Theory and Practice
in Literacy and Development
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Papers from the BALID
Informal Literacy Discussions

Edited by
Juliet McCaffery and Brian Street

Uppingham Press
on behalf of the
British Association for Literacy in Development
Dedicated to

Brian Street

Distinguished professor, inspirational scholar,
teacher, mentor and friend

Brian Street, co-editor of this book, sadly died shortly before the second edition was published. Brian challenged conventional thinking on literacy and championed a social and cultural practice approach. He was the President of BALID for many years and a committed participant in the BALID Informal Literacy Discussions, valuing the opportunity to engage in dialogue on literacy and to bridge the gap between research and practice, as exemplified in this book.
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Preface

In this book, presenters of the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID) series of Informal Literacy Discussions provide accounts of their work in different parts of the world. The writers are both practitioners and academics engaged with a range of important topics in the field, often with a specific focus on adult and family literacy. Their accounts are addressed to those new to the study of literacy in development, as well as to those with academic and field experience. The aim of this book is to share such experience and insights more widely.

In December 2011 BALID held its first Informal Literacy Discussion, and the series has continued on a regular basis – usually three or four in a year. The discussions are led by people involved in various aspects of literacy, including NGO practitioners, academics and postgraduate students. The format is informal and inclusive, and the intention is to reach a wide range of people, many of whom do not have access to university libraries and academic journals. Normally a summary of the presentation and discussion is posted on the BALID website. Both participants and presenters have commented on how valuable they have found these events, since they cover many diverse cultures and issues. We are very grateful to all the presenters who have converted their presentations into the papers in this book, which we believe offers a distinct contribution to the field of literacy in development.
Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are due to Professor Alan Rogers for his advice and assistance without which this collection would not have been published.

Thanks are also due to the BALID committee members who provided much advice and help and reviewed the papers: Katy Newell-Jones, Ian Cheffy, Mary Anderson, Charlotte Martin and Tara Furlong. And of course to the contributors who gave their time to come and give their presentations and then to prepare them for publication.

The cover photographs were contributed by Brian Street, Katy Newell-Jones and Juliet McCaffery; other photographs by the individual authors of the chapters.

Juliet McCaffery and Brian Street
August 2016
## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Building Resources Across Communities</td>
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<td>CJPOA</td>
<td>Criminal Justice and Public Order Act</td>
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<td>CRE</td>
<td>Commission for Racial Equality</td>
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<td>DCSF</td>
<td>Department for Children, Schools and Families</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
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<td>FRETILIN</td>
<td>Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>GMR</td>
<td>Global Monitoring Report</td>
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<td>LWG</td>
<td>Literacy Working Group</td>
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<td>iBCDE</td>
<td>Identity-based Community Development and Education</td>
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<td>ICAE</td>
<td>International Council of Adult Education</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Cooperation for Cambodia</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labor Organization</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>MASSLIP</td>
<td>Mass Literacy and Social Change Programme</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td>Mother tongue</td>
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<td>MTB-MLE</td>
<td>Mother tongue-based multilingual education</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<td>NRHM</td>
<td>National Rural Health Mission</td>
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<td>NLS</td>
<td>New Literacy Studies</td>
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<td>OFSTED</td>
<td>Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills</td>
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<td>OPJT</td>
<td>Popular Organisation of East Timorese Youth</td>
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<td>OPMT</td>
<td>Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women</td>
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<td>PIAAC</td>
<td>Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies</td>
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<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<td>SEAMEO</td>
<td>Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>TES</td>
<td>Traveller Education Service</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNETIM</td>
<td>National Union of Timorese students</td>
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<td>UPE</td>
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SECTION I: Policies

1. International Advocacy on Literacy and Development: Challenges and Opportunities
   David Archer

2. Adult Literacy: Policies and Structures
   Lalage Bown

3. Skills Development and Literacy for Adults: a Failed Experiment
   Alan Rogers

4. Education for All: does it Include Minorities?
   Juliet McCaffery

Introduction
The papers in the policy section are varied but all address deficits in provision for adults who wish to improve their textual communication skills.

David Archer’s paper highlights that literacy for adults, whether in the context of Lifelong Learning or skills development remains a low priority for the majority of national governments and international donor agencies. He draws attention to the formal reports such as the High Level Panel convened by the Secretary General of UNESCO, Ban Ki Moon, and the 11th Global Monitoring Report. Among the dangers and challenges are neo-liberal ideologies resulting in narrow educational goals, the domination of economic returns and the growing power of the private sector. David suggests that the way forward is to increase domestic financing to allow national governments to regain control over their education budgets, increase the budget share and resist IMF strictures and austerity policies. He proposes twelve benchmarks to indicate good quality programmes, including dedicating at least 3% of national education budgets to adult literacy. At the end of his paper, he refers to the Learning Metrics Task Force convened by UNESCO and the Brookings Institution.

Lalage Bown argues that literacy practitioners, NGOs and researchers should become ‘politically literate’. She argues that the cuts in UK government
expenditure, a drop of 40% between 2010 and 2016/17, indicate the lack of importance placed on literacy. However, the inclusion of the words ‘Lifelong Learning’ in the UNESCO report of 2014 provides an opportunity for practitioners, NGOs and researchers to develop strategies for advocacy which require entering into unfamiliar social and political areas to influence institutions and government.

Alan Rogers draws on his experience in field work in Afghanistan and in many other countries. His conceptual framework is New Literacy Studies. He describes the different literacy programmes for adults in Afghanistan which include Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and ‘third sector’ training run by NGOs. He argues that the provision that does exist ignores the literature on cultural meanings and diverse literacies and uses outdated and traditional conceptions of literacy with limited success, as traditional methods do not address the practical and immediate needs of those wishing to learn. Those who cannot or do not wish for a formal qualification learn the skills they need from others in practical situations, but in Afghanistan they are excluded from formal training if they do not have a formal literacy certificate. Alan also draws attention to the importance and yet difficulty of integrating skills development and literacy training.

Juliet McCaffery’s research on attitudes to literacy and education among Gypsies and Travellers in England found that many do not value literacy or formal education and do not consider it adds to their self-esteem, social status or economic situation. She also found that suspicion and rejection of mainstream education is not unique to Gypsies and Travellers. This led her to question the nature and relevance of ‘western’ education. She describes the multiple barriers to formal education faced by Gypsies and Travellers in England and the reasons why some reject it. She notes that Gypsies and Travellers are not the only minority in the west whose specific cultural and educational needs are ignored. She suggests that the needs of many indigenous, minority and travelling communities in the ‘developed western world’ are ignored, and educational requirements (such as attendance at school) are designed to assimilate and destroy their culture. She ends on a slightly more positive note by giving examples of instances where the culture and heritage of the people are beginning to be recognised, as with the Sami in Sweden and a few positive programmes for the European Roma, Native Americans and Australian Aboriginals.
1 International Advocacy on Literacy and Development: Challenges and Opportunities

David Archer
Action Aid

Since the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 – which was reinforced in Dakar in 2000 – one of the six Education for All (EFA) goals has slipped off the global agenda more than any other: adult literacy has become the forgotten goal! Even Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has risen up the agenda, as has youth and vocational education, and there is a lot more focus now on the quality of education. Adult literacy remains stubbornly ignored.

In 2000 adult literacy was initially squeezed out by the fact that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) only focused on two of the six EFA goals, namely primary school enrolment and gender parity. However, the problem goes back much further to the 1990s and even 1980s. Governments and donors have progressively stopped investing in adult literacy. The World Bank (WB) and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) are both complicit: in the case of DFID there was a shift because of the MDG focus introduced by Clare Short, which contrasted with Baroness Chalker’s surprising championing of women’s literacy when she was at DFID’s predecessor, the Overseas Development Administration. The situation in terms of donor support to adult literacy was exacerbated by the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI), which was set up in 2002 as a harmonised initiative of 30 major donors. Hosted by the World Bank, FTI did not live up to the ‘education for all’ in its title – and instead only harmonised donor efforts around achieving the education MDGs.

This is in sharp contrast to previous times. Adult literacy was once one of the pivotal first actions of post-independence governments breaking free from colonial rule. It was also a default for post-revolutionary governments to run mass literacy campaigns for adults – from Cuba to Nicaragua.

More recently, on the few occasions when governments have made larger investments in adult literacy, they have tended to use outdated or traditional
conceptions of literacy, based on standardised and centrally produced ‘primers’ used in short-term campaigns (ignoring all the literature on cultural meanings and diverse literacies) and encouraging ineffective teaching methods. This occurs partly because advocates are so desperate for any investment that they will use any arguments to convince politicians, claiming they can achieve quick wins with short campaigns run at low cost.

To a significant degree this has left creative participatory work on adult literacy to NGOs. Many of these are unsustainable, fragmented and dangerously competitive. There has been an inclination to use different labels and brands. I was personally closely involved in the Reflect approach (www.reflect-action.org) and there are hundreds of organisations across dozens of countries who actively use Reflect. However, there were many others who were doing excellent participatory and ground-breaking work with adult literacy – and we tended to be splintered by aligning ourselves to different names rather than working to find the common ground.

When the MDGs were first established, the year 2015 was the target date when all the goals were to have been achieved. As we approached and then passed that date there have been some significant opportunities and many challenges to reclaim the political space for financing adult literacy.

Some opportunities

On a positive note there are opportunities that arise from the growing consensus on what works in the field of adult literacy, as captured for example in the 12 international benchmarks proposed in 2005 by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE). GCE did detailed surveys of 67 literacy programmes in 35 countries – and drew out a set of common threads from these to formulate possible benchmarks. These were then reviewed, commented on and verified by 142 respondents from 47 countries. There was a remarkably high level of convergence and consensus, going beyond the brands and labels attached to different methods. The full report, Writing the Wrongs (Archer et al. 2005) provides more detail but the key outcome was the following 12 simple benchmarks:

1. Literacy is about the acquisition and use of reading, writing and numeracy skills, and thereby the development of active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods, and gender equality. The goals of literacy programmes should reflect this understanding.
2. Literacy should be seen as a continuous process that requires sustained learning and application. There are no magic lines to cross from illiteracy into literacy. All policies and programmes should be defined to encourage sustained participation and celebrate progressive achievement rather than focusing on one-off provision with a single end point.

3. Governments have the lead responsibility in meeting the right to adult literacy and in providing leadership, policy frameworks, an enabling environment and resources. They should:
   - ensure cooperation across all relevant ministries and links to all relevant development programmes
   - work in systematic collaboration with experienced civil society organisations
   - ensure links between all these agencies, especially at the local level, and
   - ensure relevance to the issues in learners’ lives by promoting the decentralisation of budgets and of decision-making over curriculum, methods and materials.

4. It is important to invest in ongoing feedback and evaluation mechanisms, data systematisation and strategic research. The focus of evaluations should be on the practical application of what has been learnt and the impact on active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods, and gender equality.

5. To retain facilitators it is important that they should be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher for all hours worked, including time for training, preparation and follow-up.

6. Facilitators should be local people who receive substantial initial training and regular refresher training, as well as having ongoing opportunities for exchanges with other facilitators. Governments should put in place a framework for the professional development of the adult literacy sector, including for trainers and supervisors, with full opportunities for facilitators across the country to access this, e.g. through distance education.

7. There should be a ratio of at least one facilitator to 30 learners and at least one trainer or supervisor to 15 learner groups (one to ten in remote areas), ensuring a minimum of one support visit per month. Programmes should have timetables that flexibly respond to the daily lives of learners but which provide for regular and sustained contact, e.g. twice a week for at least two years.
8. In multilingual contexts it is important at all stages that learners should be given an active choice about the language in which they learn. Active efforts should be made to encourage and sustain bilingual learning.

9. A wide range of participatory methods should be used in the learning process to ensure active engagement of learners and relevance to their lives. These same participatory methods and processes should be used at all levels of training of trainers and facilitators.

10. Governments should take responsibility for stimulating the market for production and distribution of a wide variety of materials suitable for new readers, for example by working with publishers and newspaper producers. They should balance this with funding for the local production of materials, especially by learners, facilitators and trainers.

11. A good quality literacy programme that respects all these benchmarks is likely to cost between US$50 and US$100 per learner per year for at least three years (two years’ initial learning, plus ensuring further learning opportunities are available for all).

12. Governments should dedicate at least 3% of their national education sector budgets to adult literacy programmes as conceived in these benchmarks. Where governments deliver on this, international donors should fill any remaining resource gaps, e.g. through including adult literacy in the Fast Track Initiative.

These benchmarks have been widely circulated and endorsed and this growing consensus on what works in adult literacy helped to re-open some space. UNESCO’s Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA), held in Brazil in 2009, though in many ways frustrating, did offer some progress in calling for a reframing of ‘literacy’, pushing for a change in how statistics should be collected in future, arguing for an end to the absurd dichotomy of illiteracy and literacy, and for countries to report against a spectrum (at least including a category of low literacy). This crucial progress did not find immediate traction but is now gathering renewed attention.

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report also helped to keep the pressure on the international community, issuing warnings for many years – flagging for example that poor quality education has left a ‘legacy of illiteracy more widespread than previously believed’. In 2013 for example it called for more attention to inequality in education and lamented that adult literacy and adult education are often sidelined in global debates. See http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2013.
The growing consensus around what works, and continued attention to the failure to meet past goals kept the pressure up as people went about agreeing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an extended process between 2012 and 2015. There were some actors pushing for a very reductive new goal focused only on children learning literacy and numeracy in the early grades. However, a broader vision prevailed and the recommendations of the High Level Panel convened by Ban Ki Moon around setting the post-2015 development agenda stressed the importance of ‘lifelong learning’, as announced in July 2012. (See http://www.un.org/sg/management/hlppost2015.shtml.)

The final SDG agreed in September 2015 maintained an expansive vision, pledging to an overarching goal (SDG4) to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all’.

One of the seven core targets linked to this goal is that ‘all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy’. This is significant as it is the global equivalent of the old MDGs and thus has significant momentum and political weight behind it – signed up to by Heads of State around the world.

The Incheon Framework for Action, developed in Korea in May 2015 by Ministers of Education around the world, and finalised in Paris in November 2015, puts the flesh on this and takes as its starting point an understanding of literacy that breaks the past dichotomy, as proposed by the International Benchmarks of GCE:

The principles, strategies and actions for this target are underpinned by a contemporary understanding of literacy not as a simple dichotomy of ‘literate’ versus ‘illiterate’, but as a continuum of proficiency levels. The required levels, and how people apply reading and writing skills, depend on specific contexts. Particular attention should be paid to the role of learners’ first language in becoming literate and in learning. Literacy programmes and methodologies should respond to the needs and contexts of learners, including through the provision of context-related bilingual and intercultural literacy programmes within the framework of lifelong learning.

A set of Indicative Strategies for youth and adult literacy are also laid out in this Incheon Framework for Action which draw on some of the insights from the twelve benchmarks:
Establish a sector-wide and multi-sector approach for formulating literacy policy and plans, as well as for budgeting, by strengthening collaboration and coordination among relevant ministries, including those dealing with education, health, social welfare, labour, industry and agriculture, as well as with civil society, the private sector and bilateral and multilateral partners, supporting decentralized provision in practice.

Ensure that literacy and numeracy programmes are of high quality according to national evaluation mechanisms, tailored to learners’ needs and based on their previous knowledge and experience. This requires paying close attention to culture, language, social and political relationships and economic activity, with particular attention to girls and women and vulnerable groups, and linking and integrating such programmes with skills development for decent work and livelihood as essential elements of lifelong learning.

Scale up effective adult literacy and skills programmes involving civil society as partners, building on their rich experience and good practice.

Promote the use of ICT, particularly mobile technology, for literacy and numeracy programmes.

Develop a literacy assessment framework and tools to evaluate proficiency levels based on learning outcomes. This will require defining proficiency across a range of contexts, including skills at work and in everyday life.

Establish a system to collect, analyse and share relevant and timely data on literacy levels and literacy and numeracy needs, disaggregated by gender and other indicators of marginalization.

Grand commitments are all very good but unless people put serious financing on the table there will always be challenges in delivering on these targets in practice. One positive step forward is that the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which has evolved from the old FTI, is now focused on supporting education sector plans. It has committed to support developing countries that have credible plans to achieve the new SDG4. Whilst a child-focused narrative still dominates and there is a reductive goal on early-grade reading, national governments are in the driving seat and if they include adult literacy in their sector plans then donors, through GPE, will fund it.
Some challenges

Certainly it is not all plain sailing. There are still powerful forces pushing for a narrow agenda based simply on early grade reading in primary schools, completely ignoring adults. There is also a big focus on measurement and assessment of learning rather than actions that might actually improve learning – see for example the work of the Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF). My own challenge to this reductive approach is important because this reductive conception of literacy in the context of schooling inevitably starts infecting how people see youth and adult literacy as well – reinforcing traditional conceptions.

Another problem is that the discourse is still dominated by looking at economic returns, which is unsurprising given the continued ascendancy of the World Bank and the growing power of private sector voices such as publishers (see chapter 11 in this volume). These same forces are also placing public education under threat: for example with the spread of low-fee private schools, which DFID are also supporting – see my blog for the Guardian (Archer 2013).

These trends are inter-connected: if you reduce outcomes to simple tests and league tables you create a climate of competition within which private sector provision thrives. The more the public provision of education is challenged by these forces, and the more government feels absolved of delivering on the right to education, the less likely it is that governments will seek to extend their responsibility into areas of education that they have ignored in recent decades. Adult literacy tends to be a victim of such forces.

The challenge to reclaim literacy is not made easier by the endless internal territorial battles in UNESCO between the headquarters in Paris and the Institute of Lifelong Learning in Hamburg. If those who are supposed to champion literacy are fragmented even within their own institution it is difficult to present a coherent way forward.

However, more fundamental problems lie in the global architecture, particularly for developing countries. The development of education sector plans really ought to be a matter for national governments in consultation with their own citizens, but in recent decades donors have become very influential. Whilst donors give a relatively small percentage of the income for education, they have a disproportionately influential voice in setting the direction of reform. Their own preferences and prejudices against adult literacy often mean education sector plans fail to include clear interventions for youth and adult literacy.
Some ways forward

In order to push back against donor power and prejudices against adult literacy, first of all there is a need to reclaim democratic decision-making over setting education sector policies in developing countries. In the 60 developing countries where it supports education plans the Global Partnership for Education requires there to be a ‘Local Education Group’ led by the government, with civil society involvement and in-country donors. This is a primary space to ensure that the central debate is between governments and their own citizens – and ideally involving open public debate, media involvement and parliamentary oversight – with the donors only playing a role to harmonise their efforts behind the agreed plans. Where there is an open, democratic process, youth and adult literacy will likely be given more prominence than they tend to be by donors.

Even more fundamentally, there is a need to move the discourse away from one where aid plays any significant role in setting the agenda – by removing dependency on aid altogether. As it is, most funding for education, even in so-called aid dependent countries, comes from domestic sources. This is because education needs a large recurrent budget to pay for teachers, and aid tends to be too short-term and unpredictable for this. In terms of increasing domestic financing for education there are some clear indicators for what might be considered key steps in this process.

The Incheon Declaration calls for governments to spend 4–6% of GDP or 15–20% of national budgets on education, noting that ‘in 2012 countries allocated 5% of GDP and 13.7% of public expenditure to education, on average’. The framework stresses that ‘least developed countries need to reach or exceed the upper end of these benchmarks if they are to achieve the targets laid out in this framework’. In some countries increasing the share of the budget spent on education will be transformative and will yield the kind of revenue needed if governments are to make new investments in adult literacy.

Beyond the share of the budget spent on education there is also a strong case for adult literacy activists to be concerned about the size of the government budget overall. Despite its recent rhetorical moves away from neoliberal dogma the IMF continues in practice to impose austerity policies on developing countries that make it hard for governments to spend more on education. Ministries of Finance are still persuaded that spending on education is pure consumption (like pouring money down the drain), rather than a strategic investment – because the returns to investing in education take eight or ten
years and governments are often encouraged by the IMF to focus on shorter-term thinking.

One of the most crucial ways for government to expand the size of their budgets overall is of course to expand the domestic tax base and make sure it is progressive. At first sight this seems to have little to do with adult literacy but in fact it is fundamental. In many contexts the government could be doubling its spending on education and this is the sort of increase in investment that will mean adult literacy can be funded without taking funds from other levels of education.

A first step would be for developing countries to stop giving away harmful tax incentives to multinational companies. Kenya alone gives away US$1.1 billion, which could double the education budget. Worldwide, developing country governments give away $138 billion in harmful incentives – more than three times the estimated resource gap for achieving education for all globally. Other actions can be taken to challenge aggressive tax avoidance. Zambia loses $2 billion, which is double the education budget. SAB Miller, one of the world's leading brewers, pays no tax in Africa. There is also scope to impose windfall taxes on extractives – a new tax on natural resource extraction in Brazil for example commits 75% of funds raised to education. For further material on this, see the Global Campaign for Education report (2013).

This re-assertion of domestic financing and domestic decision-making represents the best prospect for renewed investment in progressive adult literacy programmes in most countries. Without more money and more domestic control, adult literacy is always likely to suffer.

Alongside this, as a key step towards democratisation of education policy making, there needs to be a push towards civil society mobilisation and advocacy on education. Since 2000 we have seen the emergence of the Global Campaign for Education plus regional coalitions and over 100 national education coalitions. These did not exist in 2000, and they can help to demand a more accountable and transparent policy-making process. Many of these national coalitions are passionate about the case for investment in youth and adult literacy. See www.campaignforeducation.org.

There is also a need to build on these education coalitions to form national tax justice alliances, aligned to the emerging Global Alliance on Tax Justice (www.gatj.org). We have seen the power of tax campaigning in the UK and US, where Google, Amazon, Vodafone, Boots and others have been shamed. However,
the biggest injustices are in the poorest countries with the weakest revenue authorities, and governments that corporates can bully. The link needs to be made between education and health NGOs, youth activists, trade unions and tax experts – even involving small- and medium-sized businesses – in order to build really broad alliances that are about national development strategies. These need to be nationally financed and transparently developed, and thus to reclaim sovereignty. Anyone concerned with adult education should get involved in such campaigning as it is the means to secure transformative financing. Indeed in some ways this effort around tax justice is itself an adult literacy project: we all need to build our basic literacy around economics and budgets, because otherwise we cede too much power to an unaccountable priesthood of neoliberal economists.

Footnote: Over the past two years I have been an active member of the Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF), an international effort convened by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and the Centre for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. A report on this will be available shortly.

Based on ILD 14, presented on 27 January 2014

References


2 Adult Literacies: Policies and Structures

Lalage Bown
University of Glasgow

Literacy not only changes lives; it saves them. Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General, Message on International Literacy Day, 2014.

Starting point – the new UK context

The BALID discussion led by David Archer (see chapter 1 of this volume) tunes into the need for literacy workers and researchers to become politically literate ourselves. If we agree with the UNESCO Director-General that literacy ‘saves lives’, and that consequently our work is of the most vital importance, we are confronted with the task of ensuring that work’s survival. This means stepping out into unfamiliar political and social arenas.

The urgency of this has been made dramatically clear in the new UK political scene. Within the UK, there has already been a trend towards cuts to funding for adult education and adult literacy programmes in Further Education. The budget line for this in 2010 was £4.5 billion; for 2015/16 it was £2.7 billion – a drop of 40%.

At the same time as the General Election of 2015, Julian Gravatt wrote: ‘We face the possibility of the total elimination of adult learning funding [by the State] by 2020, so that other budgets can be protected. The fact that other sectors are more powerful in our political system doesn’t mean that they are more deserving of available funds’ (Gravatt 2015). Staff at the Welsh colleges demonstrated against an overall budget decline in that year of over 20%.

Outside the UK, the previous British Government ring-fenced the development aid budget and a portion of it has gone to literacy programmes. After the 2015 election, vocal members of an ever-inward-looking Conservative party clearly put that at risk.
The challenge
All of us – researchers, practitioners, NGO workers, education managers – share a commitment to adult learning in general and adult literacies in particular. Over the years in different times and places literacy has been seen as a human right, an essential tool for survival and an instrument of social transformation. Those visions are fading, since in almost all societies at the present day, literacy programmes are marginalised and the number of non-literate people in the world remains fairly static.

The latest Global Monitoring Report figures show 780 million adults (60% women) and 126 million youths lacking basic literacy skills, while on average 1 in 4 children entering school in developing countries will drop out (GMR 2015). The Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) has not been achieved in a number of the world’s most highly-populated countries and this means that substantial numbers of young people will grow up lacking access to the official/prevailing literacies.

