


Fall 2017

"Why Can't We All Get Along:" An analysis of Baka education, and the application of picture books in Baka

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“Why Can’t We All Get Along” An analysis of Baka education, and the application of picture books in Baka

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Fall 2017

Acknowledgements:

I want to start off by thanking Staphane and the ASTRHADE team for taking me in and helping me throughout this internship. To Stephane for always listening and all the motorcycle rides.

To the Mintoum community, especially Nyame and Souleko for being so helpful and patient with me, and to Nyame and her family for opening up her home to me

To Sarah and Matt for continuously pushing me and giving me the support I needed to get the information we both wanted.

To Christine for talking me through the application process and being full of knowledge about Cameroon and Baka education

To my Dad for all the help and support he gave me with writing this paper.

To my Brother and Mom for being there for me and constantly pushing me to do the best that I can.

To the entire SIT staff for making the last three and a half months in Cameroon and amazing experience and for the non stop support that each member gave me.

To Les Freres of Lomie for allowing me to stay with them and letting me eat all of their delicious food made by the wonderful Plucheré, and for also taking the time to discuss with me their work in Baka education.

Abstract

This research seeks to understand the implementation of mother tongue language education, specifically within the Baka community. Research was conducted in a Baka village called Mintoum over a three week period. By working with a non profit organization, information was gathered in hopes to improve the education of the Baka. Interviews were conducted to better understand, how these booklets affected not only the child's education but also the parents' reaction to books in their language. There was also an observation process conducted to see how the application of these booklets took place within a new Baka run preschool program "Chasing Two Rabbits at Once". By also working with other Baka education organizations, it was found that these groups need to work together to achieve a common goal. Mother tongue education is not an easy process, but necessary to give these children the best chance to succeed in education. The booklets with the right application process will be beneficial to not only the child but also the community.

Cette recherche vise à comprendre la mise en œuvre de l'enseignement des langues maternelles, en particulier dans la communauté Baka. La recherche a été menée dans un village Baka appelé Mintoum sur une période de trois semaines. En travaillant avec une ONG, des informations ont été recueillies dans l'espoir d'améliorer l'éducation des Baka. Des entretiens ont été menés pour mieux comprendre comment ces brochures affectaient non seulement l'éducation des enfants, mais aussi la réaction des parents aux livres dans leur langue. Il y avait aussi un processus d'observation mené pour voir comment l'application de ces livrets a eu lieu dans un nouveau programme préscolaire de Baka «Chasing Two Rabbits at Once». En travaillant également avec d'autres organisations éducatives Baka, il a été constaté que ces groupes doivent travailler ensemble pour atteindre un objectif commun. L'éducation en langue maternelle n'est pas un processus facile, mais nécessaire pour donner à ces enfants les meilleures chances de réussir dans l'éducation. Les brochures avec le bon processus de demande seront bénéfiques non seulement pour l'enfant mais aussi pour la communauté.

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Introduction:

My internship was conducted with a relatively new organization called Chasing Two Rabbits at Once. This non-profit seeks to improve Baka education and assist with community empowerment. I spent three weeks working with a partner organization called ASTRHADE to implement a pilot program of Baka language books and also to create promotional videos. Most of the time was spent in the main town of Lomie along with going back and forth to the the Baka village called Mintoum. This village is where the research piloting of two books in Baka and the videos would take place.. The books were printed out in the city of Yaounde and brought to Mintoum to test their usefulness, and observe the educators implementation process. The research was done within the village as well as with the other community of Lomie to better understand Baka education and the value of moving forward with these books.

The Baka (Background)

The Baka are an indigenous group of hunter-gatherers located in the East of Cameroon, along with neighboring countries the Republic of Congo Gabon and Central African Republic. The majority (80%) are found in in the south east of Cameroon. The Baka were primarily hunter gatherers who have lived off of, and in, the forest for thousands of years. “Ils sont considérés comme les premiers habitent du Cameroun et comme le primaire ethnie qui s’est installée en forêt”¹ The Baka have depended on the forest for all of their needs for the past 40,000 years².

