Key Knowledge Generation

Multi-Literacies Pedagogy Design: The Case of Focused Ethnographic Research and Catalytic Validity in Literacy Development

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MULTI-LITERACIES PEDAGOGY DESIGN: THE CASE OF FOCUSED ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND CATALYTIC VALIDITY IN LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Lack of teaching learning materials and parental involvement are often cited as key challenges to the provision of sustainable quality education in resource-poor contexts. These have been among a host of factors against sustainable schooling in Sub-Saharan and East Africa in particular. This paper reports a research and development initiative aimed at leveraging these and other attendant challenges. The research initiative utilized a sequential mixed method design to establish the baseline factors and status of literacy development in a rural district. The intervention responded to headlines often screaming that inadequate school and teaching resources challenge education in Sub-Saharan Africa. This was exploited as an opportunity for stakeholder participation in Multi-literacies Pedagogy Design for sustainable materials development. The study used a questionnaire survey involving all 101 primary schools in a rural district followed by rapid ethnography involving 20 of the schools and detailed vertical case studies involving another five purposively selected schools. Results revealed how socio-cultural specific factors including why appropriate learning materials were lacking and daunting challenges against parental involvement militated against children's effective learning. Consequently twenty five teachers and 10 parents were invited to participate in a capacity building workshop leading to the development of socio-culturally relevant learning materials. Together ten story books were developed in Kiswahili and English with three of the titles further developed in braille. About 45,000 copies have now been distributed to more than 150 schools as well as libraries and other intervention programmes in the region. This study has trail blazed a new theoretical framework applicable to the Sub-Saharan African context potentially responding to the context-specific challenges such as large classes, parental involvement and education budgetary constraints by national governments. This will again repudiate dominant relations of power between the home and school domains by recognizing the crucial role of communities' funds of knowledge in the curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Designing the Baseline and Intervention

In Sub-Saharan Africa, there are many reasons why lack of teaching learning materials is often cited as a key challenge to the provision of quality education and generally there are no ready answers to how the challenge could be overcome. Paucity of teaching learning resources and other challenges such as lack of parental involvement and over-crowded classrooms have consistently been among the host of factors against sustainable schooling in East Africa and Southern Tanzania in particular. A study and development initiative was carried out which had its first phase as a baseline study aimed at establishing the extent of the challenges against literacy development and the second phase attempting to find ways of providing possible solutions. The second phase to find some solution crucially included a component that involved a pedagogy design based on teaching learning materials development that this paper reports. Among the key objectives were to identify barriers to literacy development in order to establish the basis

for supporting and strengthening the educational sector through the development of appropriate learning materials in collaboration with key stakeholders at school level. The overarching professional conceptual point of departure for this literacy development and pedagogy initiative was the shift from the traditional language-only based approaches to the socio-cultural Multi-literacies approaches based on collaboration and design. The study began with a baseline survey based on a questionnaire involving all 101 primary schools in the target rural district (Ngwaru, Mwingi & Oluga, 2013) which was followed by rapid ethnography involving 20 of the schools and detailed vertical case studies involving another five purposively selected schools. Results revealed how socio-cultural specific factors were at the centre of the challenges including why appropriate learning materials were lacking as well as why parental involvement was not possible unless concerted efforts were applied to change the circumstances against children's sustainable schooling. Consequently twenty five teachers and 10 parents were invited to

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participate in a stakeholder capacity building workshop leading to the development of socio-culturally relevant learning materials. Together ten story books were developed in Kiswahili and English with three of the titles further developed in braille. About 45,000 copies have now been distributed to more than 150 schools as well as libraries and other intervention programmes in the region (Quantz & O'Connor, 1988).

This was in the University's incessant pursuit of measures to mitigate factors that militated against sustainable schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) within the aspirations of its Parent Development Network's Coastal Rural Support Programme in East Africa. The salience of this research and development initiative was hardly surprising in the context of such headlines as: "Inadequate school and teaching resources challenge education in Sub-Saharan Africa" (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012).

Production of technically designed materials such as story books by teachers for own use has not ordinarily been embraced by educators because of a number of reasons ranging from lack of capacity and technical knowhow to the unhelpful conceptions that such materials should be produced at some level and procured by the school, not produced by teachers or parents themselves. In the low-resource contexts of SSA, this view was exploited to become an opportunity to design and produce innovative resources by bringing together stakeholders for empowerment through participating in a pedagogy design workshop for the technical writing skills to produce teaching materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Parameters of the Intervention At the onset of its conceptualization, the intervention initiative was informed by three ideological and theoretical approaches born out of research that challenged the notion that the homes of poor and language minority families were literacy impoverished. Auerbach (1989) showed that there was enormous diversity in home literacy practices among and within cultural groups because communities were often rich with literacy practices and artefacts. Three paradigms informed by different ideological and theoretical perspectives as suggested by Auerbach (1995) framed the activities in the initiative:

