

## **Report on The 8<sup>th</sup> UKFIET International Conference on Education and Development 13-15 September 2005 - Oxford, England**

### **Learning and Livelihood**

The 8<sup>th</sup> UKFIET International Conference on Education and Development was held 13-15 September 2005. The venue was the University of Oxford Examination Schools in Oxford, England. The conference was convened and managed by UKFIET (UK Forum for International Education and Training) and Cf BT (Centre for British Teachers). The theme 'Learning and Livelihood' included 25 sub-themes. The main theme of this conference ties in with the start of the UNESCO decade *Education and Sustainable Development* in 2005.

The conference provided the opportunity for educators and consultants across the globe to discuss how education and training enhances livelihood:

'Taking livelihood holistically, the theme allows us to universally explore how learning enhances individual potential across the life span and the well-being of families, communities and societies.' (*Conference Introduction*)

### **Program**

The conference offered over 200 sessions/presentations ranging in format from larger, multiple thematic sessions to smaller symposia to roundtable discussions. Most 1 ½ hour sessions included three presentations. Each presenter had 15 minutes to present their topic followed by 15 minutes of questions from the audience.

Two keynote speakers addressed the introductory session. Vimala Ramachandran from India spoke of her involvement in adult literacy. Her focus has been literacy to empower women. She defines meaningful education as that which enables people to negotiate the world and their environment. She gave examples of literacy programs in South Asia for young men and women that are attempting to fulfill this definition of meaningful education. However, funding systems currently in place undermine long-term, sustainable literacy programs that will support sustainable livelihoods. The focus of most funding is to meet immediate crisis needs and immediate development.

In order to achieve sustainable livelihoods men and women need time to learn the skills required for critical analysis of situations and choices to be made for their future well-being. The training must also be rooted in the local environment/community with more integration of education and skills programs.

She concluded with answering the question: How can learning and livelihood be woven together? It can be achieved by giving people access to knowledge followed by the opportunity to implement this so that they will gain confidence and continue on with a sustainable livelihood.

Elvira Sabina is a professor of the Higher Education Department of the University of Havana. She primarily discussed the positive growth of education and literacy in Cuba under the current government system. She stated that sustainable human development requires education along with human values in all areas of life including knowledge, values, experiences and social responsibilities.

Both speakers stressed that the importance of local community training and integration of all areas of life, rather than a focus on compartmentalisation of education, will strengthen the ties between learning and livelihood.

## **Sessions**

Over the three days of the conference I attended 11 sessions. Besides the plenary sessions, I attended sessions with presentations in various sub-themes, such as, Literacy & Livelihood; School, Family and Community Relations in a Changing World; Educating and Training out of Poverty; Language, Learning and Identity; Learning and Sustainable Livelihoods in the times of AIDS – Challenges and Prospects.

Distance Education for adults seems to be popular in many countries around the world. One presentation shared about the BLSP – Building Literacy in Sudan Project. This project aims to increase daily reading among adult refugees in Sudan. The literacy classes are started as small community based reading/writing circles within refugee camps. The result has been an increase in daily reading activity and original materials produced. There is anecdotal evidence of increased self-confidence and interest in literacy among the participants.

The World Bank gave a presentation on 17 projects they have been

funding in various countries involving rural distance learning (RDL) and technology. They combine teacher training, networks and partnership, and technology.

One of the aims of these projects is to reach nomadic groups of people spread out over vast areas. As the nomadic groups move around they have materials available to them for schooling. They also have technology available at specific centres in different parts of the country. When the nomads come to a provincial centre they can connect with teachers and use the current technology available to them to continue with their training and education. They stressed that in each project they use the existing technologies available in the homes which can range from computers and satellite phones to radio, TV and audio cassette players. The presenters also admitted that this project is geared to large language groups spread out over large areas of land. It is not for countries with numerous tribal groups like PNG. The specific example shared in the session was the project in Mongolia. A Mongolian man spoke about this project. He shared that it was helpful to the nomadic groups that come into the provincial centres regularly. The technology was focused in provincial centres and the outlying areas had nothing.

