

# Educational Values and Material Development

*Agatha van Ginkel<sup>1</sup>*

The intent of this paper is to create awareness about underlying values of educational systems. Understanding of the value behind the system will contribute to better material design and better relationships with local educational authorities and teachers.

## Introduction

Everyone has his or her own ideas about the purpose of education. One should not be surprised to find out that different societies assign different purposes to education. People have certain expectations of education, and those expectations in turn influence their teaching and learning approaches. When outside experts enter a foreign education system, they might soon find themselves making critical remarks about the education system as teaching does not take place the way they value it. When this happens it is quite possible that the purpose of education in the mind of the outside expert is different from the country's educational purpose. This might lead to misunderstandings and frustrations for both the experts and the people they have come to assist.

Although the focus of this paper is primary education, an understanding of the underlying value of an education system is also useful for people working in adult literacy or any kind of training programme. Adults who attend an adult literacy class or training have expectations of education that are based on their experience with education, either from personal experience or through their children or neighbours' children. So in order to develop a literacy programme or training that would take into account expectations on the side of receivers, it is good to understand the purpose of education in the country.

First, we review the three main values that could underlie an education system and show how these values could be realized in an education system and curriculum. Then we look at the goals of a specific educational system and relate them to the underlying educational values to identify the purpose of the education system.

---

<sup>1</sup> Agatha van Ginkel wrote this article in 2002. She has been working for the Kenyan NBTO Bible Translation and Literacy East Africa (BTL) since 1995. She worked as a literacy consultant for five language groups in Kenya. She studied theology and has a teaching degree. She worked on a Masters Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Agatha helps develop curricula for adult literacy and Scripture Use and supplementary MT materials for Kenyan primary schools.

## The purposes of education

Education is done with a purpose and tends to relate to three values (Littlewood 1991):

1. Passing on valuable knowledge and culture
2. Preparing learners as members of the society
3. Developing learners as individuals

Often an education system is based on a combination of these values, sometimes focusing more on one than the other. These values set the goals for the different subjects. The first value, passing on valuable knowledge and culture, will often be reflected in a system-based curriculum. The second, preparing learners as members of the society, will often be reflected in a function-based curriculum, while the third, developing learners as individuals, is reflected in a process-based curriculum.

How would this translate into the syllabus for the subject of *language*? Littlewood (1991) made a comparison of curricula with their underlying values for teaching a foreign language, summarised in the table below:

Comparison of Curricula

	<b>System-based</b>	<b>Function-based</b>	<b>Process-based</b>
Main goal	To enable the learners to master grammar and vocabulary of a language	To equip learners to fulfil their communicative needs in an appropriate range of situations	To create a context which will stimulate the potential for natural language growth
Objectives	Defined with reference to the individual structures or items of vocabulary	Defined mainly in behavioural terms; expressing or understanding communicative functions or notions, acquiring useful skills	Expressed in non-language terms, e.g. topics, tasks or problems to be solved
Syllabus	Attempts to select and sequence these structures and vocabulary using criteria as complexity, importance, teachability, etc.	Selects and sequences these functions or skills according to criteria such as usefulness, complexity of the language they require, etc.	Provides a sequence of contexts for learning, roughly graded according to the demands they make on communication skills rather than by strict linguistic criteria
Materials	Provide learners with examples of language structures and vocabulary in texts devised specially for the purpose	Provide examples of language being used for a variety of communicative purposes	Provide a focus for using language in order to exchange meanings about these topics
Classroom activities	Provide learners with opportunities to understand and use the language forms as accurately as possible	Provide learners with opportunities to practise conveying and understanding meaning	Consist mainly of a communicative use of language and a minimum of language correction or form-oriented practice

## Two education systems, two different values

Once one is aware that there are different values that underlie education systems, it would be a logical next step to analyse the educational values of both the country one is working in and the country one comes from. This analysis will give insight into the education system and practices that one observes and therefore will enhance:

- Designing of materials that fit the purpose of the education system of that country.
- Understanding reactions of people towards materials or ideas developed by outsiders, since the outsider might come from an educational system which has a different value system behind it. That is why it is also important to understand the underlying value of one's own education system.
- Explaining to people why a certain focus or method has been chosen. On the other hand, it enhances the outside expert's understanding of why the insiders may be rejecting the materials he/she is proposing.

## Kenyan primary education example

The Kenyan primary education system could serve as an example in an attempt to apply the above.

The education syllabus for primary education for Kenya states multiple goals for education at primary level. However, there appears to be one fundamental goal which is *“to prepare and equip youth to be happy and useful members of the Kenyan society. To be happy they must learn and accept national values and to be useful they must actively work towards the maintenance and development of this society”* (Waithaka 1992:vi).

This goal is broken down into subgoals, including:

1. Education must foster a sense of nationhood and promote national unity.
2. Education should meet the economic and social needs of national development, equipping the youth of the country to play an effective productive role in the life of the nation.
3. Education must prepare children for those changes in attitude and relationships that are necessary for the smooth process of a rapidly developing modern economy.
4. Education must provide opportunities for the fullest development of individual talents and personality.
5. Education should promote social equality and foster a sense of social responsibility.
6. Education should respect, foster, and develop Kenya's rich and varied cultures.
7. Education should foster positive attitudes to other countries and to the international community.