- Intervention Prevention
- Multiple literacies and
- The Social change

These perspectives together informed the researchers' theoretical approach to the task where, on one hand, children's problems could be perceived as rooted in parents' inability to promote literacy attitudes and interactions at home. This leads

to the belief that intervention programmes would ensure that patterns of under-education would be prevented from passing from generation to generation (Intervention Prevention Approach). This approach usually involves four components parent literacy, pre-school literacy, parent-child interactions around literacy and parenting skills. This study did not implement all the four components but only two that appeared to be more efficacious parent literacy and parent-child interactions around literacy. The Multiple Literacies Perspective which describes the problem as the mismatch between culturally variable home-literacy practices and school literacies equally had an impact on our perception of the problem and how we could deal with it. We brought in the ordinary 'home' and cultural stories including the local experiences of children into the story books in the national language (Kiswahili) and the secondary school language of instruction, English to the centre of classroom pedagogy to demystify the home/school dichotomy or separation. We were influenced again by the all-embracing Social Change Paradigm that encompasses the principles of the multiple literacies tendency going beyond to emphasize the question of power relations.

Social Change Paradigm, in a sense, became the over-arching link between the theories and the study. Acknowledging issues of power as well as culture made us remain very much aware of the cultural layers of society that we knew we could not change through this study but that could not stop us from making an impact. We still believed that we could challenge the generally held views that curriculum and technically designed materials were received from outside. We saw the solution partly lying in investigating and validating communities and students' multiple literacies and cultural resources in order to inform schooling. The realization that a lot of school literacy could still be based on and tapped from children's socio-cultural resources at home made us exploit this relationship to establish sustainable culturally appropriate materials. We took a strong cue from Moll and Greenberg (1990), Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzlez (1992) who underlined that, "Regardless of educational backgrounds, the households of poor and language minority families are rich with 'funds of knowledge' which often are unrecognized and untapped by educators".

Understanding Literacy as Social Practice

Literacy is more than the ability to read and write: it is "...a cultural activity that involves people in conscious and reflexive action within a variety of situations in everyday life" (Rassool, 1999).

The Multi-literacies Movement is part of the great 'social turn' away from individual psychological and cognitive models to

social and cultural understandings of language use and its constitutive role within social life (Barton, 2000).

Pence and Nsamenang (2008) said that Africa's contributions to Early Childhood Education should draw "on contextual and cultural practices and on understandings [of child development] at local levels", not in isolation from other perspectives but as "part of a respectful, generative process that opens new channels for discussion and dialogue".

This was consistent with the motivations for the study to suggest new kinds of solutions and pedagogical approaches that would speak adequately to the experiences of rural parents and their 3 to 8 year olds. Dei and Asgharzadeh (2003) indicate that post-colonial educational policies and practices (curriculum, texts; pedagogies) in Africa fail to 'speak' adequately to the variety of human experiences. This study and innovation intended to cover this missing middle by amalgamating a pedagogy design to community and school practices. The study was cognizant of the fact that literacy awareness was co-constructed by the child's or children's families and the school (McNaughton, 2001) and that much literacy learning should naturally take place in families, homes, and neighbourhoods thus compelling schools to harness the power of out-of-school learning, especially for these children who are disadvantaged (Apple & King, 1983; Feiler, 2005). Curran (1984) asserts that Africa "provides opportunities for learning and development which simply do not exist in the West and therefore are not considered by the predominant theories". Literacy learning at home as abundantly recorded in African literature as socio-culturally based often appears to remain unrecognized (Kenyatta, 1939; Achebe, 1958).

With these books, simple, everyday stories were transformed to constructivist pedagogies. The innovation identified factors that influenced literacy development and used them as the basis of supporting and strengthening the educational sector, system and institutions. It was a project that promoted parent-teacher collaboration at home and school for literacy development including developing appropriate learning materials (story books) and finally engaged education policy makers, implementers and stakeholders in the literacy dialogue and practice at regional, district and ward level to ensure sustainability for posterity in Southern Tanzania.