The challenges we face are:

1. Why are we relatively unsuccessful in conveying to governments our conviction of the significance of adult literacy and adult learning more broadly?

2. Why are we relatively unsuccessful in persuading individual politicians and civil servants to translate policies into action?

3. And do we have practical prescriptions for structures to ensure action?

These apply to any country’s internal situation and to the work of aid-giving nations.

As Jan Eldred said at a meeting of the Literacy Working Group in 2009: ‘How can we make arguments that have influence?’

In voicing these challenges, I am not implying that no-one has responded to them in the immediate past. The example of the UK Literacy Working Group (LWG) can be quoted. Over a period of years, it has visited ministries, invited politicians, organised events and prepared and distributed literature. It has also understood the significance of winning over colleagues in the formal education sector and has organised joint activities at educational conferences. These have all been valiant skirmishes, but somehow have not won the war.
The rest of this paper will be devoted to discussion of ideas for facing the challenges presented.

Policies and international advocacy

David Archer reminded us of the importance of international advocacy – at a time when many literacy workers at all levels are preoccupied with their own internal problems. He has a point. Even when international conferences and resolutions seem remote, they can at least provide the strength of wider consensus; and if our governments have signed up to various declarations, however half-heartedly, that gives a lever in arguments to persuade those governments to act.

One lynchpin in advocacy is the concept of rights and there are several UN declarations, to which governments have signed up, on the right to basic education. For example, the original Declaration of 1948 says in Article 26: ‘Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.’

Following this, prescriptions based on an assumption of rights include the UNESCO Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education adopted in 1976 at the General Assembly held in Nairobi. Paragraph 6 of this document says: ‘Consideration should be given to the need for an adult education component, including literacy, in the framing and development of any development programme’; and paragraph 16 says: ‘With regard to such persons or groups as have remained illiterate … adult education activities should be designed not only to enable them to acquire basic knowledge (reading, writing, arithmetic, basic understanding of natural and social phenomena), but also to make it easier for them to engage in productive work, to promote their self-awareness and their grasp of the problems of hygiene, health, household management and the up-bringing of children, and to enhance their autonomy and increase their participation in community life.’

It is worth noting that the declaration quoted came about after intensive lobbying and advocacy in the early 1970s by the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) and the move to pass it was strengthened by the fact that the Assembly was being held in a developing country, where the phenomenon of non-literacy was very apparent. UNESCO has never again moved out of Paris.
Moving to the present day, there is a gleam of hope around the post-MDG plans for a programme of ‘Sustainable Development’ going forward to 2030.

The evolution of the new goals started with the nomination by the UN Secretary-General in 2012 of a High Level Panel to set out the 2030 agenda, one of the three co-chairs being David Cameron. The panel’s report in 2013 barely made mention of education, but building on their work, the UNESCO Meeting on Global Education for All, held in Muscat in May 2014, adopted a framework which included as key-words: inclusivity, equity, quality and lifelong learning. This last phrase gives a basis for advocacy of adult literacy. The final wording of Sustainable Development Goal No 4 is ‘Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.’ The small print makes this more realistic, but there is a feeling among some adult educators and literacy specialists that there is not enough strength in the case for adult literacy. The existence of this acknowledged goal does, however, give a tag on which to hang advocacy.

Policies: changing public thinking

The accumulated international consensus, particularly when it is focused on a set of principles as vague as the SDGs is not sufficient to change politicians’ minds. Both Government ministers and Opposition spokespersons at Westminster seem to have the same narrow view of literacy within lifelong learning – and most of the UK public share it. They see it instrumentally, as a means to employment in a globalised capitalist economy or, formally, as part of the formal education structure and thus either the business of schools for the young or a component of an ‘academic’ and not necessarily helpful curriculum administered to adults.

It is obviously a mammoth challenge to affect popular images and ideas. We have to find more ways in which participants in literacy programmes can give witness to their experiences and express their views. Academics and practitioners often publish excellent case-studies, illuminating learners’ needs and experiences and the lessons for providers and practitioners. But they are read by those within the field, whom we might call the converted. Our predicament is how to get access to the media, including the new media with telling stories. In more traditional media, some people may remember the impact of drama by a young woman from the West Country, May Tor, who had learned to read at the age of 28 and produced a play with a number of her fellow-learners. It underlined the nature of literacy
as empowerment and the variety of motives which influenced people to take on literacy classes. She toured with the play in the late 1990s and audiences in venues such as pubs were visibly affected by it. Would that she had managed to bring it to politicians!

The story of Malala, shot for her determination to go to school and made into a film, gave powerful witness to the problems of school-girls in Pakistan and elsewhere and gave her a powerful case. Can we find an adult woman’s story? And how else can we get the message out? Over the years, we have had poignant messages from women working to acquire literacy relevant to them, for instance: ‘I want to read and write, so that I can stop being the shadow of other people’ (quoted in Bown 1990).

Structures

Convincing those in power, whether in central or local government, in some NGOs or in important companies, is one step. It may be helped by public opinion, if we can get a wider public on our side, as suggested above. But another requisite is the establishment of structures to enable learners to gain access to useful literacy tools and to men and women ready to teach them. In the 20th century, there were mobilisation societies, in which whole populations were involved – the USSR, Cuba, Guinea-Bissau and Tanzania, and the leaders of those countries often had telling phrases. For instance, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau phrased it: ‘All those who know should teach those who don’t know.’ But in the 21st century, globalisation has – paradoxically – fragmented societies. In any case social mobilisation is not a substitute for structures embedding literacy provision.

Various recipes have been tried. Usually, in poor countries, literacy work has been the responsibility of a central government organism, a Ministry of Education or of Community Development; but then it often becomes the poor relation to other larger portfolios held by the ministry. Alternatives have included placing the responsibility for literacy within a central government agency; Kenya located it in the President’s office, assuming that it would be sheltered there, but in that case too it was too insignificant a function compared to other activities in that office. In several countries on various occasions, quangos have been set up, tasked with a literacy campaign and its sustaining. A successful example was the Mass Literacy and Social Change Programme (MASSLIP) in Ghana, a self-standing government agency with field staff throughout the country and with its own facilities for curriculum development and printing. Its strength, however, was that it was headed by
a highly committed coordinator Rojo Mettle-Nunoo, who had political clout, being close to the then Head of State, Jerry Rawlings, whose political aims included the strengthening of all levels of education (Bown 1989).

Outside central government, adult literacy learning can be given more prominence. Local authorities are closer to potential learners and have the possibility of drawing on local resources, human and financial. The critical issue is always financing. In centralising government systems such as the UK, local authorities and other local institutions, such as FE colleges, can, as we have seen, be left without resources for the task. NGOs also may be hampered by a dependence on state grants and be left unable to continue programmes in times of austerity.

One NGO has not been affected. This is BRAC in Bangladesh – the largest national NGO in the world. Because of the way in which it is funded, it continues to employ large numbers of trained facilitators who include literacy in their activities. It may not be an easy model to follow elsewhere, but it has to be mentioned because of its size and methods of working.

In conclusion

Diagnosis is always easier than solution and it’s sometimes easier to bemoan a situation as if it is an act of fate. Here, I have pleaded that we should face up to the challenges and suggested some lines of thought that we could follow up. If we don’t have the courage to confront them, we will have small successes – and the satisfaction of having at least saved some people’s lives – but we won’t make a real breakthrough. We need to arm ourselves with the knowledge of commitments which our governments have entered into and use them for leverage, to strive in every way to convince politicians and the public that adult literacy really is about life and death, taking up the opportunity of new media and to work out possible structures and mechanisms, however small, which will provide sustainability for programmes.

As I have said, our work depends on us educating ourselves in political literacy!

Based on ILD 20, presented on 12 May 2015
Selected references


This account is largely based on two projects in Afghanistan in 2005–6 for USAID, and in 2010–12 for UNESCO Kabul’s programme of the Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA). Some field work was undertaken mainly through members of the project teams. This survey also draws on work in other countries since 1973, ranging from the Farmers’ Functional Literacy Programme in India in the 1970s to a number of surveys of livelihoods and non-formal education in Bangladesh, Nepal, Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi and other countries. It is based on the concepts of what have been called the New Literacy Studies – in other words, I am not talking about a single ‘literacy’ per se but about ‘literacy practices’ seen as multiple and contextualised.

Context
The immediate context, Afghanistan, is of course well known. Officially it is one of post-conflict, but it did not feel like that. Security issues dominated everything, and taking photographs of literacy in the streets was dangerous. The tribal, language and ‘political’ (war lords) conflicts continue, quite apart from the Taliban and other radical groups. There is a very large number of people with disabilities.

Two major programmes dominate the development agenda and are crucial for our analysis of the combination of skills development with literacy learning for adults:

- DDR – disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation of members of fighting groups; this is a very large multi-faceted programme run by many agencies

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1 I am grateful for information provided to me by Mercy Corps Edinburgh and by Lifeline Network (UK). Some of the photographs were taken by Amador Guallar, others by myself. Please note that an expanded version of this study may be found in Rogers (2014b).
• Alternative livelihoods for farmers in the opium trade – with strong Western interests.

The country seemed to me to be awash with money, not always in the ‘right hands’. There is growing urbanisation.

It should be noted that there is a lack of statistics. In fact, most UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports (GMR) have left some of the Afghan columns empty rather than hazard guesses. It is estimated that the population is some 34.4 million, 6% of whom are mobile pastoralists. Official adult literacy rates are given as 28% (male 43%, female 13%). The police told us that 70% of the serving police were officially ‘illiterate’. Officially some 53% of children are in school, and 39% of pupils are girls. Schools may of course simply be a room in someone’s house (photo 1).

Skills deficit
The country has a clearly-perceived skills deficit. Decades of conflict mean that many of the skilled population were displaced and the educational provision has not kept pace with demand. Some skilled workers have returned, but employers constantly complain that they cannot find local skilled workers.
However, the surveys we did and reports from other agencies, especially DDR, showed that there are many skills, especially among the returning soldiers. These skills have been learned informally, experientially – but they are ignored or even denied by providers and trainees alike. The trainees have often internalised this sense of deficit and they regard themselves as unskilled.

For example, a recent and authoritative survey showed that there were more than 18 million active mobile phone subscriptions in 2012 and the number is growing each year. There is network coverage for 90% of the population. The skills acquired and the literacy practices involved in using mobile technology have so far been ignored (USAID 2013; see UIL 2014).

No distinction is drawn, so far as I could see, between soft skills such as skills of leadership, powers of decision-making, problem solving and attitudes of innovativeness and initiative (see GMR 2012: 172), and hard skills such as the technical skills of making and doing.

Nor is there any exploration of how such skills are learned: the balance between formal, non-formal and informal learning has yet to be analysed (Rogers 2014). However, traditional apprenticeships are still strong (photo 2), and there is much learning through self-directed learning and peer-learning, through trial and error.

Photo 2: Shoemaker’s traditional apprentice in Afghanistan
Existing skills development programmes

The existing provision for skills development consist of:

- A formal programme of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), run by the Ministry of Education. This is mainly two years of training leading to formal qualifications, and at the moment it is a small and expensive programme.

- A much larger non-formal programme of Vocational Education and Training (VET), run mainly by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) but also by other Ministries such as Agriculture, Health, and Telecommunications. More than twenty Community Learning Centres (CLCs) have been established to run short, six-to-nine month courses leading to certificates. This programme is extensively supported by international aid agencies, especially Korea (photo 3).

- There is, however, a much larger programme of informal vocational training (VT) run by NGOs (the so-called ‘third sector’) and by the private sector offering, for example, computer and language courses (photo 4). This informal programme is mainly but not entirely aimed at self-employment. It is a very extensive sector but largely unsurveyed as yet.
There are some signs of in-house employer training. In fact, some employers told us they preferred to employ unskilled workers (especially from abroad) and train them on the job rather than take the trainees from the formal or non-formal VET programmes.

In the government programmes, the language is one of TVET (conceived of as rather narrow, formal training courses) rather than the more inclusive discourse of ‘skills development’, with its implications that there could be many different kinds of development programmes and activities, including self-directed learning, for the enhancement of skills.

Policy assumptions
Behind these programmes lie a number of assumptions:

- that there is a universal lack of skills
- that unemployment is due to this lack of skills
- that this skills deficit is caused by the lack of (adequate) education or training provision
- that learning outside of formal or non-formal courses is either negligible or ineffective
- that participation in and completion of TVET or other forms of certificated training will lead to employment
that more courses will thus lead to more skills, which in turn will lead to more jobs.

Our discussions revealed a very urban-based mentality among the policymakers. Furthermore, the policies based on these largely unspoken assumptions are two-fold:

- to increase provision, especially formal and non-formal: we found a marked reluctance among the decision-makers we spoke with to strengthen the NGO or commercial informal skills development sector. For this sector, the second strand of policy implementation was being developed, namely:

- to increase regulation with National Qualifications Frameworks, standardised certificates, etc. There was a strong desire to regulate the NGO and commercial sector programmes. For example, a very large World Bank project to try to codify work-related competences was in progress which resulted in a 60-page specification of the competences required of a stone mason's assistant.

Skills development and literacy

In a context where more than half the adult population is deemed – by both the literate and by themselves – to be ‘illiterate’, the relationships between literacy learning and skills development is clearly of major significance. As well as some minority languages, there are three major languages: Dari (the local equivalent of Farsi spoken in Iran), Pushtu and Uzbek. There is a common attitude towards the non-literate population and skills development: that illiteracy means ignorance, and ‘literacy’ (i.e. formal school-based literacy practices) is a necessity before any further training can be considered.

There is a National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP) under the Ministry of Education (Afghanistan 2012). It is constantly under review: the existing curriculum, Literacy and Non-formal Education Development in Afghanistan, developed with support from the Japanese government with its general textbook, is in process of being revised. An extensive programme of Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA) funded by the Japanese government has been effective in strengthening this, as also UNESCO’s Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme.

There are political issues around literacy learning programmes. The Ministry of Education is charged by government with adult literacy learning provision
and is jealous of that commitment. Relationships between that Ministry, MOLSA and the aid agencies are not always easy, and there are signs here, as elsewhere, of the dominance of international agencies in policy decision-making.

**Existing approaches to literacy and skills development**

The providing agencies, both governmental and non-governmental in Afghanistan, as in many different countries, adopt a range of different approaches to the issue of non-literate persons’ access to vocational training and skills development.

1. **Literacy is not needed.** Some providers – especially NGOs and certain CLCs – offer informal skills development programmes with no perceived need for literacy (poultry-rearing, bee-keeping, hairdressing, carpet weaving, embroidery etc.): anyone can come in. There is an assumption that literacy practices are not necessary for the performance of these livelihoods.

2. **Skills development with literacy.** Where there is a consciousness that literacy practices are either necessary or at least very useful, a variety of strategies are adopted:

   a) Some provide work-related literacy training at the same time as the skills development programme, using the trainers to teach the literacy skills felt to be required. An example is Mercy Corps’ programme of INVEST (see Mercy Corps 2015) in Helmand Province. This approach appears to have some value, but the literacy practices learned tend to be limited and not always used after the skills development programme has ended.

   b) Others provide a parallel standardised literacy learning programme, often the learning of national school-based literacy practices from the standard textbook. Here, as in many other countries, this has proved to be very largely ineffective: the trainees frequently attend the skills development part of the programme but more rarely attend the literacy learning part of the programme (see Rogers 1994). One specific example of this approach is **workplace literacy learning**. On the whole, this was rare in our surveys but the biggest such programme was with the Afghanistan police force (Literacy for Empowerment of Afghanistan Police, LEAP). Here the trainers were mostly retired police officers who could thus teach the appropriate police literacy practices (but see below).
c) Much more frequently, non-literate trainees are first sent away to learn ‘literacy’ – a generic literacy, not a set of literacy practices. They are denied access to vocational training until they have first learned the school-based literacy practices, thus continuing and contributing to the exclusion of non-literate persons from skills development. It would seem that few potential trainees follow this route, so they do not enrol in either programme. This results in increased inequalities.

3. **Literacy learning with skills development (functional literacy courses).** Afghanistan, like most other countries, provides functional literacy learning programmes. These are Ministry of Education or NGO literacy courses with some skills development and other subjects such as health and nutrition; they also sometimes include some numeracy, such as learning to keep accounts. The literacy (practices) being taught are thought to be generic, applicable to every situation.

At the instance of the ELA programme described above, the Ministry of Education with UNESCO Kabul has been preparing some skills-related training materials (e.g. poultry rearing) to be added to the NALP, thus strengthening the functional literacy programme. In this, they are using existing practitioners to advise on the development of these teaching-learning materials, but these materials will be used by the adult literacy trainers, not by skilled professionals. The problems of functional literacy programmes are well known in many countries: there is the difficulty of literacy trainers training in a skills development area which they do not themselves practise; the amount of skills development will always be very limited; and evaluations have shown that the literacy practices learned in class are very rarely used in the practice of the livelihoods or income-generation activities being taught in the functional literacy classes (Oxenham et al. 2002).

**Existing livelihood activities**

During our projects, we carried out some limited surveys of existing livelihood activities and they confirmed what others told us and what we have found elsewhere, especially in the Learning for Empowerment Through Training in Ethnographic Research (LETTER) programmes: see Rogers and Street (2012).

- The majority of those surveyed engaged in self-employment, or in the informal sector of the economy.
- Occupations were both multiple and flexible; people made up their livelihoods from a wide range of different activities according to their own inclinations and available resources.
There were very few (if any) and very limited literacy practices in these livelihood activities. They were not missed either: frequently we were told, when we asked, that ‘it is not normal’ for them to use literacy practices in these livelihood activities. In fact, we learned this from Nepal to Egypt (Rogers and Street 2012: 94-95). Most, but not all, livelihoods could be and were being exercised without using literacy practices, to the satisfaction of the persons concerned.

The embedded literacies project
Equally, we found that in almost all livelihood activities there were embedded literacy practices and that, in some, these practices were essential. While it is possible to engage, for example, in bee-keeping (a popular training activity) without any literacy practices at all, the keeping of regular records would greatly increase the effectiveness of this income-generation activity. In the case of tailoring and welding (photo 5), the taking and recording of measurements were found to be fundamental to the activity; car mechanics too used manuals and lists of spare parts for their work. In most, if not all, such livelihood activities there are embedded literacy practices – but these textual practices were often not thought to be ‘literacy’.

Photo 5: Learning literacy and numeracy skills embedded in vocational training, Afghanistan
This then gave us the basis for our project at two different levels:

1. **The inclusion of the relevant embedded literacy practices in the skills development programme.** This is not a generic ‘literacy’ (which in fact means school-based literacy practices) but the specific literacy practices taught by skills trainers who engage in such embedded literacy practices themselves. They teach what they practise as in an apprenticeship model. MOLSA is already doing some of this: they award a certificate for training in some of their courses at different levels and some of these levels indicate a proficiency in the relevant embedded literacy and numeracy practices of that skills area. However, this is not common, and we sought a wider engagement in the skills development field to include the relevant embedded literacy practices in that training. This will make the implementation of the training and skills development much more effective and rewarding.

2. **A two-track approach.** Secondly, specifically in order to meet the need of those adults who do not wish to obtain a formal literacy certificate, as they have no intention to enter formal education or to obtain formal employment, the Ministry of Education planned to implement what they called a two-track approach. This would parallel the NALP with what they called an ‘occupational literacy’ programme that is open to non-literate adults as well as others, and it would teach skills development with the appropriate embedded literacy practices. It has long been recognised in many different contexts that:

   a mix of program offerings is required due to the demographically diverse population of adults with limited literacy. … There is no one marketing strategy or campaign that could reach such a diverse population (Adams-Rogers 1997, cited in Taylor 2006: 500).

   This is true particularly in a country like Afghanistan, where so many people are non-literate and do not participate in the NALP and are thus excluded from participating in skills development activities.

**Opposition to the above proposals**

Embedded literacy practices in other developmental training programmes are increasingly being implemented with considerable success in a number of countries, including difficult contexts such as the ASPIRE programme in Rwanda (Newell-Jones 2014), and Lifeline Network Bettah Tumara Vocational Training programme in Sierra Leone. This is not a wild untried idea. It was therefore a matter of surprise that, despite the support of the
relevant department of the Ministry of Education, we found ourselves faced with considerable opposition to these proposals, both from some providers of traditional adult literacy programmes and – more surprisingly – from certain international agencies, who nevertheless agreed that the approach to adult literacy learning would benefit from thinking in terms of ‘literacy practices’ rather than ‘literacy’. Their disagreements may be summarised as follows:

1. **Statistics and certification.** It was pointed out that those who engaged in the skills development, learning the embedded literacy practices of the skills area, would not count towards national statistics of ‘those illiterates who have been made literate’. This is an issue on which policymakers in Afghanistan and many other countries face pressure from international agencies, because of imposed measuring programmes that are aimed at determining the country’s place on the international map (Meyer and Benavot 2013). The argument that the award of certificates for ‘skills development proficiency with embedded literacy practices’ might however serve as much as a proxy for such purposes as years-attending-school has been, and still is, felt to be too difficult to implement.

2. **Formal certification is valued by many.** Many people want to receive a formally-recognised certificate for their learning of literacy practices. This is of course very clear. Several of the trainees in the Afghan police training programme said that, in addition to the embedded police literacy practices they were learning, they wanted the more formal standardised literacy training in order to get the national certificate, both for status reasons and for possible future employment. In such a case, the learning of embedded literacy practices could act as a preliminary stage, an incentive to join NALP – an access course of some kind, facilitating the learning of the more formal literacy practices of the classroom. We could see a move from the occupational literacy programme into the NALP. However, there are others who do not wish for such a certificate and who thus will not wish to participate in the NALP, where non-participation and high levels of withdrawals are constant issues. It was to enable these people to access the learning of relevant literacy practices that we proposed, and the Ministry supported, a twin-track approach: one track alone will not meet the needs of all adults.

3. **Skills trainers can’t teach ‘literacy’.** This was the issue on which the project ultimately foundered. It was felt by those who were influential that while literacy facilitators can teach some skills development, skills
trainers cannot teach ‘literacy’, even the embedded literacy practices of their own skills area. They argue that it must be a specially trained ‘literacy’ facilitator who teaches ‘literacy’, so that there should be a team of ‘specialist teachers of literacy and numeracy and trainers of vocational skills’ (UNESCO 2013). Such teams are not thought to be necessary in functional literacy programmes, where a literacy facilitator is expected to teach some basic skills-development material from a textbook – skills which they do not themselves practise.

In response, we argued that a specialist teacher of literacy and numeracy would not be necessary for teaching the literacy practices of (for example) a car mechanic: a car mechanic who already engaged in such literacy practices could do that. We also argued that much of the learning of the specific literacy practices would come not just from the skills trainers but from other skills trainees, since these courses would not be confined to the ‘illiterate’ but open to all, so the group would be a mixed group with high and low levels of literacy experience. We know a good deal now about adult learning, especially informal learning, ‘the unorganized lifelong process by which everyone acquires knowledge, skills and attitudes through experience and through contact with others’ (Bhola 1983: 47, italics added). This has also been explained by Singh (2015: ix-x):

Much the most important learning that occurs for individuals and groups in societies worldwide is not that which occurs in formal settings in schools or colleges [or adult literacy classes] but that which occurs through informal and non-formal means from family, friends, the mass media and ‘on the job’ in the workplace.

So we know that adults learn most things (including literacy practices through mediation) from other adults, not from ‘teachers’. Thus in this programme of skills development with embedded literacy practices, open to literate and non-literate alike, mediation and peer learning would be a major part of the learning processes.

Such arguments however carried little weight – it was stated categorically that this approach could not be implemented in a difficult context like Afghanistan, despite the experience of other countries. So it was decided (by outsiders) that the occupational strand must become a ‘post-literacy’ programme. (It is not clear to me what ‘post-literacy’ means when viewing literacy as social practices: how can one speak of ‘post-literacy-practices’?) They would be open only to those who graduated from the formal literacy practices of NALP: learn formal ‘literacy’ (practices?) first and then you can learn relevant ‘literacy practices’. It was not just
a matter that Ministry of Education teachers must teach all literacy; it was a fundamental belief that there is such a thing as a basic ‘literacy’ and that this must be taught by literacy specialists, and that ‘literacy practices’ can only come after learning this basic ‘literacy’. The idea that we were not teaching ‘literacy’ but specific literacy practices (e.g. a tailor’s literacy practices) was felt to be ‘too ambitious’, ‘too difficult’ for Afghanistan, even though some skills trainers are already doing this in the CLCs. Once again literacy learning is used to justify perpetuating gross inequalities by excluding the non-literate from skills development programmes.

