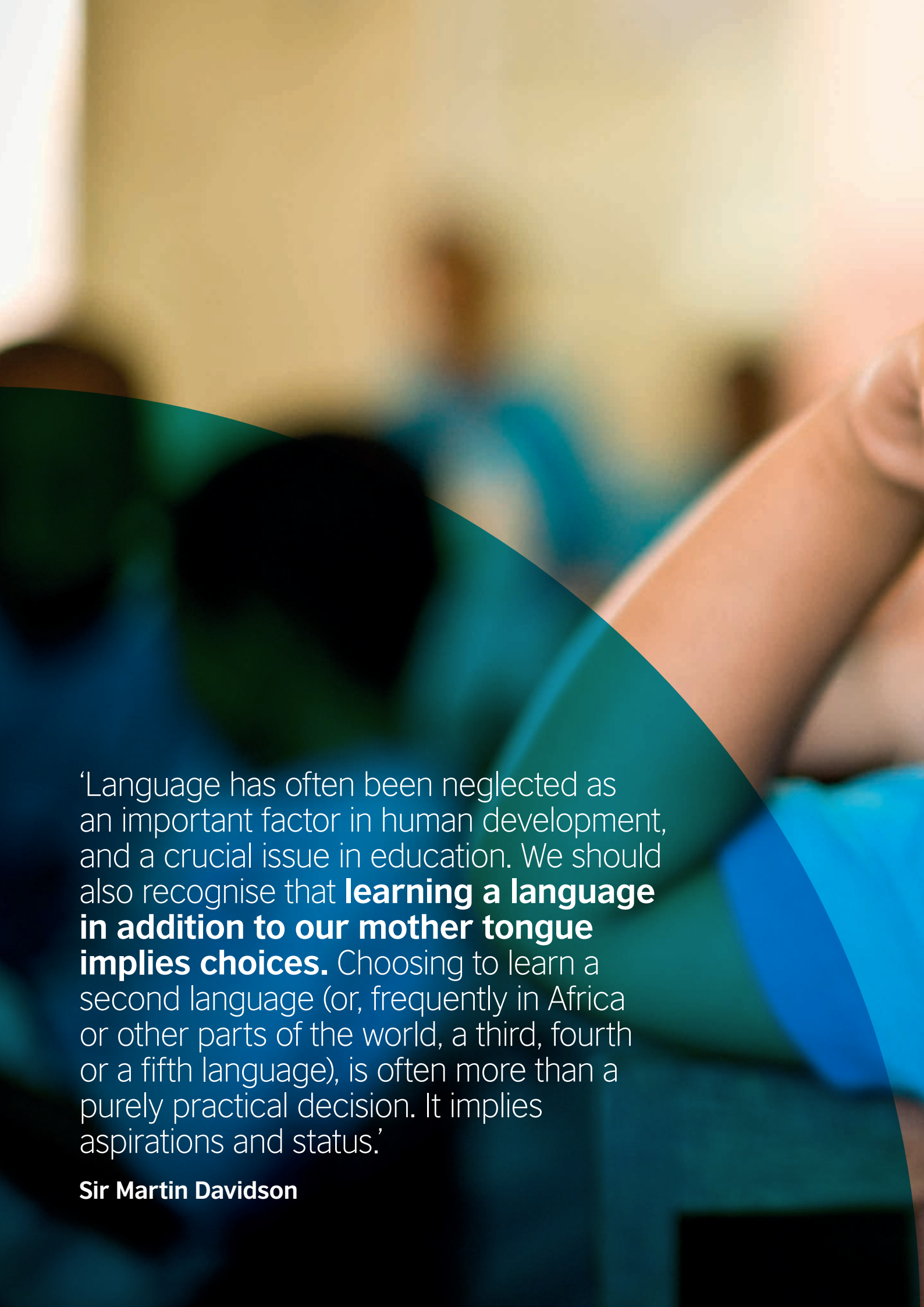
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‘Language has often been neglected as an important factor in human development, and a crucial issue in education. We should also recognise that **learning a language in addition to our mother tongue implies choices.** Choosing to learn a second language (or, frequently in Africa or other parts of the world, a third, fourth or a fifth language), is often more than a purely practical decision. It implies aspirations and status.’

Sir Martin Davidson



Multilingualism, the ‘African lingua franca’ and the ‘new linguistic dispensation’

Kathleen Heugh, University of South Australia

Introduction

Linguistic diversity or multilingualism has always been a defining characteristic of countries of the global south, particularly in Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia. For much of the second half of the 20th century, influential scholarly publications and those of large international development agencies, such as the World Bank, suggested that one of the reasons for poverty and ‘under’ development in the global South has to do with linguistic and cultural diversity (see critique in Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998). This position has been disputed by many linguists (for example, May, 2014; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) and development economists (see Grin 2003, 2008a, b) and subsequently revised in more recent World Bank and influential UNESCO publications (for example, Ouane and Glanz, 2010). It is now evident that it is not so much that multilingualism constrains development, rather it is how multilingualism is understood and managed that determines the relationship between linguistic diversity and development.

Nevertheless, a view that linguistic diversity is problematic in Africa continues to pervade much mainstream literature emerging from Western Europe and North America and this has contributed towards significant distrust within Africa of the value of education in local languages. Recently, however, there has been a change that signals an increasing awareness in the global North that multilingualism, linguistic repertoires and expertise are universal characteristics of human behaviour. This is an opportunity to advance socially just and equitable educational opportunities with minority communities in Northern countries and with the majority of people in the global South who use local and regional languages that do not carry the socio-economic capital of international languages, such as English. This is also an opportunity to examine carefully the knowledge and expertise of multilingualism and multilingual education that has accrued in both parts of the world. At present, however, despite the long history of the association of linguistic diversity with Africa and Asia, recent Northern literature pays scant attention to the experiences and expertise of multilingual societies beyond Europe, and to a lesser extent also North America.