Exploiting Community Funds of Knowledge for Pedagogy
Currently research acknowledges that family literacy practices and pupils' funds of knowledge play a unique role in the way individuals learn everyday practices (Moll et al., 1992; Moll et al., 1990; Gonzalez et al., 1993; Greenberg, 1989; Velez-Ibanez, 1989). The role of the teacher as agent of socialization has also

been highlighted (Fillmore & Snow, 2000) and this initiative enhanced teacher knowledge base. We no longer wanted teachers to remain behaviourists who despised children's experiences for teacher-centred methods or who remained adhering to packaged methods. We were persuaded by the realization that classroom practice could be based on post-modernist and constructivist constructs (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Gonzalez et al. (1993) say that pedagogies can be developed, transformed, and enriched by drawing upon (children's) existing funds of knowledge. The developed story books attempted to capture, as Gonzalez et al. (1993) say, the broad and diverse information about the home - farming, animal rearing, traditional medicine, trading, folk stories and folklore, the norms and values and moral knowledge, language and communication skills, and a host of many others. Cummins and Sayers (1995) corroborate this view: "prior experience provides the foundation for interpreting new information. No learner is a blank slate. In reading for example, we construct meaning by bringing our prior knowledge of language and of the world to the text". Gonzalez et al. (2005), in collaborative studies, made findings that challenge the status quo by asserting that local knowledge has a legitimate place in formal education, a view that has consistently been stressed by some educationists, academics, researchers and advocates of mother tongue/bilingual education (Bloch, 2002; Brock-Utne, 2001; Brock-Utne & Hopson, 2005; Brock-Utne & Alidou, 2005; Cummins, 1986; Edwards, 1998). Bourdieu (1991) asserts that educational success entails a whole range of cultural behaviour, including non-academic features like gait or accent. Lankshear, Gee, Knobel and Searle (1997) say (now) the inherently social character and embeddedness of reading and writing in larger social practices assume greater theoretical importance than ever before. Literacy studies now privilege meaning over mechanical skills, with meaning seen much more in terms of socio-cultural processes than private internal cognitive states.

Shifting Pedagogy and Experiences to the Language Learner
Probyn's (2001) studies of the perceptions and practice of teachers teaching through the medium of English in township schools in South Africa suggest that teachers and students experience stress in teaching and learning through the medium of a language in which they are not able to communicate freely. This has the negative consequences for learning including lack of self-confidence, disaffection and alienation. Practices in these classrooms are dominated by routines, choral responses and code switching which have been described by Chick, (1996) and Hornberger and Chick (2001) as 'safe talk'. Most commentators

who focus upon teacher-led safe talk see it as basically a negative procedure that constrains classroom learning. Hornberger and Chick (2001) present ethnographic studies of language practices in two classrooms, one in South Africa where Zulu-speaking students are taught through English, and the other in Peru where Quechua-speaking students are taught through Spanish. In both cases, the language of instruction is imperfectly understood by many students and even by some of the teachers. As a result, interaction in these classrooms was limited to mere repetition, cued responses and chorus-like answers. These observations are confirmed by similar studies by Brock-Utne and Alidou (2005) on Tanzania and South Africa, and Williams and Snipper (1990) on Malawi and Zambia. Gutierrez, Larson & Kreuter (1995) refer to such practices as the 'teacher script', which they define as an orientation that members come to expect after repeated interactions in contexts constructed both locally and over time'. Abd-Kadir and Hardman (2007) explore the discourse of whole class teaching in Kenyan and Nigerian primary school English lessons using a system of discourse analysis focusing on the teacher-led three-part exchange sequence of Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF).

Critical Pedagogy

This pedagogical design was advocating critical pedagogy by making parents and teachers see learning products as materials they could design and develop themselves from their own environment for their own children. Critical pedagogy was heavily influenced by the works of Freire, (1995; 2006) who heavily endorses students' ability to think critically about their education situation; a way of thinking that allows them to "recognize connections between their individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded". Through this approach, we were therefore developing a teaching approach that attempted to help students question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate. In other words, we were seeking ways of helping learners achieve critical consciousness inspired by Shor's (1992) definition of critical pedagogy as:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichs, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse.

Unlike traditional perspectives of education that claim to be neutral and apolitically critical, we were viewing all education theory as intimately linked to ideologies and shaped by power,

politics, history and culture. Given this view, we were taking schooling functions as a terrain of ongoing struggle over what will be accepted as legitimate knowledge and culture. In accordance with this notion, a critical pedagogy must seriously address the concept of cultural politics by both legitimizing and challenging cultural experiences that comprise the histories and social realities that in turn comprise the forms and boundaries that give meaning to student lives (Darder, 1995).

In South Africa Newfield and Stein (2000) report a study of critical pedagogy in opposition to the status quo, an attempt to overthrow the legacy of apartheid in South African classrooms. At the outset, classrooms seemed rigid, prescriptive places of exclusion, repression and lack of independent thinking and creativity qualities inconsistent with the political ideals of the new South African state. Inspired and assisted by the notion of Multi-literacies (New London Group, 1996) which argues that the multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches. Newfield and Stein (2000) tried to engage with pedagogic conditions of prescription, rote learning, and lack of equity (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freire, 1985).

