BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

The paper identifies and examines the synergies and discrepancies between the goals of Literacy Boost and the social practices of literacy in two sites in Indonesia. This paper is part of a larger study, which aims to discern the complexities of relationship between literacy and international development at three levels: 1) at the ideological level, by examining how childhood literacy is conceptualized as an absolutely integral component of international development agendas, 2) at the institutional level, by examining how schools, governmental bodies, and non-governmental organizations interpret and implement literacy-related policy and curricula, and 3) at the community and individual level, by considering how these interventions shape and in turn are shaped by schoolchildren, their families, and teachers through everyday practices.

Drawing upon thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Jakarta and Belu, Indonesia, this paper examines the following research questions: How is the Literacy Boost program implemented and then taken up by communities in Indonesia? What processes, contestations, and compromises are entailed in the adaptation of the program by the Save the Children Indonesia Country Office and by field staff in Jakarta and Belu? The paper highlights the ways in which a literacy intervention is co-produced by local field staff, country office advisers, and “Global North” counterparts who dispense technical knowledge and curricular models. Importantly, it considers the roles of members of the recipient communities in the complex negotiations and adaptations entailed in program implementation, and how the literacy curricula were then translated (or not) into classroom practice focusing on literacy instruction.

This paper engages with scholarship on Expert Knowledge and International Development Practice, which takes a critical look at knowledge production processes and international development best practices. In particular, formulations of “calculative practices” (Miller, 2001), expert knowledge (Mitchell, 2002), and “rendering technical” (Li, 2007) – techniques for the translation of abstract, complex social problems into international development plans and concrete practices – are critical to understanding the top-down and bottom-up processes of knowledge production in literacy campaigns. In the Indonesian context, Tsing (2004) and Welker (2014) investigate the tangled, knotty relationships between communities and international actors and the ways in which universal standards and best practices mediate between the global and the local to produce unpredictable outcomes. Similarly, literacy scholars question the ways that assessments, benchmarks, and quantitative measures imply a universal literacy that is objective, scientific, and neutral across cultural and linguistic contexts (Robinson-Pant, 2008; Hamilton, Maddox, and Addey, 2015).

Alongside constructions of literacy by international development practitioners, the research engages with socially embedded accounts of literacy that ask how written forms are received and subsequently appropriated to fit existing local, social concerns. In the Indonesian context, scholars have highlighted the unstable relationships between text and authority, underscoring individuals’ subjective and situated experiences of interacting with writing, narratives, and semiotic systems (Rutherford, 2000; Florida, 1995; Rodgers, 1993).
Building upon these accounts that problematize deterministic definitions of literacy, this study investigates the sites of tension in a contemporary literacy intervention and incorporates the dynamic relationships between individuals, communities, and international development actors and organizations. By drawing upon language socialization research and analytic methods (Garrett and Baquedano-López, 2002; Sterponi, 2011; Duranti, Ochs and Schieffelin eds., 2012; and García Sánchez, 2014), the research underscores the ways in which a standardized literacy intervention reproduces and disrupts existing modes of knowledge acquisition and group socialization. Through a through examination of local educational conditions, literacy practices, and textual traditions, this study aims to place the local within pervasive, and indeed persuasive, international development discourses.

DESCRIPTION

The dissertation draws on data collected during thirteen months of fieldwork (July 2016 – August 2017) in Jakarta and Belu, Indonesia. Extensive fieldnotes from participant observations, audio and video recordings of key activities (notably classroom lessons, teacher training sessions, and Reading Camps), pedagogic, policy, and planning documents, and over 80 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with parents, school administrators, teachers, and Save the Children staff comprise the data corpus.

