Theory, rationale and evidence base for MTB-MLE

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Different Language Contexts

Homogeneous (rural settings)

L1 as MOI
Learn L2 as subject at least until threshold level

Multilingual mixed (urban settings)

Language teaching program
Learn new L2 at least until threshold level before assuming learning through it.

2 or 3 languages (rural/urban settings)

1. MTB-MLE (one L)
2. Two streams
3. Language teaching
Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education

Education program that takes into account the ‘mother tongue’/home language of the child. It helps the child to become bi/multilingual at school, starting with the language the child knows best (or well).
Why?

• In multilingual countries, one has to be a multilingual citizen to fully participate in society, at national and local level.

• To participate in the global world, multilingualism is important.
Learning a new language: where and when?

Informal
• At home
• Business - when one knows one can benefit from the other language as in business (selling fruit, veggies, other goods).

(Non) Formal
• Language courses
• Most common place to learn new languages is at school.
What do we know? (theory)

Linguistic threshold hypothesis

• a linguistic threshold is a necessary point that a bilingual student must reach in order to benefit from bilingualism (Cummins, 1979).
What do we know? (theory)

Linguistic interdependence hypothesis

- in bilingual development, language and literacy skills can be *transferred* from one language to another.
What do we know? (theory)

Reaching the threshold takes time

- the language threshold for reading is largely based on the vocabulary size of the language user (Eyckmans, 2004; Hirsh & Nation, 1992; Nation, 2006).
- Vocabulary size threshold is language dependent

Vocabulary threshold

- English +/- 3000 words
- French +/- 2200
- Greek +/- 3450 (Milton, 2001)

- L2 learners learn about 400-500 words a year (foreign L2) (Nation 1990, (Orosz 2009)
What do we know? (theory)

Transfer starts as knowledge in L2 is learnt

- Phonological awareness
- Picture reading
- Reading letters
- Writing letters
- Comprehension

Comprehension

- Only happens when children know the language (voc/gram) of what they read/hear.
- Very controlled language till initial threshold is reached
- Still controlled till comfortable level is reached
- Children need to learn independent language learning skills
Summarise theory

- Linguistic threshold that needs to be reached before learners can benefit cognitively from new language as MOI
- Transfer of things learnt in L1 to L2/FL – gradual
- Language learning takes time – 5-6 years before initial threshold is reached
Different approaches to Multilingual Education

**Early Exit**
- L1 of child is 1-3-5 years MOI.
- Then L2/3 becomes MOI.

**Late Exit**
- L1 of the child is MOI 6 years or longer, then L2/3 becomes MOI.

**Dual/Additive**
- L1 of the child remains a part of education.
Success of different approaches to MLE

Early Exit
Weak program, hardly successful.

Late Exit
Starts to become successful

Dual/Additive
Successful and balanced
What is necessary for successful multilingualism?

1. Learning a new language or languages.
   Learning a new language takes time, it is important to make sure that the children have time to learn a language well.

2. Based on what is known to be successful to a particular context
   Not on what one thinks/insist should work because that is the time given.

3. Includes the language that a child already speaks.

4. Recognises, appreciates and builds on the linguistic and cultural background of the children.
Ad 1 - Learning a new language (in school setting)

- Takes time
  - About 400-500 words per year
  - English a language threshold is about 3000 words = 5-6 years
- Needs to be done in a structured way (even with young children that ‘pick up’ a language).
- When children have been in school for a few years they become better and faster language learners than young children.
- Build on the first language
- Needs a well thought through curriculum/syllabus/scope and sequence.
Ad 2 - Context of language learning

• Language distance influences time of language learning
  • Sabaot – English
  • Dutch – English
  • Rana Tharu – Nepali
  • Rana Tharu - English

• Language exposure outside the classroom

• Attitude towards the new language

• Language level of teacher
Ad 3 – Include the home language

• Including the home language of a child for a sufficient number of years has been successful in many developing countries.
  • And in for example Sweden, the Netherlands UK, America
  • In those countries we see that immigrant children whose language is not used tend to lag behind a bit.
Ad 4 - Recognises, appreciates and builds on the linguistic and cultural background of the children.

• Builds on their language
• Learns with examples from their own culture/surroundings
• Nurtures appreciation for all languages, including the children’s home language
  • No – ‘Backward culture’
  • No – ‘Backward Language'
Where has it worked?

Language Communities in:
• Kenya
• Burkina Faso
• Nepal
• Philippines
• Ethiopia
• Cameroon

• Mali
• Nigeria
• South Africa
• Most European countries
PLANNING FOR MTB-MLE
Planning steps

1. **Know the language context (language mapping)**
2. **L1 Literacy aspects needed to develop MTB-MLE**
3. **L2/FL curriculum**
4. **Teachers, schools, community**
5. **Develop**
6. **Pilot**
7. **Implement**
8. **Monitor/improve**