The Baka have specific gender roles when it comes to hunting and building homes. The woman is the primary builder of the mongulu (hut in which Baka live.) They also accompany their husband in forest to carry their belongings. The man uses a bows, poison arrows and traps to catch game in the forest ³. The Baka are monogamous, and often having large families.

Music and dance are two key aspects to the Baka culture. Instruments are played, often during dusk, while dancing takes place. Music and dance also occur during ceremonies such as rituals, marriage, birth and death. Another important aspect of the Baka culture is understanding the forest and all of its parts. This includes knowledge of poisonous/medicinal plants, understanding the seasons, when will be the most plentiful with game, and the best places to hunt. “Hunting is one of the most important activities [for the Baka] not only in providing food

¹ English Translation: “They are considered the first habitants of Cameroon and the first ethnic group to live in the forest” De coedindspoblemतिक van het Kind van 0-3 Jaar In Oost Kameroen: Heerlen; 1982

² Chimtom, %. K. (2012, March 22). Cameroon’s Baka Pygmies Seek an Identity and Education. Retrieved November 30, 2017, from <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/03/cameroonrsquos-baka-pygmies-seek-an-identity-and-education>

³ New world encyclopedia [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pygmy C](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pygmy_C)

but for symbolic meanings and prestige traditionally attached to it”⁴. Hunting gives the Baka not only the means to provide for their family, but also a sense of power and self-reliance.

Baka (Changes)

As with most indigenous cultures, the Baka are not living the lives that they once did. Most have now been moved out of the forest and onto the roadside drastically changing their hunter-gatherer, nomadic lifestyle. It is rare to find a Baka group that still lives completely in the forest, as “traditional lands and extremely few, if any, are still living ‘purely traditional’ nomadic lifestyles.”⁵ Bringing the Baka out of the forest has created a new lifestyle to which they must adhere.

This new lifestyle is the result of a push to sell forest-based natural resources to companies which create more exports, and income, for Cameroon. This deforestation has been in place for over 20 years, leaving far less livable forest, and “...unfortunately there are no dividends for the Baka communities”⁶. The government has given large chunks of the forest to foreign companies, who have not given anything in return to the people who previously occupied them. Often the government, or the company, will claim they are helping the indigenous group, when little is being done to support a sustainable life. Since the Baka never had true rights to the land, there was no way to prove they lived there when the organizations/companies come into the

⁴ http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/africa/where/cameroon/jengi_project/help/index.cfm

⁵ Aili Pyhälä. What Future for the Baka. 2012. Print

⁶ DW Cameroon logging companies <http://www.dw.com/en/cameroon-logging-companies-destroy-habitat-of-baka-people/a-40151352>

forest. Survival International has done work with the many types of indigenous groups in an article about the Pygmies they stated, “Without nationally recognized the lands on which they depend, outsiders or the state can take over their land with no legal barriers and no compensation”⁷

Another issue faced by the Baka is that they have rights that they do not understand, and that the government does not enforce. In 2007, Cameroon voted in favor of the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People, (UNDRIP) unfortunately these rights are not fully put into practice when it comes to protecting indigenous groups. The forests have now been dominated by forestry concessions and mining allocations, creating forests that are no longer as habitable. As mentioned, most Baka groups have been moved out of the forest by the government and are living on the roadside, creating forced assimilation which is in direct violation of Article 8 in the United Nations DRIP, stating, “Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture”⁸ The Cameroonian government made it so it was virtually impossible for this group to maintain their original lifestyle. This is another violation of the United Nations declarations, showing the government’s disregard for the rights of the Baka, even with the acceptance of the United Nations Declaration.

The mass deforestation has made going back to the forest an almost impossible task. As a result, more needs to be done to support these indigenous groups who have been forced to live outside of their comfort zone. With more support from the government, and better understanding

⁷ Survival International

⁸ United Nations Declaration of the Rights Indigenous People. March 2008

of how to help these people, much progress can be made. Assimilation might be the only answer but there are things to be done to protect their customs and culture. While it is still possible to teach the young to hunt, this may no longer be how they survive. In addition, only the government can supply places for the hunting to take place to preserve that important aspect of the culture.