The first purpose of this paper is to draw attention to, and to try to explain, the different contexts and understandings of multilingualism as these are emerging in contemporary Europe (and North America), and to contrast these with how multilingualism is understood in Africa, with some references to South Asia. It has long been understood in Africa and Asia that linguistic diversity is a multidimensional phenomenon, which includes a horizontal axis of communication for most purposes of daily life and a vertical axis of communication that permits or restricts access to power (Heine, 1977).

The second purpose is to illustrate that, while a recognition of societal multilingualism is important for policy makers and educators concerned with social justice and equity, it is also important to recognise theoretical and practical distinctions among different iterations of what is passed off as multilingual education. Some forms of multilingual education are more likely to facilitate opportunities for educational equity, while others are not. What may be considered appropriate pedagogies to ensure that minority children are able to integrate into mainstream education in a powerful national language in Europe cannot be used in Africa and South or South-East Asia where the majority of children do not use the language of socio-economic power. Similarly, what may be promising options in the global South may not be feasible in the global North. Nevertheless, there is much that can be learned from expertise in both situations. Linguists, educators and policy makers, therefore, need to exercise caution in order to avoid defaulting towards a view that contemporary debates and research on multilingualism in Europe and North America are either novel or negate what is already understood in Africa and South Asia.

The third purpose of this paper is to draw further attention to how degrees of socio-economic, political and educational marginalisation are amplified within the vertical axis of linguistic diversity. It is argued here that in order for multilingual education to be successful, educators and linguists need to apply their minds to how both horizontal and vertical dimensions of language use can be addressed simultaneously in formal, mainstream education.

Contextualising different understandings of multilingualism

Over the last few years numerous works have been published on multilingualism and multilingual education in Europe, and to a lesser extent in North America (for example, Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Baker, 2011; and Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). These discuss recent understandings of linguistic diversity as a 21st century urban phenomenon arising from late 20th century migration and the consequences of globalisation, particularly as these have an impact on Europe and North America. To put this into perspective, and if one assumes that it is possible to identify clearly distinct languages, varieties and the boundaries among them, Europe is home to 284 of 6,700 languages of the world, whereas Africa is home to 2,150 and Asia is home to 2,300 languages (Lewis, 2009). This would suggest that if there were expertise of 'extreme' or significant scales of linguistic diversity, most would lie beyond Europe. We know that in the European context, a perception that linguistic diversity is a recent phenomenon is historically inaccurate. In Europe the association between a nation state and a national language is recent, dating back only to the late 18th and 19th centuries. The selection of a widely used language variety, and its subsequent standardisation for purposes of printing texts, elevated this variety above others for use in formal education as this was expanded from the mid-19th century onwards.

This changed the linguistic ecology of Europe. The local use of 'lesser-used languages' and varieties gradually lost public notice or visibility and became increasingly marginalised in formal provision of education (for example, Extra and Gorter, 2001; Ó Riagáin, 2006). European communities, in this process, have come to be 'imagined' (Anderson, 1983) as largely monolingual for the last 100 years (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Gogolin, 2002). Nation state ideology and its ramifications for perceptions of language extended beyond Europe as a result of colonisation. In Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese have largely displaced and rendered endogenous languages invisible; and English has supplanted most indigenous Australian languages and Native American languages in the USA and Canada.

The situation in Africa and Asia, however, is different. Multilingualism in Africa and Asia has never been denied nor rendered invisible. Even when and where a European language was placed in a vertical position over the pre-colonial linguistic ecology of each African and South Asian country, this colonial language has seldom replaced the horizontal use of local language systems within and across communities. One reason is that the indigenous populations in these milieus have tended to have numerical strength on their side. A second reason is that penetration of the colonial language beyond urban centres has been weak and often only minimally evident and this has meant that local languages and practices of multilingualism have endured colonialism. A third reason is that the majority of citizens have remained outside of formal education systems administered through the colonial language, either through lack of provision or as a result of early attrition from the system. Until recently, more than 50 per cent of children of both Africa and South Asia had not completed primary school (for example, Bamgbose, 2004; Ouane and Glanz, 2010; and Mohanty, 2012).

Nevertheless, the former colonial language has come to function as a gatekeeper, which has altered the power relationships of the pre-colonial linguistic ecology. It has come to represent access to high-level power and full participation in most aspects of citizenship, including education, the legal system and the formal economy. As in the north, gaining access is restricted, as anticipated by Pool (1993) and as discussed by several authors (including in Coleman, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh, 2012; Benson and Kosonen, 2013). While the functional use of local and regional languages of Africa continues for most daily aspects of life and informal economies, the status of these languages appears to have declined, especially in relation to English, French and Portuguese. This is even when in some cases more widely used languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, Kiswahili, Fulfulde, Wolof, isiZulu, Luganda, Amharic, Afaan Oromo and Somali appear to be more robust than other less widely used languages, and even where African regional languages may be used across several geopolitical borders.

The vertical distance between the international language on the one hand and the languages of Africa on the other (in other words, a hierarchisation of languages) has had a further consequence of amplifying the vertical distance between African languages of wider communication at the national and regional levels and African languages used at more local levels. This has resulted in what Mohanty (2012) in the Indian setting calls the 'double divide', i.e. a divide between the international language and a national language (such as Hindi) or a powerful regional language (for example, Kiswahili, Hausa, Wolof) and minority languages in South Asia or Africa (such as Saora in the state of Orissa in India, or Kakwa in north-west Uganda, Nuer in western Ethiopia, Northern Ndebele/Sindebele in South Africa). Hierarchisation within highly complex or diverse societies results in differing degrees of marginalisation for those who are geographically, economically or politically further away from power. So, where the vertical dimension of language is emphasised (for example, where access to regional power is restricted to a regional language) this marginalises those who only have access to a local language; and the degree of marginalisation increases if those who use local languages are required to develop expertise in the regional and national language(s), and also the international language, such as English.

