UKFIET International Conference on Education and Livelihoods; Sept 2005

Issues arising from Papers presented in Literacy and Livelihood strand organised by UEA Literacy and Development Group

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There were twelve presentations over two days and the following represent the key themes that indicate where literacy researchers such as these are currently located, the questions they are addressing and the issues that point forward to future work in this area.

Literacies: multiple; social; process approaches cf Freire, Reflect, LGM ('Locally Generated Materials') and NLS ('New Literacy Studies').

Learning: socially based vs individual or cognitive; embedded, situated. Implications for change, new literacies

Local/ Global : privileging of 'locally' situated literacy and learning vs 'distant' literacies, brought from outside, new, 'global'

'**Capabilities' vs Relativism:** concept of 'capabilities' as basis for universal claims to 'justice', vs situated, local values; integration of two approaches?

'Impact' and 'measurement': 'skills' and atomised items vs social indicators eg conflict resolution, 'wellbeing', community activity, 'confidence', indirect indicators eg meeting halls

Language of Literacy and Multi modality: language for learning literacy; policy tensions - local pressures for English - international belief in 'first language' as better way in to literacy. Communicative practices- not just language eg visual mode eg mix of modes – visual, kinaesthetic, oral. Implications for pedagogy and policy

Terminology: 'Literacy' = 'knowledge' or competence'? literacy = everything?; metaphorical uses eg 'palpatory literacy', 'political literacy' vs 'Literacy' as reading/ writing – but still embedded in oral, visual eg layout, colour.

… and Numeracy: numeracy added on to programmes and curriculum vs different from literacy? Problems with teachers learning to teach numeracy (many are frightened and under confident).

Literacies: all of the papers focused on a social practices view of literacy, treating reading and writing as processes rather than just 'skills' or items to be formally measured and the presenters called upon ethnographic perspectives in their collecting and presenting of data. The sources of these approaches were variably cited as Freire, Reflect, LGM ('Locally Generated Materials') and NLS ('New Literacy Studies').

Learning: The authors drew attention to theories of learning that, like theories of literacy, were socially based rather than just individual or cognitive. For instance many described how adults had learned literacy on the job, the literacy practices they gradually became familiar with were 'embedded' in such activities as the work of tour guide sin Namibia, shopkeepers in Bangladesh, family units in Malaysia. In some cases literacy had been acquired without use of primers or of 'technical building blocks'.
Comment: This raised the question of how transferable such newly acquired skills might be – does this approach run the danger of keeping learners within narrow boundaries of activities they already know – what about social change and new skills and activities?

Local/ Global: The discussion of Learning linked directly with a broad theme running through literacy research and practice at this time – what is the relationship between the local and the global? Speakers provided examples of this tension from a number of countries; in Nepal, the Reflect philosophy from outside might have clashed with internal values, such as those associated with pollution and caste rules; In the Sudan learning circles chose local topics and more learning seemed to happen when groups were homogenous than when they were mixed; in Senegal shop signs indicated not only local produce but also those from the global market, such as Coca Cola; and the impact of tourism on local employment in Namibia showed the local and global i8n relation both symbolically – eg how is a culture represented by tour guides – and in employment terms – how do local guides get employment when corporations try to tie down the regulation and control of tourism?

Comment: Ethnographic approaches have tended to privilege the local – recognising, for instance, that the meanings of literacy cannot just be imposed form outside and that learning take place in situated contexts. However, recent critiques of research and theory in this field have suggested that an overemphasis on the 'local' might miss the fact that for many people literacy does come from outside - it is not locally produced. Nevertheless, some have argued that local responses to such new literacy always involves adaptations and in the end the 'global' is always instantiate din local contexts – it does not just exist 'out there'.

'Impact' and 'measurement': The dominant models available for measuring the outcomes of literacy programmes involve the use 'skills' and atomised items. The presenters suggested more qualitative ways in which the outcomes of programmes could be assessed, eg through use of social (or 'indirect') indicators such as conflict resolution, 'wellbeing', community activity, 'confidence. Examples of indirect, indicators included, the development of meeting halls as a result of a literacy project in Nepal, of a shopkeeper's capacity to engage in the marketplace in Bangladesh and of participation by villagers in local forms of tourism in Namibia. The paper by Stuart Cameron on the 'economic benefits of literacy' made clear the limitations of

dominant economic analyses of 'outcomes' and showed some of the advantages of adopting a 'Livelihoods' framework as a way of implementing broader, more qualitative approaches.

Language of Literacy and Multi modality: policy regarding the language for learning literacy; tensions between local pressures for English and international belief in 'first language' as better way in to literacy. New focus on communicative practices more broadly, not just language eg visual mode eg mix of modes – visual, kinaesthetic, oral. Implications for pedagogy and policy

Terminology: Use of 'literacy' to cover general terms such as 'knowledge' or competence'; metaphorical use of term literacy eg 'palpatory literacy', 'political literacy'. Or, restrict 'literacy' to practices involving reading/ writing – still mixed here ie reading and writing embedded din oral, in visual eg layout, colour. How to describe these links and contextual issues without collapsing into literacy = everything

… and Numeracy: in teaching and policy numeracy is often added on to programmes and curriculum – what features does it have of its own, different from literacy? Problems with teachers learning to teach numeracy (many are frightened and under confident).