Baka (Repercussions)

The changes in lifestyle have made it so the Baka are now more part-time hunter gatherers partially because they no longer spend all of their days as nomads fully immersed in the forest, but instead have small communities usually by the side of a road. On excursions into the forest they often collect different fruits, nuts, fish, and animals however, “due to diminishing number of prey... hunting does not provide adequate supply of animals”⁹. This change has created many issues for the Baka. They no longer spend long periods of time in the forest, which has resulted in a sense of hopelessness and loss of identity which can bring about alcoholism. Alcoholism is very common in Baka villages that have been removed from the forest. Depletion of forest resources, and restricted access to areas rich in plants and animals, means that days are largely spent in their homes on the road side, with not as much time in the forest compared to previous generations. This is especially true for the Baka that are closer to larger towns, it is much easier for them to survive on things brought into the town, so they no longer need to depend on the forest.

⁹ Street Directory http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/62909/education/the_baka_pygmies_of_cameroon.html

Absence from the forest also brings about many health issues including not being able to access medicinal plants along with malnutrition from the inability to gather forest resources. For children to get to the age of five is such a battle, with malnutrition, dehydration, along with water diseases and infections, claiming many children. The largest mortality issue comes from concentration of waste, caused by being sedentary, leading to poor hygiene and water conditions. Although numbers are hard to find, the child mortality rate within the Baka community is extremely high with estimated numbers up to 50%. (in my short three weeks in Mintoum, there have been two child deaths, this despite the fact that the community has a hospital near by.) Even if they have access to a hospital, it is rare that a Baka parent will have the money to take their child to the hospital.

With the close proximity to the Bantu (a dominant ethnic group), the Baka have are now faced with closer relationships and inevitable disputes. The Bantu do not easily accept the Baka as equals, and since the Baka are the minority this leads to lack of self esteem, and feeling powerless. Since the Baka grew up in the forest, they are not only physically but also culturally different from the Bantu. Differences in communities creates striation and misunderstanding of what each community thinks. With the Baka being the minority they are the ones who are seen as different and looked down upon. “This relation has been one of tolerance and characterized by hostility. A situation caused by the condescending attitude and derogatory comments with which the Bantu describe their Pygmy neighbors”¹⁰ The Bantu often see the Baka as “belonging to them,” and often scrutinize the Baka community for the land that they occupy and claim that it is not theirs. This comes with the government taking the Baka out of the forest and putting them on

¹⁰ Street Directory

“government land.” The Bantu communities do not see the land as government land, because there are many issues with land rights in Cameroon. Baka are often unemployed, and if they are employed it is by the Bantu. The conditions of these jobs may be seen as similar to slave labor (depending on the job). There are also instances when the Baka are paid for their work with alcohol, the Bantu will invite the Baka to drink as much as they can of their alcohol as compensation. This is a use of alcoholism as free labor within the Baka communities.

Even with all of the struggles that the Baka face, they still maintain as much of their culture and customs as possible, and this is important to them. Language is a key aspect of the culture that has been closely held onto. Before going to school, a child will only speak and comprehend Baka, and there are also many adults who only speak Baka. Along with language, they have held onto dance and song traditions as much as possible.

