

Mother-tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE): contexts, theories, practices

International Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Conference

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Kathleen Heugh, University of South Australia



Outline

Terminology

History of the notion of MTB-MLE

South Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa 25-country study, longitudinal data

Myths, false claims

Learning from mistakes, successes, and transnational shifts

Coloniality – post-coloniality – decoloniality

Theory from the South / Global South / southern epistemologies

Multilingualism, code-switching, translanguaging, transknowledging

Looking ahead: decoloniality – communalities of care, hope and love



Introduction: clarifying the basics

Terminology

Multilingualism & multilingual education are not new

Context

Understanding of multilingualism & multilingual education differs

- between the global South & global North
- among settings of the global South

Globalisation & diversity

Globalisation

- ≠ reduction of linguistic diversity,
- ≠ only one international language

Be careful of

inappropriate/ **incorrect interpretations** of terminology;

Or **incorrect historical accounts** of linguistic diversity in global South

Authors in global North

may not understand

the complex historical and geographic ecologies of language in the global South

Rather globalisation

- = increased diversity
- = intensifies multilingualism in the global North –
- Different kinds of multilingualism in the global South
- How people understand multilingualism differs in each context
- The vocabulary we use takes on different meanings from one context to another

⇒ **Over-reliance on global North understanding of multilingualism gets us into trouble**

⇒ **Continues cycles of coloniality & inequality**

Different understandings & use of terminology: Global South vs Global North

Global South

Historically multilingual

96% of world's languages; 55% in Asia-Pacific, 86% Africa, Asia, Pacific

European colonialism introduced idea of creating a state followed by building national identity

'state nations' – followed by attempt to 'invisibilise' multilingualism

Figurative meanings for terms such as 'mother tongue' etc.

Mother language

Langue maternelle

Língua materna

All Education in practice is bilingual or multilingual

Despite monolingual policies

Even if hidden or regarded as deviant

History of the term: - figurative, positive

Mother-tongue-based bilingual/multilingual education (MTB-MLE)

Revalues / acknowledges local & regional educational expertise, interventions & practices

Global North

18th & 19th C sense of national identity emerges

followed by concept of nation state



1 nation state = 1 national language



multilingualism invisibilised until late 20th C

Interpretation of 'mother tongue' is

more **literal** & takes on **negative meaning** early 21st C

Be careful / cautious

Models from northern contexts & linguistic ecologies may not work in

post-colonial / southern contexts & multilingual ecologies

What led to the term: Mother-tongue-based bilingual / multilingual education in the African context?

120 years of reports & recommendations for language & literacy in education



Use of local languages/mother tongue for first 1-3 years, then switch to English or French or Portuguese medium (EMI, FMI, PMI)

Recommended in

1953 UNESCO Report on the Use of Vernacular languages in education

But: after independence: 1960s – 1990s

Most 'Anglophone' countries **reduced MTE**,
and switched to international language earlier

'Francophone' & 'Lusophone' countries – usually **zero MTE**



Low retention
high repeater rates; poor achievement
low throughput to secondary

South Africa

Apartheid (separate & unequal) system 1948-1994

1953 Mother-tongue education (MTE) policy coincides with 1953 UNESCO Report

MT medium for 8 years + English + Afrikaans (trilingual) for African Children

Bilingual Afrikaans + English education for other children

English / French / Portuguese (Mol) after 1-3 years MTE in most post-independent African countries



Political resistance against 8yrs MTE & Afrikaans in secondary school (rebellion in 1976) from African language speakers in SA



Apartheid government reduces 8yrs MTE to 4yrs, rapid transition to English medium (EMI), de-emphasis on Afrikaans



Resistance to inequality of Apartheid – the terms ‘mother tongue’ and ‘bilingual’ education
negative connotations in South Africa

Few people noticed high level achievement of all students 1953 -1976 (1978)

Especially with 8yrs MTE for African students plus Afrikaans & English (trilingual education)

Highest rate of successful secondary school completions, and student achievement (Heugh 1999)

Student achievement & completion of secondary school declined after 1980

Further declined since change to post-apartheid language education policy from late 1990s to 2021 – and MTE reduced to maximum of 3yrs followed by switch to EMI (Heugh, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2011)

Mother-tongue-based bilingual / multilingual education MTB-BLE / MTB-MLE – history of the term

