



Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmm20>

Introduction: the Millennium Development Goals and multilingual literacy in African communities

Bonny Norton^a

^a Department of Language & Literacy Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Published online: 09 May 2014.

To cite this article: Bonny Norton (2014) Introduction: the Millennium Development Goals and multilingual literacy in African communities, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35:7, 633-645, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2014.908887](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908887)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908887>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Introduction: the Millennium Development Goals and multilingual literacy in African communities

Bonny Norton*

Department of Language & Literacy Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

This article is the guest editor's introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* on 'Multilingual Literacy and Social Change in African Communities'. Norton examines the diverse contributions with reference to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, formulated in 2000 to 'make poverty history' by 2015. Bamgbose argues convincingly that language is central in the struggle for educational progress, gender equality and improved health. Makoe and McKinney, for example, highlight continuities in language practices in post-apartheid South African schools, while Early and Norton address the challenges of teaching through English as medium in Uganda. As discussed by Sherris and colleagues, programmes like *School for Life*, which validate the local languages of out-of-school Ghanaian youth, are exemplary, and can be contrasted with the troubling pedagogical practices identified by Higgins in her HIV/AIDS educational research in Tanzania. The validation of local knowledge is also a theme in Namazzi and Kendrick, who insightfully address multimodal educational practices in Ugandan child-headed households. Lemphane and Prinsloo provide a window on the future, cautioning that the digital literacy practices of diverse youth can be indexical of social inequalities. The promotion of multilingual literacy remains an urgent priority in African education.

Keywords: Millennium Development Goals; language; multilingual literacy; education; Africa; special issue

Introduction

Next time ... they have to come first to the classroom level to the resource people so that they can get the real information rather than making the policy there ... so that they don't leave it to those at the grassroots to suffer.

William, a Ugandan primary school teacher, 2012
(Abiria, Early, and Kendrick 2013, 583)

In the year 2000, when 189 United Nations policymakers optimistically developed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in New York City (UN 2000), and educators provided a comprehensive framework for Education for All (EFA) in Dakar, Senegal (UNESCO 2000), they targeted 2015 as the year by which poverty would be history. As we approach this auspicious date, expectations are more guarded and the rhetoric more sober. Given this context, a special issue on '*Multilingual literacy and social change in African communities*' is timely. Far from the hotels and conference centres where global development

*Email: bonny.norton@ubc.ca

policies were debated and formulated, as far back as the first EFA conference in 1990, in Jomtien, Thailand, many researchers in this special issue took long and arduous journeys into poorly resourced communities in diverse parts of Africa. Drawing on qualitative, ethnographic research methods, they spoke to children, parents, teachers and administrators about their own hopes and goals for the future. In Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa, the researchers observed the challenges of out-of-school youth, poorly trained teachers, HIV/AIDS orphans and rural health care workers. At the same time, they saw teachers working creatively with students, heard stories of innovation and progress and observed children navigating new digital frontiers. Most of the authors took part in a colloquium on the topic of this special issue held at the April 2012 conference of the American Educational Research Association, in Vancouver, Canada, but the contribution of Ayo Bamgbose is based on his keynote address given at the Language and Development conference held in Cape Town, South Africa, in October 2013.

Global policy initiatives for development

This special issue seeks to document research on language and literacy practices across a diverse range of communities in sub-Saharan Africa, in order to contribute to a conversation on educational policy and practice, particularly as articulated in the MDGs and EFA. Much of the research discussed was undertaken in the spirit of what Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls 'decolonising methodologies'. With regard to the MDGs, a seminal article by Suzanne Romaine (2013), based on a keynote address given at a United Nations language and development conference in Bangkok in 2010, addresses the relationship between language and the MDGs, and is highly relevant to the African context. Romaine makes the case that language is 'at the very heart of major fault lines' (2013, 1) in the progress achieved thus far towards the eight MDGs. The goals, in summary are: to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development. Romaine notes, in particular:

The neglect of language, more specifically failure to incorporate and endorse educational policy and planning supporting multilingualism, will make achieving sustainable and equitable development difficult. Language policy matters because the poorest groups in society tend to have least access to the dominant languages favored in school. (2013, 3)

Romaine argues for a reconceptualization of the development process underpinning the MDGs, with language as the focal point of a set of five interrelated themes associated with poverty, education, gender, health and the environment. In all these areas, progress in education, inseparable from language policies and practices, is central to the achievement of the MDGs. Language, she argues, 'is the pivot on which education and therefore on which all development depends' (2013, 6).