4. **Challenging inequalities.** This raises the final objection which came this time from other quarters, some of those who are more concerned with challenging existing inequalities. They challenged us to show that such an approach, training in skills with embedded literacy practices, might not result in mechanical skills development and the perpetuation of existing inequalities, not social transformation. Critical literacy learning is in a way independent of the kind of literacy learning programme. It is true that embedded literacy practices can be taught in a way which confirms the status quo, just as Freire pointed out that all NALPs can be and often are taught without developing critical consciousness. Yet equally, it is not impossible, as we have seen in some tailoring and car mechanics training programmes, for skills development to lead to questioning about fashions and consumerism and environmental issues. Skills-with-embedded-literacy-practices can be taught uncritically, but they can also be taught critically.

This, then, was a failed experiment – as we reported to UNESCO Kabul, ‘you win some, you lose some’ – but it was worth trying. It is only the more sad that, after all their efforts and the support of the Ministry of Education, it was outside agencies who made the decision which denies to non-literate adults access to skills development unless they learn ‘literacy’ first, based on an outdated view of literacy as an autonomous skill.

Based on ILD 19, presented on 4 March 2015

**References**


4 Education for All – does it Include Minorities?

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Introduction
This paper focuses primarily on the experience of Gypsies in order to explore the issue of whether educational policies result in controlling and undermining travelling, nomadic, indigenous or post-colonial communities who live in western industrialised countries. My research on literacy among English Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England led me to question whether the western model of education is suitable for everyone. Western, or Eurocentric education as it is sometimes described, is dominated by economic, industrial and post-Colonial concerns. Griffin and MacEinri state that this dominant paradigm has:

…translated into overt racial policies and discriminatory practices, or into inadequate provision, or indeed into indifference within national education systems with unspoken and hidden messages transmitted through mainstream curricula (Griffin and MacEinri 2014:11).

I had been slow to accept this possibility because it challenged my 35 years’ experience in education, first as a secondary teacher in schools in England, Denmark and the USA, and then as a facilitator, trainer and consultant in adult literacy. The purpose of education was always clear to me: children and adults need to learn to read and write in order to operate in a modern society; they need to have an understanding of the world and they need to know something of the history and culture of the society in which they live.

Working as an overseas consultant for over 15 years, I had no doubt about the value of the DFID-funded literacy projects for adults in Egypt and Nigeria and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

I was surprised when my research, carried out between 2004 and 2011, on Gypsies’ and Travellers’ experience of, and attitudes towards, literacy and mainstream education revealed very low levels of educational attainment. The research found that many are suspicious of, or reject, mainstream
education for a variety of reasons including a cultural disconnect. Even in our highly industrialised and text-dependent environment, many Gypsies and Travellers did not value literacy and formal education and did not consider it contributed to their self-confidence, their social status or their economic situation (McCaffery 2012). Many Gypsies and Travellers whom I met, whether they travelled or were settled, were quite prepared to admit they could not read. The only time I have ever been asked if I could read, was when a Gypsy asked if I could read a prescription for them on a medicine bottle.

My research led me to recall an incident in 1998 during the initial phase of the British Council/DFID education project in Borno State, Nigeria. The Hausa project manager drew my attention to a newly-built modern primary school. ‘This was built for Fulani children,’ he said, ‘but the Fulani ignored it and went off into the bush. It now stands empty and unused.’ At the time I assumed this was an isolated and unusual incident as our project successfully engaged with both children and adults from the semi-nomadic Fulani herders (McCaffery 2014).

Recalling this incident in the light of my research, I began to look into the situation in other minority communities, particularly those in western countries. I found that suspicion and rejection of mainstream education is not unique to Gypsies and Travellers. Roma in Europe, Sami in Scandinavia, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives in the USA and Canada, and Aboriginals in Australia have very low levels of educational attainment, in part due to a cultural disconnect.

**Education and literacy**

There are many uses of the words ‘literacy’ and ‘education’. I am concerned with the particular ways ‘literacy’ and ‘education’ affect how people are perceived. ‘Educate’ comes from the Latin ‘to lead’ (Oxford English Dictionary). Literate is also derived from Latin ‘literatus’ – ‘able to read and write, educated, cultured, intelligent’ and ‘illiteracy’ from the Latin ‘illiteratus’, ‘unable to read and write, uneducated ignorant’.

In most societies people who are educated and can read and write, perceive those who cannot as illiterate and therefore ignorant and uncivilized (Goody 1977). Many people who cannot read and write also perceive themselves, and are perceived, as uneducated and ignorant. Many project reports and much academic research has demonstrated that learning to read and write
improves confidence and enhances self-esteem and relationships with others (Kassam 1979; Eldred 2005; McCaffery et al. 2007; Cheffy 2008). Yet, others such as Street (1984, 1993) and Rogers and Street (2012) have been arguing for over thirty years that not-literate does not mean ignorant. Gypsies and Travellers support this view as they do not see themselves as ignorant and consider other abilities of more importance to their well-being and standing in the community.

To understand a community’s attitudes towards education it is necessary to know something of their history and culture and experience of education. This is outlined in the next section.

Gypsies and travellers
The size of the Gypsy and Traveller population in England is disputed. They were recognised as an ethnic minority in 1998, yet the 2011 census was the first to include them as a separate category. The resulting figure of 57,680 for England and Wales is recognised as a significant underrepresentation. Sadly, many Gypsies and Travellers fear that self-identification may lead to victimisation, loss of work and, as in some countries, removal. Informal estimates of the population range from 300,000–400,000 of which 25,000 are known to have no secure stopping place. The Commission for Racial Equality estimated that additionally between 270,000 and 360,000 Gypsies and Travellers live in bricks and mortar (CRE 2006). My research was limited to English Romanies and Irish Travellers. It did not include Roma, Boat People, Show People or New Age Travellers.

Culture and origins
In this paper Gypsies refers to English Romany Gypsies/Romanichals, the predominant group in southern England and descendants of those who left India over a thousand years ago. Until the 19th century they spoke the Romani language. It was replaced by English and Angloromani which combines the syntax and grammar of English with the Romani lexicon. There are many Romani dialects; the dialect spoken in England is Poggadi Jib, or ‘broken language’, and dialects vary across the counties. As J. Bowers pointed out in a recent issue of the Travellers Times:

> It is a very effective way of retaining a language and excluding people from outside the culture who you don’t want to understand what you are saying. For example: ‘If Mande rokkered the poggadi jib tutti wouldn’t jin what mande was pukkering.’ (If I spoke the broken language, you wouldn’t understand what I was saying.)
Irish Travellers are a minority in Southern England. The Romani origin of Irish Travellers is now contested (Okely 1983; Kenrick 1998; Worrall 1979; Ni Shuinear 1994; Binchy 2000) and recent DNA testing has suggested they are of pre-Celtic origin (Irish Examiner, May 2011). Irish Travellers, like others from the Irish Republic, came to England at various times in the nineteenth century, and also after World War Two (Kenrick and Clark 1999). Irish Travellers also regularly come from Ireland to England to find work. Irish Travellers speak Gammon or Cant and mix these with ancient Gaelic words.

The culture of English Romanies and Irish Travellers is very strong, possibly because for centuries they have chosen to remain apart from mainstream society, and it is highly gendered. Men are responsible for providing and women for the home and family. Traditionally women abstain from sex until marriage and they dress modestly, though this was not particularly apparent in the British TV series ‘My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding’, which was broadcast in 2010. Early marriage is the norm. Romani culture is built upon strict codes of cleanliness learnt over centuries of life on the road. Gypsies and Travellers have strict rules of hygiene. Shoes should be removed before entering living accommodation. Hair should not be brushed in public. Cracked crockery should never be used, and cups and plates should never be put on the floor. The trailers in which many Romanies and Travellers live are spotless and must be kept clean like the inner body. Concepts such as mokadi and mahrime

Photo 1: Demonstrating the culture at a town fair with a Vardo, step dancing and exhibition of war heroes
place strict guidelines, for example, on what objects can be washed in bowls. Romani Gypsies view Gaujos (non-Gypsies) as unclean. Traditionally lavatories and baths should not be shared with Gaujos. Death and childbirth are considered polluting and preferably should occur in hospital not in the home (Okely 1983; Kenrick, 1998; McCaffery 2012).

Both English Gypsies and Irish Travellers prefer to be self-employed. Current occupations include tarmacking, clearing driveways, gardening, small nurseries, tree cutting, horse dealing and ‘cold calling’. Some work alone, others have firms and employ staff. Some travel for work throughout the year, others travel only in the summer months or when work is available. Very few living on private or public sites are employed in the formal sector, but some who are settled in housing work for a variety of employers, rarely revealing their ethnic heritage. Women traditionally made paper and wooden flowers which they sold along with ‘lucky’ heather. I have talked to many Gypsy and Traveller women but did not meet any women living on a local authority site who worked outside the home, but some of those living on private sites or in housing did so (McCaffery 2012).

**Methods of communication**

Neither personal communication nor business is written text based. Personal communication is verbal and communication is/was through horse fairs, weddings and funerals. Business transactions are normally carried out in cash. New laws on how much cash a person can carry without evidence of its source, impacts disproportionately on Gypsies and Travellers. Communication still continues in the traditional manner, but this appears to be slowly changing as IT, with texting and computers playing an increasing role. Facebook has become an important means of communication. This would be an interesting area of research.

**Education**

There is comparatively little literature on the education of Gypsies and Travellers and according to Levinson (2007:18) this area is under-theorised. Most information is gained from government reports. Only in the 1960s was any serious attempt made to include Gypsy and Traveller children in school. In 1963 the first School for Travellers was opened in Dublin and in 1967 the first school in England was established on the disused Hornchurch aerodrome. In 1967 the Plowden Report *Children and their Primary Schools* stated that the needs of Gypsy and Traveller children ‘have been almost entirely passed over’, and that ‘many LEAS might not be fulfilling their responsibilities’. Slowly the situation began to improve, and in 1980 a
government directive stated that the duty of the authority ‘was to educate all children residing in their area, whether permanently or temporarily’ (Waterston 1997). Yet in 1988 the Croydon Local Education Authority again refused to provide a place for a Traveller child.

Central government provided funding for a Traveller Education Service (TES) to encourage parents to send their children to school, to support children in school and provide advice to schools. In some classrooms, support teachers and welfare officers were also employed (Kenrick and Clark 1999:122). In attempts to improve educational outcomes for Gypsy and Traveller children, DCSF and OFSTED published a number of documents. See, for example, OFSTED (1996), OFSTED (2003), DCSF (2008a, b) and DCSF (2009).

Achievement, attendance and exclusions

Many Gypsy and Traveller parents who live in housing, or have a council or private site, now send their children to primary school to learn to read and write. In Brighton, which currently has no permanent sites and only one transit site, 34% (26) of the children who were within the city boundaries during the school year 2008–9 did not attend any school (Brighton and Hove Council 2009). In 2010, the DFE reported that 20% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils failed to transfer to secondary school. (Education statistics put Gypsy/Roma as one category and Irish Travellers as another.) The Traveller Movement (formerly the Irish Traveller Movement) reported that of those who transfer successfully to secondary school more than 50% of Gypsies and 62% of Irish Travellers dropped out, or were excluded before the statutory leaving age (Moore and Brindley 2012).

The achievement level of those who do transfer is very low. Attainment at GCSE is more than 20% below that of any other ethnic minority. In 2010, 10% of English Romanies gained 5 A–Cs in English and Maths; Irish Travellers achieved slightly better at 17.5%, whereas white and black Caribbean pupils achieved 49.1% A–Cs, (Department for Education 2011). Some of those who do achieve move on to further and higher education and university and gain good results.

Attendance rates of Gypsy and Traveller children are below the national average. National data published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008b) showed the average absence rate of Gypsy/Roma pupils was approximately three times, and Irish Traveller was four times, the national average and exclusion rates are among the highest (Foster and Norton 2012). Some parents provide home education and some prefer to employ private tutors rather than send their children to school.
Government policy and the efforts of the Traveller Education Service (TES) to raise the achievement of Gypsy and Traveller pupils have had some success (OFSTED 2015), yet high levels of exclusion, very low attendance and levels of achievement continue. The question then becomes ‘Why?’ Why don’t all parents obey the law and send their children to school and why do achievement levels remain so low? The tendency is to blame the parents for not knowing the importance and value of education; in other words, to ‘blame the victim’.

**Distrust of education**

The reasons for non-attendance and low achievement are, in fact, complex. Many Gypsies and Travellers said their children were not encouraged by teachers to stay on in secondary school. There were many examples of very poor relations between Gypsy and Traveller parents and teachers, including sending notes home which the parents couldn’t read. Schools do not always welcome the TES.

**No place to stop**

Any consideration of the education of Gypsies and Travellers has to include the legislation which outlaws stopping on the roadside, the limited amount of site provision and the resulting unauthorised encampments.
This situation not only reduces the possibilities for education but also fuels the negativity, prejudice and antagonism towards Gypsies and Travellers expressed by members of the public, officials, councillors and MPs of all parties (McCaffery 2012). Sympathisers are very much the minority as the media coverage around the Dale Farm eviction in 2011 demonstrated. Traditional stopping places like commons land and verges have been banked up to stop unauthorised encampments. This leaves those without a permanent site, either council or private, with nowhere to go except into local parks and recreation centres.

A number of laws have created this situation. The 1959 Highways Act stated that living on or hawking goods on the roadside was an offence. In 1968, the Caravan Sites Act placed a duty on councils to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers and 75% of Gypsies and Travellers are on local authority or private sites (CRE 2006). Many local authorities simply ignored the directive. In 1994 the 1968 Caravan Sites Act was repealed and replaced by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) making unauthorised encampments illegal. Gypsies and Travellers were recommended to make their own provision and many did so, but their land purchases were not always preceded by legal searches. Many found themselves on land for which planning permission was refused. In fact, in 1991 the European Court of Human Rights (Chapman v the United Kingdom) showed that whereas
80% of planning applications by settled people succeeded, 90% made by Gypsies were refused.

The bi-annual caravan survey conducted by the UK’s Department for Communities and Local Government in January 2015 showed 13% of caravans were still on unauthorised land. The lack of a secure and legal stopping place causes extreme difficulties if children wish to attend school. A report brought to Brighton and Hove Scrutiny Committee in 2009 did not correlate the children’s poor attendance and low achievement with evictions, and they are not correlated at national level. One family who hope eventually to get a permanent site in Brighton is continually evicted and the children moved from school to school. Unsurprisingly their literacy levels are very low.

\textit{Cultural mores}

The lack of permanent sites is a practical disadvantage, but a lack of sensitivity to cultural factors is an important factor and a major reason for Gypsy distrust is the fear of losing their culture, of becoming Gaujo (non-Gypsy). Doris, a Romani Gypsy said, ‘I don’t like what goes on there. They know too much’ (April 2009). Another commented, ‘All this other stuff like the biology and that stuff is neither here nor there for Travelling people, especially people on the road, it’s not that important’ (Martha: March 2009). Jamie (2009) pointed to Gypsies’ and Travellers’ objection to sex education in school: ‘They haven’t taken into account our sexual mores – sex education … is done in the home. Our children are separated at puberty around 12 or 13 years of age.’

While there are many barriers and issues which discourage parents, Levinson (2007: 32) states this antagonism to education more strongly:

\begin{quote}
Formal (school-based) literacy was still viewed by many … as being potentially divisive, its very use signifying a degree of assimilation. At the extreme end … there persisted a mistrust of the written word itself, a \textit{gadjo} code, both a symbol and potential weapon of an antagonistic external world.
\end{quote}

Hancock (2000) and Levinson (2007) suggest that a conscious rejection of literacy may act to reinforce group cohesion, cultural identity and pride and that for some Gypsies and Travellers retaining a non-literate tradition has become institutionalised, sustaining non-acculturation.
Recent UK government policy documents make some excellent suggestions for improving Gypsy and Traveller attendance and achievement, but there is only a passing reference to including Gypsy and Traveller culture in the curriculum (Wilkin et al. 2010). Here there is a brief reference to curriculum enrichment and the suggestion that practical examples of business and enterprise related to Traveller culture might show that education can increase opportunities for both employment and self-employment.

The inability or unwillingness of successive governments to adequately address the shortage of pitches, the lack of reference to Gypsy culture in the school curriculum, as well as the lack of teacher cultural training suggests that despite government policies of respecting diversity, the primary purpose of education is, as Bernstein said 40 years ago:

> An instrument of social control regulating the behaviour of their emotional sensitivities ... and their modes of social relationship to what is considered acceptable to a section of society to which pupils often feel they do not belong (Bernstein 1971:259).

Shortage of sites, difficulties accessing education, cultural dissonance, the virulence of the media, the prejudice of the public and the procrastination of government all suggest that the policy of successive governments has been one of assimilation. Some Gypsies and Travellers argue that the policy is aimed at annihilation.

**Minorities in other western countries**

The case of Gypsies and Travellers in England is not exceptional. Their situation resonates with that of other long-established minority and indigenous minorities in industrialised western countries. Similar practices are in operation in the Republic of Ireland (O’Hanlon 2014), though unlike England there are some excellent classes for adults. In 2012 a report on Roma education in Europe found that in Greece 44% of Roma had never attended school and in Spain, France, Portugal and Romania over 90% left school before completing upper secondary (European Agency for Fundamental Human Rights 2012).

The education of Sami people in Scandinavia followed a policy of assimilation until the end of the 20th century (Keskitalo et al. 2014). Perhaps one of the most telling comments is that of Stefan Mikaelson on the opening of the first Sami Parliament in 1969 (in Josefsen 2010): ‘We ... walk in the footsteps of our ancestors. If you destroy the footprints, the past is wiped out.’
In North America the education of Native Americans focused on conversion to Christianity, eradication of indigenous languages and assimilation. Indian languages and culture are gradually being lost as a result of federal and state policies of ‘Americanisation’. In 2000, the reading scores of Native Americans were half those of white students (NAEP 2000). In Canada the education of indigenous communities followed a similar pattern (Marker 2000). Harvey Graff (1979:9) states the purpose of education in 19th century Canada was ‘to qualify and dispose the subjects … for their appropriate duties … as Christians and persons of business … and members of the civil community’. The aim was to remove them from ‘superstitious and uncivilised practices learned in traditional indigenous communities’ and instead educate and socialise them ‘according to Christian belief system’ (Cherubini 2014:150). Similar policies in Australia based on Darwinian deficit models and white racial supremacy aimed to solve the problem of Aboriginals by absorbing them into the white population. By 1970 this policy of biological absorption led to the now famous ‘stolen generation’, when tens of thousands of children were removed from their families. The Maoris in New Zealand fared slightly better, possibly because they are a higher proportion of the population, though there is still antagonism (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999).

Change?

It is easier to ‘blame the victim’ than to rethink the purpose of education. Nevertheless, in some countries there is evidence that policies are beginning to change. In Norway, a Sami school was established in 1997, and in Sweden a Sami curriculum was launched in 2011 (Skolveret 2011). In the US, Huffman (2010) working with Native Americans suggests schools should be used to strengthen cultural identity and encourage cultural preservation. He terms this ‘transcultural theory’. Inge Kral describes a process of the gradual adoption of literacy practices in both English and Ngaanyatjarra by an aboriginal community in the western Australian desert yet at the same time adhering to traditional concerns for place. Another programme in western Australia provided additional support to encourage aspiring students into higher education.

Little has changed for the Roma people in Europe, despite the Decade of Roma Inclusion, though there are isolated examples of good practice. In Slovakia one of the five 2015 UNESCO Literacy Prizes was awarded to ‘Svatobor’ for its ‘Romano Barado’ programme for Roma linking environmental sustainability to nutrition and vocational training (UNESCO 2015). In the UK very little has changed with regard to English Gypsies and Irish Travellers. A
few successfully enter higher education, but the general level of attainment has not risen. There is a pressing need to provide all Gypsies and Travellers with appropriate accommodation and a respectful and culturally appropriate education, which values their culture and traditions and yet provides them with the skills and knowledge they require to succeed in ways they choose.

While a few changes are evident, providing meaningful education to these marginalised and indigenous communities requires a paradigmatic shift from education policies of assimilation to those of agency.

Based on ILD 18, presented on 9 January 2015

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SECTION II: Practice

5. Transferable Literacies: to what Extent do Literacy Practices Taught as Special Practices Result in Transferable Literacy Skills?  
   Ian Cheffy

6. Empowering Community Midwives (Dais) in Bihar, Northern India: is there a Literacy-Participant Disconnect?  
   Priti Chopra

7. East Timor in 1974–75: Decolonisation, a Nation-in-Waiting and a Freire-Inspired Adult Literacy Campaign  
   Estêvão Cabral and Marilyn Martin-Jones

8. Literacy in and out of School in a Brazilian Bairro: Implications for Policy  
   Maria Lucia Castanheira and Brian Street

Introduction

This section is entitled Practice as the entries here focus on specific campaigns and projects in different parts of the world and the authors adopt an approach that builds practically on the concepts signalled in section 1. Ian Cheffy, for instance, asks the question: ‘to what extent do literacy practices taught as social practices result in transferable literacy skills?’, looking at the ways in which the international community has increasingly recognised the complexity of literacy. Cheffy unpacks analytically for the reader ways in which a literacy programme draws upon the social practice model rather than a skills approach. After exploring a number of examples from different parts of the world, Cheffy concludes that though learners do acquire transferable literacy skills in the social practice approach, it is also important to focus on them and maintain a balance between the different approaches.

Priti Chopra address the question of ‘Empowering Community Midwives through Literacy Practices’, drawing on a focus group discussion with six dais—indigenous community midwives – who work in collaboration with the non-governmental organisation Adithi in Bihar. Again, as with other papers in this volume, she questions dominant perceptions, which in this case ‘construct dais (community midwives) as traditional birth attendants who are poor, illiterate,
unskilled and low-caste’. She argues that this marginalisation of *dais*, within the health care system, perpetuates and deepens socio-economic, gender and caste based inequalities. She proposes, instead, ways of understanding how *dais* are constructed and construct themselves through multiple discursive practices and subject positions, again linking her approach with the social practice view put forward by many of the papers in this book.

Marilyn Martin-Jones and Estêvão Cabral worked in East Timor, looking at the decolonisation of ‘a nation-in-waiting’. They draw upon a Freire-inspired adult literacy campaign that again links with the social practice approach in this book and they draw upon oral history work in tracking these literacy practices. The ideas about the links between adult literacy, emancipation and citizenship that circulated during this earlier period constitute, they argue, a significant dimension of the context in which adult literacy programmes are being designed and carried out in Timor-Leste today.

Finally, Brian Street and Maria Lúcia Castanheira map case studies of literacy in and out of school in a Brazilian *bairro* (working-class neighbourhood) and they suggest that such work has wider implications for our understanding of education policy. They ask ‘how do the people that educators aim to reach, talk about themselves over time?’ and they provide concrete details of such accounts. Linking this work with broader issues in literacy and development policy, they ask ‘what are the implications of such work for how we understand schooling, education and learning and their relation to people’s actual lives?’
5 Transferable Literacies: to what Extent do Literacy Practices Taught as Social Practices Result in Transferable Literacy Skills?

Ian Cheffy
SIL International

Introduction
In recent years the international community has increasingly recognised the complexity of literacy, and new approaches have accordingly been developed in literacy programmes to enable non-literate adults to become literate. However, these have not gone without challenge by literacy specialists, particularly in developing countries where traditional understandings of literacy are still dominant. One focus of their critique is the assumed lack of attention by literacy programmes based on a social practice model to the transferable basic skills of reading and writing; these are considered to be fundamental to literacy from the traditional perspective on the grounds that they are essential for the decoding and encoding of any kind of text.

This paper seeks to explore the validity of this critique. It concludes that learners in literacy programmes developed from a social practice perspective do indeed acquire transferable skills of literacy, but that it is important for such programmes not to neglect to give focused attention to the acquisition of these skills. Equally it is essential for traditional skills-based literacy programmes to ensure that their learners are indeed capable of transferring their skills across different domains and uses.