Post-apartheid Language-in-education policy, 1997

Informed by multilingual education research findings 1930-95 in Africa +
borrowed 'additive' & 'subtractive' terminology from N America & Europe

Seen in political context then as preferable to terminology (e.g., mother tongue) used during apartheid

Additive bilingual / multilingual education:

Home language (mother tongue / local language) as foundation for learning
with

Additional languages (usually international language, e.g., English)

(Additive) **bilingual education** explained as

Bilingual education based on home language (L1 / MT) and English

Minimum of 2 languages for each child

(Additive) **multilingual education** explained as

Multilingual education based on home language (L1 / MT) and English

different MTs across the country + English

where possible, also 3rd and even 4th language for each student

[Heugh 1995, 2002]

Debates between stakeholders and attempts to clarify the policy of additive bilingual and multilingual education

Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA), University of Cape Town, adapted term from **home language** to **mother tongue**

because most people understood **mother tongue** better & to avoid confusion with European & N American models of bilingual education

Bilingual education based on home language (HL) and English (Heugh, 1995)



Mother-tongue-based bilingual education (MTB-BLE) (Heugh & Alexander, 2000)

Minimum 2 languages for each student

Multilingual education based on home language (HL) and English (Heugh, 1995)



Mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) (Heugh & Alexander, 2000)

System-wide level, bi-/trilingual for each student

Principles of the language in education policy for South Africa (1997)

New terminology intended to clarify historical and political misunderstandings in the South African context

Not intended for other contexts

Original intention may be misunderstood, or interpreted differently elsewhere

MTB-BLE/MLE based on research in Africa

1930s- 1940s in South Africa:

- Students in bilingual medium education – higher achievement in school exit examinations
- Less likely to engage in ethno-linguistic conflict / more likely to co-exist peacefully

1970s in Nigeria:

- Six Year Primary Project, Nigeria 1970-1976: 6yrs MTM followed by switch to EMI with well-trained teachers + good provision of appropriate textbooks (Fafunwa, 1989; Bamgbose, 2000)

1980s-2021 Sub-Saharan Africa

- **Failure of early-exit / early transition after 1-3 years of MT to EMI, French MI & Portuguese MI**

(Bamgbose 1980s – 2021; Heugh 1980s -2021; Alidou et al 2006; Ouane & Glanz 2010, 2011; ongoing studies in Ethiopia, Uganda, e.g., Heugh & Namyalo, 2017; Mozambique, Chibutane, 2021; Burkina Faso and West Africa 2005-2013, Alidou et al., 2011; Nikièma, 2011)

Research across Africa 1930 – 2021 confirms that:

Students remain in school for more years in primary with MTE + international language – i.e., MTB-BLE

The longer the use of MTE medium, the higher student achievement

3 years of MTE is better than none, 4 years increases opportunities **but not enough to sustain lifelong literacy**

6 years increases opportunities to sustain literacy and to reach secondary school

8 years offers best chances to reach end of secondary successfully

Children can learn to read and write in 2 orthographies and 3 languages better than one or two languages

Three languages may be more beneficial than two.

MTB-MLE – terminology & practice travels to SE & S Asia via collaboration between PRAESA, South Africa and

Skutnabb-Kangas, Mohanty and colleagues – visits and research collaborations 2000-2012; 25-country study in Africa – findings in Alidou et al., 2006; Ouane & Glanz, 2010; 2011; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010.

Myths and efforts to avoid: MTB-BLE and MTB-MLE

FALSE CLAIMS

Mother tongue: term is out-dated or not valid

People don't know what their MT is – they mix languages – therefore – just provide the international language

'Mother tongue' – literal meaning discriminates against men or transgender people

MTB-BLE does not offer students adequate access to international language

CONFUSION of MEANING

Some critics misunderstand terms or misuse them and

⇒ this causes confusion for parents, teachers and education officials

REALITY

Mother tongue/language is used across Africa, SE and S Asia.

If people and communities use the term widely – then the term has validity

The language that children use, whether this is
a standard language,
a variety, a dialect, or
a mixing of languages (codemixing, translanguaging)
the language used by the father, mother, family members

= this is the mother tongue

& the term is used figuratively not literally

Bilingual and Multilingual education always offers access to the international language – but some approaches are better than others

MTB-BLE/MLE offers the best approach we know & is supported by considerable & reliable evidence

How do we understand multilingualism in education?