The central role of education in progress towards the MDGs is captured in the six goals of EFA, a UNESCO initiative agreed to by 169 countries at the 2000 World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal. The goals, also with a target date of 2015, are: to expand early childhood care and education; to provide free and compulsory primary EFA; to promote learning and life skills for young people and adults; to increase adult literacy by 50%; to achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015; and to

improve the quality of education. With regard to sub-Saharan Africa in particular, the 2013/2014 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO 2014) draws on an extensive body of data to make the claim that, while there has been some progress towards the EFA goals, most of the goals will not be met by 2015. Some of the key findings on sub-Saharan Africa exemplify the challenges ahead:

- nearly 30 million children are out of school;
- over a third of children did not reach grade four;
- over half of children who reached grade four are not learning the basics in reading;
- in some of the poorest countries, almost no young women completed lower secondary school;
- the gap between the amount of time spent in school between the poorest rural females and the richest urban males is 8.3 years;
- pupil/teacher ratios are among the highest in the world, with the primary pupil/teacher ratio at 43.

Purpose of the special issue

This special issue seeks to identify those educational policies and practices that might complicate the process of social change in African communities, and those which hold greater promise for the future, post-2015. In his work on literacy and development, Brian Street (2001) argues persuasively that if literacy projects and programmes are to be effective in diverse regions of the world, researchers need to understand the uses and meanings of literacy practices to local people themselves. In a similar spirit, Suresh Canagarajah (1999), drawing on his research in Sri Lanka, argues that understanding the 'politics of location' is central to understanding the literacy practices of a given community, particularly with respect to the validation of local and indigenous knowledge. The work of Street and Canagarajah is indicative of the increasing interest in development amongst educators in the broader field of language and literacy education, and there is also an emerging but vigorous scholarship on multilingual literacy in Africa, with journal special issues, for example, by Makoni and Meinhof (2003) and Stein and Newfield (2006).

This special issue focuses on the ways in which stakeholders in diverse African communities are navigating multilingual literacy practices in classrooms, homes, and communities, in both rural and urban areas. By 'multilingual literacy', we refer to the development of literacy in both the mother tongue and the languages of wider communication (Janks 2009; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000; Hornberger 2003; Blackledge and Creese 2010). In African communities, multilingualism is common, but the official language (generally English or French) is not the mother tongue of the vast majority of speakers. For many communities across Africa, there is sometimes ambivalence towards the teaching of the mother tongue, given concerns that it will compromise efforts to promote literacy in the official language (Muthwii and Kioko 2004; Tembe and Norton 2008). This position is prevalent, despite the large and persuasive body of research that suggests that literacy is best achieved in the mother tongue, and that the learning of a second language is in fact enhanced if there is prior literacy development in the mother tongue (Cummins 2001; UNICEF 1999). This is an important theme in this special issue, where research is focused on countries where English is the dominant official language.

Against this backdrop, the authors in the special issue take us on a research journey that criss-crosses sub-Saharan Africa, seeking an enhanced understanding of literacy

practices at grass-roots level in diverse educational sites. The researchers seek to engage both policymakers and practitioners in a productive conversation about social change, particularly with respect to language and literacy education. The first article by Ayo Bamgbose complements the arguments of Romaine, as discussed above, and helps to frame the remaining six articles, which form the bulk of the special issue. We begin the research journey in two schools in the bustling city of Johannesburg, South Africa, before heading to a rural secondary school in a remote part of eastern Uganda. We then cross over to west Africa, where we learn of an innovative programme for out-of-school youth in Ghana, in existence for almost two decades. We return to east Africa, where health literacy workers are battling to address the scourges of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, and where HIV/AIDS orphans serve as heads of households in Uganda. We complete the journey by returning full circle to South Africa, but this time to two very different homes in Cape Town, where urban youth, under contrasting socio-economic conditions, are navigating new literacies in an increasingly digital world. The overriding question we are addressing is: what do both policymakers and practitioners need to know about the findings from this continental research journey? In particular, what policies and practices are troubling, and which appear most productive for social change?