Literacy as a social practice
In the last thirty years, the social practice view of literacy has made a very significant contribution to contemporary understandings of the phenomenon of literacy in society (Heath 1983; Street 1984). Originating in the field of anthropology, it has challenged the previously dominant conception of literacy as a skill typically acquired in formal educational settings, having universal application and with particular effects for individual cognition and for social development. Focusing instead on how literacy is used rather than
how it is learned, it has drawn attention to the fact that the features of
literacy evident in one context are not the same as those found in another,
and it has argued that the ability to read and write is not sufficient on
its own to ensure that the individual can be regarded as literate in any
situation. It has led to an important redefinition of the concept of literacy in
the international arena as is reflected in the documents of UNESCO. In its
original formulation in 1958, literacy was defined by UNESCO as the ability
‘to read and write with understanding a short simple statement related to
one’s everyday life’. By 2003 this had developed into a far more sophisticated
and nuanced understanding expressed as the ability to ‘identify, understand,
interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written
materials associated with varying contexts’. It went on to say, ‘Literacy
involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her
goals, develop his or her knowledge and potentials, and participate fully in
the community and wider society’ (see UNESCO 2006). Such a shift in the
conceptualisation of literacy has implications for the way in which literacy is
taught to children and adults.

A key feature of this approach to literacy is the concept of literacy practices,
the ‘general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw
on in their lives’ (Barton & Hamilton 1998, p. 6). As this definition indicates,
such practices are inherently social, involving interaction between people
and shared community understandings of the purpose and role of literacy
in particular contexts, as well as of the informal rules governing who may
produce particular kinds of written texts, who may access them and how
they are to be used. Literacy, as a textual channel of communication between
people, is a social phenomenon.

As a literacy specialist with some years of experience in Africa, I am keen to
draw on the valuable insights of social practice theory to improve the delivery
and effectiveness of literacy programmes for adults who are learning to read
and write for the first time. Adult literacy programmes have a reputation for
low enrolment, low completion and low maintenance of literacy skills once
learned (Abadzi 2003) so it is important that as much as possible is done
to improve their effectiveness, especially given the reported low level of
literacy according to international statistics in many developing countries in
Africa and elsewhere. In places where many adults have had no opportunity
to acquire literacy through formal schooling or where formal schooling has
often proved unable to equip young people with adequate literacy skills,
the imperative to provide effective instructional programmes through which
adults can develop literacy is strong. In such settings, the desire of adults
to become literate needs to be met with instructional programmes which enable them to achieve their goal.

**Approaches to teaching literacy**

Although not primarily concerned with the processes for the acquisition of literacy, the social practice view nevertheless has pedagogical implications for those who are learning to read and write and to make use of these skills effectively in their lives. If the social practice view emphasises the diversity and complexity of literacy practices, this has to be taken into account by those designing instructional programmes and curricular materials for learners of any age. Whereas the traditional view of literacy would suggest that it is sufficient for those acquiring literacy to be taught only the basic rules of the writing system of their language on the assumption that this provides the skills necessary to ‘read and write a short simple statement’, the implication of the social practice view is that a different approach is required if learners are to become proficient in the particular literacy practices which are important for their life and functioning in their community.

Various attempts have been made by adult educators to develop literacy programmes based on the social practice approach. For example, one project in Nepal sought to promote the use of literacy in the community and focused on equipping individual participants in the programme with the skills they needed for their particular community roles. Participants also discussed how literacy was used in their community and by whom. In another project in Nigeria, local facilitators worked with the adult learners to identify local literacy practices and developed learning programmes enabling the learners to engage more effectively in those practices, thus increasing their own individual well-being and their ability to contribute to the well-being of their community (McCaffery et al. 2007).

Such programmes which take into account the particular literacy practices existing within a community contrast sharply with the traditional approach to the teaching of literacy, which is concerned primarily with the teaching of the orthographic system for the representation of the language in question. Thus in the case of languages using an alphabetic writing system, literacy learners, whether children or adults, are taught the alphabet and how each letter corresponds to a particular sound or sounds in the language. In some languages, where the sound-symbol correspondence is very systematic, this is a relatively straightforward process, but in other languages where a symbol may represent different sounds and where the same sound may
be represented by different symbols, the process is much more complex. In these approaches, the orthographic system is typically introduced to learners in a sequential manner, starting from the symbols which occur most commonly and gradually introducing over the course of a number of lessons all the symbols necessary for the learner to be able to read their language. To provide reading practice, each lesson is accompanied by a text consisting only of symbols introduced up to that point in the instructional programme. A variation of this approach introduces the learners to short texts which are not restricted by the same requirement to be composed only of previously taught letters but, in either case, the emphasis of the programme is on enabling the learners to recognise printed text and to produce texts of their own – to decode and to encode. This is reading and writing in the traditional understanding of the term (Sadoski 2004).

The transferability debate

A traditional approach to literacy instruction of this kind seeks to equip the learners with the skills necessary to read any text they encounter, at least in terms of the simple definition of literacy outlined above. In other words, it is held that the skills of decoding and encoding are applicable in all contexts involving written text and are thus transferable from one setting to another (assuming that the same language is being used). The transferability of the basic literacy skills of decoding and encoding is seen as a strength of this approach. From this perspective, it can be argued that social practice based literacy programmes cannot teach transferable skills since their understanding of literacy sees literacy practices as being quite distinct one from another. If they enable learners to engage in the particular practices which they encounter in their context, it would appear that a learner who becomes confident in one literacy practice will not become confident in another, unless they are specifically helped to develop expertise in that practice. Accordingly, if an adult in a literacy class learns how to read the instructions on a sack of agricultural fertiliser, they will be at a loss when they wish to read the newspaper to find out about local events. Similarly, the ability to write a letter to a relative asking for financial help in a crisis will not go far in enabling the learner to complete a deposit slip when they wish to increase the balance in their account at their local savings cooperative. This is an issue to which social practice theorists and practitioners need to give a response.

The response of social practice educators might well be to accept that the critique made against their approach has some validity, at least to a certain
point. They may argue that literacy practices are indeed discrete in that the texts associated with particular literacy practices each impose particular reading or writing demands on those engaged in the practices, and they require a degree of expertise and understanding which is specific to each practice. For instance, the reader of the text on the sack of fertiliser will need to approach the text with the understanding that the text sets out instructions which must be followed if the fertiliser is to be used safely and is to achieve its intended purpose. The reader may also need to understand the function of symbols or diagrams within the text indicating warning or danger, or the significance of text set out in bulleted points. They will certainly require an understanding of various forms of measurement – of volume, weight or area – and perhaps some mathematical ability to calculate how much fertiliser is to be applied and when, which itself involves an additional knowledge of the calendar. On the other hand, the understandings associated with reading a newspaper are rather different. Newspapers serve the purpose of entertainment and information but they place significant demands of their own on the reader. The reader is likely to need an understanding of the role of text in different sizes, as headlines, section headings, or ordinary text. Aspects of layout may also be involved, including being able to read text in narrow columns, and the relation of illustrations to text. The reader will also need to understand how to navigate through the newspaper, which may contain various kinds of content such as factual reports, letters, comment and opinion.

Parallel to the reading involved in different literacy practices, the abilities and understandings involved in writing also vary according to the practice in question. The writer of a letter to a relative is likely to need to understand the conventions for laying out a letter on the page, for addressing the recipient and for signing off at the end. There may also be a question of the appropriate register of language to be used, according to the closeness or otherwise of the relationship between the sender and recipient, and perhaps also the particular subject matter of the communication. Such issues do not apply in the case of completing a deposit slip but different demands arise. In this case, the writer will need to understand that text of a particular type has to be entered in particular places on the document, and that it has to be constrained to fit within the space available. Complete sentences are not required but an understanding of how to write numbers as well as words will be needed.
Underlying transferable skills

Nevertheless, in spite of these differences associated with particular literacy practices, it cannot be argued that literacy practices are entirely discrete. There are aspects of literacy which are common across all occasions of use. It has to be recognised that at a fundamental level the same skills are being applied irrespective of the particular text being read or written, or the particular literacy practice involved. Reading, whether a fertiliser sack or a newspaper, requires an understanding of the significance of printed words, the directionality of text, and, above all, the correspondence of the written symbols with the sounds of the language being represented. Writing requires a similar understanding of the writing system to that involved in reading, whether a letter is being written or a deposit slip is being completed. The ability to write with a writing instrument of some kind and in a legible manner is common to any literacy practice which involves writing by hand. Thus common foundational skills are being called upon within any literacy practice, albeit with the addition of other skills and understandings specific to each practice.

Thus a degree of transferability will be found in any instructional programme, even if the programme places a strong emphasis on teaching literacy through focusing on particular literacy practices. Although social practice practitioners and theorists may be reluctant to acknowledge that this is the case, given their rightful judgement about the weaknesses of the traditional approach, there is no doubt that learners in social practice programmes acquire at least in an informal manner the foundational understandings and skills which they need and can at least attempt to apply what they have learned in one context to another, transferring what they learn in the process of becoming proficient in one literacy practice to another literacy practice. However diverse literacy practices may be, they all share certain commonalities involving the foundational skills of reading and writing. Those who prefer a traditional model of literacy can be reassured that social practice instructional programmes do indeed equip learners with transferable skills.

It is important, however, that social practice instructional programmes do more than simply provide learners with an incidental opportunity to acquire transferable skills. The risk is that learners in such programmes, while exploring the various uses of literacy in their environment, will not develop a solid basis of foundational skills unless there is explicit focus on the learning of these skills. A programme which seeks to promote community empowerment may not meet the needs of the learners if their desire is
to master individually the skills of reading and writing. For this reason, an approach such as suggested by Rogers (1999) provides a useful model for ensuring that both the foundational skills of reading and writing are acquired as well as proficiency in the particular literacy practices of the community. In this approach, attention is given explicitly both to the acquisition of basic skills and to their application in real life contexts. The instructional programme starts with a strong emphasis on the acquisition of the skills of reading and writing with only limited attention to their application, and this relationship changes progressively over time so that more and more attention is given to learning to apply those skills within relevant literacy practices. The relative amount of attention given to the foundational skills and to their application is open to debate and may vary according to context and the needs and abilities of the learners, but it is clear that ‘real life’ or ‘authentic’ texts, which exist in the environment of the learners, provide essential material for learning if the adult learners are to become literate. The value of such materials has been successfully demonstrated by an extensive research project in the USA involving 83 adult literacy classes in 22 states where it was found that learners who had the opportunity to practise real-life literacy tasks within their literacy learning class were more likely to continue to practise those tasks outside of the literacy class than adults who were taught using a traditional approach focused on the learning of decontextualised skills (Purcell-Gates et al. 2002). Such real-life literacy tasks included reading newspapers, novels and work manuals, and writing letters, filling in forms and writing cheques. In one literacy programme intended for Christians in south Asia, the text of the Bible in a modern translation corresponding to contemporary ways of speaking provides the material for reading practice (Bible Society in Cambodia 2014).

Conclusion
Learning to become literate is a complex process demanding both a full understanding of the particular way in which the sounds of one’s language are represented in text together with a context-specific understanding of how to make use of that knowledge within the particular literacy practices of one’s environment. Both traditional skills-focused literacy programmes and the more recently developed social practice programmes help adult learners to find their way through the complexities of this process. However, it is when the strengths of both approaches are combined that learners are most effectively assisted in their learning process. Literacy programmes adopting a more traditional approach need to ensure that adult learners can truly transfer the skills they learn between varying literacy practices, while
social practice programmes recognising the diversity of literacy in context need to ensure that adult learners are not lacking the foundational skills of reading and writing.

Based on ILD 2, presented on 14 December 2011 [updated 19 February 2016]

References


Empowering Community Midwives (Dais) in Bihar, Northern India: is there a Literacy-Participant Disconnect?

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Introduction

This paper aims to explore the circumstances under which adult education programmes with dais (local community midwives) may be empowering in terms of capacity building, and to understand some of their perceptions on whether literacy learning can create a difference.

The World Bank (2015) maternity mortality ratio suggests that 174 women die per 100,000 live births in India. This highlights the ongoing need for further improvement in family planning and health care access and provision (Goldie et al. 2010). There are more than seven million dais in the rural areas of India (Chawla 2006:139). Most dais are perceived to be women, over forty years of age, who belong to socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and have no formal education or midwifery qualification (Saravanan et al. 2010). During 2005, in response to the Millennium Development Goals (4 and 5), the Indian National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) introduced a Janani Suraksha Yojana (a Safe Motherhood Scheme). Under this initiative the NRHM discouraged the practice of homebirths aided by dais in favour of hospital deliveries (Sadgopal 2013). This has implications for the identities and roles of dais as well as for understanding literacy as a process of empowerment for dais. Furthermore, well intentioned reforms and policies have proven not to be consistently matched by awareness and capacity-building efforts at community level (Narayan 2011). Restrictions created by top-down government approaches and barriers encountered in the provision of basic health infrastructure result in a continuing preference for non-institutional birthing practices aided by community midwives/dais (Bruce et al. 2015). According to Patel et al.:

India needs to adopt an integrated national health-care system built around a strong public primary care system with a clearly articulated supportive role for the indigenous sectors. ... In the process, several major challenges will need to be confronted, most notably the very low
levels of public expenditure; the poor regulation, rapid commercialisation of and corruption in health care; and the fragmentation of governance of health care. (2015: 2422)

This qualitative research study, based in one northern Indian village in Bihar, contributes to the discussion regarding the role of dais in supporting maternity and child wellbeing. Moreover, it examines their subjective perceptions about literacy learning and identifies possible contexts that may contribute to empowering capacity-building adult education initiatives for dais.

Concepts

**Identities of dais**

Dominant perceptions construct dais (community midwives) as traditional birth attendants who are poor, illiterate, unskilled and low-caste (Chawla 2006). These perceptions are not inclusive of the multiple and diverse subjectivities of dais (Sadgopal 2013). Constructing such an identity for dais, according to Pinto knowledge …

‘…serves as either a resource for social transformation or the accumulation of all that is dangerous about certain ways of thinking and doing…. Talk about dais equivocates on the matter of value – are dais good or bad for progress? Are they good or bad representatives of ‘Indian tradition’? Are they a hindrance to public health or a resource? Are they better resigned to the past or brought into the future? Within debates about how to improve life in rural areas, as within debates over knowledge and stigma, the dai is multiply disruptive and multiply symbolic.’ (2013: 33-35)

Recognising identities of dais as subjective, diverse, fragmented and embodied in discursive practices requires an ideological shift towards praxis. Interrogating knowledge construction, at all levels, about social and moral praxis for a glocal ‘ecology of care’ may open democratic spaces for acknowledging how dais self-identify (Das 2003, Pinto 2011).

**Role of dais**

Transformation in conceptualisation of the role of dais, as indigenous community midwives, started in the 19th century. British colonial rule institutionalised birthing practices and promoted ‘midwifery hegemony’ and the superiority of biomedical models under the discourse of modernisation. This continued till the Indian Independence Act 1947. Post-1947 interventions sustained this framework for the management of childbirth
through the discourse of planned development (Soman 2013). For three decades, starting in the 1970s, dais were not formally included in the healthcare system. However, the Indian government supported their existing role in local communities through the provision of informal training for maternity care (Saravanan et al. 2010). Since 2000, despite a lack of evidence, dais have been held responsible for neonatal and maternity mortality ratios in India. According to Sadgopal (2009) this resulted in the discontinuation of government support for the informal training of dais. She further elaborates that:

a context of acute shortage of personnel … argues for letting the Dais [sic] continue their work in co-ordination with the formal care providers…The inclusion of Dais in public health can strengthen the services… Including Dais and their traditions in the expansion of formal childbirth care not only addresses the important concerns behind Millennium Development Goals #4 and #5 … but also advances Millennium Development Goal #3 (women’s empowerment) as the female Dais negotiate space within the healthcare system. This will be possible only when the other female health workers … learn to respect and relate to the Dais as equal partners – a simple word, but a huge social and epistemological challenge to the Public Health Services in India today. (Sadgopal 2013)

The continued marginalisation of dais within the health care system perpetuates and deepens socio-economic, gender- and caste-based inequalities:

Any effort to make sense of the complexities of contemporary midwifery must deal not only with biomedical and governmental power structures but also with the definitions such structures impose upon midwives and the ramifications of these definitions…. On the global scale, the ramifications of the distinction between midwives who meet the international definition and those who do not have been profound. Those who do are incorporated into the health care system. Those who do not remain outside of it, and suffer multiple forms of discrimination as a result. (Davis-Floyd 2008: 168)

**Literacy as a process of empowerment for dais**

Basu et al. (2009: 1) suggest that:

While literacy has an important evaluative position in theories of development, there is no ‘theory of literacy’ that adequately captures and predicts its complex role in processes of social change, and accounts
for the role of literate (and illiterate) identities and practices in shaping social relations, capacities and aspirations.

My conceptualisation of literacy draws on the work of New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Gee 1991; Street 1993; Collins 1995) which places an emphasis on the plurality of literacy practices and meanings. NLS offers ways of exploring the diverse contextualised practices of literacy programme participants (Street 1995; Robinson-Pant 2004; Street et al. 2006).

Brandt and Clinton (2002) claim that solely relying on the ‘local’ to define the meaning and forms of literacy may ignore the material dimensions of literacy and its role in human action. Similarly, Collins and Blot (2003) argue that conceptualizing literacy as an autonomous skill or as multiple locally-situated practices is not enough for defining the meaning and forms of literacy. This has implications for the claimed empowering and transformative intentions of policy and programme practice. By locating their interrogation in the domains of literacies, power and subjectivity they forefront situated historical processes, intertwined with literacy practices, and deconstruct assumptions about ‘consequences of literacy’ (Goody and Watt, 1963 cited in Collins and Blot, 2003: 6). They make explicit the dialectics between assumptions about the ‘uses of literacy’ and conceptualisations of ‘identity, authority, and visions of the self and the future’ (ibid. p8).

Literacy as a process of empowerment for dais may widen a space for democratic participation within the learning context and in wider society (Chopra 2011, 2014). Through an empowering education process dais may be positioned to contribute to ‘maternity care governance for the benefit of local communities’ (Sadgopal 2009:52).

**Methods**

**Participants**

I draw on one focus group discussion with six dais who work in collaboration with the non-governmental organisation Adithi in Bihar. This was followed by a series of semi-structured interviews with one of the dais who participated in the focus group discussion. The six dais who contributed to the focus group discussion work in the same village and are either Dalit Hindu or Muslim. Dalit Hindu dais belong to a variety of sub-castes, such as Paswan, Mehto, Rajak, Nuniya and Das. All the dais are mothers and some of them are grandmothers.
Site: The village
The village is located 110 kilometres from the town where the district administration offices are situated. The village is approximately six kilometres from the district subdivision office, hospital, bank and police station. A primary health centre (PHC) is accessible in a neighbouring village at a distance of 3 kilometres. There are 247 houses in the village having a total population of 1,305 people. The majority of people living in this village are Dalit. One family belongs to the non-Dalit Baniya caste and there are 16 Muslim families in the village. Only 31 families in the village own land. Surrounding the village are privately-owned fields and 714 acres of government-owned land. Some 97 acres of this land is wasteland and the rest is agricultural. Despite reforms such as the Bihar Land Ceiling Act 1961 this land has not been distributed to the landless people living in the village. Most of the people in the village work as daily wage agricultural labourers and sharecroppers. Seasonal migration for three to four months a year, to do labour work in other states such as Punjab and Haryana, is frequent amongst men in the village. Traditional trades are maintained by potters, cobblers, carpenters, fuel and fodder sellers, dhobis (laundry persons), butchers and tailors living in the village. Out of a total population of 1,305 people approximately 116 people have engaged in some form of formal education. There are approximately 67 men and 40 women in the village who have completed secondary school. A majority of these people belong to the Baniya and Paswan caste groups. Most people belonging to other sub-caste groups and the Muslim religion have not accessed formal education beyond primary school level.

Semi-structured interview and focus group discussion
The focus group discussion with six dais was centred on developing an understanding about how they perceived their role, challenges they encountered in their work, and changes in their delivery practice following their collaboration with Adithi. The conversations also revolved around their perceptions of reading, writing and numeracy practices within the context of their work.

The series of semi-structured interviews with one person occurred over a period of one month whilst I was residing in the village. The semi-structured interview texts enabled me to gain an insight into the identities, changing roles and discursive practices of dais working with Adithi in more detail. As Drzewiecka (2001: 250) claims, ‘in these texts, social relations and distinctions become visible as interviewees locate themselves in relationship
to cultures, communities, and others’. All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Hindi, written in English and narrated back in Hindi for research participants’ validation (Bryman 2001). The series of interviews and focus group discussion were thematically analysed in response to conceptualisations of identities of dais, the role of dais, and literacy practices as a process of empowerment for dais.

Findings

Perceptions of dais

I did the pulse polio campaign. I got 100 rupees (approximately £1.20) for that. I went house to house and did all the work but some teacher gets all the official credit and support just because they can mark on a form what has been done. I am not made in charge just because I cannot mark a form and that makes me angry. (Interview participant)

In line with the experience of the interview participant, focus group research participants shared that they were familiar with their village and had no restrictions placed on their mobility within the village. They were one of the few women in the village who had access to the homes of all the women in their village area. They shared experiences about their difficulties in receiving validated recognition from government officials and their own lack of confidence in communicating with health officials. They believed that they contributed to maternal and child wellbeing by encouraging women in the village to take decisions about caring for their daughters and participating in government family planning health programmes. They also mentioned that they had to take account of issues such as women’s socio-economic dependence and restrictions on mobility that impacted on their decision-making power, in the family and community, concerning their health care and reproductive rights. Demonstrating how policy and practices of the state can interlock with patriarchal roles and values held onto as norms by different individuals, in their everyday life contexts, and expressed through communities of practice (Wenger 1998), dais shared their experiences of working with certain norms and beliefs that existed amongst some families in the village. For example, they mentioned negative social attitudes amongst people towards immunisation and family planning, nutritious diet and health care for women, and the birth of girls leading to female infanticide. The focus group discussion and series of semi-structured interviews revealed that dais are not a fixed and stable subject within the context of the village. Perceptions of dais are impacted on by gender inequalities intertwined with socio-economic and cultural relations within the family and in the wider society (Das 2003, Pinto 2013).
Dais as change agents

According to the Quran it is a sin to take the life of a child. I do not accept money for killing female babies and I try my best to convince families to accept their child as a gift from god. I always share my positive experience of having seven sisters and three daughters with other women. (Interview participant)

Through Adithi health programmes the role of dais has extended beyond delivering babies. In addition, dais working with Adithi have developed a network through which they share practices and support each other. During the focus group discussion dais explained how their role as change agents, through participation in Adithi health programmes, developed. For example, they mentioned that within people’s homes and in their village they are involved in supporting and enabling access to government health programmes such as family planning and immunisation. They also mentioned that they can impact on people’s decisions as they are trusted more than ‘outsiders’ who work in health programmes and therefore can, at times, facilitate decisions for women. Through refusing to commit on female infanticide and by justifying their position and perspective they claim to promote positive social attitudes towards the birth of female children. Through their participation in Adithi programmes it was not only their role within people’s homes that evolved but also the perceptions of government health workers, as dais were being allocated the responsibilities of a general health resource person. Developing shared values and understanding within communities of practice in the village, according to the dais who participated in the focus group discussion and interview, also involved challenges experienced in access to information, transforming negative social attitudes and in developing autonomous officially supported and recognised discursive practices within the village (see Sadgopal 2009, 2013).

Situated literacy and numeracy practices for dais

It is difficult to provide official evidence, to government and Adithi health programme staff, about the birth and death of children as this is not registered and no written record is maintained in the village. (Interview participant)

In order to explore adult education programmes as empowering it may be useful to develop insights into the historically rooted communication practices through which different dais develop, use and create knowledge to write/act in their own voices on lived experiences (Chopra 2011, 2014). For the dais, adapting and incorporating a range of authentic texts,
related to their work, may develop and strengthen their capacity as well as contribute to their engagement with health officials and people in the village, an interest strongly emphasised in the focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. Some areas related to their work, for reading, writing and numeracy were identified as:

- Being able to read medical prescriptions and details on medicines such as expiry dates.
- Being able to read about human biology.
- Reading and writing activities involved in their first aid and women and child health work.
- Reading and writing for maintaining records on immunisation cards.
- Learning how to check and record a person’s pulse, blood pressure and breathing using basic medical equipment.
- Writing the name and address, for themselves and other people, to give to health officials during visits to the health centre and hospital.
- Having accessible contextualised resources to share about government health services, family planning, first aid, immunisation, prenatal pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal health care.