Global North

Debates (apparently) emerge from:

Monolingual 'nation-state' ideologies

Dominant discourses/languages

Theory of bilingual education often misunderstood as

Two separate systems

But practices more complex - gives rise to a northern misunderstanding - of

Multilingual education

As limited to small subset of European / North American bilingual models of bilingual education

Pedagogy: direct method, communicative language teaching

Separation of languages

Majority language vs. minority languages

Global South

Horizontal and Vertical systems co-exist:

Vertical multilingualism / parallel & separate monolingualism

colonial 'nation state' ideology



placed over

existing horizontal system of multilingualism

with

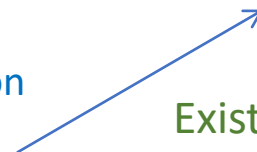
Education theory from the north

models & pedagogies that do not fit bilingual & multilingual education in southern contexts

Existing southern systems of horizontal multilingualism

lie beneath all informal education & economies

bi/multilingual educational practices/repertoires are in every classroom, even when overlaid by vertical monolingual policies



Actual practices: *'multilingualism is the medium of education'* (Wan Marjuki, 2015)

Sarifpah Aisah Wan Marjuki, a former 3rd Year linguistics student of Heugh, undertook classroom research in Sarawak in 2015 and found: *multilingualism is the medium of instruction*

In one classroom the teacher uses: Arabic, Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Sarawak

... by practicing multilingualism as the medium of instruction, the students will be able to understand and pay more attention in their learning lesson

In another classroom in a different part of Sarawak

...dual language which is Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Iban can be found in one of the rural area school in Sarawak

Three participants interviews were from different ethnolinguistic communities: Iban, Malay and Melanau.

... respondents think that the usage of more than one language is one of the best way to develop their [students] language repertoire

... all respondents stated that they enjoy being multilingual and it ...somehow helps a lot in their career development

... being multilingual will ensure the language proficiency among people in workplace, school and among the society

Aisah's observation

...usage of more than one language in school and on the sign board in a public area in Sarawak ... has indicated that there is a usage of other language rather than only the national language which will accommodate every speech community in Sarawak

Aisah Wan Marjuki concludes her research with a recommendation:

... multilingualism and cultural diversity in Sarawak should be maintained in order to preserve the identity of its people and their nation (Wan Marjuki, 2015)

After 20 + Years of MTB-MLE developments & debates, what more do we need to know for Africa & Asia - Pacific to share and use productively

Expertise in understanding of

- multilingual education (see also Plüddemann et al., 2004; 2010)
- how people actually communicate in their daily lives in contexts which are linguistically and culturally diverse (e.g. Wan Marjuki, 2015)
- how languages change as one moves from one village or town to the next
- how people manage these changes in order to communicate for practical purposes
- why and how Indigenous languages continue to be so important for healthy, inclusive and safe communities (see also: Benson & Kosonen, 2013; Lo Bianco, 2016, 2017; Stoianova & Angermann, 2018; Person, 2018; Heugh & Mohamed, 2020)

Southern (S-S collaboration) & decolonial perspectives of

- linguistic diversity and
- diversity in literacy practices

The World Bank now recognises the validity and reliability of this body of research (World Bank, 2021)

Rethinking Literacy from a perspective of Southern multilingualisms and literacies

The global shifts and turbulence resulting in changes of N-S, S-S and E-W patterns of communication, including notions of 'literacy' are changing

What do we need to learn?

How do we bring together Southern and Northern experiences of Literacy(ies)?

Which research data do we know is reliable and valid for students in (South) Africa?

Where and how do we start again?

Southern perspectives

How First Nations peoples in Australia, India and Canada relate to literacy

Remembering (early) literacy practices that date back 60 000 years in Africa

Decolonising our minds in regard to literacy / biliteracy / trilateracy

Key findings of longitudinal studies of literacy / biliteracy & educational outcomes in Africa

Multilingualism in one place is not the same as in another – there are many different kinds of multilingualism / multilingualisms are plural features of humanity / people use their various multilingual repertoires in different ways for different purposes

The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, located in Central Australia

Uluru lies at the heart of the region and is the site where the creation beings from the Tjukurpa interact. The markers of these stories and ancestral beings are seen on the rock and in the surrounding environment. The three communities that make up the community are connected through Tjukurpa and Uluru is a powerful visual site that draws Anangu people together from across the region.