Setting the scene

Bamgbose's paper (2014), like that of Romaine's, addresses 'the language factor in development goals', but focuses more comprehensively on socio-economic development. Bamgbose draws an important distinction between economic growth and economic development, arguing that while economic *growth* is equated with the quantitative value of goods and services, economic *development* concerns the well-being of citizens. He argues persuasively that meaningful development must aim for the full realization of human potential and an optimal utilization of a nation's resources. His reference points for development are not only the MDG, but also NEPAD – the New Partnership for Africa's Development, initiated by the African Union in 2001. The four goals of NEPAD are the eradication of poverty, the promotion of sustainable growth and development, the integration of Africa into the world economy, and the empowerment of women. With regard to language education, in particular, Bamgbose argues that development cannot be achieved without participation, and that participation necessarily requires effective communication in the languages in which people are competent (see also Bamgbose 1991). As such, language is the 'the missing link' in global policy initiatives for development, and can aid in communication and information dissemination, transfer of technology, education and good governance.

An important reminder for language educators, particularly in the African context, is that the official languages of English or French are associated with the formal economy and the educated elite, who constitute only a small part of Africa's population, as confirmed by EFA Global Monitoring Reports. Also of great significance are the activities of the majority of Africa's population, who work in the informal economy, using local languages for agricultural, commercial and other economic activities. The logical extension of this reality is that local languages should not be neglected in schools, and that literacy in local languages will enhance the development of the informal economy. Indeed, Bamgbose argues, that 'the brunt of the realisation of the MDGs will necessarily have to be borne by indigenous African languages'. This focus on languages should also be complemented by an appreciation of the role of culture in the realization of the MDGs. With regard to

education, gender and health, for example, a people's customs, beliefs, traditions and practices need to be understood and perhaps transformed in the interests of social change.

Plus ça Change, Plus C'est la Même Chose

With Bamgbose's insights as a reference point, we begin our research journey in two classrooms in post-apartheid South Africa, where Pinky Makoe and Carolyn McKinney (2014) remind us of the disturbing continuities between pre- and post-apartheid language practices in South African schools. Their paper, 'Linguistic ideologies in multilingual South African suburban schools', is a sober reminder that progressive changes in language policy do not necessarily impact local practice. Although post-apartheid South Africa has 11 official languages, Makoe and McKinney's research illustrates the ways in which English remains the language of power in schools and communities, with indigenous Bantu languages relegated to marginal status. Drawing on research in a primary and a secondary school, respectively, where the majority of students are native speakers of Bantu languages, the researchers describe how language hierarchies are perpetuated in school practices, with little opposition from parents. The central issue concerns conceptions of what language is and what counts as linguistic competence within the context of wider discourses of power, well understood by both teachers and parents. While 'a little bit of Zulu' might suffice as a linguistic resource, English remains the language of power in South Africa, as it was under apartheid, giving 'access to social and economic mobility'. The researchers argue that without an understanding of the language ideologies informing both policies and practices, the full range of learners' multilingual repertoires cannot be legitimately used as resources for learning:

The South African [language in education policy] is silent on the possibilities of using more than one named language in the classroom simultaneously, and it is not uncommon for Education Department advisors and officials to condemn the use of code switching by teachers. It is the ideology of languages as pure and bounded that underlies the guilt commonly expressed by teachers who do use code switching in classrooms where the language of learning and teaching is English, despite English not being the home language of learners.

A related issue addressed by Makoe and McKinney concerns the variety of English used by many African students, and the extent to which Black South African English (BSAE) might be considered a 'language problem' by some teachers. The researchers make the case that the variety of English most acceptable to teachers is White South African English (WSAE), and that some believe that BSAE speakers 'cannot pronounce things properly because of the influence of their languages'. Not only are the phonological features of WSAE perceived to be 'neutral' and 'comforting' to many teachers, but advanced proficiency in English is also often equated with advanced academic ability. Their troubling conclusion is as follows:

It is not just English that is exclusively constituted as the legitimate language in the school space but rather the particular ethnolinguistic repertoire of WSAE, which has accrued the invisible prestige of whiteness.

Hybrid repertoires or 'broken English'?