So, there are at least two dimensions to multilingualism in Africa and South Asia. First, is the horizontal use of language repertoires used by people to communicate within and across communities; and second, is the vertical arrangement of different languages, where languages at different levels of the hierarchical system permit or restrict access to certain kinds of public and civil activity (see also Heine, 1977).

Conceptual cleavages in the understanding of multilingualism

There are several conceptual cleavages in contemporary discussions of multilingualism, partly because scholars immersed in concerns of northern countries have not understood or have overlooked contributions of scholarship from elsewhere. Despite historical documentation, research and expertise in the complexities of linguistic diversity in Africa and South/South-East Asia (for example, in Coleman, 2011; Mohanty, 2012; McIlwraith, 2013), its scope and significance is overlooked almost entirely in recent European and North American literature (for example García, 2009; Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Abello-Contesse et al., 2013). A significant example of cleavage is evident in recent sociolinguistic debates in which the conventional conceptualisation of language(s) as having distinct and discretely separated boundaries is under critique.

Since the groundbreaking work on bilingualism in Canada (Heller, 1999), many North American and European sociolinguists believe that they have uncovered something that has not previously been understood about the nature of language and, by implication, therefore has not been understood in Africa and Asia. This is the idea that languages as used in society are not hermetically sealed off from one another. This, of course, is the horizontal dimension of languages that has, in fact, been very much part of earlier generations of critical debate and discussion of language practices in civil society and in education in many parts of the world, and particularly in Africa and South Asia (for example, Tadadjeu, 1980; Bamgbose, 1987; Chumbow, 1987; Djité, 1993; Fardon and Furniss, 1994; Agnihotri, 1995, 2007). Educators and linguists working in southern environments have nuanced understanding of how languages used in everyday life are fluid; and how people draw on the repertoires of their immediate, local and district communities, in order to play, tease and engage in micro-economic enterprise. Because language is a significant instrument of exclusion for the majority of citizens in the South, scholars in these settings also have a heightened awareness that in order to access socio-economic, political and educational opportunity, people need the tools to navigate both vertical and horizontal dimensions of language use.

The recent interest in studies of diversity, particularly in Europe and to a lesser extent in North America, arises from what appears to be a dramatic increase in the mobility of people, particularly in regard to migration from Asia, Africa and the Middle East to Europe, coinciding with advances in information technology and economic effects of globalisation (for example, Vertovec, 2007; Krotter et al., 2011; Kraus, 2012). Civil society, national states and the European Union are having to grapple with the phenomenon of the horizontal dimensions of multilingualism as recognition of diversity seeps into contemporary urban cultures and socio-economic enterprise. Singleton et al. (2013) offer a persuasive argument that 'multilingualism is the new linguistic dispensation', and that a distinctive characteristic of contemporary society is linguistic diversity. This is encouraging because such realisation opens up opportunities for a sharing of knowledge and expertise of Southern and Northern understandings of diversity in ways that may be mutually enriching. It does not, however, mean that Europe or the world has suddenly become 'super diverse' (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). What it signifies is that scholars in Europe and North America may be coming to understand realities that have been understood for a long time elsewhere.

Horizontal and vertical dimensions of multilingualism

Communities and states of Asia and Africa have for at least two millennia grappled with, managed and mismanaged, and come to understand different aspects of diversity. These are arguably on more extensive scales of number and geographic space than those found in Northern settings. As suggested above, knowledge of such dimensions of linguistic diversity may very well be useful for, and shared with, the North, and these are discussed in more detail below. One of the most important aspects of understanding linguistic diversity, long recognised in the South, is the multi-dimensional nature of linguistic repertoires and practices. One of the dimensions is the horizontal communicative purposes of language(s) use within communities of close linguistic, cultural and spatial proximity. The horizontal use of language is extended, through a process in which linguistic repertoires are broadened, in order to facilitate communication between or among communities, as socio-cultural, linguistic and spatial proximities decrease. Paulin Djité (1993) understands this as resulting in continua of languages or language chains which link one community to the next in Africa. Twenty years ago, Fardon and Furniss (1994) took this understanding of multilingualism and overturned a 20th century understanding of the term 'lingua franca'. Rather than thinking of a lingua franca as associated with an international language such as English, French, Spanish, and so on, they suggested that as a result of such horizontal linguistic practices 'multilingualism is the African lingua franca'. In other words, communicative practices in highly diverse milieus across Africa are not restricted to rigid borders that seal one language off from another. Rather, language practices of Africa reflect diversity and, if there are borders between languages, then these are, at the very least, permeable (see also Heine, 1977; Heugh, 1999; Makoni, 2003).

Secondly, languages, certainly in Africa, have also come to be used and to function along vertical and hierarchical dimensions, as they have in the global North. The colonial introduction of European languages and European ideologies of language, which link the notion of the nation state to a single national language, have altered the pre-colonial linguistic ecology of Africa. The selection of some language varieties and the selective processes of standardisation have led to a small number of languages identified for high-level socio-political, economic and educational purposes since the late 19th century. The processes of standardisation serve the purpose of sealing

off porous borders, thereby reducing horizontal use and access to these languages. Pool (1993) argues that this process co-occurs with, and is a strategic mechanism employed by, the state (or those in powerful positions) to amplify divisions in society. It is to exclude most people from access to power, whether this is access to high levels of economic, educational, legal or political power. The idea of a national language of the nation state and what Gogolin has called the 'monolingual habitus' (2002) gives speakers of the dominant or national language a distinct advantage over those who are speakers of languages deemed less powerful. This is especially the case if the speakers of the latter come from communities or homes of low socio-economic status.