<https://nyangatjajara.nt.edu.au/about-us>

Uluru – known as Ayers Rock, during the colonial period in the Central Desert of Australia



Each language is related to literacy and communal relationships

Knowledge is co-created & transmitted through intimate associations, affiliations & anchorage in knowledge,

e.g., *Tjukurpa Tjuta: The 100 Languages*

Katrina Tjitayi (2018) in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands of the Central Desert in Australia

‘Before the baby is born, she hears the mother’s voice and the relationship is the number one language. The language and stories are carried inside...they’re already there. **If I see a person, I can see language in their *kurunpa* (spirit).** When children are moving around and playing, they have language. **Language is talking, singing, story wire, painting, hunting, *inma* and dancing, storytelling...it is all connected – *tjungu*.** I have a relationship with trees, country, land and **when I see something like a tree, my *kurunpa* hears its language –** the relationship is already there. Many languages make us rich and *proud*.’ (Katrina Tjitayi, 2018)

Further elaborated in the:

Early Years Painted Philosophy Project, Ernabella 2020 (Series of 3 works of philosophical art-texts, developed and translated in oral and written texts co-constructed by three sisters: **Janet, Katrina and Umatji Tjitayi**)



Painting Story <https://nyangatjatjara.nt.edu.au/about-us>

15 senior community members and artists from across the three Anangu communities and after workshopping, present the findings of the research through a collaborative art piece. The piece is presented here. You can hover the mouse on sections of the painting and read the stories the artists and project directors shared as an explanation of the work. The art itself is a comprehensive document in which history, knowledge and literacy in Pitjantjatjara language are incorporated on a canvas – through a process of co-constructing knowledge (text, Sam Osborne, 2021)

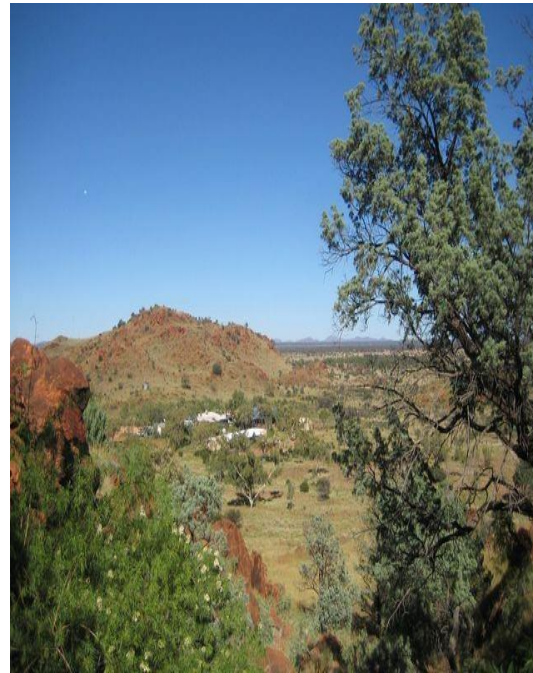
Plural ways in southern communities disrupt the 'master' notion of literacy – with alternative agencies, citizenship, opportunities & hopefulness

In Cree language revitalisation and learning in community and on the Land in Saskatchewan (Daniels, et al.)

- Language revival in learning together is necessary in order to become
- This is a participatory growing into being / living & knowledge
- Guided by elders towards our spiritual selves in communion with land
- Intimate relationship with language – living through language – as language learners become spiritual

Bottom pic. B Daniels, Medicine Walk, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan, Canada

(see Daniels, et al., 2021)



In consensual conversations with Anangu elders & youth in remote Central Desert, Australia, researchers Armitage and Osborne, find

- Anangu elders patiently retell the story that must be told and heard – until understood by the 'white' English-speaking researcher
- Anangu youth, teaching Janet, the the researcher, to read the landscape: 'Janet you are not looking' – when she loses her way in the bush
- Anangu women's methodologies for literacy – in story-painting
- Hopefulness of Katrina Tjitayi and her sisters – that young people will be grown up well and healthily in language
- Reading is not possible unless knowledge and language are already present

Top pic. J. Armitage, W. Anangu School, Central Desert, Australia

(see Armitage, 2021a, b; Osborne, 2021)



Southern people co-construct historical records that will be read, understood and remembered

In which understanding and knowledge is co-produced and co-revealed.