The hegemony of English, and what it means in classrooms and communities, is also a dominant theme in the article by Margaret Early and Bonny Norton (2014). In their

research site, a remote secondary school in eastern Uganda, the ‘Queen’s English’ is held up as the gold standard in both oral and written interaction. What the youth hear in their communities is described as ‘broken English’ rather than ‘hybrid repertoires’, and students ‘fear’ to speak English in the classroom. The particular focus of Early and Norton’s research is on the challenges that subject teachers face in teaching content knowledge through English as a medium of instruction, in a context in which African languages, spoken by all the students in the school, are not officially sanctioned in the secondary school classroom. Teachers who draw on an indigenous language for the purposes of exposition or explanation risk censure or ‘punishment’ by the authorities, and are sometimes seen as simply ‘incompetent’ in English. Assessment practices exacerbate the language challenges faced by students, when, for example, competence in subject areas such as biology is not matched by equivalent competence in written English.

Poverty remains the canvas on which these stories and images are etched. While there is now Universal Primary Education in Uganda, the increase in numbers from 2.7 million in 1996 to 7.3 million in 2007 (Kyeyune 2011, 87) has put great strain on local resources and the quality of instruction in schools. Similarly, while the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2007 promised greater opportunity for Ugandan youth, the reality was larger class sizes and fewer per capita resources. With class sizes sometimes greater than 100 in Early and Norton’s research site, and where students have to ‘imagine’ how different colours combine in art class, the language of instruction becomes only one of the many challenges that teachers, students, and communities face. In biology, for example, ‘the teacher is just the whole bible’ in the absence of textbooks and other instructional materials. Pre-service teacher educators struggle to prepare teachers for these contexts, and many teachers have two or three jobs to compensate for poor salaries. With regard to the lack of recognition of indigenous languages, in particular, Early and Norton argue that language policies, despite best intentions, might, like other ‘placed resources’ (Blommaert 2010; Prinsloo 2005) become dysfunctional when moved across distinctly different spaces, from relatively well-resourced urban areas to poorly resourced rural communities, and from elite to grass-roots contexts.

Schooling outside schools

While Universal Secondary Education in Uganda offers promise, at least in principle, for Ugandan youth, out-of-school rural youth in Ghana may have the opportunity to access an innovative complementary education programme (CEP) called *School for Life* (SFL), a programme initiated by the Danish non-government organization in 1995. The programme responds to the needs of children and youth aged 8–16 who are unable to access formal schooling because of labour demands or geographic isolation. Key features of this programme, and its impact on education in Ghana, are described by the authors Arie Sherris, Osama Saaka Sulemana, Andani Alhassan, Grace Abudu and Abdul-Rahaman Karim (2014). SFL offers participants a nine-month course in basic literacy in a local Ghanaian language at the end of the work day. It adopts a flexible approach to learning and limits class sizes to 25. From 1995 to 2011, over 100,000 youth have graduated from SFL, and over 75,000 have enrolled in formal schools as late starters.

Drawing on their research in two rural villages in northern Ghana, the authors identify the value of a CEP for key stakeholders, including SFL learners, para-educators, and CEP administrators and collaborators, demonstrating how shared local values reflect and constitute the programme’s identity. The key findings of the research are that SFL helped students enhance their identities as learners, many of whom transitioned successfully to

formal school; it also enabled students to support both their families and their communities. A particularly interesting finding is that SFL's focus on mother tongue literacy proved very helpful in the transition to English as medium of instruction in formal schools in Ghana. As one student said, 'I have noticed that [SFL] students perform better at formal school than students who have not gone to [SFL]. Because our students can read in Gonja it helps them read in English'. At the same time, however, the following poignant comment from another student highlights the ways in which rural/urban divides in Africa increase the invisibility of rural communities:

My community has a health clinic. We don't have electricity because the government is not aware of us. If you want to better your community, you need to struggle at school ... *School for Life* should be a school you can attend for many years because learning can help you make the government aware of us.

HIV/AIDS 'education'?