There is a link between the arguments of Pool and those of Makoni (2003) and Makoni and Pennycook (2012) who have come to discuss what they see as the artificial 'invention' of languages. One way that they see languages as invented is through the process of standardisation. Standardisation involves selecting and excluding vocabulary and 'identifying' grammatical rules, and the 'reduction' of spoken language to written text. Standardised languages, by implication, therefore, are reduced, narrow or 'select' versions of spoken forms of communication. By implication also, horizontal and spoken forms of communication that are not subjected to or escape standardisation, are not restricted or constrained by the rules of the rarefied, standardised and written forms. The similarities and differences between what has happened in Africa and Europe, for example, may be summarised as follows:

- In Africa, standardisation of a few African languages plus the introduction of a former colonial language in each geo-political territory has resulted in high-level socio-political, educational and economic marginalisation of the majority of citizens. Local and regional languages continue to be used for most informal educational, economic and vehicular communicative purposes, and this involves using multilingualism as a lingua franca. Thus people use local and regional languages for most purposes, but they also require access to French, Portuguese, and/or English.
- In Europe, standardisation of a variety to which the majority of citizens have spoken proximity has resulted in the marginalisation of relatively few minority language communities. The languages of these communities have lost visibility and functional use beyond localised communities. These communities are obliged to use one of the standardised languages for vehicular communication. Globalisation has increased the need also to have access to English.

Implications of vertical and horizontal multilingualism in education

Probably the most resilient belief in most countries of the world is that access to successful education, economic, social and political opportunity is possible only through English or another high-profile language of wider communication (Spanish in Latin America, Putonghua in China, and so on). Although many sociolinguists from both Northern and Southern contexts contest the notion of languages as separate entities (e.g. Djité, 1993; Agnihotri, 1995; Heller, 1999; García, 2009; Makoni and Pennycook, 2012) the process of standardisation and hierarchisation of languages has nevertheless resulted in a materialisation of printed media, published works, dictionaries and educational materials in relatively few of the world's languages. A triangular association between the written language, the language with which power is associated and the language of education becomes one which is difficult to deny or dislodge. In Europe and North America, because the majority of school children speak a language variety that is fairly close to the standardised written language, education systems have been able to concentrate most resources on this language. Attempts to accommodate what are regarded as anomalous minority indigenous and migrant communities have included usually assimilatory or transitional models in which the home language is tolerated for as short a time as possible.

Non-government bodies are sometimes able to offer maintenance programmes and/or experiment with 'translanguaging' (García, 2009) practices to bridge the home language and mainstream language of education (for example, Blackledge and Creese, 2010). In these programmes, educators attempt to find ways to work with the linguistic repertoires of learners and simultaneously also to facilitate access to the language of mainstream education. An optimistic view of translanguaging is that, at present, it is a term loosely used to include a range of exploratory as well as established pedagogical strategies aimed at strengthening the connections between the flexible and more fluid uses of language (i.e. the horizontal dimension) with those of the more restricted language (i.e. the vertical dimension) of formal schooling.

In the global South most people speak and use languages in their daily lives which are not associated with power at the level of the nation state. For example, only a minority of people in Africa have sufficient and meaningful access to French (e.g. in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire), Portuguese (in Angola and Mozambique) or English (in, for example, Malawi, Uganda and Namibia). In India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the vast majority of people do not have the kind of access to English that allows them to escape poverty (Coleman, 2011). The scale of

marginalisation experienced in the North and South is so different that the educational circumstances of education, particularly approaches to multilingualism, are also different. Whereas it is a matter of concern for minority communities in the Northern context, it is a matter for majority communities in the Southern context (see also Liddicoat and Heugh, 2014). In each case, an educational goal is equitable education. The use of local languages is advanced by NGOs and in alternative education in both settings (for example, Akumba and Chiatoh, 2013 in Cameroon; Blackledge and Creese, 2010 in the UK), and also short transitional programmes in some mainstream systems. System-wide use of multilingual practices, whether implicit or explicit, however, is a characteristic feature of education across Africa and South/South-East Asia.

Multilingualism in system-wide education

Since the UNESCO Education for All conference in Jomtien in 1990 and the international agreements and commitments to the Millennium Development Goals, of which universal primary education is the most significant, enrolment in primary school has shown dramatic improvement. Retention to the end of primary and into secondary, however, remains a challenge. There are now numerous studies which demonstrate a causal link between school retention and the language of education, specifically, where there is a mismatch between the home or community language and the language of school education (e.g. Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Benson and Kosonen, 2013). In Africa, local African languages have been used in mainstream primary schools in one or more of the following ways:

- In the early introduction of reading and writing (school-based literacy), followed by a switch to English, French, Portuguese or Spanish medium, in most countries.
- As overt medium of teaching and learning for three or more years, followed by a switch to English medium (currently in South Africa, Uganda).
- As overt medium of teaching and learning for six years of primary education, accompanied by well-resourced teaching of English as a subject (for example, the Six Year Primary Project in Nigeria, 1970–76).
- As overt medium of teaching or learning for eight years and/or through the primary school system (as currently in Ethiopia; in South Africa between 1955 and 1975, during the first phase of apartheid and simultaneously in Namibia).
- In the covert practice of code-switching, used to assist students to understand the curriculum that is supposed to be taught through English, French or Portuguese (in which students and most teachers have insufficient proficiency).

Regional or national languages of Africa have also been used in education in the following circumstances:

- As the medium of instruction, prior to a switch to English before or by the fourth grade (for example, Cichewa in Malawi; Setswana in Botswana).
- As the medium of instruction across primary schools, followed by a switch to English (including Kiswahili in Tanzania and Amharic in parts of Ethiopia).

In other words, multilingualism is evident in the mainstream schooling system of every country in Africa, and it is also a feature of most non-formal education offered in remote environments for vulnerable students and in many adult education programmes (Bamgbose, 2004; Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Akumbu and Chiatoh, 2013; McIlwraith, 2013). Small-scale, large-scale, system-wide and multi-country studies have been conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the multiple iterations of multilingual education (Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh, 2012). Because these occur in the mainstream systems and particular educational circumstances of Africa, the scale of these studies exceeds research of multilingual education in Northern countries, where multilingualism is not yet mainstreamed.

What has been learned?