Closing the Theoretical Gap

In all and other studies, none has gone on to do something about the challenges. Classrooms remain without materials, parents remain uninvolved and teachers as behaviourist as ever. Low resource communities remain dominated by relations of power, regarded as having no contribution to their children's schooling. This is the first study in Sub-Saharan Africa that takes a bold step forward to bring teachers and parents together, school and community together to repudiate dominant relations of power and establish a firm foothold on true constructivist pedagogy. In Sub-Saharan Africa, this is the first study that weaves theory into practice. The first study that gives parents genuine reason to believe they know what happens in the school and can become part of it. This study domesticated story book writing skills to ordinary school and community undertaking; in the process ensuring that post-colonial educational practices (curriculum, texts; pedagogies) in Africa can start to 'speak' adequately to the variety of human experiences.

Enhancing Literacy Research

Another perspective this pedagogy design enhanced was that of literacy research. This study was carried out from the critical ethnographical and native researcher perspective (Carspecken & Apple, 1992). It was being involved in auto-ethnography, (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Agar, 1996; Berger,

2001). From the first strand of the baseline study, the aims were to document and report the situation of the participants and empower them by including an advocacy perspective (Carspecken, 1995; Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Thomas, 1993). Typically, I was being a political-minded individual seeking, through this research and innovation, to challenge inequality and domination (Carspecken & Apple, 1992). As a critical native ethnographer, I used this study to underpin my desire to 'liberate' my participants by using their work to Thomas, (1993), aid emancipatory goals or negate the repressive influences that lead to unnecessary social domination of all groups.

As signalled in the title of the study Parent Teacher Empowerment for Literacy Development, the intent was to empower the research participants by including an advocacy perspective including catalytic validity. Catalytic validity requires that the documentation of the research topic should lead to a greater awareness and, where possible, the increased participation of informants. With catalytic validity an ideal audience is in a position to use ethnographic work as a resource, critically appropriating aspects of the work for their ability to clarify the basis of everyday life and the possibilities for its transformation (Simon & Dippo, 1986). I was repositioning the African researcher to energize marginalized Africans. Lather (1986a; 1986b) explained "catalytic validity" as a measure of validity in critical research as follows:

Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it. . . Efforts to produce social knowledge that will advance the struggle for a more equitable world must pursue rigor as well as relevance (1986b).

PUTTING LITERACY THEORY INTO PRACTICE
From Language Approaches to Multi-literacies and Post-Methods The major point of departure in this initiative was in seeking pedagogical solutions by taking a paradigm shift from the traditional language-based approaches to the Multi-literacies approaches (Street, 1984; 1997). This study was aware that traditional approaches remained centred on tired methods of teaching reading and writing based on a singular national language form or official language form conceived as based on a stable system of rules such as sound-letter correspondence. The pedagogy of Multi-literacies that we advocated in this study focused on modes of representation much broader than words alone but encompassing children's everyday environmental surroundings including stories based on their experiences. This is what translated into socio-culturally appropriate story books for teaching and learning as one implementation tool. This was uniquely suitable for the context of the study where the wealth of language, traditional stories and environmental wealth could be exploited for story books writing in the two key languages in the education system Kiswahili, the national language and language of education in the primary school and English the language taught as a subject in the primary school and the language of education in the secondary school.

The Multi-literacies approach was embraced in the same way as the increasingly popular methodology in ELT, the Post Method (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) which seeks alternatives to method instead of an alternative method. Consistent with the researchers' views, both approaches put emphasis on context and hence had specific cognitive, cultural and social effect. In that regard, the story books were based on the social-cultural experiences of children in Tanzania and East Africa stories depicting everyday experiences and language illustrated in rich pictures (multi-modality). They could be seen in that sense as linking Multi-literacies and post method ushering in a genuine shift in the role of the teacher from a disseminator to a learning facilitator, and student from a passive receiver to a critical thinker and participant. Presented with such stories as a methodology, the learners were expected to make an attempt to develop critical thinking about their views of the world based on the familiar cultural modes of representation stories and pictures from their local environment. Again, part of the aim was to create conditions for social inclusion where the main characters were deliberately boys and girls as much as they were simple villagers and professionals and most important of all, catering for the visually impaired learners by creating braille story books on the same stories as those for the other children. In inclusive classrooms, the visually impaired will read together with the sighted children about familiar stories about themselves. (One of the story books was written by visually impaired teachers about their childhood experiences). Participation of parents increased the much missing dimension of parental involvement in the context of the study to enhance the experiences of learners and the teachers at the same time. The initiative endeavoured to ensure that differences of culture, language, and context (low resource communities) did not entail exclusion from curriculum and pedagogical participation.