The role of non-government organizations in promoting EFA in sub-Saharan Africa is also discussed in the article by Christina Higgins (2014), who examines two HIV/AIDS health literacy programmes in rural Tanzania, where she has done extensive research over a number of years. However, while this context, like the Ghanaian study, is also rural and informal, the learner group is adult. Within the framework of *multiliteracies* (Kalantzis and Cope 2012), Higgins argues that critical health literacies have the potential to engage individuals in the deconstruction of texts and the transformation of their social identities and social relations. In contrast to the learner-centred strategies of SFL in Ghana, however, Higgins documents the ways in which health literacy instructors in these train-the-trainer programmes often missed valuable opportunities to promote critical health literacy. To support this argument, she provides compelling evidence that teacher-centred instruction, and even group work, failed to draw on the local knowledge of the participants in their programmes, often leaving participants passive and disengaged. The central argument she makes is that learners have their own 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al. 1992) that can be utilized in classroom contexts, particularly with regard to religious and indigenous belief systems, and that pedagogical strategies need to be developed to draw on learners' local knowledge if HIV/AIDS education is to be effective.

By taking an ethnographic approach to literacy events (Barton 2012), Higgins illustrates and analyzes the ways in which the educators in her study conveyed information about HIV/AIDS through two kinds of literacy events: (1) instruction using written modes of language from official booklets and on blackboards and flipcharts and (2) breakout sessions in groups that the participants were often assigned, which involved writing out answers to key questions posed by the educators. Her analysis shows a predominance of functional rather than critical health literacy practices, in which much time was spent writing notes on poster-sized papers, with female participants generally remaining on the margins of group activities. Although the learners were in fact all traditional healers and peer educators in their communities, there was 'a lack of pedagogical space' for local knowledge and critical engagement, and learners were positioned as 'students' rather than 'local experts'. The participants noted that visual teaching strategies, including videos and role-play, would have been more pedagogically productive, promoting more dialogic learning. The conclusion Higgins draws is significant:

Though it is exceedingly difficult to find 'solutions' to the problem of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, treating actual experience as the basis of education would go a long way in constructing identities that can aspire towards change.

Children teaching children

The ravages of HIV/AIDS are also highly visible in the neighbouring country of Uganda, where Elizabeth Namazzi and Maureen Kendrick (2014) have undertaken innovative research with households led by children, most of whom have lost their parents as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. While the youth in the Ghanaian study had reduced opportunities for formal learning, these young Ugandans struggled with a lack of adult support in the informal context of the home. Using funds of knowledge and sociocultural perspectives on children's learning, the researchers documented through ethnographic observations and interviews how children in four child-headed households used local cultural resources as tools for teaching and learning in the home. Such cultural resources included stories, songs, riddles and proverbs, which were co-constructed, re-appropriated and remixed by the children into what the authors call 'hybrid texts'. These texts deviated to some extent from traditional knowledge and practice but maintained some features of more traditional genres. Namazzi and Kendrick illustrate how these hybrid texts weave together the life histories and social challenges experienced by the children, helping to strengthen bonds between them, share new knowledge and enhance language skills in Luganda, the mother tongue.

In contrast to the teacher-centred, text-based instructional practices discussed by Higgins in Tanzania, Namazzi and Kendrick highlight the productive and engaging ways in which the siblings in the four households support one another in the learning/teaching process, and the authors document the ways in which the hybrid texts 'travel' from other sites of learning, such as the school and the trading centre. They demonstrate, for example, how the use of music, play and performance led to active engagement by siblings in the learning process, as exemplified by data from 15-year-old Gabe:

At times on our way to school, sometimes when we are in town there are some plays. Rakai project usually presents teaching on ways in which one can prevent him or herself from getting HIV/AIDS so in such a case I come back, act for them [siblings] and tell them the things I have learnt from there that they should do so as not to get HIV.

Namazzi and Kendrick conclude that their research provides a window into the unique production and use of multilingual cultural resources in child-headed households, and speaks to the need for educators and policymakers to better understand the critical role of siblings in the learning of linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Digital ways, unequal worlds

The interaction of siblings in language and literacy events in the home is also investigated by Polo Lemphane and Mastin Prinsloo (2014), but in a very different African context. In their study, set in two homes in Cape Town, South Africa, the siblings come from families with unequal socio-economic resources. While the children in both families are black Sotho-speaking South Africans, the siblings in one family (the Mahlale family) live in cramped quarters in a shanty town on the outskirts of the city, while the second family (the Boltons) live in a leafy, wealthy suburb. Of interest to the researchers are the ways in which the children in these contrasting settings engage with digital literacy practices in

their respective homes, and the extent to which these practices are indexical of larger social, economic and linguistic processes. Thus, while the siblings in Namazzi and Kendrick's study incorporated songs, plays and riddles in their daily interaction, the mediating tools in Lemphane and Prinsloo's study were digital resources, which had other intriguing consequences for social interaction, language learning and identity negotiation.

