



## INCLUSION THROUGH STORYTELLING AND ARTS

**Heli Ketovuori and Mikko Ketovuori**

*University of Turku, Finland*

The project described herein took place in Pokomo, Kenya and Turku, Finland. The idea behind the project was to provide tools for language learning by gathering local stories from schoolchildren and collecting drawings, narratives and photos for a book telling about the lives of children in both places. The material was released also in an exhibition held in both Kenya and Finland. While working with children in Kenya, local teachers were trained in using computers, in the arts and, above all, in inclusion. By using story crafting method the “*Here, Now, There, Then*” project provided pupils a unique opportunity to tell their stories with their own voices and, at same time, to compare life from another country’s perspective.

**Keywords:** Inclusion; Storytelling; L2; Arts.

### To be Able to Read and Write

Even though the language of Pokomo has been spoken a long time, most of the inhabitants of that area have not seen their language in written form. In Finland, the situation was similar in 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Mikael Agricola, following the footsteps and the ideas of Luther, published the first Finnish book called “ABC-book” in 1543. While from the historians’ perspective the effects of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century’s discover of printing is well documented (Fergusson 2011, 61–67), for the individual to be able to read and write is also profound. These skills, while they open up the world for individual – also provide the basic tools for general development in society.

According to UNESCO’s Dakar “Framework for Action” report of 2000, there were approximately 880 million illiterate people in the world. In ten years time, the situation has improved only a little. In 2010 the estimated number of illiterate people was still 775 million (UNESCO 2012, 5). To be able to read and write contributes to an individual’s self-esteem. Illiterate people are often stigmatized and marginalized in their societies, with females often being the greater proportion of the population who are illiterate. To provide reading and writing skills for all is imperative.

In order to promote literacy, sufficiently resourced, well-targeted programs with innovative use of technologies and methods are essential. The scaling up of practical, participatory learning links literacy with empowerment and local development is important for reaching these goals (ibid. 16). In the Pokomo-Turku story crafting project under the title of “*Here, Now, There, Then*”, drawings, narratives and photographs were used in creating book and exhibition, which compared life in two different places: Finland and Kenya. Creating stories from one’s own life and environment was an interesting task for the pupils, but was also empowering for the whole community.



**Picture 1.** Classroom in Pokomo.

### **The Definitions of Culture**

People from a shared cultural background tend to interpret reality in the same way – they have a common acceptance of the meaning of the things. However, when people are coming from different backgrounds, their experiences and how they interpret life differs. To explore these differences, we can examine the routines of daily life for example through drawings, narratives and photos. At its best, this kind of cross-cultural approach can change people’s thinking about their way of living. When they see the world through the lenses of other people, they will discover new things about others, and possibly get a new perspective on their own lives.

Traditionally, culture includes great works of art and widely distributed forms of popular culture, like films, music, fashion, design, entertainment. All these things make up the content of ordinary people’s lives. The dichotomy between “high” and “low” (popular) culture is both widely used and has framed the definition of culture for many years in the western world. The highest achievements of culture have been gathered in museums. These collections set the standards in certain well-delineated area of life. However, in recent years, the situation has changed, as the effects of globalization and knowledge of other culture areas is increasing. The focus of the word *culture* has altered to mean more something that refers to the “sum of human doings” or to “the way of life”. We are now more interested in studying the practices, than merely the plain objects of culture.

After this “cultural turn” following questions is asked: How do people signify certain things and doings in their lives? What do they see as important and put emphasis on? How the meanings are constructed and reflected in certain culture? From this point of view, culture can be formulated as a sum of human doings that consists of common, shared meanings in the context of praxis of daily social

environment. The way things are emerges as narratives that people tell about “who they are” and “where they come from”. In other words: a culture is a system of meanings that people attach as labels for meaningful things in the world. From this point of view, the culture is the concept of a system of meaningfulness (Hall 2003, 2–11).

### Sharing the Meanings

The most efficient tool for sharing meanings is language. However, in culture meanings are also embedded with many nuances that are not always communicated with the words. The meanings can be shared for example through images, gestures, rituals and habits that are constantly being produced and exchanged in everyday interaction between people. Communication, thinking and feeling are based on it. From this point of view, language, emotions and concepts are all systems of representation (Hall 2003, 4).

The representations can have thus two forms: the apparent form and mediated, secondary, form as an object. These forms would include photography, narratives, music or anything else that represents the culture. When representations are arranged, for example, as an exhibition or book they are signified. To signify means 1) to be a sign or symbol of something 2) to mean something 3) to have influence or an important effect on something. The process of signifying can be taught, for example, by story crafting. The change of normal roles where children are the storytellers – not the adults – is a signifying process in itself that has an educational value. In the story crafting method, the three aforementioned levels are present because 1) the written story is a sign or symbol of something 2) both the process and the product mean something, and 3) the method influences general learning and self-esteem simultaneously.

For human beings, it is natural to perceive and store one's life as autobiographical narratives. In those narratives, the emphasis is not on what has actually happened, and where, but more on the individual's relationship to lived and experienced memories. In narratives, a person provides his or her own interpretation of the situations lived through, and the things that happened. Through these narratives both one's personal identity, as larger groups identities are constructed (Ropo, 2009). These narratives also constitute what is called culture. Culture affects all the individuals that live in that “circle of meanings”.