The data show that in most circumstances, unless children come from high socio-economic status backgrounds, they are unlikely to do well in school, particularly if they are expected to learn only through the medium of a language that does not have wide functional use in local and district-wide communities. Parents do not want education in the local language only; parents and students wish to have educational access to at least one international language, usually English, so that their children will have the opportunity to escape poverty. The most compelling international research data that demonstrates how both of these imperatives can be addressed successfully in low socio-economic status contexts comes from Nigeria (Six Year Primary Project, 1970–76), South Africa (1955–75) and Ethiopia (1994–2012) (for example, Bamgbose, 2004; Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh, 2012).

In each of these cases, one or more of local and regional language varieties have been used as the primary medium of instruction while English has been systematically added, and learned as a subject for between six and eight years before students are expected to learn through English. These languages are treated as separate entities, just as they are in every formal education system of the world. However, teachers and students also know that languages are used for vehicular purposes and they also find ways to make strategic use of language repertoires of the local,

district and regional relevance community. The vehicular, horizontal dimension of communication supports teaching and learning and it supports students' access to the vertical dimension of language.

Research data of other approaches to multilingualism provides useful information of what does not work or does not achieve the aspirations of civil society. Multilingual education during the first phase of apartheid provision (1955–75) was successful in implementing multiple ethnolinguistically separated systems in which each learner developed high-level proficiency in the local language and English (and, to a lesser extent, also Afrikaans). However, because segregation was a goal, the horizontal and vehicular opportunities for expanding communication across African languages was deliberately discouraged. The segregationist intent made parents distrustful of, and caused them to reject, this form of multilingual education in 1976. From this we may learn that multilingual education, which is associated with the architecture of vertical policies of divide and rule, will be rejected by civil society.

The data on other iterations of multilingualism that remove local languages in fewer than six years and also stigmatise the purposeful use of 'code-switching' and other dimensions of horizontal language use in the classroom, continues to show low levels of student achievement and high levels of repetition and attrition before, or by the end of, primary school. In those situations where only one African regional or national language is used, the speakers of other language communities are disadvantaged and achievement levels are low.

Conclusion

There remains a long journey ahead in order to ensure that education authorities implement multilingual education in ways that are most likely to result in equitable educational outcomes for most children in Africa and Asia, and for minority children in Northern countries. There is a considerable body of knowledge of what has been tried, and what has and has not worked well, across whole systems in Africa. What would be helpful would be if more linguists and scholars in Europe and North America understood the value of reciprocal exchanges of research findings and expertise, and also the different circumstances in which linguistic diversity manifests itself in different parts of the world. In particular, we need an urgent pooling of resources to advance pedagogical approaches that make best use of the linguistic repertoires that children and teachers bring to each classroom in order to access the kind of knowledge capital that permits or excludes access to fully participative citizenship. To do this, we need nuanced recognition that multilingualism is multidimensional and contextually differentiated.

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The role of Kiswahili as a lingua franca in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

In this paper I examine countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that use the lingua franca Kiswahili and for what purposes. First is a description of what a lingua franca is followed by a brief history of the lingua franca Kiswahili. I then analyse the general and specific roles of the lingua franca in Sub-Saharan Africa. Five distinct roles have been identified: Kiswahili for detribalisation and class formation, political participation, secularisation and Kiswahili in science and technology (Safari, 1980).

A brief history of Kiswahili

There are many definitions of what constitutes a lingua franca. In this paper, I define it as a bridge language, a unifying language, a language adapted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different. It is a language systematically used to make communication possible between people not sharing a mother tongue, in particular when it is a third language distinct from both mother tongues.¹²

Africa has more languages than any other continent (Safari, 1980). Swahili is one of these languages and is derived from the Arab word 'Sawahel', meaning coasts. Swahili is therefore the language of the people of the coast of East Africa. Although it contains a number of loan words, mostly from Arabic, Swahili is essentially an African language.

Having originated in East Africa, Kiswahili has spread and is spoken by over 100 million people worldwide. Its spread in East and Central Africa has taken place against a background of interactions between church and state and between economics and politics (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1995). Missionaries, merchants, administrators, politicians as well as educators have all played a part in the drama of this linguistic spread.

Kiswahili continues to play a major role in political, administrative, economic and religious functions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Initially, it was used purely for purposes of trade, marketing and employment in East Africa. In Uganda, Kiswahili has played a major role in the economy, but this role has not persuaded successive Ugandan educational authorities to introduce the language formally in schools on any significant scale. The political role of Kiswahili, particularly in East African countries, has on the other hand promoted vertical integration, creating links between the elite and the masses. It is when Kiswahili is needed either for a political function or for religious purposes that educational policy makers become inspired and governments or missionaries move with dispatch towards giving the language a role in the formal structures of training and socialisation.

The role of Kiswahili in Sub-Saharan Africa

Kiswahili assumes the role of a lingua franca more so in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Other countries that use this language for communication, in religion or embassies are Burundi, Rwanda, the Comoros Islands, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zambia, Botswana and parts of South Sudan, among others. The roles of the lingua franca are discussed as follows.

Kiswahili and de-tribalisation

'De-tribalisation' is not a process by which people stop thinking of themselves as Kikuyu or Baganda or Wachagga. De-tribalisation has to be seen in a somewhat different context. Firstly, it can take the form of changes in customs, rituals and rules, and a shift towards a more cosmopolitan style of life. In behaviour, a particular Kikuyu or Muganda or Mchaga may no longer be guided by the heritage of values and rules of his or her rural, ethnic community, but in loyalty and identification, the person may even be more ferociously a Muganda or Kikuyu than ever. It is therefore possible to have declining ethnic behaviour as one becomes increasingly cosmopolitan, but stable or even increasing ethnic loyalty in terms of emotional attachment. The question therefore arises about whether Kiswahili has played a part in the sense of de-tribalisation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

12 See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua_franca

The other sense of de-tribalisation concerns the emergence of new loyalties, not necessarily to supplant older ones but more often to supplement them in complex ways. Those new loyalties could be in terms of social class or religious affiliation or rallied identity or national consciousness. The question, therefore, arises about whether Kiswahili has played a part in making the network of loyalties among East Africans and Africans at large more complex and more diversified.