The digital resources in the Mahlale family were restricted to two mobile phones belonging to the parents, while the Bolton children had a desktop computer readily available, high-speed Internet connectivity, and a PlayStation connected to the television. While the Mahlale children struggled for access to the mobile phones, and had few opportunities for language development on the one game available on the mobile phone, the Bolton children were able to engage in a wide range of literacy events on their digital media and had multiple opportunities to develop meta-awareness around language. At the same time, however, Lemphane and Prinsloo raise concerns about the subtractive bilingualism taking place in the Bolton household, in which the English language was becoming increasingly dominant and 'the Bolton parents show[ed] no interest in "heritage language" maintenance for their children, nor in passing on their own bilingualism'. Drawing on an understanding of new media as placed resources, which operate in specific ways in particular contexts, Lemphane and Prinsloo's research offers a compelling demonstration of the ways in which digital media can exacerbate social class differences in home contexts, producing different identities, social ambitions and investments. They argue further that such differences translate into and contribute to the maintenance of social inequalities in school settings, which in turn reinforce language and social class divides in the wider society.

Engaging policy and practice

Although the research projects described above took place in very different African communities, sometimes thousands of miles apart, there is one key finding across all the sites that is relevant to both language and educational policy. The research suggests that prescriptivist language and educational policies, which do not harness the local knowledge of teachers, students, and parents, are missing important opportunities for promoting educational and social change. Such 'local knowledge' includes the indigenous languages and hybrid discourse practices of learners – whether in shanty towns or multilingual schools in South Africa, rural schools or child-headed households in Uganda, health literacy centres in Tanzania or CEPs in Ghana. While local languages are encouraged in the early grades of schooling, the research suggests that indigenous languages cease to have value in the advanced grades. In South Africa, for example, when students are struggling with English as the medium of instruction, teachers only guiltily 'smuggle in' local languages; in Uganda, the use of African languages in secondary school classrooms puts teachers' jobs at risk, even though students are reluctant to use their 'broken English' to communicate; in Tanzania, local healers who are not literate in English have few opportunities to contribute meaningfully to HIV/AIDS education programmes, and women in particular remain on the margins of classroom conversations. Significantly, it is in more *informal* sites of learning, as illustrated in Ghanaian CEPs and Ugandan child-headed households, that African languages and cultural resources are harnessed for productive and engaged learning. This finding is supported by the research addressed in Parry (2009) and Asselin and Doiron (2013), which are insightfully reviewed in this special issue by Espen Stranger-Johannessen (2014) and Shelley Jones (2014), respectively.

At issue here are prevalent understandings, at policy level, of what ‘language’ is and how it should be incorporated in educational practice. The dominant view of language presented across most of the research sites discussed in this continental research journey is that language is a bounded, homogeneous system, with a static relationship to a particular group of people. There is thus ‘good English’, associated with elite, well educated, and often white people, and then there is ‘broken English’ used in trading centres and the local economy; there is ‘pure Zulu’ and ‘pidgin Zulu’, and there is standard English and Ghanaian Pidgin English. What is considered legitimate in schools, and also for high-stakes assessments, is only ‘good English’. The construct of language as a meaning making practice, unbounded and hybrid, is not recognized by policymakers influential in the communities examined, despite the extensive literature on ‘world Englishes’ (Kachru 1990; Thumboo 2001) and ‘plurilingualism’ (Council of Europe 2001). The consequences for discourse practices and meaning making in schools and classrooms are profound: unless students can speak, read and write standard English, their chances of educational success are bleak. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that educational outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa fall far short of the MDGs.

