Literacy Exposure and Experience Program (LEEP)
An internship in minority language education

by Elizabeth Braun Foerster
Abstract

Minority language speakers need opportunities that enable them to develop their own capacity as educators. The Linguistics Institute Training Unit of Payap University in Thailand sponsors one such opportunity, a 9-month literacy internship program. This is one case of how that program enabled a young woman from a minority language group to learn about and receive training for mother tongue literacy work and do a practicum among her own language group.
Literacy Internship Program

The Linguistics Institute Training Unit (LITU) of Payap University is in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The Institute has initiated a literacy internship program because of the need for more educators to serve among language groups in Thailand to help with language development. Many communities are asking for help in setting up Mother Tongue (MT) Literacy Programs or Mother Tongue Based – Multilingual Education (MTB-MLED) programs. There are not enough literacy specialists and consultants to meet those needs. Many of those who are able to provide assistance, such as SIL MLED consultants, are temporary or at least not available long term.¹

Thai nationals, on the other hand, are not “temporary”. They have freedom to live and work in their home country wherever and for as long as they desire. In order to make local language literacy and education efforts more sustainable, it is only logical to involve Thai colleagues and trained specialists. Therefore, in order for SIL to promote sustainable literacy and education initiatives and have the privilege of having Thai colleagues to work with, they need to contribute to creative methods for training. However, many Thais are not aware that “Literacy” or “Multilingual Education” is a career option.

Beginning a career in a field which they or their families and support systems know nothing about is very risky for a Thai, especially for a member of a minority-language group. Thus, the internship program was created to give young people a chance to “try it out” for a limited time. This offer enables them to see if the work is something they enjoy and can do well before they invest time and energy in the training that will be required for them to do it as a full-time career. This also gives their families and support systems an opportunity to see that the work is valuable and worth the risk and time investment.

Recruitment

The internship program was advertised as LEEP – Literacy Exposure and Experience Program. Networking and relationships were productive in identifying prospective candidates for the program. The program initially began with one intern in January 2008. A second intern began in November 2008 and a third joined the program in April 2009.

¹ Elizabeth (Liz) Braun Foerster, the author, is a literacy specialist and Multilingual Education Consultant in Thailand. Her undergraduate training was as an elementary school teacher. She completed a Masters in Applied Linguistics in 2005. She began her career with SIL in 1985 as a primary school teacher in Papua New Guinea for 2-1/2 years and, since 1996, has worked in literacy and multilingual education in Thailand. She is currently the SIL Literacy Coordinator for the SIL Mainland Southeast Asia work group and strives to provide opportunities for experience and training to SIL fieldworkers and national colleagues.
Requirements
The internship program is designed for people with a college degree. In some cases, the internship can be used as a requirement for work experience needed for completion of some undergraduate degrees.

The program includes supervisors and mentors. These are people with whom the intern can feel comfortable and come alongside to observe, work with, learn from, and ask questions.

The intern received a small stipend each month to cover daily expenses for food and transportation. The stipend amount is less than someone with a college degree can earn, but it is adequate for a limited period of time.

A Description of the First Internship
The first intern graduated from Chiang Mai University in April 2007. She is from one of the minority language groups in Thailand. Her village is about two and a half hours away from Chiang Mai. There is a primary school right next to her village and secondary schools close enough that she was able to live at home throughout her education. Her entire education was in Thai but everyone in her village, including her parents, speak their mother tongue at home. She is the first person from this village to graduate from a university. She majored in Political Science, and then did volunteer work, as well as working in a business before she applied for the internship. She did not feel personally fulfilled in the business world, even though her salary was good. She had offers for other jobs but she chose the internship because she wanted to serve others and help with mother-tongue education for her own language group.

This literacy internship provided an opportunity for her to learn about: 1) mother-tongue literacy work and MTB-MLEd; 2) receive some training for literacy work; and 3) conduct some literacy activities among her own language group while gaining practical experience. Her internship took place January through September 2008.

The project coordinator and literacy training staff taught the intern about the principles and methods of mother-tongue literacy and MTB-MLEd. This training was done one-on-one in an informal setting, as well as during additional workshops that she was able to attend as a participant.