From Baseline Findings to Teaching Learning Pedagogy Design
This storybook initiative was based on genuine research findings from the baseline survey study conducted earlier to establish barriers to literacy development. As indicated above, this had involved first, the gathering of survey data from all the 101 schools in a rural district in Southern Tanzania to establish the various parameters that would inform the other more detailed

aspects of the study. It is noteworthy to remember that the rural district used was in one of the least-resourced parts of the country partly explaining the region's inclusion in the AKDN's Coastal Rural Support Programme. The baseline Literacy Survey involved all lower and pre-primary school teachers in the 101 primary schools in the district (15 in pilot and 86 main roll out) to document the exact nature of material and human "resource poverty". This was the entry point into what was to become a two-year long project. There was need to establish, among others, the extent of the shortages of teaching learning material to understand why this specifically disaffected teachers and students especially in these rural communities. Among the results was the clear indication that teaching learning materials were in acute shortage and yet were not on the list of priorities by the responsible regional and district educational structures that appeared to be focusing on getting more children into school and ensuring that the schools were adequately staffed and teachers received their salaries on time every month. Teachers on their part were largely disaffected by the conditions they worked under, feeling neglected by the responsible authorities as they remained with no incentive at all to promote their learners' experiences. The study again documented the very low levels of parental involvement based on the belief that until parents could be viewed as strategic pedagogical partners, little progress would be recorded in children's educational achievements.

In this regard, findings indicated that parents unfortunately were not convinced that their families could benefit from school education as it was constituted. They thought school education did not promote their local economies but was alien because it did not teach their children to become helpful in their fishing and farming. This explained why at one study school it was learnt that the Standard Seven class had recorded 100 percent failure rate or 0 percent pass rate because teachers had been threatened with eviction from the community if they made children pass the examinations. Why would parents not want children to pass? They did not want to be bothered to find secondary school fees which government insisted on for all children who passed the primary school leaving certificate (Ngwaru, Mwingi & Oluga, 2013).

Closing the theoretical Pedagogical Gap
Among others, we focused on enhancing parent-child interactions around literacy to increase the role of adults in stimulating children's interest as well as opportunities for parents and teachers working together to reduce the home school gap. The over-arching intention was to seek ways of improving literacy development pedagogy the relationship between teachers, learners and instructional materials to create potentials for children's sustainable schooling. We believed in improving teachers'

performance by providing a rich meaningful and engaging environment supported by appropriate teaching practices. Teachers and parents had to be enabled to understand the significance of teaching learning materials design as integral to pedagogy that would scaffold children's experiences. The variety of ways the story books were going to be used when placed in the hands of parents and teachers was going to speak to the range of challenges in these schools. Parents were going to be more familiar with the books used in the schools because they were going to take part in the book development activity and recognize the effort to alleviate the shortage. When children took books home, parents were going to see the books in a different light something they could relate to in a more constructive and meaningful way. Schools previously constrained by lack of more versatile materials such as books were going to promote children's reading habits by establishing libraries and reading clubs based on their stock of books accessible in reasonable quantities for the first time. Teachers were going to be able to use individual story books for a range of purposes for different curriculum subjects from Creative writing, Agriculture, Recreation and even Science. Against the background of crowded classrooms, children could now individually borrow books and read, share stories with other children, parents and even teachers. We believed we had extended the frontiers of literacy development perspectives by designing a multifaceted pedagogical design based on the extension of the Social Change Approach and focusing on the multiple literacies for collaboration.

Story books as Pedagogy Design Materials of Choice
Considering the place of the three literacy approaches above that informed our positions, we remained convinced that the central coherent assumption was that educational problems did not originate from one monolithic source. Complex interactions of political, social, and economic factors in the broader society were to be scrutinized rather than only family inadequacies or differences between home and school culture. This explains why we rather ultimately took story book materials development to the centre of our intervention strategy believing they cut across a number of issues and factors that resonated with children and parents' lives. Through a parent and teacher stakeholder workshop, we set to develop socio-culturally sensitive story books that could be used in all parts of Tanzania and East Africa and by extension sub-Saharan Africa with a lasting appeal to children, older readers and parents.

The problems and dilemmas posed by resource shortages were clearly problematized by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012) thus: Everyday lack of resources is often cited as a key challenge to the provision of quality education in resource-poor

contexts. Yet, what is meant by resources? And, is provision of resources a sustainable pedagogical model where funding for purchasing the same is extremely scarce?