A crucial but often invisible stakeholder in this debate are the parents of African children (see Tembe and Norton 2008). As parents observe the exercise of power in both local and regional African communities, they see that politicians, doctors, nurses, teachers and bankers all speak and write standard English. African parents want their children, equally, to speak and write the Queen’s English, so that their children have greater opportunities for the future. While parents value the mother tongue, and understand its cultural and educational importance, they are not convinced that the mother tongue will provide access to desirable employment and financial security for their children as they grow older. The refrain we have heard in many research projects in Africa is, ‘We will teach our children the mother tongue; you teach them English’.

How can research contribute to this complex conversation, and perhaps suggest ways in which the impasse between policy and practice can be breached, as William, quoted at the beginning of this introduction, asked so poignantly? To address this question, other related questions arise: Who exactly are the policymakers? What influences policy-making? How do policies ‘travel’ from the centre to the peripheries of power? Can practitioners influence policy? While there are no simple answers to these questions, the acute educational challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, as documented in this special issue, demand the concerted efforts of all stakeholders. As a framework for action, the statement of principles of the Language-in-Education Conference held in South Sudan in March 2012 (summarized below) are a helpful starting point and speak to the issues raised in this special issue (McIlwraith 2013, 7):

- (1) The multilingual nature of African society is a resource that should be celebrated and used.
- (2) African languages should be used in partnership with international languages such as English and French.
- (3) Parents, the state and civil society should be informed of the benefits of using African languages alongside European languages.
- (4) Learners should be taught up to lower secondary in the languages they know best.
- (5) Additional languages should be introduced only after learners have developed reading and writing competency in the language most familiar to them.
- (6) Transitions to additional languages should be gradual and not sudden.
- (7) Effective teaching should be promoted, and good teaching valued.

- (8) The teaching of reading and writing is particularly important and must be improved.
- (9) Non-formal education should form part of the education system.

Although considerable resources are necessary to operationalize many of these principles, there are important initiatives that require little more than political will. There is an urgent need to introduce greater flexibility into language and education policy, and to ensure that administrators communicate this flexibility to teachers. The central role of African languages in the informal economy, as noted by Bamgbose, should also be recognized by both parents and teachers. The role of mother tongue literacy as a scaffold for additional language learning should be better communicated to parents, and the multilingual resources that many children bring to school should be acknowledged. Teachers should be encouraged to draw on the wide range of local resources available to them, including African languages, to ensure that learning is meaningful. This includes recognition of multilingualism as a valuable resource, and the role of codeswitching as a useful scaffold in learning. Both learners and teachers need to have greater ownership of meaning-making practices and their identities and investments need validation (Norton 2013; Norton and Williams 2012). As Abiria, Early, and Kendrick (2013) have noted, if teachers are active participants in educational change, there is greater impact on classroom practices. Advances in digital technology are increasing the extent to which local resources can be scaled up to promote multilingual learning and teaching, as exemplified in the innovative African Storybook Project (Welch et al. 2013). As we approach the post-2015 era of the MDGs, we hope the findings of our research will help to inform policymaking so that policymakers 'don't leave it to those at the grassroots to suffer'.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Ron Darvin for meticulous copyediting and John Edwards for insightful feedback. Much of the work for the special issue was undertaken when the author was a Distinguished Scholar in Residence at UBC's Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies. This support, a UBC Faculty of Education grant, and SSHRC, are gratefully acknowledged.

References

- Abiria, D., M. Early, and M. Kendrick. 2013. "Plurilingual Pedagogical Practices in a Policy-constrained Context: A Northern Ugandan Case Study." *TESOL Quarterly* 47: 567–590.
- African Union. 2001. "The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)". Accessed April 11. <http://www.nepad.org/system/files/NEPAD%20Framework%20%28English%29.pdf>.
- Asselin, M., and R. Doiron, eds. 2013. *Linking Literacy and Libraries in Global Communities*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Bamgbose, A. 1991. *Language and the Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bamgbose, A. 2014. "The language factor in development goals." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:10.1080/01434632.2014.908888.
- Barton, D. 2012. "Ethnographic Approaches to Literacy Research." In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, edited by C. Chapelle. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Blackledge, A., and A. Creese. 2010. *Multilingualism: A Critical Perspective*. London: Continuum.
- Blommaert, J. 2010. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Canagarajah, S. 1999. *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cummins, J. 2001. *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: California Association for Bilingual Education.