These desires for contextualised literacies and numeracies, explored through the research, are just a part of examples of specific work-related communication practices that may be recognised and developed within the adult education programme (see for example Robinson-Pant 2004; Street et al. 2006). Implementing such a process is not free from a dialectical relationship between discriminatory practices produced through hegemonic structures and the agency of dais. Democratic space for transformation, making a difference through adult education, may be created if actors, at all levels, engage in a multilevel and committed process of unlearning their positions of privilege through self-deconstruction (Spivak 2012). Creating such democratic adult education spaces may enable dais to impact on understanding of their identities, roles and responsibilities through self-representation. Transforming understanding does not necessarily mean that all discriminatory structures and practices become transcended. The empowerment of dais may remain constrained and limited by the continuation of discriminatory practices produced through hegemonic structures. Therefore, in this context, empowerment may be recognised as transformation created by dais as change agents, through self-representation and postures of autonomy (Landry and MacLean 1996) adopted in their fields of discursive practice, within and outside the adult education programme.
Conclusion

The focus group discussion and series of semi-structured interviews highlight that perspectives about and by dais are rooted in a dynamic of relationships constructed between inequalities, agency, and maternal and child wellbeing. Dominant perceptions of dais as deficient exclude ways of understanding how dais are constructed and construct themselves through multiple discursive practices and subject positions. These perspectives could be explored and deconstructed through self-representation and postures of autonomy within the space of an adult education programme. However, transforming such inequalities and inequities requires a particular ethical commitment and expression of moral agency at all levels (Landry and MacLean 1996, Spivak 2012).

Based on ILD 22, presented on 19 November 2015

References


East Timor in 1974–75: Decolonisation, a Nation-in-Waiting and a Freire-Inspired Adult Literacy Campaign

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Introduction

This paper provides an account of insights emerging from research related to the history of adult literacy in Timor-Leste. It focuses on the literacy campaign initiated during the brief period of decolonisation from Portuguese rule in 1974–75, and then sustained by the Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN) and by the União Nacional dos Estudantes Timorenses (UNETIM), its student wing, during the years following the Indonesian invasion. Many of those who participated in this literacy campaign lost their lives in the struggle against the Indonesian occupation and there are now very few archival sources relating to adult literacy initiatives during this period, so the research reported in this paper has involved revisiting this period through archival research and oral history work with participants in the campaign who are still with us today. The broad aim has been to deepen our understanding of this significant period.
in the history of adult and popular education in Timor-Leste. The ideas about the links between adult literacy, emancipation and citizenship that circulated during this period constitute a significant dimension of the context in which adult literacy programmes are being designed and carried out in Timor-Leste today. In the contemporary fields of adult education and youth work, they jostle for space with other ideas about literacy that have been shaped by globalised discourses about literacy and development and about ‘literacy skills’ for entry into the labour market.

The 1974–75 adult literacy campaign: context and key social actors

According to the archival evidence that has been reported so far (e.g. Taylor 1999; Themudo Barata 1998), the population of Timor-Leste was approximately 500,000 in 1974, but only 20% were able to read and write. During the Portuguese colonial period, the education system was severely neglected (Cabral 2002). With the advent of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in April 1974, a window of opportunity opened up for the East Timorese. Political parties were established and, amongst them, was FRETILIN. Each of the parties outlined their political manifesto for the destiny of the territory and FRETILIN emerged as the sole party committed to immediate independence from Portugal (Cabral 2002; Hill 2002). Moreover, FRETILIN identified the education of children and adults as one of its main priorities.

Among the leadership was a small group who had been university students in Lisbon, based at the Casa Timor. While studying there in the early 1970s, they had encountered students from Portuguese colonies in Africa. Through these contacts, they had learned about the work of Paulo Freire among the rural poor in the north east of Brazil in the 1960s and about his ideas regarding the role of adult literacy in consciousness-raising (consciencialização) (e.g. Freire 1967). These were ideas that had been taken up in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique in adult literacy classes in the liberated zones during the long colonial wars against the Portuguese (e.g. Freire 1977). When these Timorese students returned to Timor-Leste in September 1974, some of them, notably Mau Lear\(^3\) (António Carvarinho) and Sahe (Vicente Reis), initiated an adult literacy campaign based on the same principles. The Timorese Campanha de Alfabetização thus became an integral part of the political programme of FRETILIN throughout the campaign for independence. We cannot separate the one from the other (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008).

\(^{3}\) Mau Lear is a nom de guerre, as is Sahe. The given names of these two university students returning from Portugal are shown in parentheses.
Because the vast majority of the adult population had had no education in Portuguese, Tetun was chosen as the language for the campaign since it was the *lingua franca* across most of the territory. An adult literacy handbook in Tetun was devised by Mau Lear and his wife Bi-Lear (Maria do Céu Gonçalves Pereira), who was a primary school teacher. The handbook was based on what Mau Lear had learned, in Lisbon, about the Freirean approach to adult literacy and it was printed in Dili (personal communication with Roque Rodrigues). It was used by adult literacy volunteers, known as *brigadistas*, who were involved in the campaign in different regions. Two regional literacy centres were established: Centro Piloto 1 in Aileu and Centro Piloto 2 in Bucoli, near Baucau. Centro Piloto 2 was founded by Sahe.

Revisiting the literacy campaign through oral history

As indicated above, the main methods of data collection for this project were archival research and oral history interviews with former participants in the literacy campaign. The research was carried out by Estêvão Cabral in Timor-Leste and Portugal in 2009 and 2010. In all, 22 oral history interviews were carried out with 16 women and six men. Of these, 16 of the interviewees (women and men) chose to be interviewed in Tetun and six chose Portuguese. All these interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full.

As the oral history research progressed, it became clear that the 22 interviewees fell into four broad groups, as follows:

- Nine of them (six women and three men) indicated that they had been trained in 1974–75 as volunteers for the literacy campaign by the university students who had returned from Portugal and by other members of the FRETILIN leadership.

- Five interviewees (three women and two men) indicated that they had received their training in the mountains of Timor-Leste after the Indonesian invasion of December 1979 and had then served as literacy volunteers.

- A further five interviewees (four women and one man) had been active participants in the campaign but had not been through any training.

- Three other interviewees had been primary school teachers at the time and had volunteered for the literacy campaign, of their own initiative, during the Easter vacation of 1975.

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4 Estêvão Cabral briefly participated in the campaign himself in 1975, though he was never trained as a literacy volunteer.
Because of their diverse pathways into the campaign, the opportunities available to them for training as literacy volunteers and the varied nature of their involvement, the interviewees spoke in different ways about the campaign and revealed different understandings of its purpose. They also expressed different ideas about literacy pedagogy.

In the next five sections of this paper, we have chosen to focus on the group of nine interviewees who were originally trained by the university students from Portugal and who were involved in the literacy campaign from the outset. There are clear themes that resonate across these interviews and they relate to different aspects of the campaign. Also, because of space constraints, we draw on just four of these interviews in illustrating the themes. The different aspects of the campaign are as follows:

- the campaign leadership and the training of these volunteers
- the groups of political activists involved
- the interviewees’ accounts of the purposes of the campaign
- their ideas about literacy pedagogy and about the Freirean approach to adult literacy
- the conditions for the conduct of the campaign before and after the Indonesian invasion.

The campaign leadership and the training of volunteers
The prominent role of Mau Lear and Sahe in the leadership of the campaign and the training of volunteers was particularly evident in the interviews with the ‘group of nine’. They were referred to by name or by their nom de guerre. Sometimes, they were mentioned along with other university students returning from Portugal in 1974, such as Hatta (Hamis Bassarewan), as we see in extracts 1 and 2 below. Sometimes, other members of the 1974–75 FRETILIN leadership, such as Roque Rodrigues, were also mentioned as contributors to the political education and training of literacy volunteers.

Please note that although the interviews were carried out in Tetun and Portuguese, because of space constraints, we have only been able to include here the English translations of these interview extracts.

*Extract 1: Interview with MM in Tetun, 19 October 2009*
EC: Do you remember the names of any other people who were involved – either as teachers or as teacher trainers?
MM: Ah! From the beginning comrades Sahe, Mau Lear and Hatta were there. It was the three of them who trained us.

*Extract 2: Interview with ZS in Tetun, 22 October 2009*

EC: What were you doing before that?

ZS: We got our training while we were in UNETIM. It was Sr. Roque Rodrigues, Roque Rodrigues who first trained us and, after that the students who returned from Lisbon ... Together they trained us on politics and Paulo Freire’s literacy method.

**Groups of political activists: UNETIM**

All the interviewees in the first cohort of trained volunteers had at some point been members of UNETIM, the student wing of FRETILIN. In 1974–75, the UNETIM membership consisted of secondary school students since no university had been established in Timor-Leste by the Portuguese. These interviewees spoke of UNETIM as their way into the literacy campaign and into involvement with the wider political movement for independence. This comes over clearly in the next interview extract.

*Extract 3: Interview with AB in Portuguese, 15 October 2009*

EC: Did you teach alone or with others? With whom? Were they members of FRETILIN or UNETIM?

AB: Yes, I went to teach. We were a group ... we were all members of UNETIM ... We were students, we got together in the organisation that was founded, because, as we know, there were few people with basic schooling ... education!

**Groups of political activists: OPMT**

The participation of women in the campaign was particularly significant. Women literacy volunteers outnumbered men in late 1974 and early 1975, and this was confirmed by personal observation by Estêvão Cabral during his involvement in the campaign. This observation also resonates with the interview data gathered for this project. OPMT (the women’s branch of FRETILIN) was founded on 28 August 1975. Several of the women interviewed in this project had started out as members of UNETIM and then moved across to OPMT, while continuing their involvement in the literacy campaign and building on the work initiated by UNETIM. We see this in extract 4 below, taken from an interview with one of the women who had been involved from the start of the campaign.
**Extract 4: Interview with AB in Portuguese, 15 October 2009**

EC: Is there anything else that you remember about the experience of teaching adult literacy?

AB: August, August 28 … to be exact … a number of students who were in UNETIM, female students, integrated into the Popular Organisation of Timorese Women … OPMT continued, more or less, with the activities that UNETIM initiated.

**Groups of political activists: OPJT**

OPJT, the youth branch of FRETILIN, was also mentioned by one of the interviewees who had been trained in the first cohort of volunteers. The membership of OPJT was broader than that of UNETIM: it included those who had not had access to secondary schooling under Portuguese colonial rule. Some UNETIM members, like the interviewee cited in Extract 5, were members of both organisations.

**Extract 5: Interview with PC in Portuguese, 20 October 2009**

EC: Did you teach alone or with others? With whom? Were they members of FRETILIN or UNETIM?

PC: Yes, we were part of the OPJT, and from UNETIM – the UNETIM block, yes!

**Understandings of the purpose of the campaign**

All nine interviewees who had been in the first cohort of volunteers indicated that the adult literacy campaign had been closely bound up with two broad political purposes: that of raising people’s awareness of the oppressive conditions of Portuguese colonialism (consciencialização); and that of the struggle for self-determination. Thus we see explicit links being made in the discourse of the interviewees between the literacy campaign and consciencialização. Take, for example, the following interview extracts.

**Extract 6: Interview with AB in Portuguese, 15 October 2009**

EC: [Asking about the adult learners] How, and to what extent, did they use what they had learned?

AB: Yes! I think we achieved our goals to some extent, because it was not only reading and writing but also awareness-raising.
**Extract 7: Interview with PC in Portuguese 20 October 2009**

EC: What did the participants learn?

PC: Besides reading and writing … also our objective was to politicise and to engage in awareness-raising campaigns, to instil the spirit in them [the adult learners] … for independence … yes? Because, at that time, our objective was to politicise our people and at the same time, we … wanted to support our people so that they could read and write, yes?

**Ideas about literacy pedagogy**

All nine of these interviewees showed that they were aware of some of the principles underpinning the Freirean approach to adult literacy. For example, they indicated that their pedagogy was based around ‘key words’. They defined these as terms that were associated with everyday life in Timor-Leste at the time: words such as *fós* (rice) and *tobaco* (tobacco) as shown in the interview extract below.

**Extract 8: Interview with MM in Tetun, 19 October 2009**

EC: How did you teach [literacy]?

MM: We began with words like ‘tobacco’. We asked them: do you know tobacco? They would tell us that they knew about it because they smoked it. In turn, we asked them to explain to us the process of planting tobacco. As we learned with them about [tobacco] agriculture, how to follow the process from planting to harvest and selling it in the market, they learned with us about letters … After they had explained to us and we had explained to them, we raised their awareness [about their conditions] and then we showed them the way to write the word ‘tobacco’.

Another interviewee remembered some of the actions that were taken to change the relationship between literacy teacher and literacy learner (interview with ZS, 22 October 2009). Speaking of her work as a young literacy volunteer in Centro Piloto 1 in Aileu, she talked about shared work in the paddy fields and in the vegetable gardens in the mornings, followed by afternoon and evening meetings at the Centre and literacy classes that focused on the shared work of the morning. In this interview, there is a clear resonance with Freire’s writing about embedding adult literacy pedagogy in the lived realities of the learners and about democratisation of the relationship between teacher and student to create space for dialogue.
The campaign in 1974–75: people, places and resources

The first training sessions took place in Dili in late 1974. The first adult literacy classes began in early 1975. The classes were mostly held in private houses and involved four to five households at a time. The numbers participating in the classes varied from 12 to 20, as we see from the following interview extract.

Extract 9: Interview with M in Tetun, 19 October 2009

EC: Did you teach alone or with others? If with others ... with whom? Were they members of FRETILIN or UNETIM?

MM: Yes! We were all members of UNETIM. We had a procedure which involved going to teach four or five households [at a time]. Once people had gathered in one house we started to teach.

EC: How many were there in your classes?

MM: Women and men ... I don’t remember because sometimes there were up to 12 people and we were told that there should not be more than 20. There were up to 12 people and 15 was the maximum.

Those who had been trained had access to the literacy manual, ‘Rai Timor, rai ita niang’. They also worked from the notes (apontamentos) that they had kept from their training sessions, as noted in the extract below.

Extract 10: Interview with AB in Portuguese, 15 October 2009

EC: Did you use a book? Did the students use a book? If so, which one?

AB: Eh ... we had notes ... in our preparations we used notes as a way of guiding us to teach.

Some of the interviewees indicated that they had contributed to the drive to extend the literacy campaign into other regions of Timor-Leste in April 1975 during the Easter vacation. Groups of UNETIM secondary school students had travelled out to the regions during the Easter vacation, when the schools were closed and based their literacy classes in local school buildings. As we see from the extract below, several of the women in the first cohort of volunteers went, with OPMT, to Aileu, to Centro Piloto 1.

Extract 11: Interview with MM in Tetun, 19 October 2009

EC: How long did you teach – for how many weeks, months or years?

MM: We started to teach in April. At the same time we joined OPMT and a group of us went to Aileu to form the Centro Piloto. [The person] who stayed in Dili was comrade Aicha and her group to continue with
the literacy campaign [there]. When we went up to the countryside we also continued with the literacy campaign in some areas. For example, those of us in the Sector Centro Leste and others in the Sector Centro Norte continued with the literacy campaign. And not only that, before the coup, in Bucoli, we had a pilot centre in Bucoli. Pilot centre number 2 there was also part of the literacy campaign.

However, by late September/early October 1975, with the threat of an Indonesian invasion looming, many literacy students from Dili volunteered to go to the military front on the border with West Timor (Interview with AB, 15 October 2009). This brought the literacy campaign in Dili to an end.

Conditions after the Indonesian invasion

All nine of the interviewees who were part of the first, pioneering cohort of literacy volunteers confirmed that, after the Indonesian invasion of December 1975, the literacy campaign continued up in the mountains, behind the lines held by FALINTIL, the armed wing of FRETILIN. (FALINTIL remained the armed wing of FRETILIN until 1986, when it became the armed front for National Liberation.) A new cohort of literacy volunteers was also trained during this period. The adult literacy work continued in the Centro Piloto in Aileu for at least two years because of its remote, mountainous location (interview with ZS, 22 October 2009), but the literacy teaching in Bucoli ceased soon after the invasion because of its proximity to Baucau.

The conditions for this new phase of adult literacy work were, however, much harsher: few writing materials were available up in the mountains, though supplies came through from time to time from the clandestine front in the urban areas. Finally, when the main focus of the Resistance shifted to the clandestine front in the 1980s, conditions there became too dangerous to organise literacy classes (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008).

Concluding comments

In this paper, we have provided some brief glimpses into the lived experiences of some of the participants in the campaign initiated in Timor-Leste 1974 and into their accounts of the nature and purpose of the adult literacy work that they were engaged in. The focus of the paper was on interviews with a group of 9 women and men who were involved in the campaign from the outset and who were all trained by the group of university students

5 Aicha Bassarewan was the sister of one of the students returning from Portugal, Hamis Bassarewan (Hatta).
returning from Portugal in 1974. Among all 22 of those interviewed for this research project, the ‘group of nine’ were those who were most centrally involved in the political campaign for Independence and in the literacy campaign associated with it. As we have seen, their accounts of the campaign were closely intertwined with political discourses about liberation from colonialism and about self-determination. They also mentioned several Freirean ideas about adult literacy that were circulating widely in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the context of the social and political movements of those times. Freire’s political exile from Brazil from 1964 onwards and his engagement with the anti-colonial struggles in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique (e.g. Freire 1977) contributed to the spread of these ideas and to their take-up in Timor-Leste from the mid-1970s (Durnan 2005; Boughton 2008).

However, as we noted at the beginning of the paper, there was considerable diversity across the sample of 22 interviewees. Others had taken different pathways into the campaign and had had different opportunities for training as volunteers. They had therefore had different degrees of access to the ideas behind the literacy campaign. So, as the research progressed, we became increasingly aware of the need to take account of the diverse contributions made by different groups of social actors in the study of literacy campaigns. Clearly, every campaign needs to be studied with reference to the particular political and economic context in which it arises and with reference to the specific conditions in which the campaign is conducted (Arnove and Graff 1987). At the same time, we also need to focus our research lenses on the different social actors involved, how they are positioned at different stages within a campaign, how and to what extent they take up ideas about literacy and how these ideas guide their pedagogy. Particular advantages accrue from oral history work, because of the focus on human agency and on people’s own understandings of the particular events in which they are participating.

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8 Literacy in and out of School in a Brazilian *Bairro*: Implications for Policy

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This account draws on the experience of families that moved from rural areas to a *bairro* (working-class neighbourhood) on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, capital of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, in the 1970s and 1980s. Such case studies of how people experience processes of change in relation to migration and mobility, and with particular focus on schooling and literacy, have wider implications for our understanding of education policy.

The first study was developed as part of Castanheira’s Master’s degree (Castanheira 1991). Data collection was from October 1987 to April 1988. The second study is in development and was initiated in March 2009. At this time, Castanheira re-entered the field and examined the consequences of social changes that took place in this neighbourhood in shaping the ways in which participants use writing in and out of school and the meanings of literacy for them.

**Theoretical and research background**

*New Literacy Studies (NLS) in Educational Contexts*

Street’s chapter ‘NLS in Educational Contexts’ (in Skinstad van der Kooij et al. 2015) addresses the issue of literacy as social practice (LSP) that involves social partnerships, rather than seeing literacy as an a-social, ‘autonomous’ skill as in many dominant approaches. We build on this approach in the present paper, offering a critical perspective on the dominant ‘skills’-based model, what Street refers to as the ‘autonomous’ model of literacy. So, we argue that it makes better sense educationally to name and define literacies in the plural, given that a variety of genres and texts are to be found in everyday practice.
**Doing ethnographic fieldwork**

Castanheira conducted ethnographic fieldwork among people in working-class families in Trombetas, a *bairro* on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in both 1988 and again from 2009, in research that is continuing. She initially worked as research assistant in a childcare centre coordinated by a women’s organization (*Associação de Mulheres São Judas Tadeu; Women’s Association of Saint Judas Tadeu*), for two years (from 1985 to mid-1987) and, later, studying how children in that neighbourhood engaged in literacy practices before and after entering elementary school, as part of her Master’s course at University Federal of Minas Gerais (UFMG) (1988 to 1991). She then returned to Trombetas in 2009 as part of her post-doctoral research, to continue interviewing and observations with people who had been young children in her first visit and were now adults with their own children. This return to her original site after a long gap was partly prompted by her relationship with a Master’s student from this area, who had read the original dissertation and talked about it with Trombetas people. The responses were very positive and they wanted to meet Castanheira again and for her to continue researching with them. The research data, which we call upon in some detail below for both methodological and theoretical commentary, included field notes, interviews and transcripts, pictures, and videos from research in these two periods.

In both case studies, Castanheira adopted a similar research approach: a social perspective on literacy (Street 1984, 2005; Barton et al. 2000; Castanheira et al. 2001) and an ethnographic perspective (Green and Bloome 1998; Heath and Street 2008) to engage in participant observation and data analysis. As argued by Green, Dixon, and Zaharlick (2001), when exploring an ethnographic approach, the researcher engages in the development of a *logic of inquiry* in the process of collecting, analysing and representing data. In this perspective, the construction of a *logic of inquiry* is intrinsically tied to the responsive nature of ethnography and, as Bloome (2005: 276) suggests, such ‘inquiry on language and literacy is defined in the doing and cannot be pre-determined’.

In the current study, the construction of its logic of inquiry was triggered by the fact that Castanheira was returning to Trombetas after 20 years and by the very nature of ethnographic work she was engaged with a constant comparison (Heath and Street 2008) of the present with the past, of one social group or situation with another, and the examination of local and global relationships (Baynham and Prinsloo 2008; Brandt and Clinton 2002; Reder and Davila 2005; Street 2005). The consideration of these
aspects led to the proposition of the following research questions: ‘What is happening to writing (and reading) in this neighbourhood? What changes can be identified in the way research participants engage in literacy events or literacy practices (Street 1984) taking place in Trombetas? What are the implications of such a case study for our understanding more generally of literacy and change?’

From such a broader analytic perspective, Castanheira argued that we need to make visible the centrality and capillarity of the notion of context within the literacy field, as well as challenges faced by literacy researchers. Further questions this raised included: ‘How to deal with the relationship between context, meaning and interpretation? How is context defined in a particular study? And what are the implications of different views of context for understanding a particular phenomenon?’ The research in Brazil reported here builds on these ideas in examining the meanings of literacy among members of working-class families that lived in Trombetas, a neighbourhood in the city of Ibirité.

The wider implications of this research are that changes in the Trombetas literacy landscape can, we suggest, be seen as indexes of wider economical and educational changes that have taken place over time in the fields of literacy and education. Elsewhere Castanheira has addressed some other aspects of these changes, associated with economics and migration, focusing particularly on ‘changes in literacy practices across generations of working-class families in Brazil’ (Castanheira 2013).

**Education and learning in different settings**

In Brazil educational policy has attempted to take account of the recognition that out-of-school literacies may be different from those in school. However, researchers suggest this remains mainly rhetorical and school continues to impose a narrower, more formal view. Similarly, international education policy pays lip service to a more social practice perspective, but in fact continues to measure and value a narrower view. We consider the implications of case studies on literacy practices in and out of school in the local context signalled here in Brazil and we attempt to draw out some of the implications of such research for policy approaches, both nationally and internationally.

In addressing these issues we make explicit some of the underlying concepts and activities involved in conducting ethnographic fieldwork in such contexts – in this case over two periods, twenty years ago and currently. The main question we posed was, ‘How do these people, whom educators aim
to reach, talk about themselves over time and across different institutional settings? How do they navigate across these settings? In analysing these data, then, we propose an alternative to dominant policy perspectives that stress schooled literacy and the autonomous model of literacy (cf. PISA; PIAAC; GMR). We therefore conceptualise engagement with literacies as involving moving beyond narrow schooled conceptions of literacy as autonomous skill and instead taking account of the concept of literacy as social practice in everyday contexts.