To understand how literacy is conceptualized and operationalized by international development practitioners in the field, I collected Literacy Boost program documents, including curricula and other pedagogic materials, training manuals, monthly field office reports, monitoring and evaluations reports, and Literacy Boost programming documents. As such, Save the Children’s own data, gathered through surveys, previous qualitative research, and assessments, are important sources of data for the current study. Field notes and audio and video recordings were gathered from observations at teacher training sessions and Literacy Boost public presentations (for example, to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture). I also conducted 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with staff members at all levels of the organization: local/field office, country office, and international office. Finally, I did participant observation at the Save the Children field offices, observing the day-to-day activities of the staff.

In tandem with the focus on Save the Children Literacy Boost staffers (as one community of practitioners), I conducted intensive ethnographic research at the two Literacy Boost implementation sites in Jakarta and Belu in 2016-17. In order to enrich understandings of how literacy development plans and bodies of knowledge are received, appropriated, and practiced, I systematically sought to include multiple voices and experiences of the Literacy Boost program participants. Over 60 interviews with staff, teachers, principals/administrators, parents, and community members allowed me to trace gaps between plans and implementation of the Literacy Boost program across the two research sites. At each school site, I conducted two months of daily classroom observations at the early grade levels in order to gain a broad perspective on early grade teaching and learning processes. During these classroom sessions, I also gathered textual artifacts from the schools, such as reading and writing lesson plans and samples of student writing. I also observed ten times at the Literacy Boost after-school Reading Camp.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings are organized into the following three strands: 1. Cultural adaptations (in which the Literacy Boost modules are made local, along the various scales of Indonesia, region, and even
school); 2. Linguistic adaptations (in which the Literacy Boost assessment and literacy curriculum as articulated in teacher training modules are made to fit Indonesian language, as well as further modifications based on multilingual contexts – of particular pertinence in Belu, Indonesia); and 3. Discursive adaptations (in which the mode of presenting materials and communicating directives are adapted along the implementation chain).

The cultural and linguistic adaptations were among the most discussed by the Literacy Boost staffers in teacher training sessions, and even leading up to the launch of new project sites. The chain of translations encountered a blockage, however, when it came to teachers’ uptake of cultural translations. Though teachers did conduct everyday translations (linguistically and culturally) of all kinds of curricular material, the vast majority of teachers still had difficulty in adapting Literacy Boost activities to local languages, a context of multilingualism, and in using local materials and practices for those Literacy Boost activities.

The conclusions from this paper bear implication for Literacy Boost’s implementation in Indonesia, in its current and future program sites. More broadly, this paper advances understandings of the relationship between literacy and international development processes, which can contribute to the better design, contextualization, and implementation of literacy initiatives globally.

**Keywords:** literacy, international development, translation, multilingualism

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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**The Pedagogical Labor of “Development from the Margins”: Education, Labor, and Infrastructures in Indonesia**

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**BACKGROUND**

In light of one of this panel’s key goal to offer theoretical and methodological considerations to the development of anthropology of education within the Indonesian context, this paper centralizes one of the core tensions in the subfield by asking: how do we define “education” and what, in turn, “counts” as objects of study for anthropologists of education?

In the United States, “education” is increasingly equated with “schooling,” despite the fact that many anthropologists of education have shown that schooling is only a subset of the education that occurs in everyday life (Pollock & Levinson 2011; Varenne 2008). An overarching goal of this paper is thus to denaturalize this association and offer one approach to anthropologically study processes of education outside of the context of schooling. I ground this discussion in a working concept that I have termed “pedagogical labor” in my research on infrastructures, education, and labor in contemporary Indonesia. First, I describe the research context and questions within which this concept is situated. Next, I discuss the two bodies of literatures that this concept is built upon: (1) the social practice theory of learning and (2) phatic labor and the social infrastructures of communicative channels.

**Research Context**

Since 2014, the Indonesian central government has engaged in ongoing efforts to “develop Indonesia from the margins” (*membangun Indonesia dari pinggiran*), a national development motto that centralizes the longstanding issue of regional disparities between the core island of Java, where most of the country’s population and economic activities are concentrated, and the small islands of its historically marginalized eastern periphery. In an effort to stimulate economic