

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 **L1** and **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

MDGs

1. Eradicate poverty
2. Achieve UPE
3. Empower women
4. Reduce child mortality

Need for L1/C1 communication

1. Target marginalized groups
2. Access to education, not just schools
3. Self-expression, evidence for teachers
4. Access to health care/information

Languages and MDGs 5-8

MDGs

Need for L1/C1 communication

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 5. Improve maternal health | 5. Access to health care/information |
| 6. Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases | 6. (same) |
| 7. Ensure sustainability | 7. Validate relevant local identity/practices |
| 8. Develop global partnerships | 8. South-South may be most useful |

Bolivia: Indigenous midwives

Problems:

High maternal death

Discrimination

No respect for culture

Language barrier



Photo: Felipe Morales

<http://www.unfpa.org/public/site/global/lang/en/pid/2614>

Midwife program:

Indigenous women trained

Return to communities

Observe traditional practices
(e.g. afterbirth)

Share health information in
local language

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](http://www.unesco.org/most/bpik21-2.htm)

Getting terminology straight

**Ls in society
(language status)**

DL = dominant
language

NDL = non-
dominant
language

**Ls in the classroom
(language proficiency)**

L1 = language
spoken/understood
by the learner

**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?

Strategy	Examples
Non-formal first (L1 literacy, preschool, vocational, alternative)	Cambodia, Bangladesh
Pilot/experiment	Bolivia, Niger, Philippines
L1 as a subject of study (secondary, tertiary)	Nigeria, South Africa
Local curriculum component	Thailand, Indonesia
Policy option (decentralized, choices can be made locally)	Mozambique, Ethiopia

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


FINDINGS FROM ETHIOPIA

Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas (eds) 2010


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

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

Overcoming challenges

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

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.”