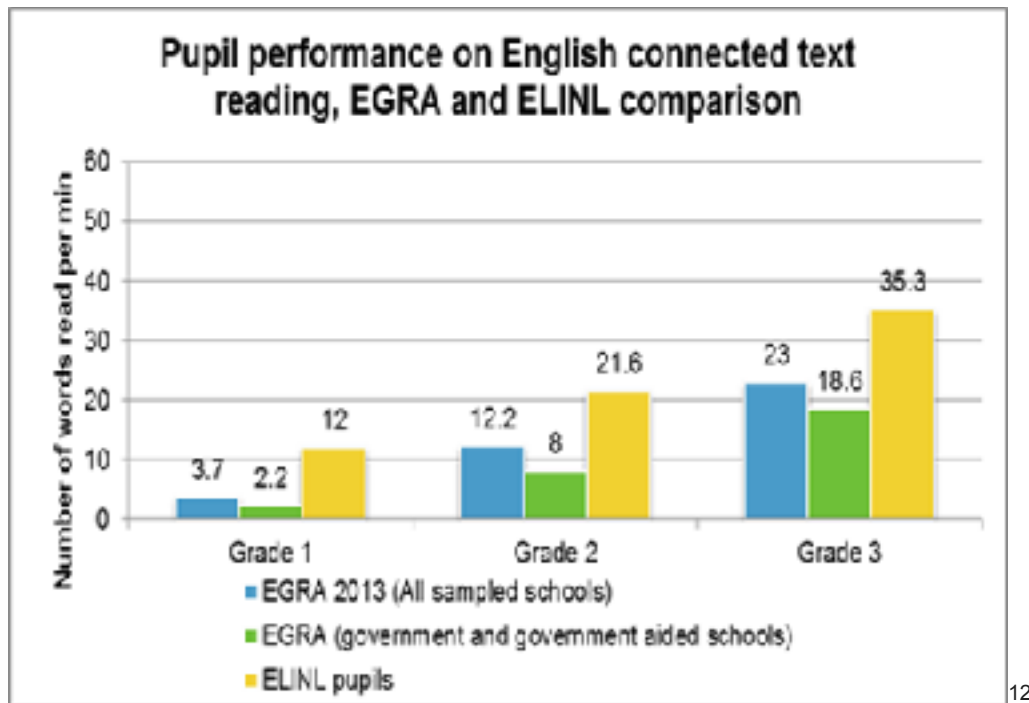
Additionally, the amount that the Baka still can hunt they do, and it is important to them to teach this skill to their children. Even though they are on the roadside, the ventures into the forest still occur (numbers depend on location) and the it is important to the parent that their child know how to hunt. Even though the forest is diminishing hunting is a crucial part of their culture that they do not want to let go of. Even with their vast efforts to keep as much of the culture alive as possible, as each generation grows further and further away from the forest, keeping these traditions alive and well is going to be a battle. With support however, it is possible to keep many of the traditions intact, and with more government support these groups can get the aid they deserve.

Learning to read and write in mother tongue

In the United States, most people are lucky enough to attend a school where the language they speak at home is also the language that is being taught at school. However for many indigenous groups, this is not the case. Until going to school at the age of five or six the child has only heard their mother tongue language. “Throwing children off the linguistic deep end to immerse them in English before they learn their own language invites literacy failure in both English and their own language”¹¹ The children have also likely never seen the language written, since most stories are told orally, and books in indigenous languages are rare, and likely expensive.

When the indigenous five year old walks through the door on their first day of school, they will often not understand anything that is going on, or be able to communicate with the majority of their peers. They will start to learn a new language along with learning to read and write (for the first time) in that language before they can even speak it. This often proves to be incredibly difficult, and mentally draining for a child. A pilot program was done in Gambia that showed the vast difference between a child who first becomes literate first in their native language compared to a child who initially only learns to read and write in a second language.

¹¹ American Institute of Research <http://www.air.org/resource/language-learning-and-literacy-native-tongues-first>



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This puts an emphasis on the early stages of children learning, and how impactful education can be if the first years of education are spent on mother tongue literacy. Not only is the child more likely to succeed when the transition begins, but with the initial mother tongue influence, the child will feel more comfortable in a school environment which is crucial for young learning. An article in the American Institute for Research states “Children can learn to read well in a new language only if they have a strong foundation of literacy in their first language”¹³ This foundation is an important survival tool for future learning. There has to be a certain amount of literacy with the mother tongue before the transition is made in order to reap the benefits.

¹² <http://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/children-learn-better-their-mother-tongue-part-2>

¹³ American Institute of Research

Preschoolers learning to read and write the language they first learn to speak is vital for their learning process. “Two decades of world-wide bilingual education pilot projects have shown that children who are first adequately taught to read their mother tongue learn to read the national language much more easily and with better comprehension than those who struggle to learn to read in a foreign language”¹⁴. The small issue is that there is a level that the child needs to reach for this to be effective. If the literacy level in the mother tongue is not reached before the child is introduced to another language they will likely fail at both. This however is the most effective form of education and if put into practice the child will succeed with both languages.