Kiswahili has indeed facilitated both senses of de-tribalisation. In terms of diversifying social attachments, it has done this through its impact as a language of unifying people from different ethnic backgrounds, its role in the diffusion of Christianity and Islam, its functions in politicising virtual consciousness among black Africans and the part it has played in creating new forms of national consciousness among the inhabitants of each of the countries in Africa, particularly East Africa.

An earlier role played by Kiswahili in supplementing East Africa allegiances is its role in Islamisation and Christianisation. This was particularly so in the countries that later came to be known as Kenya and Tanzania. Kiswahili facilitated social interaction among Muslims from different ethnic groups and regions and gradually built up a comprehensive culture of its own over and above language as a mere medium of communication. Swahili culture was born with its own Islam, its own worldview, its own dress culture, its own cuisine, its own ethics and aesthetics. At the same time, the language itself was providing further communication between the Waswahili (Swahili people) and other groups and was contributing to the expanding Christian network of affiliation of the people of the coast of East Africa. The lingua franca gradually acquired the additional role of becoming the language of Christian mission.

In the process of de-tribalisation, the role of Kiswahili is also linked to the process of urbanisation. Urbanisation in East Africa has also been a major factor behind the erosion of rural ethnic customs and ritual, though it has not eroded ethnic loyalty and identity. The groups from different ethnic origins have intermingled in places like

Dar es Salaam, Lubumbashi, Mombasa and Jinja. Kiswahili has been a facilitating factor behind such urbanisations and has served as a lingua franca among the different ethnic communities. It has also been, quite often, the most important language of the workplace and the marketplace in the towns. The towns and cities also became major centres for the new politics of African nationalism, and Kiswahili is playing an important part in the new phenomenon of African nationalism. Africans in Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, Mombasa and Nairobi have listened to speeches from a new breed of African politicians agitating for African rights. Politics in Kenya, Tanzania and parts of Zaire have become more national, partly owing to the communicative facility of Kiswahili as a lingua franca.

Another role Kiswahili has played in de-tribalisation in Africa is the emergence of national armies and security forces. Kiswahili has become the language of command. Ethnic intermingling in the barracks accompanied by new military routines and drills has contributed towards the erosion of more localised forms of ethnic customs and ritual within each group.

In Uganda, the political danger of Kiswahili being hated by Ugandans owing to its association with Idi Amin's tyranny was counter-balanced by more positive prospects as a result of the National Resistance Army's liberation efforts.

In the DRC, its role in the military was limited to the early years of Belgian colonialism. However, the transnational lingua francas, Kiswahili and Hausa, have served as important vehicles of inter-ethnic interaction, aiding in expanding the social horizons of the African army recruits.

Kiswahili and class formation

Among the Arabs of the East African coast, especially from the 18th century onwards, Kiswahili was an aristocratic language rich in religious imagery and linguistic Arabism, rich in poetry and rhetoric. In places like Lamu, Pate, Kismayu and Pemba, the highly Arabised variety of the language was becoming a medium of elegance, eloquence and polite culture. There was also a simplified Kiswahili for discourse with the *Wasenzi* or barbarians.

Kiswahili and political participation

Kiswahili has evolved into the primary language of politics in Tanzania and Kenya. The masses in those countries became increasingly involved in national agitation for African rights. A national political constituency emerged partly because a national lingua franca Kiswahili was operating in those societies.

In 1974, for instance, President Jomo Kenyatta ordered that debates in parliament be conducted in Kiswahili, which happens to date and to a lesser extent among Kenyan politicians generally. During campaigns prior to general elections or by-elections, Kiswahili is used extensively to seek votes from the masses who mostly understand Kiswahili rather than English. The language of practical politics nationally has become overwhelmingly Kiswahili, from speeches at mass gatherings to oration in parliament.

In Tanzania, Kiswahili has made it possible to mobilise more people in the political and decision making process of the country. The ruling party of Tanzania has helped to enrich Tanzanian Kiswahili in terms of political vocabulary and metaphor.

In Uganda, until the soldiers first captured power in January 1971, Kiswahili was more a language of economic than political participation. Idi Amin's military takeover saw a reduction of political participation by the masses. Parliament and political parties were abolished and even student politics gradually ground to a halt. Paradoxically, this shrinking of the political arena in Uganda was accompanied by an expansion of the use of Kiswahili in national life (Kasfir, 1976). Radio and television media were ordered to use Kiswahili for the first time as one of their languages and the government formally conferred a national language status. By being in power, the soldiers increased the use of Kiswahili in communicating with the general public. However, the return to civilian politics in the 1980s reduced Kiswahili's role in the national political life of the country. The restriction of the military to the barracks also reduced Kiswahili's contact with the society at large. Currently, the majority of Ugandans uphold and use Luganda in their daily communication and Kiswahili is known by just a few of the masses.

Much of Africa is in an important transition towards a more liberal political order. Kenya, Tanzania and to a lesser extent the DRC are already firmly on their way to political pluralism. All these changes are likely to expand the political horizons of Kiswahili in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Kiswahili and secularisation

Kiswahili began basically as an Islamic language. However, the range of uses that Kiswahili is being called upon to play in society has been shifting more decisively in the direction of secular roles. In addition, its gradual utilisation in spreading the Christian gospel had secularising consequences. The Christian missionaries, who used Kiswahili for propagating faith, also used their educational institutions for transmitting Western secular ideas, skills and concepts. The increasing use of Kiswahili for communicating Western civilisation helped to secularise the language.

Kiswahili has been called upon to serve the needs of other religious systems and other worldviews, hence the language appears to be undergoing a process of de-Islamisation. The language is helping to promote civilisation in much of Africa, south of the Sahara. Kiswahili has become a medium of entertainment through secular music like Bongo Flava; it is used in media in Africa and beyond. It is also used in trade. Organisations such as the South African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for East and South Africa (COMESA) and the East Africa Committee (EAC) have embraced the use of Kiswahili as a language of trade.