Our understanding of literacy slowly changes

- if we can forget the noise of global North scholarly works
- if we can recognise irrelevant, misleading discussions of literacy & multilingualism in post-colonial global South contexts

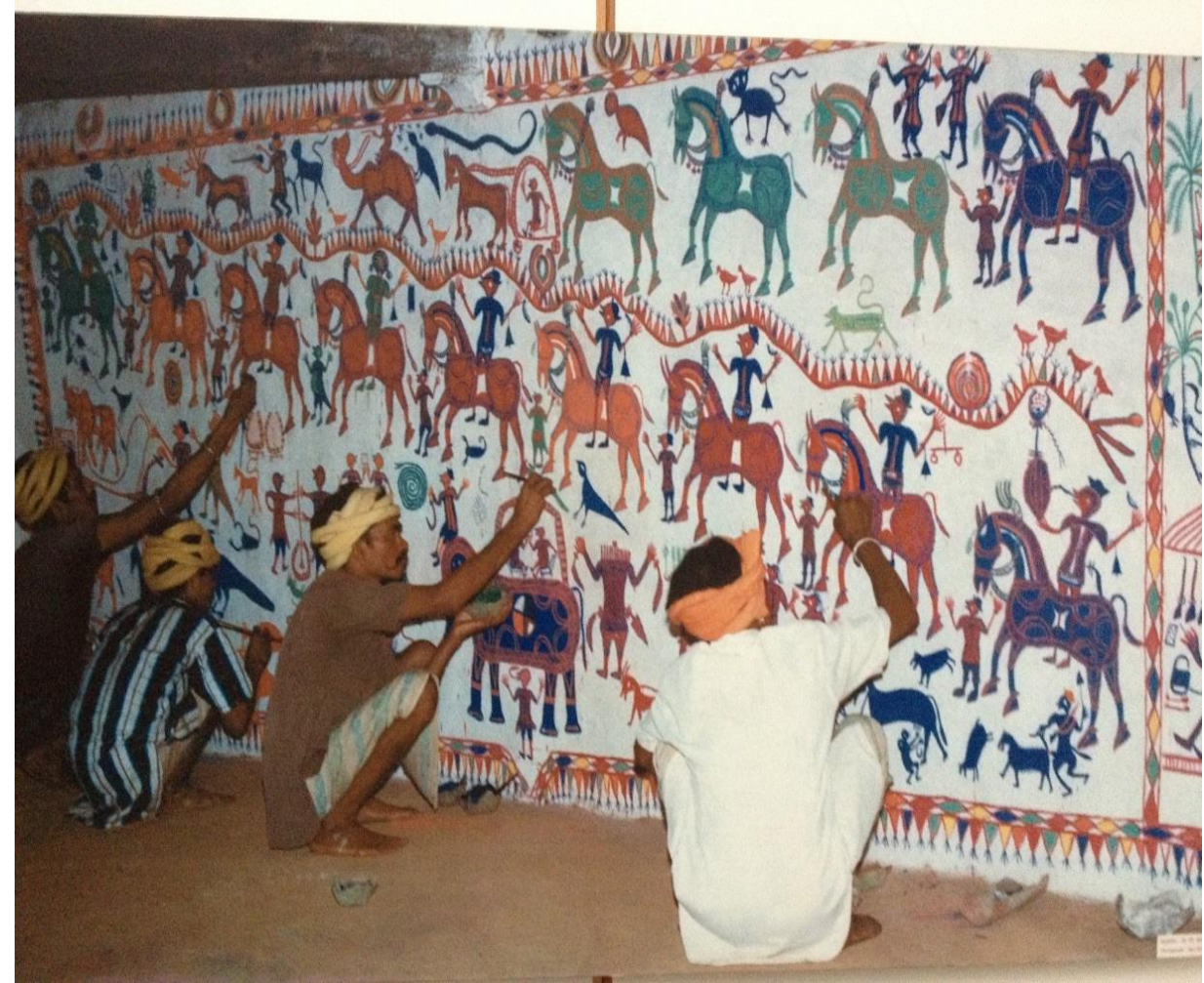
Ideas, knowledge and experience including of literacy for southern peoples come from:

- deep foundations of belief / faith, knowledge systems and ways of living and working together as communities
- strong associations and affiliations with particular places
- care for living and non-living, including human beings, ancestors and those who will follow

In places such as these – can /should we think or speak of ‘new’ knowledge of literacy & multilingualism from northern texts?