Mother Tongue Usage with the Baka

Specifically with the Baka, the learning of the mother tongue could be essential in improving the communities overall education levels. Since this community is far behind in education, making it as easy as possible for them to learn is crucial. The Baka are a large enough group so that they can occupy enough schools that are solely taught in the Baka language. This is important because the Baka are seen as outsiders, if the Baka went to schools that were primarily filled with other Baka children, they would not be the minority. The current generation of Baka are attempting to adhere to the new lifestyle that was forced on them and attend traditional schooling.

The close, but dysfunctional, relationship with the Bantu creates a sense of self doubt and a dislike to attend school as Christine Leonard states in her article about Baka education

¹⁴ Christine Leonard. Mother Tongue Literacy for the Baka: Potential and Possibilities. 2011. Print

“dropout rates for Baka are very high in transition to Bantu schools”¹⁵. When going to Primary school these children are often ostracized and bullied by the Bantu for the sole reason that they are Baka. Lack of education creates an even larger gap between the Baka and the Bantu which leads to never ending cycle of inferiority.

In an article about the future of Baka education, the author asks “The question thus arises: what if Baka schools were designed so that they better respected and reacted Baka needs, culture, traditions and livelihoods? For instance, rather than having “school holidays” when the rest of the nation has a holiday, children could have leave from school when it is harvesting season, when families and entire communities tend to go for weeks or even months to the forest to harvest seasonal products”¹⁶. Having a school system that better aligns with the Baka lifestyle would create an easier transition for them, along with decreasing the dropout rate.

This program would need to include a transition, not only in the time they are in school, but also the language of instruction. Another reason why the dropout rate of Baka is so high is because of their transition into the French language education system. Until going to primary school, these children are only speaking Baka at home. By the time they get to primary school they have to learn a whole new language along with learning how to read and write in that language before even fluently speaking it. The transition would be much easier if the mother tongue language was taught first, and then the national language was brought in. This accompanied by the change in “school holidays” would give the community a stronger chance in

¹⁵ Christine Leonard. Mother Tongue Literacy for the Baka: Potential and Possibilities. 2011. Print

¹⁶ What Future for the Baka

a successful education career. With more educated Baka, they are more likely to better understand their rights, and give themselves a fighting chance.

It is easy to talk about creating an education system that will fit Baka needs, but it is definitely not so easy to create a whole new curriculum, train teachers, and build schools. Luckily there are amazing people in the world who have dedicated much of their time and lives to helping the Baka and hopefully improving their lives. There is a new preschool organization, that is still in the beginning stages, but has the potential to be a huge step in the right direction for improving the lives of the Baka. I spent 3 and a half weeks interning with this organization and hopefully I helped keep the program moving in the right direction.

Background Chasing Two Rabbits

Chasing Two Rabbits at once is an organization that began with an independent study project that Sarah Strader conducted in 2011. After she graduated college, Sarah received a research grant to live and worked with the Baka for over a year. Sarah's initial research goal was to understand the Baka parents thought process when deciding to send their children to school. She found that the question was not that simple, and there was so much more to the answer. The name Chasing Two Rabbits comes from a conversation Sarah had with a Baka parent. He said deciding between sending your child to school and educating them on how to live in the forest is like chasing two rabbits, if you try you will end up with nothing.

Sarah's goal was to create a program that worked with the Baka lifestyle and also promoted Baka culture which the parents also said was a crucial aspect of their life that was being lost in the Bantu educational system. Sarah's main goal was to create an education system

that was purely run by Baka, and that was psychologically and culturally empowering. After extensive research with Baka children partnered with ASTRADHE to conduct a randomized controlled trial in two villages (with eight control villages) where Baka teachers taught Baka children preschool. Sarah collaborated with ASTRADHE to engage Baka educators, musicians, voice actors, and storytellers to create one year's worth of preschool teaching material onto an MP3, crank powered device that the teachers can listen to and use to create and deliver lessons. Recorded content includes lessons, educational songs, and stories, all in Baka and voiced by familiar voices from the community, to keep the children engaged.

