Multilingual Education in India: the rewards and hazards of large scale government programs
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The background situation Studies show that early childhood education in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh has included a high drop-out/push-out rate of 75-80% from school; low achievement at grade 5; children scoring no marks in language; teacher shortages and absenteeism, low teacher capacity and negative classroom practices.

Advocacy with government on introducing Multilingual Education (MLE) included discussions with (frequently changing) top officials to try to persuade them, using research, theory and international agencies' statements, that the current system was not working. Plans were also developed with linguists from local universities.

Pilot programs began in 2003 in eight language groups in Andhra Pradesh, and in 2006 in Orissa with ten language groups. The programs worked with government structures and systems and using national funds (for achieving EFA). There was little time to develop orthography, curriculum and materials. Expansion was quick and now there are 2500 schools assigned to MLE in Andhra Pradesh and 547 schools in Orissa Grades 1-5.

Obstacles; these include that initiatives are often started by a group/person with supportive state officials and are vulnerable to those officials changing position; commitment at all levels is often lacking; there is a lack of sustainability in terms of funding; multiple languages in classrooms; lack of teachers and training capacity; materials not published in time.

Some positive results: language is now recognised as an issue in children's learning; communities are mobilised and supportive; there is a central/national MLE centre; there has been small scale research ; 2 MLE programmes are running with grades 1-5 materials prepared (including multilingual dictionaries in 8 languages in AP; there are two evaluations in progress.

What have we learned about building a sustainable MLE program?

Advocacy; Get it on the agenda, but as a high priority is not so easy. Individuals may do the lobbying but you need a network of support—links between academic institutions, international agencies, government.

Policy---India has good laws and policies but the translation on the ground is not always in line with those ideas. The Right to Education Act was notified in April, 2010. It talks about the right to quality, child-friendly education with a number of quality parameters for both infrastructure and quality. It says there should be mother tongue instruction to the extent *possible;* this needs more definition. State policy as well as national policy is needed.

On policy, you have to think big at the beginning but start small and grow. Develop good locally supported, nationally recognised programs. Have less rigidity on methods – be prepared to compromise a bit.

Sustainability: gaining local support. Focus on communities who are more open to it, who are enthusiastic about their mother tongue, who show some signs of enthusiasm and spend energy and time to make a successful project. Involve NGO and other networks, including technical resource sources. Ensure there is cultural adaptation of materials, not just translation.

Educational issues; Need to change the way language is taught – mother tongue as well as the Second Language (L2) ; Need for a clear framework for training and classroom practice in language learning.

Funding; Need to be strategic in getting funds into budgets; influencing planning permissions. At a district level the district collectors and district magistrates are holders of the budget.

Other activities: Networking and collaboration with universities etc; getting message into the media; conducting longitudinal studies and research on teaching and learning.

Barriers and challenges*;* Parents often want English. Teachers don't believe multilingualism is a resource. Officials may give outward support but have no commitment for political reasons.

What next? Target teacher education. Plan advocacy forums. Build capacity at national and state level. Create dedicated full time teams, working on comprehensive planning and a long term road map with small achievable short term goals. Quality improvement in classrooms requires changes in all major components in educational planning.