Against Human Rights Violations in (Haitian) Education & Beyond: Foundations, lessons, impact...

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What’s the *function* of education?

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.

Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
From Dr. Elizabeth Vogel Taylor @MIT @MITHaiti:

1. “[B]ringing Human Rights issues into STEM can alter the focus from simply “What can we make and how can we make it?” to “What are the needs of our world and what can we do to understand and address those needs.””

2. New learning outcome: “identify unmet needs and [...] approach those needs in meaningful and respectful ways [...]”

3. “At MIT, students are amazing at reaching whatever goal they set for themselves. Programs that help them choose goals wisely (such as by focusing on Human Rights) can therefore have a huge impact in STEM.”

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Linguistic foundations

“Literacy conducted in the dominant standard language empowers the ruling class by sustaining the status quo. It supports the maintenance of the elitist model of education. This elite model of education creates intellectualists and technocrats rather than intellectuals and technicians. In short, literacy conducted in the dominant language is alienating to subordinate students, since it denies them the fundamental tools for reflection, critical thinking, and social interaction.”

“Without the cultivation of their native language, and robbed of the opportunity for reflection and critical thinking, subordinate students find themselves unable to re-create their culture and history. Without the reappropriation of their cultural capital, the reconstruction of the new society envisioned by progressive educators and leaders can hardly be a reality.”
Our finish line:
Reflexive anti-colonial use of *local* languages is *integral* to human rights in education

Alongside its contributions to both science and social justice, linguistics, like education and other disciplines in the humanities, has too often been used as a tool for intellectual and political domination. Yet linguistics is critical, alongside education and STEM, for tackling global challenges, especially in promoting participatory readiness and distributive justice in disenfranchised communities that speak local languages—in Haiti *and beyond*. As Marx said, “the task is not merely to understand the world, but to change it.”

*In Boston Review:*
https://www.facebook.com/michel.degraff/posts/10154211309468872
Language and Liberation is a global challenge...

Hubert Devonish

UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report highlights the importance of mother tongue education for quality education:

- An estimated 40% of the global population do not receive education in a language they speak or understand.
- This can hold back a child’s learning, especially for those living in poverty.
- Children should be taught in a language they understand.

In multi-ethnic societies, imposing a dominant language in school systems has frequently been a source of grievance linked to wider issues of social and cultural inequality.
Universal human rights—on paper

1. “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”
   (Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

2. “…persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right … to use their own language..”
   (Internationally Convenant on Civil & Political Rights)

3. “the education of the child shall be directed to development of respect for the child’s … own language”
   (Convention on the rights of children)

4. “For the purposes of the present Convention: ‘Communication’ includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication … “Language" includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non spoken languages…”
   (Convention on the Rights of Persons w/ disabilities)
Universal human rights—on paper

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

(United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Yes, on paper only. keeping in mind that, in practice on the ground, even the UN routinely violates such “rights and freedoms”—for example, when UN authorities in Haiti use French in meetings with Haitians who speak Kreyòl only and whose communities are being decimated by the cholera that was introduced in Haiti by UN troops disposing of their feces in a major river.

See http://ijdh.org for more details about UN’s human rights violations in Haiti.

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One spectacular case of human-rights violation through language & education

1. All Haitians speak Kreyòl; only 3–10% speak French. Yet French is the PRIMARY language of instruction.

2. Only 10% who enter primary school finish high school.

3. About 1% have some university-level education.

4. Rote-learning throughout.

5. Haiti = most impoverished country in Western hemisphere with highest index for inequality.
Some “hard, brutal facts”

re: human rights violations in Haiti

1. The (mis-)use of French is one cause of academic failure and distress among the majority of Haitian children.

2. French in Haiti = tool for neo-colonial “empire building” & for “élite closure”

3. Countries that do not use their native languages for formal instruction have the worst records of academic achievement and national development (Walter 2008; Hebblethwaite 2012).

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Key question
(re: “Linguists’ most dangerous myth”):

Are the (“abnormal”?!) “discontinuities” that are allegedly found in the history of Creole languages of a fundamentally distinct nature than the (normal?) “discontinuities” that are found in the history of non-Creole languages?
Answer (see DeGraff 2005ff)

http://mit.edu/degraff

There is no fundamental difference between “creolization” as in the history of Haitian Creole vs. “language change” as in the history of English and Romance languages.

[This my own favorite example of “what science can contribute to human rights”...]
New roots/routes toward “direct action” for promoting human rights in education

MIT-Haiti Initiative http://haiti.mit.edu

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Les Bourricots sont Utiles
Donkeys Are Useful

Alsacricy Jean

Liv Nan Lang Manman Nou
Livres dans notre langue maternelle
Mother Tongue Books

https://www.facebook.com/aiplusenglish/videos/vb.407570359384477/967994680008706
World Bank vs. LKM studies: Reading of letters and words

In 3rd grade, 23 words/minute (WB) vs. 60 words/minute (LKM)
https://www.facebook.com/michel.degraff/posts/10155196871093872
Spreading the LKM model

INNOVATIONS: TEACHING & LEARNING MATERIALS
FRIENDS OF MATÈNWA, INC.

INNOVATION
Mother Tongue Books

INNOVATOR
Friends of Matènwa, Inc.

LOCATION APPLIED
Haiti: Matènwa Community Learning Center (MCLC), Matènwa, Island of Lagonav

POTENTIAL IMPACT
Pilot project includes five schools, children in grades 1-3

The World in Words
December 22, 2014 - 3:30 PM EST
Reporter Amy Bracken
This story is a part of HUMAN NEEDS

This village school in Haiti helped propel a national movement to teach kids in Creole

Mother-tongue books in Haiti: The power of Kreyòl in learning to read and in reading to learn

Michel DeGraff
One math-related example of these 3 pillars

https://www.facebook.com/michel.degraff/posts/10155106973973872
MIT-Haiti Initiative at the University level

and adapt them in Kreyòl with the help of Haitian professors.

https://youtu.be/HJ6kx7JX24U
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MIT-Haiti by the numbers

• 7 STEM workshops in Haiti + 1 MIT-Haiti Fellowship at MIT
• 6 locally led workshops (October 2015–September 2016)
• 2 symposia (MIT, October 2010; Haiti, March 2017)
• 250+ enrollments in MIT-Haiti workshops (faculty in STEM and high-level government officials)
• ~150 universities and schools represented at workshops
• 50+ apps in Kreyòl for active learning in STEM
• 6 online video tutorials in Kreyòl for genetics and biochemistry

Impact: Changes in attitudes & classroom practices...

... vis-à-vis the use of:

1. Kreyòl as language of instruction
2. Active learning
3. Technology in teaching
Language choice affects quality and access

“When I teach in Kreyòl] many changes occur because the children ask more questions. Sometimes you even feel that they are speaking too much; then you switch over to French so that there will be less interaction in the class.” (Workshop participant)
Summary of “Direct Action” (à la MLK Jr.)

1. Create a new *lexicon* for STEM in Creole languages—and other local vernacular and indigenous languages

2. Create a new *culture* of deep learning based on the use of native languages

3. Document successes—*evidence-based model*

4. *Demystify negative attitudes* against local vernacular and indigenous languages.

5. *Language advocacy* empowering speakers of local languages via production of knowledge *in* local (low-resource) languages
Men anpil, chay pa lou
Bibliography & resources at:
http://mit.edu/degraff
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