Most typically, as in this UNESCO report, resources are considered to be textbooks or some such reading materials. While undoubtedly they were important and served particular purposes, we wanted to broaden the application of transition from Literacy to "literacies" (Street, 1984), by expanding possibilities for learning from single language models to sociocultural engagements with others through shared understandings of ourselves, communities, and environments. For us "resource-poor" environments offered opportunities for the creation of pedagogically-rich contexts of learning through the empowerment of teachers, learners, families, and communities. Education stakeholders in the context teachers, parents, ward coordinating officers and education officers were the sole authors of these story books after a week's workshop on story book pedagogy design. Through hands-on activities of design, creation, and production of learning materials, they enhanced their skills and appreciation of the process. They collaborated to develop the ten story books capturing a variety of interests and possible backgrounds to be used across disciplines and more. In this innovation, the concept of resources was understood as objects and activities of learning, their design for more effective learning processes and the planning of innovative alternatives to traditional pedagogies. This was therefore an activity undertaken to integrate resource development into a process of pedagogy enhancement through teacher-parent and other stakeholder involvement and engagement.

Story Book Development

On this principle it was decided to develop story books for chil-

dren in Early Years mainly in the popular national language and based on stories that related to their everyday experiences. The design project very much focused on the most salient aspects of cultural resources and literacies in the resultant story books. Advocated was cultural maintenance that preferred negotiation rather than cultural assimilation (it was not the intention to deny learners their culture in favour of say, English culture promoted by books from Cambridge or Oxford University Presses). Ten storybooks were developed mainly as readers for the lower primary school touching on everyday experiences of the lives of low-resource communities. Seven of the books were in Kiswahili (the national language and language of education in Tanzania's primary schools as well as national language and language of education in the first three grades in Kenya). The other three were developed in English, the language that children learnt in Tanzania as a subject in the primary school and the language of instruction in the secondary school. This is again the language used for instruction from mid primary onwards in Kenya and Uganda. For inclusiveness a further three from the ten were developed in braille two in Kiswahili and one in English. These story books therefore could eventually be used in the three East African countries of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda as the commissioners of primary education in the countries had already expressed interest. After their successful completion, the ten were passed on to the Tanzania Institute of Education for review for suitability as school books for recommendation to the Commissioner of Primary Education. This was accomplished and more than 45,000 copies have since been printed and distributed to more than 150 primary schools and agencies of the Aga Khan Development Networks that are promoting literacy development in Early Years in Tanzania.

FIGURE 1
Cover Pages of the Ten Story Books
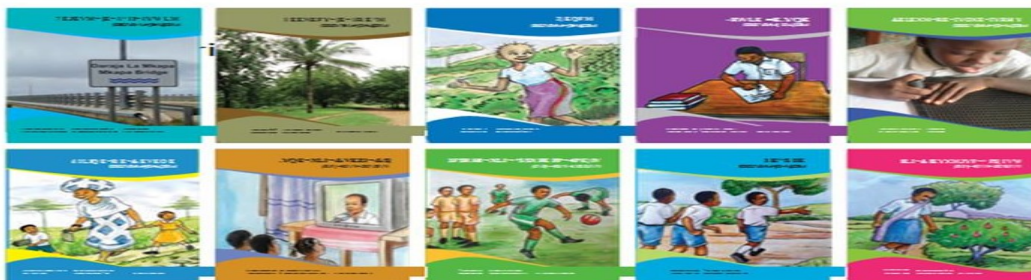
SYNOPSIS OF THE TEN STORY BOOKS
Safari ya Mzee Mushi (Journey by Elder Mushi)
Elder Mushi, a coffee farmer in Northern Tanzania, prepares

himself for a journey from his home in Marangu in Moshi to Lindi and Mtwara to the south of the country. On the Dar-Es-Salaam leg he was surprised to see a beautiful modern bus

because he had been told there were only old buses that were not even reliable. He sat next to Mr. Beta, a teacher who was familiar with the areas along the whole route where Elder Mushi was going. He was told to sit down and see now that he was visiting the region. He was surprised to find out the many development projects, good food and many historical sites that were tourist attractions. He eventually returns to Dar-Es-Salaam safely by air from Mtwara Airport (Molteno, 1984).

Mahajabu ya Mnazi (The Wonders of a Coconut Tree)
Do you know a coconut tree? The Wonders of a Coconut Tree is a story about how Elder Mkwacha and other villagers of a village called Mtua benefit from this wonderful tree. The tree grows to a hundred years and people have various uses of its products. The tree has various uses from food, cooking oil and powder, to fuel, medicines and construction materials. Follow elder Mkwacha and explore these wonders.

Nyambi (Girl's Name)
Nyambi was a girl who did not obey her parents. She was advised to respect the sacred forest where good mushrooms grew and not to comment on anything she saw in that forest. Nobody was allowed to go alone to look for mushroom in that forest. One day she walked into the forest alone but disregarded everything she had been told. She lost her way, found no mushrooms and walked the whole day until she became tired. Exhausted she sat under a tree and fell asleep until some two women neighbours found her the following morning. She was re-united with her worried parents who had set off looking for her since the previous day.