According to Jerome Bruner (1986, 11–15) there are two kinds of thinking that are needed in life. They are complimentary: **paradigmatic thinking** (logic-scientific which can be used in reasoning) and **narrative thinking**, which refers to autobiographical memories, as well as to imagination that is used in everyday life. From the educational point of view, both types of thinking are equally important. However, because narrative thinking is linked directly to the mother tongue, it is essential to teach it well. This also makes paradigmatic thinking easier.

### Inclusion and Holistic Approach

Educational systems throughout the world are in the midst of change. According to the UNESCO “Education For All” program, the nations have committed to develop their educational system in such a way that all learners have access to education. Six internationally agreed-upon educational goals intend to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015 and are, as follows:

**Goal 1** Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

**Goal 2** Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality

**Goal 3** Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs

**Goal 4** Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults

**Goal 5** Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality

**Goal 6** Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

These goals are not easily achieved with traditional methods of schooling. More innovative ways of pedagogy is needed. So-called normal schooling is usually based on textbooks and a one-way transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the children, focusing on basic skills and the accumulation factual information. Alternately, the approach of inclusive schools involves methods that aim at the transformation of students. Learning is not just intellectual, but also physical, moral, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual in nature. This kind of holistic approach aims at nurturing the students' inner self by using several artistic, creative and collaborative methods. The traditional school is far too formalistic to provide meaningful learning experiences for those students who live under circumstances that – in western standards – are underdeveloped.



**Picture2.** Mother tongue tree.

Inclusion is thus not just a philosophy, but also something that affects also the way things are done. Inclusion is the major challenge facing educational systems around the world. In the economically poorer countries, the priority is the millions of children who never have the opportunity to see the inside of classrooms; in wealthier countries, young people who see the mainstream educational lessons as irrelevant to their lives, are at-the risk of dropping out. Inclusion is a process about learning how to live with differences and learning how to learn from differences. It is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers. It is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students. And above all: inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners, who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement (Ainscow, 2005). With the theoretical underpinnings of inclusion, culture and arts, the illiteracy project described here, was put on practice.

### What Was Done?

The project was implemented in 2009–2011 in Kenya in the Tana River area and in the Varissuo teacher training school in Turku. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland funded the project. In the Pokomo area the pupils are normally taught in English, even though they mother tongue is Pokomo. In Varissuo, pupils are taught in Finnish, while approximately 50% of the students do speak other languages as their mother tongue. The immigrants coming to Turku are from countries like Russia, Bosnia and Afganistan, as well as Somalia. Even though these two places, Kenya and Finland, are very different, they still share the same pedagogical problem: how can we help the students to learn better, while the language used in the school is not their language in their homes? In both of these cases, the school languages are called as second languages (L2). In these circumstances, the project's main goal was to reinforce the pupil's own language and cultural roots. The central aims for the project were as follows:

1. Develop reading skills in Pokomo Language
2. Create material for reading by making a publication in three different languages: Pokomo, English and Finnish
3. Arrange teacher education in Kenya in storytelling, photo processing and publishing
4. Promote the appreciation of the children's own culture by telling stories and by taking photographs and making drawings of their everyday life
5. Promote intercultural understanding and education to multiculturalism by introducing other cultures
6. Build bridges between different generations – the present and the past – by involving also the parents in the project
7. Teach and develop L2-methods for the use of Pokomo language teaching by using storytelling method
8. Build exhibitions of pictures and stories collected during the process both in Pokomo and Turku

In the first phase, a team of educators from Turku University gathered together in planning the project. A lot of help was given by the Finnish Wycliffe organization, which had done already work in Kenya, with the funding of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The actual project started in Varissuo in August 2009 with three classes of school children ages 10, 13 and 15 years. Altogether over 50 children were taught to use the story crafting method. For instance; the children would interview each other, or their parents. The guidance for story crafting were as simple as:

*Tell any story you want. I will write it down just as you will tell it. When you are finished, I will read it aloud. Then if you want, you can correct or make any changes.*

Pictures – drawings, by the students, and photographs – were added to the story after the writing process.

In the second phase in the spring 2010, Finnish educators travelled to the Tana River area to give training for the local teachers in following topics:



- Storytelling method for bilingual children
- Photography
- Child-centered approaches in education

The schools that participated the process were Tarasaa Primary School, Arapmoi Primary School, Gadeni Primary School, Kipao Primary School, Kipini Primary School and Maziwa Primary School. After the course, two laptops as well as digital cameras were donated to the schools for their future use. During the course, 40 local teachers gained hand-on experience using the new techniques. In addition, the teachers were given both transportation and meals during the course.



**Picture 3.** Exhibition in Turku University Teachers Education Department.

A year later, when both the Finnish and Kenyan project material was gathered together, Exhibition and publication party, of the *“Here, Now, There, Then”* book, was held in the University of Turku Teachers’ Education Department. The books were given to the children and families that took part in the project. In that way, all the children were able to see their own stories printed in a book written in they own mother tongue and in two other languages, which was the primary goal of the whole process.

## **Conclusions**

What was achieved? Can we expect that permanent changes take place due the intervention? We have to understand that to do work in an undeveloped country, is not about proving some theory to be right, but more about taking real action. Change takes time. However, from the history of Finland, we know that it happens. What is sure is that this storybook project showed how to turn around traditional pedagogy. The children were bookmakers, all were included and they discovered the value of their own mother tongue.

The story crafting method did, and will contribute to their enjoyment as they read stories in their own language, about their own culture and environment, as well as learn about other cultures.

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