At the beginning of the internship, the intern viewed videos about MTB-MLEd, such as the Advocacy video produced by UNESCO and SIL, and videos of programs that are being implemented in Thailand. She also watched a set of

---

2 The internship was facilitated by Elizabeth Braun Foerster, LITU literacy consultant. Additional training staff included Pat Lew, LITU coordinator, and La Rinthima, LITU trainer, and other SIL members.
videos from an orientation workshop about mother-tongue education. She transcribed the videos into Thai as she listened, in order to help her understand all of the principles being presented, as well as to prepare a tool for others to use. All of the preliminary activities were designed to give her an overview of the work she would be involved in during the internship.

The intern participated in a Mother Tongue Education Program Planning workshop held at the Linguistics Institute in April 2008. The Manual for “Planning Community Based Education Programs in Minority Language Communities” by Susan Malone was a resource for this workshop. As an additional exercise, she also helped edit parts of the manual that had been translated into Thai before it was distributed.

The intern developed literacy materials and practiced using them under the supervision of the training staff. She used the LITU Writers Workshop Manual as a resource as she learned to write original stories in her own language. She also practiced translating stories from Thai into her mother tongue to read to the children in her village.

After attending a “Music for Literacy” workshop, she wrote an alphabet song in her own language. For each sound of the alphabet she used a key word, an appropriate sentence, and a fun melody.

The intern wrote many original “Listening Stories” based on the guidelines in the manual from the LITU workshop for “Writing Listening Stories for the Development and Promotion of Local Languages”. She also wrote action songs to go with the stories. These stories and songs are designed to be used in mother tongue development activities for kindergarten-aged children. The children enjoy all of the stories and songs she has written.

In addition, she prepared materials, such as puppets, and a flannel board. They were to be used in mother tongue language development activities for young children or for children learning Thai as a second language. She demonstrated how to use these materials in workshops.

The intern also developed literacy mobilization aids for her community, such as examples of big books and small books to help the community members understand how a mother tongue education program would be a valuable asset for language development and promotion in the village. During the program, she was given an opportunity to apply what she learned and developed to help promote mother-tongue literacy in her home community in Northern Thailand.

To help in planning and developing mother-tongue education programs for kindergarten-age students from minority language groups in Northern Thailand, the intern assisted in obtaining information about the local Thai education system. In particular, she organized visits to seven kindergarten classes in
Chiang Mai to find out what is taught, how it is taught, and how well the students are learning.

She had the opportunity to work with a Thai partner organization that also has the goal of serving minority language groups through language development and MTB-MLEd, the Foundation for Applied Linguistics (FAL). She observed and assisted in workshops under the supervision of the coordinator. She often gave demonstrations of the teaching methods that were being presented. She participated twice in Total Physical Response (TPR) workshops held to train Thai teachers who teach minority children in border provinces how to use this method to teach Thai listening and speaking skills to their students.

As a result of the internship, the intern:

- Learned about the principles of MTB-MLEd and what is involved in planning for a MLEd program. She applied what she learned by working with others from her community to set goals and write a draft plan for their language-development program.
- Attended training workshops, seminars, and courses focused on language development, mother-tongue education, using music and arts in literacy programs, translation methods, and how to use total physical response for teaching a second language.
- Wrote and prepared examples of materials to be used in a mother-tongue literacy program for her language group (such as listening stories, reading books, songs, and big books).
- Developed mobilization activities to use in her community.
- Practiced using the materials she developed.
- Prepared an observation form, observed, collected, and documented information on activities, teaching methods, and performance in kindergarten classes in Northern Thailand.
- Wrote a journal of her experiences and thoughts about what she had learned and done.
- Helped plan, prepare, demonstrate, and teach in two literacy workshops held at the LITU.
- Helped prepare materials, give demonstrations, and teach in a workshop for a mother-tongue literacy and revitalization program for one of the languages in Chiang Mai.
- Helped demonstrate the Total Physical Response method for teaching a second language in two workshops for Thai teachers who work in border areas where the students don’t speak the national language, Thai. These workshops were sponsored by the Thai Ministry of Education with technical support from FAL.
- Gave a presentation about literacy work to a group of more than twenty people at a camp sponsored by a Thai organization for people interested in learning about linguistics, translation, and literacy work.
• Translated many literacy training materials and stories into Thai to be used in training workshops.

The intern’s future plans are to continue helping and participating with literacy workshops as well as preparing and testing materials in her mother tongue. She has been offered a scholarship to study overseas for nine months. When she returns, she will continue to work in the field of literacy and mother-tongue education by serving with FAL.

