Learning to read in multi-lingual contexts: best practices from the field

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Literacy and Learning Advisor
Meet Amina

• Age: 6
• Grade: 1
• School location: rural Katanga, DRCongo
• Mother tongue: Lunda
• Familiar with: Kiswahili (LOI)
• No pre-primary
• Teacher speaks: Sanga and some Kiswahili
• Teacher learned to read in: French
Question

How do we create a curriculum that is responsive to Amina given the following factors:

• the diversity of language backgrounds
• the global push for mother tongue/national language reading instruction
• The power of language choice in post-conflict context
• Perceptions that international languages like English (or French) are the language of business.

SO THAT...

Students learn to read and write proficiently? (and love reading!)
Best practices drawn from developing reading programs implemented worldwide

GET TO KNOW YOUR CONTEXT:

#1: Engage in a socio-linguistic mapping.
#2: Ensure language of instruction is standardized.
#3: Understand the language elements and structure.
Best practices drawn from developing reading programs implemented worldwide

DO SOMETHING WITH IT:

# 4: Develop context-sensitive approach to instruction.
# 5: Use information to develop a realistic and systematic scope and sequence.
# 6: Develop language and context-appropriate student texts.
# 7: Develop appealing, quality, and rich reading materials.
# 8: Address sensitivities around language of instruction.
GET TO KNOW THE CONTEXT!
Best practice # 1: Engage in a socio-linguistic mapping

To capture...

- the languages that students and teachers predominately speak.
- whether teachers can speak, read, and write the language of instruction.
- needs for distribution of resources and materials.
Best practice # 2:
Ensure language of instruction is standardized

• Choosing and standardizing orthographies:
  1. Gather information.
  2. Identify/recommend orthography.
  3. Develop a scope and sequence per language.
  4. Adapt SynPhony or Primer Pro to languages.
Best practice # 3:
Understand the language elements and structure

- Understanding the language helps determine how to most effectively to teach reading skills in this language.

Transparent or opaque?
Swahili
skuli → English
kusoma → school
jufunza → reading

Agglutinative
Nilikwenda soko.

OR

non-agglutinative?
I went to the market.
DO SOMETHING WITH IT!
Best practice # 4:
Develop context-sensitive approach to instruction

• Determine the approach to reading instruction in a way that accounts for information gathered.
• Determine how to best prepare students for reading in 2 (or more) languages.
## Best practice # 5:
Use information to develop a realistic and systematic scope and sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Reading comprehension</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>6</td>
<td>b, k, c + vowels + review of syllables already studied and short words (no more than 2 syllables)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d, t, p + vowels + review of syllables already studied and short words (no more than 2 syllables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g, v, z + vowels + review of syllables already studied and short words (no more than 2 syllables)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r + vowels + review of syllables already studied and short words (no more than 2 syllables)</td>
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<td>review of all syllables learned and word reading of 2 syllable words</td>
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<td></td>
<td>review of all syllables learned and word reading of 2-3 syllable words</td>
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<td>write dictated syllables from repertoire of syllables studied</td>
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*Image credit: fhi360*
Best practice # 6: Develop language and context-appropriate student texts

1) Don’t simply translate.
2) Use language elements to inform development.
3) Ensure themes are accessible and familiar.
Best practice # 7:

Develop appealing, quality, and vocabulary rich reading materials

- **Big books or read-alouds** relevant to student’s culture and focus on building vocabulary.
- **Supplementary materials** (i.e. Leveled texts) following text leveling criteria.
Best practice # 8:
Address sensitivities around language of instruction

• **Address the negative perception** of local language of instruction in your activities at all levels:
  - Community
  - Teachers and school directors
  - School system (inspectors, coaches)
BIG TAKE-AWAY

These are complex issues

THEREFORE...

1. Get to know the context.
2. Use this knowledge to design your reading materials and program.

SO THAT...
BIG TAKE-AWAY

.... Amina can learn to read and write proficiently and with enthusiasm!
Questions?

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References

- SynPhony: http://www.sil.org/resources/software_fonts/synphony
- Primer Pro: http://software.sil.org/primerpro/about/
- Bloom: http://www.sil.org/resources/software_fonts/bloom

Contact:
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