**Ethnographic approaches**

The accounts provided here, then, involve reflection on ethnographic fieldwork in two periods, twenty years ago and currently. In 1988/9 Maria Lúcia researched in a *bairro* as part of her Master’s degree. She had worked there for two years previously, following a women’s association day care programme. She interviewed Ivete, mother of Clovis (who was 11 at the time) and also two of her children: Carla, a girl of 9, and Cassimiro, a boy of 7. In 2006, Priscilla, a Master’s student who lives in the neighbourhood, took Castaneira’s thesis at the local university and showed it to Ivete’s family, who read with interest the section where their names were cited. Clovis’s daughter noted particularly what her grandma, Ivete, said about her father and his dislike of schooling. Then, in a more recent visit, Clovis himself referred to these accounts of his ideas about schooling from his perspective as someone now working in electronics.

Clovis refers back to moments of his life including the relationship of the literacy practices at school to those required in the factory he started with his father and a brother, which makes machines to produce packages for such goods as yoghurt, milk, etc. He recalls an original experience in which literacy was seen as associated with schooling whilst other literacy practices didn’t count – the notion of ‘Hidden Literacies’ (Nabi et al. 2009). In fact he is now engaged in complex literacy practices, for instance, in his map of circuit boards (see photo 3) and his use of computer programs for projecting new machines.

One interesting observation across these periods was that writing became much more visible on the streets of Trombetas, e.g. advertising, signs, pamphlets, and newsstands. Also changes in the Trombetas landscape resulted from and reflected the economic change from a rural economy to the area becoming an industrial/urban economy. In the 1980s, the region where Trombetas is located (Ibirité) received migrant families looking for work in the industrial area of Belo Horizonte. The job market expanded and
work became available in factories (making automobiles, clothes, cement, mechanical structures, etc.), in construction, in commercial stores, and also involving cleaning and working as maids for the better-off families. The 1980s were known as the years of the ‘Brazilian economic miracle’, as it was named by the military government. This period was marked by the intensification of industrialisation and urbanisation, hyperinflation, waves of rural workers moving to major cities (e.g. São Paulo, Belo Horizonte). The military government discourse was that economic wealth needed to grow for it later to be ‘shared’ with all. In reality, the economic miracle was just for a few, workers were living in very difficult conditions. Migrant families went to live in poor metropolitan areas such as Trombetas (see photo 1). Many of them did not have qualifications for specialised jobs, and worked on informal contracts, with large families earning less than the minimal wage. In these families, the majority of adults had no schooling or only two years of elementary school. Their children left school at a young age to get jobs as maids, cleaners, and masons. Many of these children were part of a contingent for whom school had failed at first grade. For decades, Brazil had been known for not promoting 50% of first graders to second grade.
Later, after the end of the military years, the Brazilian economy began to stabilise. New economic programmes such as Plano Real, implemented in 1994, opened the path for the creation of conditions that would help to control inflation. These changes were followed by a certain improvement of working conditions, and some families began to see more of their members earning a minimal wage. By 2009, the landscape of Trombetas had changed (see photo 2), and become a dormitory neighbourhood.

At the beginning of the new century, Brazil universalised schooling, and cash transfer programmes helped poor families to keep their children in school.

In the table below, we present a comparison of educational policies that were in place in the late 1980s and in 2009.

Various educational policies were in place when Castanheira initiated the second case study in 2009: automatic schooling promotion to correct school flow was initiated in 1983. In 1998, the government revised the textbook programme that had been created in 1954, and required that textbooks for all disciplines be reviewed and evaluated by university researchers and teachers before they were bought and distributed by the state universally in public schools. Research has indicated that this kind of evaluation improved
the quality of textbooks, and in the case of Portuguese and early literacy textbooks gave space for a social approach for teaching reading and writing. A cash transfer programme was implemented from 2001, and to take part in this programme families had to keep their children in school. In the early 2000s, there was also a reduction in the number of students in the first grade class from 45 to 25, the expansion of elementary school from eight to nine years, and an increase in the number of systemic assessments in various levels of schooling, which contributed to a test-driven curriculum in many places. In 2009, working-class families, such as those that lived in Trombetas, began to see some of their children finishing high school. With affirmative action programmes implemented by Lula’s government, some students had access to public college. (Note that 70% of Brazilian college students go to private college.) Working-class college students either pay for less expensive colleges or have their study financed by the State programmes that support private institutions. While the consequences of these changes for working-class families need to be further investigated, we develop here a case study that contribute to the wider debate.
One case study of these changes that we develop further here can be seen in the experience of Clovis, who cites different ways of seeing himself with reference to different institutions, and who can be seen to navigate across these institutions. For instance, he refers back to moments of his life including school, the factory, church and his relationship to people in these settings. In the thesis written by Castanheira when Clovis was 9 years old, his mother is cited as saying Clovis didn’t like school. Like many of his colleagues and Brazilian students, he was part of ‘school failure’ statistics. Clovis, now 35 years old, refers back to his experience at 9 years old, representing his position and identity and the movement he made in his life. He signals meanings that school had for him, the agency he has for his own development. People such as him created space for themselves, their life, separately from school. For instance, he reports on his earlier experience, ‘What I used to think, it was a kind of ignorance what is no good, I used to think … How is Tiradentes [a Brazilian leader resistant to the original Portuguese rulers] going to help me with electronics?’ Reflecting on his past action from his more recent role as a father, he assesses his past view of school as somehow limited and presents reasons why he did not like school: for instance it had no relationship with his interest in electronics. So, he says that at that time, ‘I used to skip classes to go to my father’s workshop. I would hide it from him because if he found out he would hit me; it was a workshop for fixing TV. I was fascinated by electronics. So I kept skipping
classes. One day my father found that out and he almost hit me saying, “You are going to study!”

Castanheira asked him, ‘Did your dad stay in the workshop?’ and he answered, ‘No, only his employee was there, and he covered up for me. I stayed there helping him to fix TV. I got lots of criticism at that time such as, “He is dumb”, “He failed at school”.’ So, we can see Clovis getting help from others: for instance, his father had a small place where he fixed TVs and radios and Clovis was able to stay and learn in this alternative space, a kind of apprenticeship that clearly helped his identity shift. So, as he grew older, he began to be able to celebrate the rewards of an alternative path to formal schooling, inverting his position with those that had evaluated him negatively. By the time he was about 16 years old, he had developed his knowledge of new technologies, started buying computer parts and assembling computers himself. He also created a place, a small school for teaching others how to use computers. During this period, he was able to pass on what he had learned about technology and the uses of the computer, so even the school principal respected him for this: Clovis the ‘dumb’ gave classes to the ‘principal’. In an interview he affirmed, ‘I started to work young; many that were smart in my classroom worked for me; the guys were working for me who was the “dumb”.’ He was able, then, to remember and reaffirm his path to others and to challenge the negative way he had been positioned in the school context through positively creating work space for others in alternative learning spaces, in this case involving new technology and computer skills.

In trying to make sense of these experiences in terms of the wider debates about literacy and learning with which we are concerned here, we can see Clovis’ recall of the original sense of schooling as legitimising literacy capacities. In this case, the schooling view of Clovis’ experience meant deficit – he was seen as ‘dumb’, ‘too shy to look in people’s eyes’. But now he actually practises literacy in his occupation and social relations in quite complex ways, which we might see from beyond the schooled context as social practices of literacy. Yet even now he and others may still see his practices as inferior – the notion of ‘Hidden Literacies’ (cf. Nabi et al. 2009) in which literacy is seen as associated with schooling whilst other literacy practices don’t count. The schooling ideology, then, still lurks in the discourse. The complexity of the actual literacy practices he was engaged in can be seen, for instance, in Clovis’s map of circuit boards and use of computer programmes for projecting new machines (see photo 3).
Conclusions

The experience we recount here, then, leads to a number of questions that can be seen as part of the larger debates in the field of literacy and education. For instance, we found ourselves asking many questions. How do these people, whom educators aim to reach, talk about themselves over time and across different institutional settings? How do they navigate across these settings? What are the implications of these questions and these data for literacy and development policy? What implications do these questions raise for research methods, for instance: how can we follow people as they navigate across sites and settings and track their actual uses of literacy? Here the application of an ethnographic perspective, adopted for these studies, might also have broader significance. Finally, we might ask what are the implications of such work for how we understand schooling, education and learning and their relation to people’s actual lives?

Based on ILD 15, presented on 24 February 2014

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SECTION III: Community/Language

9. Parental Involvement in the Provision of Mother-Tongue Materials: Two Exploratory Interventions
   *Barbara Graham*

10. Community Involvement in Planning and Implementing Local Education Programmes
    *Catherine Young*

11. Literacy Publishing for Northern Nigeria
    *Mary Anderson*

12. ‘One Finger Can’t Crush a Louse!’ The Development of a Community of Literacy Practice in Tanzania: from Orthography to Literacy
    *Margaret Beckett*

**Introduction**

The theme in this section is ‘Community Language’ with papers that focus on local involvement of parents and community, taking account of different language involvements and their implications for education and publishing.

Barbara Graham extends to contexts in the global South studies of the valuable role parents and care-givers play in supporting children’s education through literacy and other activities at home, and she points out ‘the extent to which parents are involved in children’s education and the potential for increased involvement in children’s literacy development’. Two exploratory interventions enable her to apply ideas about parental intervention to areas in Tana Delta County, situated in the semi-arid coastal area of Kenya, which is characterised by high levels of poverty and low literacy levels. Barbara concludes by proposing that similar interventions, over a longer period, could be conducted in the future ‘with a design which makes provision for careful evaluations of their effectiveness both for supporting parental involvement in producing mother-tongue (MT) materials and children’s literacy progress’, a key theme in the overall approach of authors in this volume.

A similar theme is explored by Catherine Young, who points out that ‘research is increasingly bringing to light how consideration for culture and language
in the schooling system has a significant impact on learning achievement and identity formation’. One effect of this approach in Asia has been growing support for mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) as a tool to address both indigenous rights and nation-building agendas, an approach which leads to the more general question, ‘How can non-dominant language communities achieve their education and development goals while retaining – and celebrating – their languages and cultures?’, a question that is addressed implicitly or explicitly by the authors in this volume. In pursuing this question in an Asian context, Catherine reflects on her experiences while supporting the work of Save the Children in Bangladesh and the work of SIL Bangladesh, working with local language communities in the southeast and northwest of the country. She has also compared and contrasted Bangladesh experiences with education and development programme consulting and programme evaluation in the Philippines, Cambodia and Nepal. Again a rich international comparison of complex local data can feed in to the overall issues raised in this volume regarding social and community perspectives on literacy practices and their implications for education. For Catherine, the relationship of adults and children is a key issue, moving beyond the dominant policy perspectives that have tended to focus on schooling and the testing of children, as Rogers notes in the first section of this volume.

Mary Anderson notes the ways in which commercial pressures interact with educational policies, goals and aspirations, especially at school level, in the context of Northern Nigeria, where she has worked in the field of literacy, drawing on her academic background in linguistics and language-teaching. The conundrum for a publishing practitioner, she suggests, is how the view of literacy as social practice, that most contributors to this volume are representing, relates to the ‘political and commercial realities that are part of the educational world’. To address this she applies anecdotal reflections drawn from her particular professional experience, with a focus on children’s literacy, ‘but with sideways glances at the intricate links and mutual influences between children’s and adult/community literacies’, a theme we have seen throughout. A combination of local data with a more socially aware overview can, she suggests, help us to understand the role of literacy in these education systems. In accomplishing this aim and helping readers who will engage with the BALID volume, she goes on to provide detailed accounts of the use of text books in such contexts and unpacks the ‘Hausa literacy market’ as a way in to such local understanding.

In the last paper in the book, Margaret Beckett describes her work with the Rangi people in Kondoa District in Central Tanzania, 100 miles north of the
national capital, Dodoma. The population of 450,000-500,000 are farmers who live in a relatively undeveloped area in terms of roads and services. The Rangi are proud of their language and heritage and many maintain their use of language and love for their history and traditions even when they have to move to the cities to work to support their families. Rangi is the language of everyday life but is forbidden in schools where the official languages are English and Swahili. The Rangi believe that ‘togetherness is strength’. Margaret describes getting to understand the people, the language and the culture and this community strength. Developing an orthography and working with local people using a community approach they initially developed three booklets. The programme gradually expanded and a network of group leaders was developed. Forty books in the Rangi language have now been produced.

The fascinating and different complex accounts of local literacy practices provided in this final section of the book can give us all a basis from which to then engage further in the comparative and international comparison and analysis on which the volume is premised.
9 Parental Involvement in the Provision of Mother-Tongue Materials: Two Exploratory Interventions

Barbara Graham
SIL International

Introduction
Research studies conducted in western countries have consistently demonstrated the valuable role parents and care-givers play in supporting children’s education through literacy and other activities at home (Heath 1983, Wells 1986; Ada 1988; Stewart 1995; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Kernan 2012). This paper explores the relevance of their findings for the very different contexts existing in the global South. It considers the extent to which parents are involved in children’s education and the potential for increased involvement in children’s literacy development. A review of major research findings is followed by descriptions of two small-scale interventions in Kenya, designed to explore the potential for parental involvement in the production of reading materials in different languages; to facilitate discussions about literacy in general, and mother-tongue (MT) literacy in particular; and to stimulate literacy-related interactions between adults and children. The paper concludes with a discussion of the achievements, potential achievements and constraints.

Desforges and Abouchaar’s (2003) review of research findings from North America, Australasia, continental Europe, Scandinavia and the UK identified many forms of parental involvement, comprising home-related factors, such as the provision of a secure and stable environment; intellectual stimulation from parent-child discussion; and good models of social and educational values, as well as parents’ contact with the school for sharing information, participating in school events and in school governance. The most significant positive effect on children’s achievement was found to be the spontaneously occurring interactions which help to shape their self-concept as learners and to set high aspirations. This finding concurs with Vygotsky’s (1986) proposal that learning, viewed as cultural understandings, is achieved through interaction and dialogue within the zone of proximal
development (ZPD), the distance between a child’s current attainment and his or her potential development, made possible through problem-solving with guidance from adults or more able peers. Also shown to be supportive are factors associated with literacy-rich home environments, such as the number of books available; time spent on literacy activities; and the age at which the child began reading with adults (Stewart 1995). Factors not directly related to reading and writing, such as watching television, doing chores and playing, can also support literacy achievement.

Literacy-rich environments and literacy-based parent-child interactions are most evident in western countries where literacy materials abound and where a tradition of adults reading with children exists. This is not true of all communities in western countries, however. Lower socio-economic or non-dominant groups often have literacy practices which differ from the prevailing practices promoted by schools (Heath 1983; Gregory 2002; Kenner et al. 2004). The low academic attainment persistently experienced by many of these communities has led to specifically targeted literacy interventions (Evangelou et al. 2008; Hemphill and Tivnan 2008; Stavans 2012). Some researchers have reacted against what they see as a deficit model in which parents’ styles of interaction is equated with children’s lack of success in school (Heath 1983; Gregory 1994; Moll et al. 1992; Stavans 2012). They suggest that schools need to do more to recognise and to accommodate the different experiences and skills that parents and children gain outside school as a basis for literacy development. Stavans (2012: 19), for example, criticizes the ‘patronising and unsympathetic scholastic framework’ of schools which do not value the cultural and linguistic diversity of Ethiopian immigrants to Israel:

Ethiopian parents could promote and support their child’s literacy development during schooling, in their own ways and according to their cultural background, if schools were to encourage that. Their literacy practices, as those of other immigrant and minority ethnic groups, would differ significantly from other non-Ethiopian families. These practices undoubtedly would play an important role in the child’s literacy development.

The broader understanding of the influences on literacy progress is good news for children living in the global South where, in many cases, the language used at home differs from the school; there are few literacy materials in the home, either in the first language (L1) or in the language(s) used at school; and parents are often not confident users of school literacy. The notion that literacy is ‘ideological’, representing not one ‘autonomous’ entity but
situated ‘literacies’ practised by people in different social settings supports the legitimacy of differing literacy experiences and styles of interaction (Street 1984). However, it is seldom recognised by parents or educators in the global South that parents’ interactions with children can have much to do with the learning taking place in school, or that parents can be involved directly in children’s learning.

Interviews with teachers and parents conducted in an economically disadvantaged community in rural Zimbabwe at the beginning of a study of parental involvement found that teachers felt that parents could offer nothing to children’s literacy development (Ngwaru and Opoku-Amanka 2010). Parents too, did not see themselves as active partners with the school. One parent did acknowledge that ‘We help by forcing them to school since they do not know the importance of schooling’ (p. 302). Another commented ‘I respect school education because it instils discipline and self-control’ (p. 302). The comments indicate that at least one form of parental involvement mentioned above – good models of social and educational values – was present. Parents were not unconcerned about education but the challenges which most impacted their lives, their ‘ruling passions’, were related to poverty and not literacy (Ngwaru and Opoku-Amanka 2010). When their ruling passions were allowed to be expressed and acknowledged, parents were willing to engage in discussions about literacy. Ngwaru (Ngwaru and Opoku-Amanka 2010) contends that the quality of parents’ engagement with teachers observed during his research challenges the widespread assumption that African parents lack the necessary willingness or ‘capital’ to engage actively in their children’s education.

**Tana Delta County, Kenya**

Tana Delta County, situated in the semi-arid coastal area of Kenya, is characterised by high levels of poverty and low literacy levels. In a country-wide assessment of literacy and numeracy in the first three years of primary school the county was ranked 119 out of 122 counties (Uwezo 2011). The assessment was carried out in Swahili and English, in accordance with the languages most often used for education in lower primary classes in Tana Delta schools. Neither Swahili nor English is the MT of the majority of children in the area. The major MTs are Pokomo, a Bantu language, and Orma, a Cushitic language. English, the former colonial language, and Swahili, an indigenous language of wider communication, are both official languages of Kenya. English is mandated to be used exclusively as the language of instruction from grade 4 onwards (except in lessons for the subject Swahili). Swahili is most often used between people who do not share the same MT.
Kenya’s language-in-education policy states that the MT of the catchment area is to be used in the first three years of primary school as the language of instruction and also taught as a subject in a 30 minute MT lesson each day (Kenya Institute of Education 2002). Practice however rarely complies with policy since English, and to a lesser extent Swahili, is mostly used. Teachers and parents accept the language-in-education status quo as it is felt that teaching through English as early as possible will better equip children to succeed in a very competitive education landscape. Furthermore, school textbooks (apart from those for teaching the Swahili language), are generally available only in English. The Pokomo and Orma languages are therefore seen as spoken languages, with little value for education. This view persists despite studies and pilot programmes showing beneficial results when MT is used as a principal medium of education for as long as possible (Ramirez et al. 1991; Thomas and Collier 1997; Walter and Chuo 2011), and that reading in the MT leads to greater comprehension and engagement (Trudell and Piper 2014).

A challenge to the language in education status quo was mounted by a local NGO, the Pokomo Language Project in 2002 with its Pokomo Mother Tongue Education (MTE) programme. The Pokomo MTE programme sought to facilitate the use of the Pokomo language in lower primary classes in schools where Pokomo children were in the majority. Through its work 30 Pokomo story books and three textbooks for the Pokomo MT lesson were distributed to ten pilot schools. The books were the result of a series of workshops where teachers and illustrators from the community were brought together to write and illustrate stories. The time from writing to trial materials going into schools was about 18 months. The production of higher specification printed copies took much longer due to funding issues.

The programme also conducted ‘mobile library’ sessions which met outside of class times and made use of all the Pokomo books so far produced by the Pokomo Language Project, whether for children or adults. It was soon found that the numbers of Pokomo books were inadequate. However, the cost of production and time involved meant that it was unlikely that more books would be produced soon enough. It was also noted that books in other languages were needed because though Pokomo children constituted the vast majority in these schools there were still some children from other language groups. There were as yet no published Orma books available, but Swahili books would have been a good interim measure for children who did not speak Pokomo. The dearth of African MT books is well noted (Ogechi and Bosire-Ogechi 2002; Edwards and Ngwaru 2011). The
perceived lack of commercial viability, particularly for the education market; lack of writers, editors and other publishing machinery catering for MT texts; agreed orthography for many languages; and the greater material and social ‘capital’ of the English language – all serve to downgrade publishing in African languages. However, against these obstacles must be placed the significance of literacy for ongoing education and the importance of regularly reading a range of reading materials in appropriate languages for enhanced literacy development. While acknowledging current realities for MT publishing, solutions must be sought. One possibility may be to use locally available resources to provide cost effective reading materials in a timely manner. Locally available resources include human resources represented by parents who can use their knowledge of the community’s oral literature and their writing skills to provide materials in the MT for their children.

**Two exploratory interventions**

The first intervention addressed the need for reading materials in the Pokomo language. The original idea was that parents of children in lower primary classes would be invited to the school and told about the project to write known children’s stories and songs for children in the school. Parents registering their interest would be asked to attend three one-hour writing sessions with their own pencil and two exercise books. One exercise book would be used for writing drafts and the other one for a neat final version. It was considered that the cost of these materials, equivalent to 30 pence or less, would not be prohibitive for parents as they usually provided exercise books and pencils for children in school. The use of inexpensive materials also addressed the issue of sustainability if the intervention was to become an ongoing aspect of parent-school interaction. A meeting to which all parents of children in the lower primary school were invited would also provide a good opportunity for parents to hear a presentation of the reasons and expectations for the proposed intervention. Even though a parents’ meeting would not reach those who do not usually attend such meetings, it would allow parents who attended to be informed and to give their immediate response on the possibility of attending the sessions where they would write, receive feedback from others in the group, then write a final version for children to read.

The plans underwent some changes during discussions with the head teacher of the school where permission was sought for the intervention. Rather than a meeting to inform a large percentage of parents from the lower primary,
the head teacher suggested using a convenient sample of parents, i.e. those making up the school management committee (SMC). The three hour-long writing sessions, were reduced to one two-hour session, taking place on the day the SMC was due to have a meeting. Finally, the exercise books and pencil for each participant were to be provided by the NGO and not by participants. The writing session began with the 12 SMC participants examining and reading a display of Pokomo books. Most were not aware that books in the Pokomo language were being used in the school or that the official policy stipulated MT use in lower primary classes. They were told why Pokomo reading materials were important for children and also the role that they themselves could play in providing reading materials. Participants were then asked to write a traditional story, song or other form of oral literature for children that they were familiar with in the Pokomo language. By the end of the two-hour session, even though few had written in Pokomo before, everyone had drafted texts; checked their work with others; written their final version and read the texts to, and with, a group of children. A sheet of lined paper was placed under the plain page of the second book to act as guidelines in assisting with keeping the letters of uniform size. The group benefited from the presence of a few participants who had attended the Pokomo Project’s adult literacy classes and who gave assistance with Pokomo spelling where necessary.

The second intervention took place in a different school but continued the theme of local involvement in the production of reading materials. This school had a greater mix of languages and therefore, as well as Pokomo texts, the goal was also Swahili and English texts. The possibility of texts written in other MTs was not excluded. Parental involvement was one component of a Reading and Writing club for class 2 children, meeting two days per week after school hours. Each session lasted for one hour and the club continued for ten weeks in one school before moving on to another school. Club activities were based on a collection of texts in Pokomo, Swahili and English. The texts were presented on A4 laminated sheets, or story cards. The first story cards consisted of original material written by Pokomo MTE staff and reformatted versions of previously written texts. During each session which MTE staff and the teacher co-facilitated, children sang from an enlarged printed song sheet; listened to a story from one of the story cards; wrote freely in response to the story; and read story cards of their choice. At the end of ten weeks the school was expected to buy a set of 100 story cards, made up of 20 English, 40 Swahili, and 40 Pokomo texts. Some of these texts would be ones used during the club and would therefore be familiar, while others would be newly added. It was hoped that the new
texts would include some material written by parents and the class teacher in the language of their choice.

Before the launch of the club, a meeting of the class 2 parents was held to discuss the idea of the club. Most of the parents attended to hear the head teacher, the MTE representative and the class teacher talk about the value of having a large amount of long-lasting reading material in the children’s languages. The teacher even compared a book with torn covers and curled pages currently being used in the class with examples of laminated story cards to make the point about longevity of materials. After these discussions the cost of the story cards was addressed. It had been thought that the school would bear the cost of the set of story cards, at 1000 Kenya shillings, equivalent to about £8 at the time. This amount did not cover the cost of production but was based on what it was felt the school might comfortably afford. During the meeting the head teacher instead told the parents that the cost would have to be met by the parents themselves. Parents immediately calculated how much each would need to pay. Some gave their money to the teacher immediately while the others committed to bring their contribution in the following weeks. Also during this meeting, parents were invited to contribute to the set of story cards by submitting texts written at home to be developed into story cards by MTE staff. By the end of the ten weeks two stories in English had been received from the class teacher and a number of short texts in Swahili were received from parents, or other family members. The last session of the club was a celebratory time attended by parents, the head teacher, a local councillor and other teachers in which children displayed aspects of the club by singing, reading and acting out one of the stories. The set of 100 stories in the three languages was presented to the class. Unfortunately only the contribution from the teacher made it into the final 100 story cards. The home-produced Swahili texts from parents appeared too late to be included.