Kiswahili in science and technology

In the Kenyan education system, Kiswahili was used only in the first few classes of formal schooling. It was not given a chance to evolve and develop into a language of scientific discourse. Tanzania has succeeded to date in using Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in their institutions of higher learning. Currently, Kiswahili is a compulsory subject in Kenya's primary and secondary schools and in examinations at national level. In addition, the new Constitution of Kenya promulgated in 2010 states that Kiswahili is the second official language in Kenya, implying that the language has the same status as English (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

In Burundi, Kiswahili is an optional language just like German or French is in Kenya. It is taught in universities mainly by hired lecturers from Kenya and Tanzania and to a small extent the native populations. Only a few universities, such as the University of Burundi, offer Kiswahili as a subject. However, in recent times, the students of Kiswahili at the university are beginning to embrace the language more through forums like the Kiswahili Students' Association of Universities of East Africa (CHAWAKAMA – Kiswahili movement).

In Rwanda, Kiswahili is an additional language taught in some universities like Kigali Institute of Education. However, Rwandese are beginning to embrace the language. It is hoped this will extend to other Sub-Saharan countries where Kiswahili has not penetrated.

Conclusion

It is time for Kiswahili to be seen as a factor of identity for Africans. De-tribalisation can be part of the process of expanding human capacities to socialise beyond ethnic loyalties and Kiswahili has a role in broadening the horizons of Africans and enriching their loyalties and allegiances. In addition, it can further facilitate economic participation in multi-ethnic workplaces and help to promote political participation as a national language of persuasion, bargaining and intrigue. Kiswahili is probably the most eligible single African language in black Africa for transformation into the first indigenous African language for modern science and technology. As a result, it may not be long before Africans find the political will to invest in Kiswahili as a test of whether technological advancement is ever possible in Africa without Westernisation. Must access to modern science and technology be exclusively through the alien gates of European languages? Can the African masses ever begin to participate in modern science without making it available, at least in part, in an African language? Kiswahili, an African language, has the capacity, potentiality and elasticity to assume this role.

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The African Storybook Project: an interim report

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The problem

The 2013–14 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2014) draws on an extensive body of data to document the educational challenges facing the global community. With regard to Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, some of the key findings are:

- Nearly 30 million children are out of school.
- Over a third of children did not reach grade 4.
- Over half of children who reached grade 4 are not learning the basics in reading.
- Forty per cent of children under the age of 15 cannot read a sentence.
- In some of the poorest countries, almost no young women completed lower secondary school.

A key obstacle to learning to read is the drastic shortage of appropriate stories for early reading in languages familiar to young African children (Parry, Andema and Tumusiime, 2005). Conventional publishing models, which rely on economies of scale, are unable to provide sufficient numbers or variety in the multitude of languages on the continent (Welch, 2012). To help address this acute educational and social challenge, the innovative African Storybook Project (ASP), launched in 2013 by the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide), seeks to promote multilingual literacy development for early reading through open-access digital stories in multiple African languages and English.

By ‘multilingual literacy’ we refer to the development of literacy in both the mother tongue as well as languages of wider communication (Martin-Jones and Jones, 2000; Hornberger, 2003; Blackledge and Creese, 2010). In African communities, multilingualism is common, but the official language (generally English or French) is not the mother tongue of the vast majority of speakers. For many communities across Africa, there is sometimes ambivalence towards the teaching of the mother tongue, given concerns that it will compromise efforts to promote literacy in the official language (Muthwii and Kioko, 2004; Tembe and Norton, 2008). This position is prevalent, despite the large and persuasive body of research that suggests that literacy is best achieved in the mother tongue, and that the learning of a second language is in fact enhanced if there is prior literacy development in the mother tongue (Bellamy, 2001; UNICEF, 1999).

The project

The ASP’s aim is to stimulate the provision and use of openly licensed stories in local African languages for early reading. To achieve this, the ASP is drawing on advances in digital technology to promote the literacy of children in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹³ The focus is the development of mother tongue literacy within a multilingual framework, which also helps children transition to the country’s official language (for example, English or French). Open-access digital stories in multiple languages are currently being developed for the three pilot countries (South Africa, Uganda and Kenya) and will be made available on a comprehensive website run by Saide. Through this website, users will be able to:

- Find enjoyable stories for children to read.
- Translate them into a local language or dialect.
- Adapt them for the reading level needed.
- Download and print them.
- Create new stories and upload them.
- Read them on a variety of devices.

13 See: www.saide.org.za/african-storybook-project

The questions

The overarching question for the ASP is: how does the digital publishing model using open licensing facilitate or hinder access to, and use of, stories (creation, versioning and distribution) for early reading in a variety of African contexts? The project needs to collect and make available stories for use in African early reading contexts, but also provide an opportunity for people to create and particularly to translate/version these stories for use in other contexts. Without the latter, the numbers of texts to support early reading in local African languages will be inadequate. Owing to the scope and scale of need, the ASP is a project of partners with the common goal of sharing and using local language stories for early reading. A number of key issues are emerging that are of interest to both practitioners and researchers:

1. What do we mean by a 'story'? A story for early reading? An African story for early reading?
2. What are the issues in translating and versioning stories for early reading in local African languages?
3. How do we support teachers, parents and communities to use stories effectively for literacy development?
4. How do we deliver digital stories in contexts where there are power supply and internet connectivity issues?
5. How can alternative open license publishing models facilitate/take forward multilingual literacy development in African early reading contexts?

The challenges

While space does not permit an elaboration of all these issues, we will provide a flavour of some of the challenging issues we are addressing:

What is suitable content for children?