Insha Ya Juma (Juma's Winning Essay)
Every year there is a competition in Lindi District and this year it is Essay Writing. Juma wrote about a cooperative group called Jitegemee (Be Self-Sufficient) where his father was the chairman. He won a prize for the school which received books and ten benches. The essay described how the cooperative group never used to get good harvests until they were given crop production lessons from experts from Aga Khan Foundation. Juma concluded his story by saying that he wanted to become an agricultural expert to teach people about food and cash crops. When he finished reading, the head teacher was full of praise for his essay.

Bahati Na Nukta Nundu (The Blind Girl Bahati and Braille)
This is a story of Bahati, a blind girl who wants to get education but her parents do not know what to do. At the age of seven,

her father takes her to school for registration but is told the school did not register visually handicapped children for they did not have a teacher. Bahati wishes to know how to read and write and sits down to figure out how she could develop braille letters and give them names. She begins with six letters and takes them to the head teacher at school. The teacher is happy to be taught and slowly blind children come to learn to read and write. Bahati proceeds to college and now is a teacher at the University of Dar-Es-Salaam.

Rehema Na Baraka (Rehema and Baraka)
Rehema and Baraka are fraternal twins who live in town with their parents. Towards the New Year holiday, they go visiting their grandmother in the rural area with their mother. The grandmother is happy to see them to answer their questions about various things they did not know. Why was she looking at the sun before saying it was time to go home from the field for lunch? Why was the cock crowing only at certain times of the day? How did she know that certain types of mushrooms were poisonous? On the New Year's Eve, they went for a village traditional dance in which they took part to the delight of their grandmother.

Juma the Brave Boy
One day on his way home from school, Juma saw strange men with masks on their faces trying to hide big boxes in a cave. He kept at a safe distance and watched them before he went to alert the head teacher who in turn made a report to the police. The police wasted no time and the culprits were arrested, tried, convicted and sent to prison. The boxes contained assorted stolen electrical gadgets and Juma was rewarded with two boxes of exercise books and was seen on television news that evening talking about how he had seen the thieves. Juma's parents were proud of him.

Mbonde the Football Player
Mbonde was the most popular footballer at Miembeni Primary who instilled fear into all opponents. The Korosho (Cashew Nut) Cup organized by the Ward Education Coordinator was being hosted by Mbonde's school and everybody was cheering when the teams entered into the field of play. Mbonde scored the first goal in the first half but in the second half was pulled out because of an injury. When he was out, their opponents equalized but in the 89th minute, the coach brought back Mbonde who scored the winning goal a minute before the end of the match.

Mazoea (Boy's Name)

Elder Pondamali and his wife have one truant child called Mazoea, who does not like schooling. He often absconds and goes about on dangerous adventures with other boys who do not like school. One day he missed death by a whisker when they were swimming and mistook a crocodile for a log and he was late to see his friends jump out of the water. They however eventually rescued him when the croc had missed him and got away with his shirt. The other day he almost drowned again fishing in a big river. This time he ended up in hospital and recovered.

The Beautiful Flowers

Primary school girl Njelemba always saw a beautiful flower tree on her way to school. On one particular morning, when she was late because she had hurt herself, she found the flowers open and more beautiful. She told her friends at school and they eventually told their teacher that the flowers opened during morning break time (ten o'clock) and closed at lunch time (one o'clock). The teacher took the whole class for an outdoor lesson on flowers to observe how the flowers opened and closed. Children learnt more about flowers and were encouraged to plant more at home and school.

These Books as Stories

Edwards (2015) asserts the link between stories and the way we feel as humans saying:

With all the advances in brain science, it's been possible to show that a good story makes the brain release dopamine, a neurotransmitter that increases blood pressure and heart rate. Not only that but it triggers the release of oxytocin, the neuro-chemical that affects our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. So it has the potential to spring us into action.

Clearly, reading a story is not a superficial activity but does stimulate the whole body from the brain to the whole infrastructure of the human being. Significantly, if reading stories makes us spring into action, developing stories will make us do more. This is why again writer Cron (2012) says:

When you're lost in a good story, it's not arbitrary; it's not pleasure for pleasure's sake. It's biological, it's chemical, and it's a survival mechanism. Story or narrative takes those big ideas, abstract concepts, dry facts and translates them into something very specific that we can experience, and so feel, and that's what tells us how we feel about it, what it means to us and moves us to action (Cron, 2012).

Storyteller, Robert McKee puts the story perspective that links more naturally with the aim behind this initiative when he says: "Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer and more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact". This had to be the aim of this initiative in the context of converting school education into more digestible stories and pictures among people who would identify with them more.

