Community Involvement in Planning and Implementing Local Education Programmes

Catherine Young

catherine\_young@sil.org

Notes for presentation given to the

British Association of Literacy in Development (BALID)[[1]](#footnote-1)

May 2012

# 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 an 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.[[2]](#footnote-2) 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 continue to hold the Government accountable to it’s 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 Bangladesh. 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 mobilization. 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 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[[3]](#footnote-3), Identity-based Community Development and Education (iBCDE), projects of International Cooperation for Cambodia (ICC) (see footnote) are examples of ways in which community involvement can be valued and support appropriate and 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 communities 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[[4]](#footnote-4) shares the community action/reflection cycle practised by the staff teams of 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 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 to both the quality of a programme and, potentially, to the sustainability of a programme 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 in 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 or different as national language; same or different to 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 and transition and transfer between languages.

## Curriculum development

Programme goals are the foundation for planning, implemention 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 program 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 etc. – for learners in an MTB-MLE programme. Three general categories of goals may be considered:

1. educational goals - the knowledge that learners will have attained on completion of activities or the programme
2. 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 societyand
3. 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’s.

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 mobilizing adults who live and work with children, so that they are prepared to give children the chance to freely and increasingly participate in society.

1. This document represents personal notes to accompany a presentation given to British Association for Literacy in Development, May 2013. This document does not intend to serve as a formal paper for publication. This document should not be cited without the permission of the author, Catherine Young (catherine\_young@sil.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kosonen, K., & C. Young. 2009. *Mother tongue as a Bridge Language of Instruction: Policies and Experiences in Southeast Asia.* Bangkok, Thailand: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation, World Bank. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . http://www.icc.org.kh/activities/iBCDE [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mariam Smith; http://www.icc.org.kh/activities/iBCDE [↑](#footnote-ref-4)