- Early, M., and B. Norton. 2014. "Revisiting English as medium of instruction in rural African classrooms." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.908890](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908890).
- Higgins, C. 2014. "Constructing identities through literacy events in HIV/AIDS education." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.908892](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908892).
- Hornberger, N., ed. 2003. *Continua of Bilinguality: An Ecological Framework for Educational Policy, Research, and Practice in Multilingual Settings*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Janks, H. 2009. *Literacy and Power*. New York: Routledge.
- Jones, S. 2014. "Linking literacy and libraries in global communities." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.909114](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.909114).
- Kachru, B. 1990. "World Englishes and Applied Linguistics." *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 19 (1): 127–152.
- Kalantzis, M., and B. Cope. 2012. *Literacies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kyeyune, R. 2011. "Enfranchising the Teacher of English through Action Research: Perspectives on English Language Teacher Education in Uganda." In *Social Justice Language Teacher Education*, edited by M. Hawkins, 86–101. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Lemphane, P., and M. Prinsloo. 2014. "Children's digital literacy practices in unequal South African settings." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.908894](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908894).
- Makoe, P., and C. McKinney. 2014. "Linguistic ideologies in multilingual South African suburban schools." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.908889](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908889).
- Makoni, S., and U. Meinhof, eds. 2003. "Western Perspectives in Applied Linguistics in Africa." *ALLA Review* 17 (1).
- Martin-Jones, M., and K. Jones, eds. 2000. *Multilingual Literacies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- McIlwraith, H., ed. 2013. *Multilingual Education in Africa: Lessons from the Juba Language-in-Education Conference*. London: British Council.
- Moll, L., C. Amanti, D. Neff, and N. González. 1992. "Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms." *Theory into Practice* 31 (2): 132–141. doi:[10.1080/00405849209543534](https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534).
- Muthwii, M., and N. Kioko. 2004. *New Language Bearings in Africa*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Namazzi, E., and M. E. Kendrick. 2014. "Multilingual cultural resources in child-headed families in Uganda." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.908893](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908893).
- Norton, B. 2013. *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*. 2nd ed. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Norton, B., and C. Williams. 2012. "Digital Identities, Student Investments and eGranary as a Placed Resource." *Language and Education* 26 (4): 315–329. doi:[10.1080/09500782.2012.691514](https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2012.691514).
- Parry, K., ed. 2009. *Reading in Africa, Beyond the School*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Prinsloo, M. 2005. "The New Literacies as Placed Resources." *Perspectives in Education* 23 (4): 87–98.
- Romaine, S. 2013. "Keeping the Promise of the Millennium Development Goals: Why Language Matters." *Applied Linguistics Review* 4 (1): 1–21.
- Sherris, A., O. S. Sulemana, A. Alhassan, G. Abudu, and A.-R. Karim. 2014. "School for Life in Ghana: promoting literate opportunities for rural youth." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.908891](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.908891).
- Stein, P., and D. Newfield, eds. 2006. "Multiliteracies and Multimodality in English in Education in Africa." *English Studies in Africa* 49 (1).
- Stranger-Johannessen, E. 2014. "Reading in Africa, beyond the school." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:[10.1080/01434632.2014.909113](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.909113).
- Street, B., ed. 2001. *Literacy and Development*. New York: Routledge.
- Tembe, J., and B. Norton. 2008. "Promoting Local Languages in Ugandan Primary Schools: The Community as Stakeholder." *Canadian Modern Language Review* 65 (1): 33–60. doi:[10.3138/cmlr.65.1.33](https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.65.1.33).
- Thumboo, E., ed. 2001. *The Three Circles of English*. Singapore: National University of Singapore, UniPress.

- Tuhiwai Smith, L. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- UNESCO. 2000. "The Dakar Framework for Action." Accessed April 11. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>.
- UNESCO. 2014. *2013/2014 Education for All Global Monitoring Report*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNICEF. 1999. *The State of the World's Children*. New York, NY: UNICEF.
- United Nations. 2000. "United Nations Millennium Declaration." Accessed April 11. <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>.
- Welch, T., J. Tembe, D. Wupukhulu, J. Baker, and B. Norton. 2013. "The African Storybook Project: Literacy for the Future." Paper presented at 10th International Language and Development Conference, Cape Town, October 15–17.