Discussion
The need for MT reading materials was a major impetus for these interventions which also aimed to explore the potential for parental involvement in ongoing writing for local readership – children in the primary school. At the very least the interventions achieved local writing, which was shared with others or with the potential to be shared, first in the Pokomo language and also in Swahili and English. Other achievements and potential achievements can also be noted. These, and the constraints which also exist, are explored below.
Research findings suggesting that the most effective aspect of parental support is the spontaneously occurring interactions between parents and children suggest that activities encouraging such interactions would be most helpful. The first innovation was carried out under the direction of a facilitator, at a specific time and place and was therefore not spontaneous. However, a degree of spontaneity was present in the interaction between adults and children as the adults shared their writing with a group of children. No specific instructions were given to the individuals who volunteered to share their writing, apart from being asked to read with the group of children. However, they engaged in a range of activities including reading to the children and asking questions afterwards; reading a song line by line, which the children repeated as the parent pointed to the words; singing the song with the children, again pointing to the words; and allowing the children to read a story while pointing to the words but without joining in. Their spontaneous action suggested that they might already be used to interacting with young children in this way, though perhaps not doing so regularly around books. The interactions could also serve as an encouragement to those who volunteered and those observing to use their writing in this way at home. In the second intervention the texts produced by the teacher and parents, or older siblings, can be considered to be spontaneous since they were written at the writers’ volition, in their own time and concerned a self-chosen topic.

The interventions also placed literacy activities within a local setting by using locally-available resources to meet a local need. The major impetus for both interventions was to provide reading materials in the local language for students. This was the rationale presented to parents but it is doubtful if this was a felt need for the participants who took part in the first intervention. They were willing to take part, perhaps as an interesting diversion before their meeting, since there was no discussion prior to the meeting about the exact nature of the activity. However, the discussion after the exercise was valuable in revealing their concerns about the literacy achievement of their children and providing an opportunity to discuss the role of MT literacy in supporting achievement. There was no prior belief expressed in the value of MT literacy to address the perceived lack of adequate literacy progress, but many of the participants expressed willingness to continue to write in Pokomo. It may be that a continuing experience of writing in the MT along with reading to, and with, children could positively affect their position over time. The texts written for the second intervention were expected to join others as part of the story-card set. It was unfortunate that texts written by
parents did not appear on the final set of story cards since it is likely that the appearance of a selection of home-produced writing along with the name of the author would encourage writing for possible inclusion in other story-card sets.

Both interventions also provided a forum for discussions about literacy between parents, teachers and MTE staff promoting MT literacy. Topics addressed included the value of MT literacy, the spelling system of the Pokomo language, book provision in different languages, and the affordability and longevity of reading materials. These topics resulted from the practical activity of writing and reading in which parents were engaged, or invited to engage. These achievements, though modest, illustrate the potential for parental involvement despite the constraints that undoubtedly exist in rural areas of the global South.

Perhaps the greatest constraint is the novelty of the notion that parents could be involved in providing reading materials for schools by writing their own texts. Parents are used to supporting the school by paying various kinds of fees towards the running of the school and by being involved in school committees. Participating in writing materials to be used by the children in the school was a new idea, not only for parents and teachers but also for MTE staff members. The sustainability of both activities requires head teachers, teachers and MTE staff to be convinced of the value of involving parents in children’s learning generally, and more particularly, of the value of using these kinds of activities to promote parental involvement. They would also need to be committed to the efforts needed to empower parents to provide this kind of support. The novelty of the idea may have been behind the reticence of the head teacher to extend the invitation for the first intervention to a wider cross-section of parents. Even the modest achievement alluded to above may not be seen as important if this kind of parental involvement is not valued, or is seen as an irrelevance or disruption to usual school activities.

Another important constraint is the availability of human and financial resources. The first intervention required a facilitator to plan and coordinate the activities as well as finances to purchase the equipment used. The facilitator was a member of the MTE team acting in a voluntary capacity. The venture could have continued with the support of MTE personnel but MTE programmes are often understaffed and unable to extend themselves to all the possibilities for work presented. Another option would be for a core group of parents to be trained to undertake the roles involved in the activity
and a committee formed. Though brief conversations were held with the head teacher and the SMC about the possibility of the initiative continuing, neither option was seriously explored. Furthermore, the role of the instigator of the intervention changed, leaving the programme without personnel to build on the intervention. Although the original design of the intervention aimed for low financial cost, some costs were inevitable. The head teacher either did not believe that parents should be asked, or would be able, to contribute finances for the materials they would use. The sustainability of innovations rests heavily on the availability of adequate funding. Where funding is largely dependent on external sources it is prone to external pressures. Local funding may also experience pressures from varied forces, but local providers may be in a better provision to make small adjustments.

The second intervention used personnel from the MTE programme as well as the teacher to lead the Reading and Writing Club week by week. The sessions acted as training for the teacher who was expected to take over after the 10 weeks by running a similar club or by using some of the activities in the class. The process of making the story cards was also labour intensive, requiring hours of work on the part of MTE staff to write and edit stories then format, print and laminate them. The second intervention, unlike the first, involved the parents’ own resources to a degree. They contributed finances for buying the set of story cards and wrote texts using their note paper and pencils or pens. Though lack of finances do present constraints, these parents’ willingness to contribute to the provision of reading materials from their own resources suggest that parents might be willing, when able, to use their resources for innovations they perceive will be of benefit to their children. Finance also impacts on quality. The presentation quality of home-produced writing was not a priority as they were expected to be developed into story cards by MTE staff. The stories completed during the first session were, however required to be neatly written, so that they could be read by children, hence the additional plain exercise book and the sheet of guidelines to ensure uniformity of size and straight lines. The presentation would still not be favourably compared with professionally published books and it could be argued that MT books would then be equated with low quality in the eyes of parents and children. However the argument can also be made that locally-written stories represent value for writers and readers that may not be comparable with professionally produced books. Additionally, the greater the volume of writing produced in the community, the more writing skills will be developed and the greater the likelihood that material will be available for eventual professional publication.
Achievements and the potential for further achievement have been alluded to above, along with attendant constraints. The potential for parental involvement in the provision of MT texts and other languages exists if opportunity is given for regular writing events about which a wide cross-section of parents are informed and invited to participate; and if value is given to parents’ writing by the texts being shared and used with children directly or developed into story cards. The resulting presentation might not be favourably compared with professionally-published books but parent- and community-produced texts may confer benefits in relation to the writers’ perception of themselves as contributors to children’s learning and as a means of encouraging literacy-based interaction with children at home as well as in school. Despite the modest achievements noted, the constraints may mean that these interventions may not be easily replicated, even though some aspects may continue. For example, a version of the Reading and Writing club still continues in some schools but without the component of materials creation and therefore without the aspect of writing produced at home by parents. It would be valuable if similar interventions, over a longer period, were conducted in the future with a design which made provision for careful evaluation of their effectiveness both for supporting parental involvement in producing MT materials and children’s literacy progress.

Based on ILD 3, presented on 13 May 2012

References


Introduction

Research is increasingly bringing to light how consideration for culture and language in the schooling system has a significant impact on learning achievement and identity formation. This is reflected in a growing number of rights declarations that support culturally relevant education for Indigenous Minorities (e.g. World Council of Indigenous People’s declaration of principles and ILO Convention [169] Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples).

Consequently there is a growing support in Asia for mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) as a tool to address both indigenous rights and nation-building agendas. Such support comes from many sectors including large multilateral organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF, international funding institutions such as the World Bank and the SEAMEO (Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation), an intergovernmental organisation promoting regional cooperation through education, science, and culture.

Countries in Asia have also signed the World Declaration on Education For All and have been making efforts to achieve this. Throughout Asia, despite initial reluctance in some nations to empower minorities, local offices of education have been permitted to conduct pilots in MTB-MLE, and there is a growing acceptance of the approach and provision in national policies (Kosonen and Young 2009). However, weak participation from local communities and low government capacity to implement MTB-MLE threatens to undermine the success of these pilots, which may lead to their abandonment. There is, therefore, a growing need to build civil society institutions to support and encourage this effort, and to continue to hold the government accountable to its EFA commitments.
A critical question in regard to education and development for non-dominant language communities is:

How can non-dominant language communities achieve their education and development goals while retaining – and celebrating – their languages and cultures?

Sociolinguistic issues of identity and development in a globalising/globalised world, issues of migration and immigration, displaced populations as well as indigenous non-dominant language communities have encouraged educators and development facilitators to focus on issues of language and culture in the delivery of appropriate and effective quality education.

This presentation arises from reflection on experiences while supporting the work of Save the Children in Bangladesh and the work of SIL Bangladesh working with local language communities in the southeast and northwest of the country. I have also compared and contrasted Bangladesh experiences with education and development programme consulting and programme evaluation in the Philippines, Cambodia and Nepal.

Community participation

Francis Keppel (1916–1990), American educator and United States Commissioner of Education (1962–1965), is reputed to have said, ‘Education is too important to be left solely to the educators.’ This phrase was repeated recently by Congressman Magtangol T. Gunigundo of the Philippines when addressing a national symposium on mother-tongue-based multilingual education, concerned with the development and design of MTB-MLE programmes in a country of more than 168 languages, emphasising the potential role of communities – particularly representative language and development associations – in the design and development of mother-tongue-based multilingual education.

Appropriate, contextualised mother-tongue-based multilingual education involves collaborative top-down and bottom-up activities from national level duty-bearers such as Departments and Ministries of Education, national and international funding institutions and more locally-based formal and non-formal organisations.

School management committees can be one example of community involvement in promoting mother-tongue-based multilingual education. The roles and responsibilities can be practical, administrative and may
include monitoring of the programme. School management committees may facilitate parent/teacher interaction and may be responsible and accountable to others external to the community. In non-formal education, school management committees may be positioned as recipients of funds in order to implement community-based education programmes.

A proposed structure for the implementation of mother-tongue-based multilingual education in a country in the Asia-Pacific region proposed the creation of two community-based agencies – mother-tongue councils and parent associations – in areas where MTB-MLE pilot projects would be situated.

Their main roles and responsibilities would be to participate in orthography development, material production and community mobilisation. The councils would work very closely with MLE teachers, regional coordinators and parent associations on curriculum adaptation to reflect the values and cultural context of local associations and to create literature and instructional materials for the children in the programme. National organisations and those giving technical assistance would intentionally build capacity in mother-tongue councils and parent associations to support on-going material development and promote intergenerational mother-tongue literacies.

The involvement of parents and close family members is key in adapting the curriculum to reflect the experiences of learners from non-dominant language communities. By contributing stories that are relevant to local context and dialoguing with professional educators on cultural values and practices, the curriculum and instructional materials will more accurately reflect the pre-school experiences of the learner and the desires of the community for education.

Cambodia
Building Community Involvement in Bilingual Education (BCIBE) and the current project, Identity-based Community Development and Education (iBCDE) (http://www.icc.org.kh/activities/iBCDE), both run by International Cooperation for Cambodia (ICC), are examples of ways in which community involvement can be valued and can support appropriate, quality education. Although education among Bunong in the Mondulkiri province of Cambodia is improving, the Bunong people have often expressed themselves as objects rather than subjects in matters of education, and few understand that they have rights to education that include the use of local languages.
and culture. Assisted by its high proportion of Bunong staff, ICC has made significant inroads in representing minority educational issues. However, it is aware that greater legitimacy must be achieved by mobilising community-based groups. It has become increasingly apparent that the sustainability of cultural consideration in education, such as that provided by MTB-MLE, depends on the community’s own ability to voice its concerns. In order to do this the community needs to critically reflect on the importance of culture in education, organise itself and voice its opinions through effective and appropriate channels. The diagram below (International Cooperation for Cambodia 2014: 2) shares the community action/reflection cycle practised by the staff teams of iBCDE.

Figure 1: The community action/reflection cycle used by iBCDE

The following are the objectives reflecting the theory of change within the iBCDE project. Notice the integration of education and development outcomes rather than the isolation of education/schooling from societal needs.

**Objective 1: Community wellbeing**
Desired Change: Indigenous minority communities are aware of the social and cultural change happening in their community, and are taking action to ensure that this is congruent with their desired future.
Objective 2: Culturally-relevant education

Desired Change 1: Indigenous minority communities understand the purpose of education and are taking increasing ownership of education in their village.

Desired Change 2: Local educators (formal and informal) in indigenous minority villages have the capacity to fulfil educational rights.

Objective 3: Improved Indigenous Livelihoods

Desired Change: Indigenous minority communities are able to sustain and improve valuable natural and agricultural resources in the face of societal and environmental change.

Participation in programme design and development

In the development of innovative approaches to the integration of language and education for minority-language communities, outside agencies may take the lead in curriculum design and adaptation or in instructional materials development. However, in line with both a rights paradigm and sociolinguistic principles underscoring knowledge of a language and ownership of language and culture, the involvement of parent associations or mother-tongue councils in programme development adds both to the quality of a programme and potentially to its sustainability, as capacity for programme development increasingly lies nearer to the beneficiaries of the education intervention. Three examples of such participation are shared below.

Orthography development

Participatory approaches to the development of a writing system that represents a language brings community members as full participants into the decision-making process. Such a participatory approach moves away from writing-system development as an activity isolated from the primary users of the language. Full linguistic information should be available and shared with the community and potential options discussed in order that script and orthography decisions (same as or different from national language; same as or different from neighbouring languages) can become a dialogue between outsiders and insiders. This has the potential to enable issues of group and ethnolinguistic identity to be established while understanding issues associated with learning, transition and transfer between languages.
Curriculum development

Programme goals are the foundation for planning, implementation and evaluation. Parents, teachers and others who understand the community and context that the learners come from, and who share the vision for the impact of the programme and outcomes for the learners when they have completed the MTB-MLE programme, can be participants in the establishment of these goals.

Mother-tongue councils, school management committees or parent associations can consider community values and mores and then describe the goals – cognitive, physical, affective – for learners in an MTB-MLE programme. Three general categories of goals may be considered:

- educational goals – the knowledge that learners will have attained on completion of activities or the programme
- language and cultural goals – the languages that will be used in activities or the programme and the relationship to their heritage language and culture and to the language(s) and culture(s) of the wider society, and
- social/economic goals – the ways in which education relates to both community and national development needs.

A thematic approach to community development enables both educators and teachers to identify topics that learners can relate to and identify localised content through which the programme goals can be met.

Materials production

Mother-tongue councils and parent associations can participate in the development of instructional materials for multilingual classroom through sharing stories and writing stories for both new readers and readers building fluency in reading in the mother tongue. The participation of community members in this process will help ensure that materials development will reflect the context in which the programme is embedded. Participation of community members – particularly adults – in writing, editing and illustrating stories for the classroom can heighten their involvement and ownership of programmes. The involvement of local illustrators ensures that pictures for instructional materials are aligned with the local context.

Parental and community participation in testing of materials, review of materials and selection of final materials will build understanding of both the programme plan and the desired goals/objectives of the programme.
Challenges

Bringing community members to workshops or in discussions does not, however, always denote participatory approaches or respect. It is vital that we contrast genuine participation with ‘tokenism’. Community members should have the opportunity to understand the consequences and the impact of their opinions and have confidence that their voices matter – non-genuine ‘participation’ often merely disguises what is actually manipulation, or tokenism. Again, the key to genuine participation is ensuring respect for views. In addition to facilitating and supporting activities to foster participation, it is increasingly important to consider whether and how to ensure follow-up of recommendations and concerns.

Genuine participation implies freedom from manipulation and pressures and requires shared trust with adults’ evolving capacity and willingness to listen to and learn from one another, to understand and consider the child’s point of view, to be willing to re-examine their own opinions and attitudes and to envisage solutions that address the needs of their children.

Participation is a challenging learning process and cannot be reduced to a simple formality. Fulfilling the right of children to participate in empowering education, beginning in their home language, entails training and mobilising adults who live and work with children, so that they are prepared to give children the chance freely and increasingly to participate in society.

Based on ILD 3, presented on 13 May 2012

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11 Literacy Publishing for Northern Nigeria

Mary Anderson
BALID

Introduction
In the expert world of development agencies, whether government or NGO, much research is undertaken and reported about the effects of intervention programmes, such as teacher training, curriculum development and IT support. These are widely described in annual reports, the development literature, and at conferences such as the UK Education and Development Forum (UKFIET). What may not be so obvious are the non-government, non-NGO factors that influence the field of literacy, such as literary heritage, local culture and politics, amongst others. The ultimate focus of this paper is the commercial pressures that interact with educational policies, goals and aspirations, especially at school level, in the context of Northern Nigeria.

Making money from educational pursuits has a long history, both in the private school tradition and in the production of educational materials. There is inevitably a market orientation, where what buyers expect and demand (whether parents, religious institutions, governments or exam bodies) dictates what is offered. My professional experience lies in creating educational books, and I will be exploring the research, thought processes and cultural negotiation that I engaged with in order to produce materials that are potentially perceived as appropriate – and commercially successful – for the Northern Nigerian market.

My academic background lies in linguistics and language-teaching. After a period of teaching and linguistic research in West Africa, I had a career in publishing during which I developed my editorial and writing skills. Axiomatic to the writing of this paper were two particular commissions: to write four books of a literacy and language arts primary course for the Caribbean (with its complex political mix of Creole and English), and then to co-write with Hausa colleagues a series of literacy books in Hausa for Northern Nigerian primary schools.
Since those two pieces of work, and since leading an informal literacy discussion for BALID in 2012, I have learnt much more about literacy issues through my BALID colleagues. In particular, I have become more aware of the concept of literacy as social practice. Brian Street (2000) defines literacy practices as the ‘broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts’. There is an inevitable tension between the conventional school classroom and such an interpretation of literacy:

Within the last twenty years, literacy has come to be seen in terms of a social practice…. Whereas the traditional view of literacy regards literacy as a skill acquired by individuals through an educational process typically located in the classroom, the social practice view focuses on the ways in which people make use of literacy as individuals or as communities of people. It locates literacy in the community and in everyday life (Cheffy 2007).

Below I refer to one of the outcomes of this approach – learner-generated writing.

The conundrum for a publishing practitioner is how to marry such a view of literacy with the political and commercial realities that are part of the educational world. What follows is a compendium of anecdotal reflections drawn from my particular professional experience. My focus is on children’s literacy, but with sideways glances at the intricate links and mutual influences between children’s and adult/community literacies.

The Northern Nigerian cultural context

Northern Nigeria is a complex cultural canvas. Much of the north-west and north central areas were politically united by the Sokoto caliphate (1809-1903 AD), which lasted until the British under Lord Lugard defeated Sultan Muhammadu Attahiru I at the Battle of Burmi, near present-day Bauchi. Borno, home of the Kanuri people, remained a distinct caliphate during the pre-colonial period, but was incorporated into the Northern Nigeria Protectorate in 1914.

Many different languages are spoken in the region, but the lingua franca is Hausa, a Chadic language that is ultimately related to Arabic and Hebrew in the Afro-asiatic language family. According to Wikipedia, in 2007 some 34 million people spoke Hausa as their first language and an estimated 15 million as a second language. There are sizeable populations of Hausa-
speakers in Niger (and the diaspora extends mainly westwards along trade routes), but the majority of Hausa speakers live in Nigeria.

With exponential population growth and the status of Hausa as a lingua franca, it can safely be assumed that the above figures are conservative estimates. In fact, it is likely that in Northern Nigeria the number of Hausa-speakers is on the rise, to the detriment of other less ‘useful’ languages. I would also argue that Hausa has a unifying effect on the region, which compares with the use of English and/or Pidgin across cultural and linguistic boundaries in the south of the country.

Hausa has a rich oral culture of fables, proverbs, riddles and poetry, which are well documented by Furniss (1996). These are the mainstay of evenings after dark, when grandmothers (in particular) enjoy time together with younger members of the family and the village community. I will refer to these later in the context of choosing texts for inclusion in literacy-teaching materials. Suffice it to say here that Hausa society has been recently described as being ‘steeped in the listening culture’ (Garba 2015), and a wealth of stories and books have been adapted for radio listening.

Alongside its listening culture we must consider literacy in the context of the literary culture of Northern Nigeria. Yakubu A. Nasidi (2015: 198) explains: ‘Ajami [the Hausa adaptation of Arabic script] had developed its own forms of literacy based upon the local adaptation of the Arabic writing in northern areas … especially after the Sokoto Jihad at the beginning of the 19th century.’ Ajami writing for Islamic studies and for poetry continues to be a strong force in the 21st century. However, it exists alongside a literary tradition in the Roman script, which was established in the 1930s by the Literature Bureau under Dr Rupert East (Adamu 2015). This led to a wealth of Hausa literature in Roman script, which is still enjoyed to this day. People on the street will still talk with delight about Magana Jari Ce and Ruwan Bagaja, both classics of that period.

Nasidi (2015: ) goes on to explain that ‘literature in the Roman script is here to stay with us. Its engagement with questions of power and domination aside, literature subsists [in Northern Nigeria] as part of a burgeoning culture and industry.’ That Hausa literature in Roman script has spawned a thriving market in locally-produced novels (see below). Moreover, Hausa-speakers have the option of reading much else besides in Roman script. These include, for example, text messages, innumerable web-pages (including the BBC news), and the Hausa newspaper Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo, which is published three times a week.
Muslimah Media Watch reports that Kano city, lying in the Hausa heartland, is ‘the lifeline of Hausa market literature’, which are called littattafan soyayya (‘books of love’) in Hausa. The majority of people who write and buy such books – in their hundreds of thousands – are women. Littattafan soyayya, as the name suggests, mostly deal with themes of love and marriage although they may also address wider social issues, such as HIV, education and censorship. See the references for an interview with one such writer, Sa’adatu Baba.

This love of literature and language was reflected in the British Council-managed literacy programme for adults in Borno and Adamawa states which adopted a social literacies approach in which the adults identified their learning requirements. This led to the production of learner-generated materials in four languages: Hausa, Fulfulde, Bura and English. These included folktales, fables, personal experiences, critical reflection and explanation such as ‘Why we move’, giving the reasons for seasonal migration (British Council 2002; McCaffery et al. 2007).

What is perhaps significant about the littattafan soyayya as a phenomenon is not only that they foster reading, but that they also offer an enjoyable way for people, especially women, to engage with serious issues of the day. This is in stark contrast to much formal education. Only the day before writing this paragraph, I had a Skype conversation with the head of an NGO in rural Kaduna State, central Northern Nigeria, observing that children in a local western-style school are ‘bored out of their minds’ because there are up to 100 children in a classroom, there are no books, and teachers don’t know how to teach.

**Education in Northern Nigeria**

Much of the research literature on Northern Nigeria focuses on western interpretations of education (boko in Hausa), with only a sideways glance at traditional Islamic education. Unfortunately, I am in no position to report on the interplay between the two systems. However, it is important to recognise that many children attend western-style schools in the mornings and then Islamic schools in the afternoons. Nasir Mohammed Baba’s 2011 article about ‘Islamic Schools, the Ulama, and the State in the Educational Development of Northern Nigeria’ gives a good overview of the system. I have sat with children in school and leafed through their ajami, Arabic-script writing in what we call the ‘back’ of their exercise books, and read their Roman-script Hausa copied from the blackboard in the ‘front’ of the same book.
Estimates of boko school attendance vary between 60 and 80%, according to the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN). According to UNICEF’s Global Initiative on out-of-school children (2012), 7.3 million primary-school age children (29.6% of the total) were not in school in 2008. Some of those children may be the children of pastoralists, such as the Fulani, others may be attending Islamic school only, while yet others may be helping their subsistence farmer parents or not able to attend for financial or other social reasons.