A challenging issue to address in a multi-community, multi-country project is what constitutes appropriate content for children's reading. Many of the stories we are collecting come from rural communities, and the contexts for these stories are specific to the communities from which they arise. They are also designed for oral storytelling. If the project intends to use them as illustrated read-alone books for early reading, not only in the original context, but also for children in widely diverse contexts, how should they be versioned in other languages, for other communities? What criteria of suitability for children will be applied? Indeed, should criteria for suitability be applied? In one of our stories, for example, some people have objected to sexual references, while others have raised concerns about stories that hint at domestic violence. The following provides a response to these issues, but does not resolve the challenges:

Exposing children to controlled violence in books allows for healthy discourse and provides a means to discuss fears and insecurities in the real world. (Boudinot, 2005: 4)

What strategies are needed to support teachers, parents and communities to use stories effectively for literacy development?

Research (Bunyi et al., 2011; Kyeyune et al., 2011; Saide, 2009) indicates that in all three pilot countries (Kenya, Uganda and South Africa) there is very little attention given to teaching early grade reading instruction in teacher education, particularly in African languages. If reading instruction is covered at all in teacher education courses, it is usually assumed that teachers can apply what they have learned about teaching reading in English to teaching reading in any other language. This assumption is problematic.

The progress

To advance the project, pilots are being conducted in 12 rural and urban sites across Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Lesotho. We hope to increase dramatically both the numbers of stories for early reading and the African languages in which these stories are available. Plentiful provision will assist literacy organisations and schools in their quest to incorporate reading as a social practice in African countries. However, a website with stories tested in a selection of pilot sites will not effect the change that is needed. The project will rely on a wide range of partner organisations to support teachers, parents and communities to use the website and its stories.

One of the initiatives in the first year of the project was a research colloquium sponsored by the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia and held at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies in South Africa in October 2013. The aim was to develop a collaborative research framework that would help to advance the goals of the project¹⁴. There were 40 participants at the colloquium, representing seven African countries, Canada, the United Kingdom and Sweden. The African countries represented were South Africa, Lesotho, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Botswana, and participants included scholars, teachers, writers and poets. The most important outcome was the establishment of the African Storybook Research Network (ASReN), led by a Research Advisory Committee comprising Bonny Norton (Chair, University of British Columbia), Mastin Prinsloo (University of Cape Town), George Openjuru (Makerere University), Suzanne Romaine (University of Oxford) and Ephraim Mhlana (Saide)¹⁵.

The primary goal of the ASReN is to promote research projects and programmes that will explore key issues of critical importance related to the ASP, particularly in early reading. To this end, the ASReN seeks to:

- Develop and nurture a community of scholars with shared interests in the ASP and other related projects and programmes.
- Disseminate open-access publications and resources that might be helpful to the ASReN and ASP community.
- Inform the community of news, events, resources and funding sources that might support ASReN research projects and programmes.
- Maintain productive relationships with teachers, parents, librarians, policy makers and other members of the wider community whose support will help advance the goals of the ASP.

Implications for policy

ASP outcomes have important implications for global policy initiatives. In the year 2000, 189 United Nations policy makers developed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in New York City (United Nations, 2000), with the overall goal of making poverty history by 2015. Two key scholars, Ayo Bamgbose (in press, and this volume) and Suzanne Romaine (2013), address the relationship between language and the MDGs, with Romaine arguing that language is 'at the very heart of major faultlines' (2013: 1) in the progress achieved thus far towards the eight MDGs. While language, she argues, 'is the pivot on which education and therefore on which all development depends,' (2013: 6) there is an urgent need to address how language is to achieve social change in African schools. To this end, she argues for a reconceptualisation of the development processes underpinning the MDGs, with language as the focal point of a set of five interrelated themes associated with poverty, education, gender, health and the environment. In all these areas, progress in education, inseparable from language policies and practices, is central to the achievement of the MDGs. The practices of the African Storybook Project therefore have direct relevance to policy (see also Norton, in press).

Bamgbose (in press, and this volume) also addresses the language factor in development goals, but his reference points for development are not only the MDG, but also NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, initiated by the African Union in 2001 (African Union, 2001).

¹⁴ See: www.africanstorybookproject.pwias.ubc.ca/

¹⁵ A ten-minute YouTube video provides an overview of the research colloquium (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rc-qjmdetp8&feature=youtu.be) and there is also a 30-minute YouTube video examining some of the questions for research in greater depth: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZZ83_GzXMQ

NEPAD's four goals are the eradication of poverty, the promotion of sustainable growth and development, the integration of Africa into the world economy and the empowerment of women. With regard to language education, in particular, Bamgbose argues that development cannot be achieved without participation, and that participation necessarily requires effective communication in the languages in which people are competent (see also Bamgbose, 1991). Like Romaine, then, he takes the position that language is the 'the missing link' in global policy initiatives for development and can aid in communication and information dissemination, transfer of technology, education and good governance. Further, he makes the argument that the official languages of English and French are associated with the formal economy and the educated elite, who in fact constitute only a small part of Africa's population. What must not be neglected are the activities of the majority of Africa's population, that works in the informal economy, using local languages for agricultural, commercial, and other economic activities. The very heart of the African Storybook Project is the validation of local African languages and the promotion of multilingual literacy. The interactive ASP website was officially launched in Pretoria, South Africa, in June 2014, with sponsorship from the European Union. The future is promising.

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10th INTERNATIONAL
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The British Council hosted the tenth International Language and Development Conference in Cape Town in October 2013. The conference coincided with reviews by development professionals and policy makers worldwide of progress towards the eight 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was an opportunity to focus on a range of language-related issues common – but not unique to – developing countries across the African continent. This collection is drawn from papers and presentations across the four main strands of discussion: language policy; language, literacy and education; language in socio-economic development; language, culture, identity and inclusion. The writers look at African languages, varieties of English and other languages from policy level to practical application in the classroom, and in the home and wider community.

Hamish McIlwraith, editor of this publication, is founder of McIlwraith Education, an international education consultancy based in Edinburgh. He has worked as a teacher, lecturer, trainer and consultant in China, Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and Central Europe.

Each contribution in this volume was subject to the British Council's peer review process, led by the volume editor and the British Council's Commissioning Editor for Publications.

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