Many key findings and potential advantages were listed as a result of this pilot project. These will help them to develop more appropriately tailored projects for others. He stated that when the funding from World Bank stopped – after 2 years – the Mongolian project closed down.

I was not surprised that the project was not sustainable because of the dependence on outside aid (for finances, training, materials and equipment) and the lack of community ownership in the project. The World Bank gave out CDs with detailed information about these RDL (rural distance learning) projects. A CD has been sent to the Literacy Office in LCORE available to anyone interested in reading up on this idea. They really have researched this quite thoroughly and the project is an impressive one.

A number of presenters focused on the need for local, community-based literacy/education. I heard such presentations from people working in India, Uganda, Sudan, Macedonia and Nepal. They each presented projects they are currently working in to promote community-based education for both children and adults.

My presentation, under the sub-theme of *Language, Learning and Identity*, was about STEP. I focused on the elements of the STEP course that foster and encourage vernacular, community-based literacy programs. I started with a bit of PNG history to help the audience understand the context in

which we work. The main part of the presentation was to discuss the focus of vernacular, community-based literacy in each component of the STEP course. I concluded with some of the challenges our STEP graduates face and the positive impact they have had on many language groups in PNG over the last 10 years. An electronic copy of the complete paper is available in the Literacy Office in LCORE.

The sessions I attended were quite diverse yet I found them helpful and interesting. I learned many new things and discovered that many of us share the same challenges and successes as we work in literacy around the world.

## **Contacts**

My main contacts were with the presenters of some of the sessions I attended and others that I met over the lunch break. I was pleased to get some time with Barbara Trudell (Africa Area) and become better acquainted with her. She and I were the only SIL representatives at this conference. It was interesting to hear what others are doing in the area of literacy and education around the world and they expressed interest in the work of SIL in PNG as we visited and spoke informally.

## **Personal Reflections**

It was a privilege to attend this conference. I found the sessions informative and sometimes challenging as I tried to learn all the current acronyms being used in this field.

This conference was truly international as I heard presenters from various countries such as Africa, Nepal, India, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Denmark, Croatia, Norway, England and the U.S. It was heavily attended by people working in Africa, so many of the presentations were focused on work in Africa. I was disappointed to see so few people from the South Pacific or Southeast Asia. The topics were quite diverse and there could easily have been another SIL representative from PNG attending other sessions besides the ones I attended.

This was only the second conference I have attended for SIL but I can see the necessity of SIL members attending conferences just to keep abreast of current trends in the world of literacy and education. Since we are encouraged by SIL International to produce academic papers, it is necessary to attend these international conferences to keep our papers current and pertinent for our colleagues around the world.

As I listened to the various presentations I realised that many literacy/education workers face the same challenges and issues that we do in PNG. It was encouraging to hear that many of us, worldwide, are on the same track with our focus on training at the community level and encouraging community ownership of literacy/educational programs.

Writing a paper and making a presentation was quite a challenge but I have found it to be a worthwhile endeavour and I would like to see more SIL literacy workers taking part in this aspect of our work. We become too insular and stagnant the longer we remain isolated in our jobs with minimal outside contact with other professionals in our field of work.

## **Future Plans**

I have written a paper and submitted it for publication at the UKFIET Conference. Two journals, *IJED* (International Journal of Educational Development) and *Compare* were looking for possible articles. The paper will be in the Literacy Office of LCORE. I will also be writing an article for READ Magazine based on the topic of my paper.

## **Recommendations and Conclusions**

As mentioned above, it is crucial that our literacy workers stay abreast of current literacy/education theory and practices worldwide. This enhances a person's ability to continue in his/her work to the best of his/her abilities.

I would like to recommend that the PNG-SIL Branch make a regular practice of sending different literacy personnel to conferences such as this one. It benefits our branch, our literacy workers and the men and women we train. It also benefits others as we make contacts and develop relationships with colleagues worldwide. Training is professed to be one of SIL's top priorities. With this in mind, it is my sincere hope that we will be able to continue sending our literacy trainers and consultants to conferences in order to continue doing our job in the best ways possible.

I would like to thank the LCORE Department of the PNG-SIL Branch for providing the expenses that enabled me to attend the UKFIET Oxford Conference.✍

Submitted by Joanne Locnikar  
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