When analysing these goals according to the three educational values mentioned above, it becomes apparent that preparing learners as members of the society is the most salient goal. Only one goal focuses on the passing on of valuable knowledge and skills, and only one of them focuses on the development of the individual learner. From this analysis, one would expect a curriculum that would lean towards a function-based curriculum.

When analysing the education system of a West European country one often finds that the underlying value is to develop learners as individuals. The curriculum that supports such a value tends to focus on facilitating natural development and would lean towards a process-based curriculum. When someone with such a background comes to work in a country such as Kenya, it is quite likely that learning activities will be interpreted differently. This could become a potential area of misunderstanding and perhaps even conflict with the local people if one was not aware of these differences. For example, a learning activity like group discussion where learners have a lot of input and the teacher facilitates the process would be a

valued activity where the focus is to develop the individual. However, in an education system that has a main focus on a learner becoming a useful member of the society, such an activity might not be appreciated. On the other hand, other factors, such as cultural norms, may also contribute to the dislike of such an activity.

## The purpose of education related to the language curricula

In order to find out how the goals of primary education are reflected in the curriculum, and in order to make this paper most useful for the development of language materials, the subjects concerned with languages in the Kenyan education system will again be used as an example.

In lower primary education in Kenya three languages are taught: the mother tongue, Kiswahili, and English. It is planned that in lower primary classes the children are taught in their mother tongue and will learn Kiswahili and English as subjects. In upper primary classes English is the language of instruction. Each language has its own purpose, as described below.

The purpose of teaching a child to read and write in his mother tongue is “to provide a means by which he can learn and understand the value and concerns of his society” (Waithaka 1992:143). Mother tongue serves as a bridge between home and school, but it is also a useful mechanism for laying the foundation of literacy and numeracy skills in other languages. It is mainly taught as a help to learn other languages, but it is hoped that through the mother tongue the learner will also appreciate and respect the culture and cultural heritage of his own people. Its underlying purpose, therefore, is to pass on valuable knowledge and culture.

While the purpose of MT instruction is clearly stated by Waithaka, the purpose for teaching Kiswahili is not specified. Nevertheless, learners are expected to be able to hear, understand, read, write, and speak Kiswahili after eight years of study. Since Kiswahili is the predominant language of wider communication for many people in Kenya, the underlying purpose seems to be to prepare learners to be functional members of the wider society.

The purpose of teaching English in lower primary is to enable the learner to use English as a medium of communication in the fourth year of primary school. At the end of primary school a learner should have enough grasp of English to:

- Listen, understand, and respond appropriately.
- Be able to use correct pronunciation, stress, and intonation to be understood.
- Be able to read and understand instructions and to read for information and pleasure.
- Be able to write to express his ideas meaningfully and legibly in English.

To summarize, it seems that the purpose of teaching the mother tongue fits in with the goal of passing on valuable knowledge of culture. However, preparing the learner to become a useful member of the society appears to be the purpose of teaching Kiswahili and English as LWCs. The content of the teaching materials used for these subjects also supports this assumption.

## The implications for material development

If an outside expert were going to assist in developing materials for the subject of *mother tongue* in the Kenyan education system, it would be useful to know that the main purpose of education in general is to

prepare pupils to become useful members of the society. On the other hand, the subject of *mother tongue* is also seen as a valuable means to pass on general knowledge in the lower levels of primary school and knowledge about culture. Within this context there is space for the material designer to explore possibilities to create materials that fit the underlying value of the education system. In Kenya the primary education syllabus gives good guidelines for the content of the materials. The applications would be in the learning activities that would be appropriate for the context. It is likely that activities where the teacher becomes a facilitator would not be appreciated. There are, of course, more variables to consider, such as actual teaching practice, available resources, linguistic suitability of methods, etc. But if the underlying value is ignored by the designer, it might lead to materials that will either be rejected by the people as being foreign, or the teachers will be creative and transform them to what they believe the purpose of education is and teach them accordingly.

There is much more to explore in education systems. The article in *Notes on Literacy* 25:3–4 by Berry (1999) about ideologies in literacy programmes touches on some issues, but it would also be useful to explore how an education system sees the transfer of knowledge based on “knowledge centred” and “person centred” paradigms (Roberts 1998). This would again be useful in developing teacher-training programmes and in designing materials.

## Bibliography

- Berry, K. 1999. Literacy programs: Getting the ideology right. *Notes on Literacy* 25:3–4.
- Littlewood, W. 1991. Curriculum design. *Applied linguistics and language teaching*, by R. Bowers, and C. J. Brumfit. London. Macmillan and The British Council, 11–22.
- Roberts, J. 1998. *Language teacher education*. London: Arnold.
- Waithaka, J. M. 1992. *Primary education syllabus*. Volume 1. Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Education. ■