**Program Schedule**
The schedule began with plenty of time for orientation to the internship and MTB-MLEd. Throughout the 9-month period there were a variety of scheduled activities, including participating in workshops such as Literacy Program Planning, Music for Literacy, Writers Workshop, Writing Listening Stories, Translation Methods, and Using Total Physical Response to teach Thai to minority-language speakers. The intern also set up observation visits to Thai kindergarten classes. When she was not involved in a workshop or a scheduled activity, she prepared literacy materials in her mother tongue and in the national language. (The full schedule is in the appendix.)

**Program Training Materials**
A variety of current training materials were used in the duration of this internship. (See the appendix for a list of those resources.)

**Future of the Program**
The program is continuing with two more interns. These interns are also members of one of the minority language communities of Thailand. When they were accepted into the internship program, we were not aware that a MTB-MLEd pilot project was beginning in their language through the Thai Ministry of Education. Because the FAL is helping with this program, the interns have the opportunity to be involved in a credible project in their own language. They have a SIL member as a supervisor and mentor who is also working in that project with FAL.

**Summary**
The LITU conducted a 9-month literacy internship for a Thai national who was a minority-language speaker. This internship provided an opportunity for the intern to learn about mother tongue literacy work and MTB-MLEd, receive some training for literacy work, prepare materials in her language, conduct some literacy work among her own language group to gain practical experience, and serve other language groups by assisting in training workshops.
The intern learned and experienced these things under the supervision of a mentor. Motivated and hard-working, she always did more than was expected of her. Her attitude, talents, and love for people and her work made her a joy to mentor. She expressed that she is thankful for the opportunity to do the internship and said she grew in many areas, not only learning about literacy work but in her personal growth as well. She was challenged to do many new things in areas in which she was not confident, but was able to do them successfully.

The intern has received confirmation to pursue work in literacy. She is currently attending a training program overseas with an international organization, the Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation, and, when she returns, will work in Mother Tongue Education with a local organization, the Foundation for Applied Linguistics.

Hopefully, the internship program can continue to grow and its impact will be a body of Thai Mother Tongue Literacy and MTB-MLEd specialists serving the growing number of needs for local-language educators in this part of the world over the coming decades.

Appendix

Program Schedule:

January:
- Orientation to internship and MTB-MLEd.
- Visit Music for Literacy workshop – (she actively participated and wrote songs in her language).
- Helped teach her mother tongue to a Payap M.A. Linguistics Student (she occasionally taught her throughout the internship period).

February:
- Prepare mobilization materials for the promotion of Mother Tongue Literacy promotion.

March:
- Observe and assist at a TPR training given by FAL to Thai Teachers teaching in border areas, Bangkok.
Program schedule (continued):

April:
- Participate and assist with the Literacy Program Planning workshop at the Linguistics Institute Training Unit of Payap University.
- Write up a Literacy Program plan for her home community with those from her language group who came to the Literacy Program Planning workshop.
- Do awareness raising, mobilization, and literacy activities in her home community.

May:
- Observe and assist with a teacher-training workshop for the FAL, Chiang Mai.
- Develop literacy materials and teaching activities in her mother tongue.

June:
- Continue to develop materials in her mother tongue and practice teaching.

July:
- Attend the Language Development Conference in Bangkok.
- Observe and assist at a second TPR training given by FAL to Thai teachers teaching in border areas, Bangkok.

August:
- Prepare for, visit, observe, and collect information in three Thai kindergarten classes.

September:
- Arrange for and visit two more kindergartens and write up observations.
- Complete a journal of experiences, including what she had observed and learned.
- Prepare materials and demonstrations, and assist in a two-day literacy workshop for a minority language group in Chiang Mai.
- Prepare materials, write example stories and songs, and prepare and give demonstrations for a workshop on “Writing and Using Listening Stories” at the LITU.
Training Resources:

Malone, Susan. Planning Community Based Education Programs in Minority Language Communities, SIL International – Asia Area, 2006.


Videos of LITU Mother Tongue Education Orientation Meeting. Linguistics Institute Training Unit, Payap University, 2008.


Writing Listening Stories for the Development and Promotion of Local Languages Manual, Linguistics Institute Training Unit, Payap University, 2008.