Or should we look more closely at our southern realities?

Pic. Heugh, 2012. Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (National Museum of Humankind), Bhopal, India. Artists recording history to be read by present and future generations.



Key findings from African & SE & S Asian Research 1980 -2021

Students in multilingual societies who attend formal education (schools) need

a minimum of 6 years of *learning to read* **and** *learning how to read for learning*

in the language of their local community (home/mother/first language)

and

6+ years of well-resourced teaching & learning of a second/third language (e.g., English, French, Portuguese) and opportunities to develop biliteracy (through transfer of capabilities from L1 to L2/L3; and also from L2/3 to L1 – two-way transfer

before

They can learn through the L2/3 effectively

There is no short cut

There is NO reliable evidence, from any where in the world, that shows that early transition from the L1 to an L2 (i.e. by Grade 2/3) will show positive literacy achievement for students in low-income multilingual communities. Close scrutiny of evaluations that make claims of long-term literacy achievement have been found to be unscientific, fundamentally flawed & misleading (Ouane & Glanz, 2011; Heugh, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012; Mohanty, 2018)

Instead, in Africa & South & S E Asia we have found and developed

multilingual pedagogies that can be used in urban, rural and remote communities that can make MTB-MLE work well

Ones developed by teachers in schools of Africa (e.g. Achmat & Lewis, 1992; Westcott, 2004)

Ones being developed by teachers in Malaysia, in every ASEAN country, across the Asia-Pacific, the Américas
(e.g. Benson & Kosonen, 2013; Person, 2018; see also Benson & Plüddemann, 2010)

And teachers, even in Ireland, have found these to be so productive that in a school with 80 different language communities, students exit primary school with literacy in their home languages, Irish Gaelic, French and English
(Little & Kirwan, 2019)

Heugh, International MTB MLE Conference, Malaysia, 23-25

Nov 2021

MTB-MLE: we now know that biliteracy/triliteracy and multilingual education includes both purposeful *translanguaging* & *transknowledging*

Translating knowledge from one language to another involves

Knowledge, language & literacy

Knowledge developed in one language may not be known in another language.

Two-way exchanges of knowledge between community and the school



And between the school & community involve ***transknowledging, translanguaging & biliteracy***

'learning to hear, read, understand, exchange knowledges of the community and world'

Multilingual pedagogies that have evolved in Africa & Asia Pacific for thousands of years include both mixing of languages and separation of languages for specific purposes

Global North scholarly **claims suggest that vague translanguaging practices can bring social justice – BUT these do NOT offer students strong capability in at least one language of power, access to higher education and career / employment opportunities**

They do not liberate or empower students in post-colonial & low-income countries

They also do not deliver social justice to minoritised students in the global North

UNLESS students are also given full access to the language/s of power (Heugh, 2019, 2020, 2021)



Africa & Asia have proud decolonial histories of literacy & MTB-MLE scholarship

It is these histories and scholarship that must guide our youth and future generations

We have our own research about

how and why colonial / neo-colonial and post-colonial
dependency on northern discourses
reproduces policies that default to a single national language, or EMI
and

ones that deny the existence of / or stigmatise the daily multilingual practices of multilingual education in Africa, Asia and the Americas

We know that

Multilingualism and multilingual practices in one context/country/part of a country is not the same as in another

Teachers in schools are best placed to understand the multilingual needs of their students

They will respond as best as possible – when policies are flexible enough to accommodate responses that are appropriate for local communities

It may help if we open our ears (*vula iindlebe*) to hear, listen and acknowledge that in reality

Multilingualism is the lingua franca in Africa (Fardon & Furniss, 1994)

Multilingualism is the medium of instruction (Wan Marjuki, 2015)

These are essential understandings for any education authority that cares for students from diverse backgrounds

Both national minority communities & also migrant and refugee communities

If we are to travel towards a world in which core values of humanity are honoured with

Care, hope and love for peaceful futures

We can use what we know better by sharing our expertise

Enkosi Kakhulu / Gealeboa / Merci /Thank you/Palya!

Heugh, International MTB MLE Conference, Malaysia, 23-25

Nov 2021

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