There are government and international pressures for children to attend primary school, but the realities on the ground are complex and very worrying. In the same Skype conversation mentioned above, my NGO friend in Kaduna state observed that there has been a huge influx of children into the local primary school because the government has undertaken to feed the children who attend school. Food may well be an incentive, but does it result in children becoming educated, or even literate? Are teachers recruited to teach such new school recruits, and are they trained or even paid? All these matters are the subject of daily discussion in educational circles and in the Nigerian press.

In light of the above, it is extremely worrying, though not surprising, to read the opinion that ‘most primary school leavers in Nigeria constitute [a] … class of “newly created illiterate Nigerians”’ (quoted in Edem 2011).

Language and literacy

Even if the definitions of literacy are many and varied, there are two facts that seem to be almost universally acknowledged. One is that literacy is a Good Thing, and the other is that adult literacy is almost always the poor relation of children’s literacy. This latter fact is especially evident in the scant government funding of adult (and family) literacy programmes – a lack that is sometimes filled by NGOs such as Reflect-Action Aid, and Feed the Minds. In a recent report (see references), Feed the Minds claims to ‘see literacy as a tool for transformation under a broad definition which embraces IT and other media resources’. Adult literacy programmes on the whole have very specific aims which are often linked to social issues such as women’s empowerment, spiritual development, and community rights. These are well documented in other papers in this volume.

The perception, interpretation and practice of literacy vary hugely, especially where several languages and two scripts are vying for dominance in different spheres of life, such as the commercial, religious and governmental. Rafat
Nabi, in her *Hidden Literacies* (2009), neatly demonstrates how a strong literary tradition provides an ambience for literacy activity even among those who might claim that they are ‘not literate’ because they did not finish primary school.

The official statistics for western-style literacy in Nigeria, according to UNESCO’s Round Table on Literacy (2012), is 50.6%. This figure, however, belies huge variations between states: from 92% in Lagos to just 14.5% in Borno. In the country as a whole, 65.1% of men and boys are deemed to be literate, but only 48.6% of women and girls.

Literacy and literacy-teaching in Nigeria are plagued by many of the problems that beset so many former colonies, and prominent amongst these is the issue of language. English is the country’s official language, representing the route to higher education, power and influence. English is also the language used as the medium of instruction in secondary education, and it is the presumed medium in most primary schools too. However, English is the mother tongue of only the most elite families; and although the south uses English (or more often and more correctly, Pidgin) as a lingua franca, on the whole that position is occupied by Hausa in the north.

Many educationalists argue for mother-tongue medium of instruction for children and adults, at least in the early stages of literacy education. For example, the concluding statement of principles after the 2012 Juba Multilingual Education in Africa conference declared, amongst other points, that ‘learners should be taught in basic (i.e. up to lower secondary level) formal and non-formal education through the language they know best’ (McIlwraith 2013). However, in my observation and experience, the ideal of mother-tongue medium of education is severely compromised on the ground. The pressures are at least two-fold.

Any Nigerian adult or parent with professional aspirations hopes that they or their offspring will go to university, where the medium of instruction will most likely be English. Many non-specialists believe that the earlier English is introduced, the better chance there is of a successful education. This results in pressure not to use a child’s mother tongue – or even the local lingua franca – as medium of instruction, even in the first years of primary school. English reigns OK – aided and abetted by initiatives such as Jolly Phonics, which claims success in teaching literacy through the medium of English, even to children who have never heard that language at home or in the communal environment (see under Universal Learning Solutions in the references).
The second pressure is that of suitable orthographies and teaching materials. In Northern Nigeria, Hausa has an established, widely-used writing system (though secondary articulations such as implosive consonants are not consistently distinguished). This is simply not true of many local languages. Without an accepted orthography, materials developers will struggle to produce bulk resources, teacher-training is problematic, and mother-tongue education is compromised.

I am a great believer in protecting as many as possible of the world’s languages, their associated cultures and identities. But in terms of the practicalities of education, I do see Hausa-medium instruction as the lesser or two evils for Northern Nigeria, and it is in the spirit of that compromise that I became involved in helping to co-create Hausa literacy books for local primary schools.

Educational publishing for Northern Nigeria

Educational publishing is a cut-throat world. In the latter half of the 20th century, the export arm of British publishers prevailed over the textbook scene in several African countries. However, with the advent of the 21st century the dominance of overseas publishers has waned, partly because of problems with repatriating profits, and partly because local publishers have taken up the reins of this potentially lucrative business. Whether local or international companies are involved, there are inevitable economies of scale at play, seeking the lowest common denominator in order to gain the greatest share of the market. Like any business that is accountable to shareholders, the pressures of investment and return are very important. This is not to say, as Lily Cole does in a BBC interview (Smale 2016), that you cannot ‘be business minded and still be socially responsible. Social business has been tried and tested, and even though it is not the norm, there are lots of examples of it working that you can point to.’

Since there is such a strong concentration of Hausa-speaking people in Nigeria, the opportunities for successful publishing are considerable, though they are tempered by lack of buying power. For a commercial operator, it is a matter of discerning the difference between huge need (for educational materials) and a burgeoning market.

The educational publishing market is complicated by politics. Every respectable Ministry of Education has a curriculum for primary and secondary schools, and all school resources must be officially approved. (See the references for
the current Hausa primary 1-3 curriculum.) One of the main pressures on publishers is to ensure that their materials reach the government-approved list, which is the effective gateway to ‘school adoptions’ and therefore payment.

However, the path to government approval is a slippery one, sometimes aided and abetted by fair means and foul. There have been reports that publishers paid bribes to international donors and aid agencies (such as the World Bank) in order to secure textbook contracts. It is an open, undocumented secret that government curricula in Nigeria and elsewhere have sometimes been manipulated to conform to the syllabus of a particular publisher’s series of books. And there was a well-publicised case in 2011 of a publisher falling foul of the UK’s Serious Fraud Office and paying £11.3 million in fines for corruption (*The Bookseller* July 2011).

When creating content, there is a tendency towards blandness of cultural context: please the greatest number, cause the least offence. In terms of design and production, the effects of financial constraints can be seen in the limited use of colour printing, very basic design parameters, and a tendency towards poor paper quality. A good example of the latter is the *Gishirin Zaman Duniya* series, published by Benchmark publishers in Kano. I do not know the sales statistics of that publication, but I suspect its price, and its Islamic tone of voice are winners in certain sections of the Northern Nigerian literacy market.

**Conceptualising a series of literacy resources**

As a European writer and editor working with local Hausa colleagues I inevitably came to the Hausa literacy market with my particular mind-set. Perhaps most importantly this included my knowledge of school textbook design and use. The primary competition at that time included *Ka koyi karatu* (Northern Nigeria Publishing Company 1981), *Mu fara karatu* (Longman 1971) and *Da koyo akan iya* (University Press Limited 1986). Each of these have particular strengths, including the gradual introduction of phonic building blocks, use of local traditional stories, and ample illustrations. Since then an important new series, *Hasken Karatu*, has come on the market, published by Learn Africa (2014).

As my colleagues and I visited schools, researched the ‘competition’, watched numerous lessons, listened to teachers and pupils, and commissioned co-authors, the following initial needs began to emerge:
• To honour the government’s curriculum. In practice, this meant making sure that we both covered the curriculum and expanded it in order to iron out inconsistencies and create a more complete whole.

• To recognise prior knowledge about language, oral story-telling, values and culture, whether Hausa was the mother-tongue (L1) or not (L2).

• To encourage inter-generational literacy by depicting oral literature.

• To recognise and build on existing literacy assumptions in the social environment: advertisements, pictures, labels (Omo, Fanta, Coke ...), text messages, and so on. There is inevitably a big difference between the urban and rural cultures.

• To be sensitive to cultural norms, with regard to dress and the separation of girls and boys from a certain age in school.

• To somehow create a sense of local ownership, by faithfully depicting cultural values, and building on them.

• To include the beginnings of health-education.

• To educate teachers, by offering prompts and cues for methodology and classroom-management within the pupils’ books.

We in fact only got as far as conceptualising the first three books of a planned six-book series, but throughout this experience, other, broader issues were also at play in the back of my mind: to strengthen pupils’ sense of self-respect and identity (particularly important for girls) – perhaps through diaries or letters; to depict a sense of aspiration, empowerment and even enterprise; to open up a window to the wider-world. In fact, there was constant dialogue between myself and my (male) co-authors on all these issues. Such lofty ideals had to be tempered by practical and pedagogical realities.

The initial methodology in the books is based on phonic building blocks, with footnotes offering teachers brief cues for how to teach the syllables depicted on the page. Traditional teaching methodology is heavily influenced by the rote learning imparted in Islamic schools. Rather than challenging that, we incorporated it into the books, thus respecting the teacher’s existing methodology. The ba bi bo bu be chant depicted below is traditionally used for teaching the five Hausa vowels.
The books depict the traditional fun enjoyed by children, such as songs, games, riddles, and stories. The following picture shows a favourite Hausa folktale featuring Gizo, the trickster spider, who also appears in Ghanaian and Caribbean stories as Anansi.
Conclusion

In many ways, the experiences I have recounted in the latter half of this paper were a great privilege. Yet I am uneasy with the role of being an ‘expert’, intruding on an established culture. Be that as it may, in terms of the international literacy norms and statistics, literacy-teaching in Nigeria seems to have failed as a social practice. How this may be rectified, with or without expert help, remains an unanswered question.

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References


‘One Finger Can’t Crush a Louse!’ The Development of a Community of Literacy Practice in Tanzania: from Orthography to Literacy

Margaret Beckett
SIL International

The above title is a Rangi proverb taken from our book of Rangi proverbs (Rangi Community 2009). All the proverbs are somewhat cryptic, but have rich meanings in the cultural context of Tanzania. They have been used in the community for generations, and are still used in everyday life. They carry important ethical and social truths. This one carries the following meaning: ‘Anything important needs a group of people to accomplish it; you can’t work on your own, and togetherness is strength.’ That is certainly true for any visitor seeking to bring development. Is cultural ignorance perhaps the reason some initiatives fail?

In our western cultures speed is linked to efficient use of resources. In the context of the Rangi people, it is the opposite: anything worthwhile must be given time, commitment, relationships and long-term work. The aim of this paper is to give a narrative outline of progress over ten years of work with the Rangi people. I am writing as a participant in the processes described.

The Rangi people group is located in Kondoa District, 100 miles north of the national and regional capital of Dodoma in Central Tanzania. The estimated population is 450,000–500,000. The Rangi are farmers and inhabit a large area with a relatively undeveloped infrastructure in terms of roads and services. This people group are proud of their language and heritage and many maintain their use of language and love for their history and traditions even when they have to move to cities to support their families. All children learn Rangi from childhood: it is the language of everyday life, of play, of farming activity, of celebrations, joy, pain and grief.

Links between identity, self-confidence, language use and effective learning are well established in education practice in the ‘developed’ world. Similar principles can be found in ‘developing’ communities, such as the Rangi
people. The freedom to use local people-group languages impacts on issues such as identity. The Rangi people are proud of their language, which until recent years was a purely oral language. It is a fascinating and rich culture in which to begin work in local-language literacy.

During my first year or two here, much of my time was spent learning. I had to learn Swahili, the national language, and also to learn how to live in rural Tanzania. Following on from this building of relationships, observing and learning how local Rangi life is lived, finding out about everyday practices, celebrations, the farming year and culture have helped me see life from the local perspective to some extent.

In Tanzania all education takes place either through Swahili or English, the two languages accepted by the government as national languages. However, there are over 120 languages spoken in Tanzania, and many have yet to be developed into written forms. A rich heritage of stories, folklore, and local history will be lost unless the local languages are treasured and researched as part of the cultural heritage of Tanzania. There is some support for this in government policy (Tanzania Government, 1997).

There have been multiple challenges for me personally, and the first was to begin to understand the local world view and culture. The Rangi people in Tanzania love proverbs, traditional stories and riddles, like many other people groups around the world.

One proverb says ‘A visitor is blind.’ In order to work effectively here it is necessary to begin to see life as the local community does. We begin to see reality through their eyes, and to understand culture, attitudes, opinions, and everyday life. Another proverb states that ‘A visitor is like flowing water,’ which means both flowing water and visitors pass in a short time. Another says ‘A new hen needs a rope tied to its leg.’ This is an example from the realities of life. A new hen joining a free range flock has to be tied, so that it can’t go far, or it will get into difficulties and possibly dangers. It has to get used to its new home environment as the first priority. For similar reasons it is essential that a visitor initially is a learner! External initiatives taken forward quickly and without community involvement will fail. Our cultural blindness would guarantee that. Long-term relationships are crucial to any progress in community development. Here, good relationships open doors to learning, and to cultural understandings which in turn support finding priorities, agreeing cooperative development of learning materials, and thus the use of relevant teaching materials becomes possible.
In the rural areas, where about 75% of Tanzanians live, the language of communication in homes and everyday life is the local people-group language. In cities many people are also fairly fluent in Swahili, however for a subject or issue to be really grasped and understood the most powerful means of communication is the local language (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2009).

We took a community literacy approach in the Rangi area, where anyone of any age can join a group in order to learn how to read in their mother tongue. This was partly because we saw the need in the wider community, and also because current government policy does not permit local-language teaching and use in schools. Thus literacy development is broadly conceived and firmly grounded in local social experience.

Initial development work
A linguist worked in research and development, supporting and guiding orthography development. Phonology, grammar and anthropological sketches were completed cooperatively (Stegen 2006). People from different Rangi areas were initially involved in this and a few trial publications were developed.

From there working together with the local community, continuing to learn about their view of their language, a trial literacy guidebook was developed (Kijuu et al. 2006). This comprises twenty lessons, to be taught to groups or used as a self-study resource. It has enabled many mother tongue speakers who were already literate in Swahili to read in their local Rangi language.

Next steps
Over the next few years this transitional literacy initiative was implemented in cooperation with village governments in several village communities, to date approximately 40 villages. From these groups we found Rangi people who had the motivation and potential to lead groups or to write well in their languages. A team of writers meet and work together to write traditional stories, health and nutrition related stories, and some Biblical stories, in response to expressed needs in their community. A network of literacy group facilitators was gradually built to take the work forward in their villages. They also meet for training and problem-solving activities.

Through the transitional literacy programme we soon found that a significant number of people needed a different approach. According to our group
of writers and facilitators, a structured, direct approach to mother-tongue literacy was needed. They wanted an approach which started inside the Rangi language, rather than one which required knowledge of Swahili as a prerequisite. Many had not had opportunities for formal education, or had completed a few years of basic education. Also the opportunities to read, even in the national language, are very limited in rural areas, so fluency in reading is exceptional. Working together with the team of writers we developed a community approach to initial literacy.

The importance of speaking, listening, reading and writing as interrelated aspects of literacy practice, set in an appropriate cultural context formed the foundation of our approach. All learning is social. Learning here is certainly social, the wellbeing of each family is strongly linked in to the wellbeing of the community. Oral tradition is very strong. So learning to read in groups from texts which are based in everyday life, then from texts which are linked to local life, many of which have been part of the oral tradition for generations, enables readers to access meaning and use a range of reading strategies successfully. The texts provide opportunity to use predictive skills on texts which are familiar, loved and valued in speech. The use of other reading strategies such as phonic decoding, cross checking for grammatical sense and semantic sense are made easier. Matters of grapheme-phoneme relationship are simplified as the orthography is phonetically consistent. These narratives also offer contexts for extended speaking and listening work, and a culturally-grounded group reading approach (Peplow and Swann 2016).

Developing resources and learning groups with mother-tongue Rangi speakers

Foundation stage resources are structured around local everyday objects and related key words, with their associated letter of the alphabet. This is combined with a key word and an appropriate illustration of that word to provide a context to learn letters and their related spoken sounds. The development group of writers decided on large books for group use, which fits well in the cultural context.

Initial group reading links speaking and listening and narrative text at every opportunity. For example, a simple narrative with a focus illustration/drawing can be used as a discussion starter, then as a context for developing directional awareness, print awareness and reading fluency skills. These
simple narratives are used by the facilitator from the start and provide motivation to continue learning at sentence, word and letter level. They also provide a ‘scaffolded’ learning approach (Vygotsky 1986). A great deal of enjoyment, laughter and discussion takes place, which is great for bonding and motivating the group to stay together and keep on learning.

Our first booklet revisits letter-sound correspondence, with added learning opportunities at word and sentence level. This booklet leaves little margin for errors.

Our second booklet revisits this learning and extends into three or four simple sentences which form a text about the object depicted in the key picture, which is easy to read.

Our third booklet revisits both of the first two and extends into extended narrative text of 40-50 words relating to each key object and its uses in daily life. Using this set of resources, numbers of Rangi mother tongue speakers have successfully learned to read their language, and we have had a lot of fun and laughter on the way.

The strength of this simple programme is the strong base in local culture and therefore immediate relevance to the local people and their lives. Also because of the strong group culture, participants go home and share their learning with family and friends, not dissimilar to the principles of shared or paired reading in the UK (Topping 1995).

After initial trials, a network of literacy group leaders was gradually developed. They work in their local communities, facilitating literacy development through a series of group meetings or classes, followed by more independent reading. These facilitators work together with our groups of writers and illustrators to develop more materials. My role is largely in enabling them, supporting the text processing, publication and sales processes. Working groups take place as needed, gradually extending understanding of literacy and developing their skills in teaching.

Each year representatives of the groups work together to produce the narrative text and illustrations for a calendar. An unforeseen advantage of this is that many families are developing a ‘library’ on their living room walls. Unlike the UK, where we would remove the previous year’s calendar and replace it with a new one, people here leave all the previous years’ calendars on the wall, and add the new one to the display. So ten years of calendars
means ten ‘books’. This means that the family and many of their friends, neighbours and relatives are exposed to meaningful text in a culturally relevant and acceptable environment, and thus are becoming increasingly print aware and developing fluency in literacy, and enjoying the process.

At the time of writing we have about 40 titles in print in Rangi. Texts are of varying levels of complexity and different genres, to take account of the varied needs in the community. The group wants to move on into simple first-aid booklets, basic health care, and women’s home-based income-generation projects.

Interesting developments which complement this are the fast moving development of mobile phone technology. There are usually a few people in each village with access to this, so we are putting Rangi text and voice recordings into a form available through smart phones. There is now a group on Facebook which began as four or five people, but now there are over 2,500 people using the group pages. I am fascinated by the spelling used in this, which reminds me of the developmental stages of spelling which I saw in education contexts in the UK. The Facebook group provides opportunities to use the Rangi language, especially for those who have moved into larger cities where people link with other Rangi speakers even there. City children are becoming increasingly part of the wider Swahili-speaking culture. This is all part of language movement, and brings a range of benefits. Their parents want the children to know about their cultural heritage and roots in the Rangi mountains, and city families regularly return to their home villages, so they often buy Rangi books for themselves and their children to read. Some books we publish as diglot, using Rangi and Swahili, in parallel text. This makes the language even more widely accessible and enriches the vocabulary and language use of Rangi speakers, especially in cities.

The effectiveness of the project is due largely to the relevant cultural approaches and materials, and also to the social strength of groups where learners enjoy learning together and support one another. As we move forward more materials will be developed, covering a range of themes, as decided through group consensus.

Ways forward
The project still has a way to go and there are many villages as yet untouched. However we are optimistic about the future, and as another proverb says, ‘To go slowly is indeed to travel.’ The English equivalent would be ‘More
haste, less speed.’ We look forward to increased autonomy, having a vision for materials development and learning development led and sustained locally with minimal external support – in fact, a developing ‘community of practice’.

I have worked in the Rangi area for ten years; more recently I have become involved with other languages in neighbouring areas, e.g. Burunge. For me lessons learned in the Rangi project will inform further work with Rangi and with other people groups in the area, such as Alagwa, Burunge and Mbugwe. The Mbugwe language has strong links with Rangi and the Alagwa language has strong links with Burunge. It seems that the geographical isolation of these communities, combined with language impact from other neighbouring groups has resulted in different paths of language development, particularly in terms of grammar.

As we move forward and the initiative develops as seems fit to the community, indeed togetherness is strength! Or perhaps I should say that as a ‘new hen’ in cultural terms I appreciate all that being tied by friendships and culture has brought to my life in terms of opportunities to enjoy the rich culture of the Rangi people. I have been enriched by this, and have received far more than I have given.

Based on ILD 17, presented on 3 December 2014

References
Notes on Contributors

Dr Mary Anderson is a linguist with a special interest in Nigeria and west Africa. She has worked for many years in language-teaching publishing, both as a commissioning editor and as a writer. More recently she has become involved with developing materials for teaching basic literacy skills in non-European languages. She has been a BALID committee member since 2012.

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Professor Lalage Bown has supported BALID for many years and was the Honorary President 1992–1998. She worked in Africa for 31 years, establishing and expanding university-based adult education programmes in Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria and Zambia. While in Africa she observed and
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**Dr Priti Chopra** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education and Community Studies at the University of Greenwich, UK. For more than 16
years she has worked as a researcher and education practitioner for the design, delivery and impact assessment of adult education programmes in India and the UK. As a part of her work in India she completed research projects for UNESCO, ActionAid and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Amongst other areas, her current research interests include widening participation and social justice in education, inclusive curriculum development and global education policy.

**Dr Barbara Graham** is an experienced educator with over 30 years of direct involvement in the education of students ranging from pre-school to adults in the UK, Canada, Japan, and Kenya. She is currently working with SIL International, where she fulfils the roles of International Coordinator of Literacy and Education and consultant to Multilingual Education programmes. In addition to practical field experience Dr Graham has studied issues related to language and literacy in multilingual and multicultural settings for much of her career.

**Dr Juliet McCaffery** is Secretary of BALID, a Research Associate of Sussex University and an international consultant. Juliet specialises in literacy, gender and equalities. She has worked in school and adult literacy in the US, Brighton and London and then as gender officer at the British Council. She has worked in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent. She became interested in English Gypsies and Irish Travellers as an elected local Councillor and researched their attitude towards education. Her research interests are literacy and marginalised communities. She has a number of publications.

**Professor Marilyn Martin-Jones** is an Emeritus Professor based at the MOSAIC Centre for Research on Multilingualism, University of Birmingham. She was the founding Director of the MOSAIC Centre (2007–2010). Over the last 35 years, she has been involved in critical ethnographic research on multilingualism and literacy in classroom and community contexts in the UK. She has a particular interest in the ways in which language and literacy practices contribute to the construction of identities, in local life worlds and in educational settings, and the ways in which such practices are bound up with local and global relations of power. She is currently editor (with Joan Pujolar) of the Routledge book series: Critical Studies in Multilingualism.

**Professor Alan Rogers** is Visiting Professor at the Universities of East Anglia and Nottingham. His main interests lie in informal learning and teaching adults; he has engaged in research and training of adult teachers in many
countries and is currently working with adult literacy practitioners in a range of countries in Africa and Asia. He has published widely on adult education, literacy and development.

Professor Brian Street was the President of BALID until his death shortly before the second edition of this volume was published. He did anthropological field work in Iran during the 1970s, from which he developed theoretical approaches to literacy in cross-cultural perspectives. He then taught social anthropology at the University of Sussex for over 20 years and became Professor Emeritus of Language in Education at King’s College, London. He wrote and lectured extensively on literacy practices from both a theoretical and an applied perspective. He had a long-standing commitment to linking ethnographic-style research on the cultural dimension of language and literacy, with contemporary practice in education and in development.

Dr Catherine Young is currently Director of Global Language and Development Services for SIL International. Catherine began her work with SIL International in the Philippines where she was involved in linguistic research and literacy and education activities in southern Palawan, developing both adult literacy and children’s classes in upland mountain communities. She has consulted with international organizations on language-in-education issues in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Thailand with a focus on mother tongue-based multilingual education for non-dominant language communities. Catherine has a Master’s of Education from the University of Sheffield and holds a PhD in Education from the University of Wales.
The British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID) is an NGO established in 1987. It seeks to raise the profile of literacy in development by organising training courses, conferences and seminars in the UK and overseas. These events have helped equip practitioners and professionals to respond to the literacy needs in their own contexts and spheres of influence.

BALID promotes adult and family literacy as a basic human right, in the context of development. It provides an independent forum in which literacy practitioners and academics can share their knowledge and experience of literacy and numeracy initiatives, with a particular focus on adult and intergenerational learning. In order to highlight the role of literacy in the development agenda, BALID has recently collaborated with the University of East Anglia, the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE), and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

BALID is managed by a committee of individual members and representatives of organisations engaged in literacy work. Please join us! Further information about BALID membership and events may be found at www.balid.org.uk.