An example is given of the efficacy of one of the stories: Safari ya Mzee Mushi and the specific feelings it invited in a policy and dialogue dissemination meeting entitled Parent-child Interaction-Around Literacy-Event. Regional and District officials, parents, children, university representatives and the press gathered at this event. The Deputy Chairman of the Lindi Regional Council was among the dignitaries involved in the dialogue and had the following to say about the story book Safari Ya Mzee Mushi: (Elder Mushi's Journey).

Summary and Meaning of One Book
Safari Ya Mzee Mushi

This is a story developed by three teachers, a deputy head teacher, a ward coordinating officer and a parent.

The Story

Elder Mushi, a coffee farmer in Northern Tanzania, prepares himself for a journey from his home in Marangu in Moshi to Lindi and Mtwara in the South. Immediately after the coffee harvest, he sets off starting on the Moshi Dar-Es-Salaam leg of the journey. On the morning to begin the Dar-Es-Salaam leg of the journey, he was surprised to see a beautiful modern bus because he had been told there were only old buses that were not even reliable. He sat next to Mr. Beta, a teacher who was familiar with the areas along the whole route including Lindi and Mtwara where Elder Mushi was going. He told Mr. Beta that he had been told that people from the south were cannibals and that there was no beef or milk. He was told to sit down and see for himself now that he was visiting the region. He was surprised to find out the many development projects and the good food similar to his home including many historical sites that were tourist attractions. He confirmed that Mount Kilimanjaro was not the only tourist attraction in the country. He eventually returned to Dar-Es-Salaam safely by air from Mtwara Airport.

The Remarks

Speaking in poetic rhythm the Deputy Regional Council Chair said: All these stories reflect real issues about our socio-cultural environment and bring together parents, children and the school closer.

Coming to the story of Mzee Mushi:

- What is being said is very true (Aya yapo)

- The socio-cultural context described is real (Mazingira aya yapo)
- People from Moshi say if they went to Lindi they would be victims of cannibalism
- People from Lindi equally say if they went to Moshi they would suffer the same fate
- Apparently these are genuine prejudices that need to be addressed (need for action)
- People in Tanzania need to know that they are all the same
- Nobody from the south or north will be a victim of cannibalism in another region
- We are all the same (emotional plea)
- These stories are good and those who follow them will get to understand
- Children who will use them will find reading and learning enriching experiences.

Impact of the Initiative

The Head of Research at Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, East Africa described the whole study that included this intervention as the first of its kind in the Institution and the story book initiative as a non-traditional research output. The project sponsors, Strengthening Education Systems in East Africa (SES EA) were kind enough to avail more funding to have 45, 000 copies printed and distributed to 150 schools in the regions in Southern Tanzania where they sponsored different projects through their different AKDN Coastal Rural Support Programme in low-resource communities. This has had a huge impact in the reduction of shortage of reading materials for a long time as each of the schools now has a total of about 250 copies of Kiswahili and English storybooks together. Schools with visually handicapped learners have again received a further three hundred braille copies. Further copies were going to be donated to other entities of the AKDN namely Aga Khan University (IED EA) for their Reading Clubs and Aga Khan Foundation for use in their various early literacy development projects including community libraries in the Reading to Learn initiative in Tanzania and Kenya. The Aga Khan Educational Services would again use the books as library resources from pre-school to Standard Seven. It is highly likely the books are going to be used in all the three countries of the East African Community including Kenya and Uganda as their Commissioners of Primary Education have expressed interest in the same.

CONCLUSION

As the search for more effective literacy development methodologies continues, this story-book initiative hopes to expand the repertoire. Focusing on context of the learner who has otherwise been considered a passive recipient of whatever the teacher brought is one of the most significant contributions being made. Developing storybooks that spoke directly to the children and parents about themselves was significant in the context. In the Southern Tanzanian socio-scape parents and children apparently had a very low opinion of the benefits of schooling as currently constituted and this obviously changed their views. The spectre of poverty and low educational achievements, among others, had left ordinary and everyday methods of teaching largely unpopular and ineffective as stakeholders felt they were excluded from the education system. Offering new methodologies in the realm of Multi-literacies in the context of post method was one innovative way forward. The wide impact of the story books as documented above bears testimony to the new possible ways of approaching the third spaces that have always been ignored and blamed for their fate.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research and innovation now needs be carried out on Family Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa outside South Africa. Early work on this originated in the US and an increasing number of initiatives came from the UK, Australia and Latin America with South Africa following later (Auerbach, 1997). This could focus on mapping family literacy programmes and activities in order to establish the impact of family literacy practices and programmes on children's academic achievements. Ideally this would need to cover more than one country in Southern and Eastern Africa.

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