How the learner’s home language and culture can be used to reach educational goals

Language, Education and the MDGs
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Discussion points

1. Relationship of teaching/learning language(s) to MDGs

2. How \textbf{L1} and \textbf{C1} can be brought into education systems or expanded

3. Overcoming myths and challenges: Experiences in MLE
Please raise your hand if...

You speak at least 2 languages
...at least 3?
...4?
...5?

You learned to read in your home language (L1)
You learned to read in a second/foreign language
You learned bilingually
L1 = home language(s)
C1 = home culture(s)

1-minute “brainstorm”
on paper:
How can L1 and C1 help us reach the MDGs?
RAISE YOUR HAND if you thought about:

- Access to literacy and numeracy
- Access to health information
- Basic education for early childhood, primary or adult learners
- Giving girls/women a chance to show teachers what they know
- Valorizing local knowledge
- Giving learners a foundation so they can learn additional languages and content
## Languages and MDGs 1-4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MDGs</th>
<th>Need for L1/C1 communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Eradicate poverty</td>
<td>1. Target marginalized groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Achieve UPE</td>
<td>2. Access to education, not just schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Empower women</td>
<td>3. Self-expression, evidence for teachers</td>
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Languages and MDGs 5-8

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<tr>
<th>MDGs</th>
<th>Need for L1/C1 communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>5. Improve maternal health</td>
<td>5. Access to health care/information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases</td>
<td>6. (same)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ensure sustainability</td>
<td>7. Validate relevant local identity/practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Develop global partnerships</td>
<td>8. South-South may be most useful</td>
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</table>
Bolivia: Indigenous midwives

Problems:
High maternal death
Discrimination
No respect for culture
Language barrier

Midwife program:
Indigenous women trained
Return to communities
Observe traditional practices (e.g. afterbirth)
Share health information in local language

Photo: Felipe Morales
Canada: Indigenous knowledge of sustainable ecological practices

Issues:
Need to consolidate dispersed knowledge
Determine environmental impact and new practices

Hudson Bay bioregion:
Collected information on sustainable livelihoods (30 communities)
Translated and compiled
Serves as resource for communities and schools

Photo: NISGA'A NATION KNOWLEDGE NETWORK
http://www.unesco.org/most/bpik21-2.htm
## Getting terminology straight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ls in society</th>
<th>Ls in the classroom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(language status)</td>
<td>(language proficiency)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DL = dominant language</td>
<td>L1 = language spoken/understood by the learner</td>
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</table>
| NDL = non-dominant language | L2 (DL) = language to be learned, often a foreign language!
Confusion between setting goals and doing what is possible

Maldives:
English (DL) medium – yet only one L1 (Dhivehi)!

Negative backwash:
Preschool children ages 3-5 expected to learn 3 langs!
How can L1/C1 be brought in?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-formal first <em>(L1 literacy, preschool, vocational, alternative)</em></td>
<td>Cambodia, Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot/experiment</td>
<td>Bolivia, Niger, Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>L1 as a subject of study <em>(secondary, tertiary)</em></td>
<td>Nigeria, South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local curriculum component</td>
<td>Thailand, Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy option <em>(decentralized, choices can be made locally)</em></td>
<td>Mozambique, Ethiopia</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
UPE is justifying L1-based bi/multilingual education in low-income countries

Vietnam: Piloting in 3 languages

Mozambique: Implementing in 16 languages
MOZAMBIQUE
Curriculum reform (2002) gives schools 3 options:

1. **All DL** (FL=Portuguese)
2. **DL with oral L1** *(de facto)*
3. **L1-based MLE**
Decentralized education system

Central level: National curriculum, methodological guidelines, resources

Provincial/regional level: Materials development & support, teacher placement

School district level: Decisions about languages and organization of teaching
1. Regions using 8 years of L1 medium have the highest national achievement scores in all subjects including DL (Eng).

2. Switching to DL before 6 years of L1 medium does not result in improved DL proficiency.

3. Teacher training in the language of instruction helps teachers develop L1.
Negative backwash of assessment in the DL only

English only assessment (secondary and teacher training entrance exam)

English (DL/L3) only from gr 9 (secondary)

Pressure to start English medium earlier despite better results in L1
## Overcoming myths

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Misleading beliefs/ falsehoods</th>
<th>What research/ experience says</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1 wastes school time when only DL is needed/wanted</td>
<td>L1 literacy/learning improves achievement, builds foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using the DL (L2/foreign L) as a medium will promote DL learning</td>
<td>It takes 5-7 years of quality L2 before academic proficiency can be developed</td>
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<tr>
<td>All teachers should teach the DL and in the DL</td>
<td>It is more efficient to train specialist DL teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bi/multilingual programs are costly</td>
<td>Start-up costs of MLE are recuperated after 2-3 years (per-pupil expenditure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents want DL</td>
<td>Parents want <strong>effective learning</strong>, L1 <em>and</em> DL</td>
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## Overcoming challenges

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<th>Challenges</th>
<th>What research/experience says</th>
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<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous (mixed language) schools</td>
<td>Classrooms organized by language, team teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teachers who share learners’ L1</td>
<td>Affirmative action for local teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unrealistic DL goals</td>
<td>Organize specialist DL teachers, plan for short-term, medium-term and long-term goals</td>
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<td>Low quality in L1-based schools/programs</td>
<td>Demonstrate in private/elite L1-medium schools</td>
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<td>Commercial publishers won’t use L1s</td>
<td>Whose agenda? Support local publishing, desktop</td>
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Lessons from “South” and “North”

1. Teachers need high proficiency in L2 to teach it (or in it) – train and test
2. Multilingualism is desirable (2+1 policy)
3. Need for bi/multilingual:
   - methods (preview-review, alternate day)
   - materials (side-by-side, different fonts...)
   - assessment (learner responds in any lang)
   - curriculum (diff competencies in L1/L2/L3)
Dr. Neville Alexander, teacher-researcher-activist, PRAESA, Univ of Cape Town:

“If you’re not following your own agenda, you’re following someone else’s.”