While attending Harvard Graduate School of Education, Sarah met Matt Owens who was very intrigued by what Sarah's work. She, Matt and two other graduate students worked for the next year on creating and improving upon this grassroots approach to education. This program not only benefits the students, and empowers the Baka parents and the teachers, but they also work with the community to understand what is best for their children's education. As Matt said "Nobody knows the Baka better than the Baka. Baka knowledge and expertise are necessary for program success and its inclusion is foundational component of our operating philosophy"¹⁷ Because of the education level of the Baka they often see themselves as inferior because of their illiteracy. The Two Rabbits model seeks to serve the Baka in the way the Baka want to be served. As previously mentioned, a problem with Baka education is that it is not often set to Baka needs, and/or the organization comes and goes. Two Rabbits seeks to solve this problem, meeting the needs of Baka along with making sure the Baka are doing the education so that it can be carried out long after the creators are gone. Currently Two Rabbits is operating in two Baka villages

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Matt Owens

since it is still in the pilot stages. Sarah and Matt hope that within the next two years Two Rabbits will be operating in about 30 villages serving more than 2,000 Baka children. Since the Two Rabbits model seeks to educate the children to learn to read and write Baka first, the parents might be more likely to more become involved. This gives the parents the feeling that they are more than their illiteracy and they do have the power to educate.

Currently Two Rabbits is run through a civil society called ASTRAHDE (Association pour la Traduction et le Développement Holistique de l'Être Humain.) ASTRAHDE has been working with the Baka for over 20 years and has a close relationship with many of the villages. By working with ASTRADHE, Two Rabbits is able “piggyback” on the close relationship with the Baka community, rather than coming into the community as a new organization that the Baka do not know and may not trust. This also provides the opportunity of working on the project from the US since there is no office that needs to be kept up in Cameroon. Working through local organizations is something Two Rabbits would like to emphasize, creating the community feel, and also bringing in outside expertise.

I contacted Sarah a couple weeks before ISP period to discuss a possible internship opportunity for me at Two Rabbits. After a couple conversations with Sarah, she got in contact with Brigitte Anziom (the Cameroon coordinator for Two Rabbits), the Secretary-General of ASTRHADDE with whom Sarah has a close relationship. They then decided it would be beneficial to have me as an intern, and we would be able to work well together. I met with Brigitte the week before my internship started to discuss logistics and how everything was being handled. I also had many practical questions. I did not know much about Lomie I wanted to understand what the town was like and how accessible everything would be.

Internship Explanation and Descriptions

I was assigned two different jobs when Sarah and I agreed to work together. The first was printing out, and piloting: a Baka alphabet book, a short story in Baka called Ewasa, and a phonics book. The second job was to create promotional videos for the program so donors can get a better understanding of the schools in action. I received the book materials in a PDF format and Sarah and I agreed on the quantity that I would print. This PDF format of the book came from Christine Leonard, who helped create these books. Christine lived in Cameroon for over 20 years, and worked closely with Baka education and Baka literacy. Before printing Sarah, Christine, Matt and I had a Skype session to talk about and explain how to fold the smaller books. This was an amazing tool, since it was so easy for me to make have this Skype call with them, I could then pass on my knowledge to the people in Lomie who do not have as easy access to internet. Christine also gave me the testing instructions that came along with each separate book. When printing the materials, the large alphabet book along with the phonics books took a long time to print and were more expensive than expected. Unfortunately, I did not plan for this and did not have the time to print out all of the material we wanted. I was able to print out three big alphabet books, 3 big Ewasa stories, 30 small alphabet booklets, and 15 small Ewasa stories. This was going to have to do, since I did not have time to print more books before I left Yaounde.

When arriving in Lomie I met Stephan, who would be my main partner, and would take me to, and from, Mintoum. My program was set up in a way that I was going to Mintoum about twice a week with a three day two night stay the second week of my internship. Since I was working more with Two Rabbits than ASTRHADE, the time in Mintoum was more necessary

than time at the office. The first visit to Mintoum was mostly for observation and to have the parents sign a permission slip giving the OK for me to film their children in the classroom.

When I arrived the students were distracted and nervous, during the lesson they were mostly paying attention to me rather than the lesson which I expected. I knew that after a few days if I was there constantly the kids would not look at me as a stranger anymore and hopefully forget I was there. One of the educators, Souleko reassured me and said that the first day with someone new they are going to be timid but after a few days they would adapt and it would be fine. The parents gave their permission and I began filming that next Monday. I also explained to the educators (Nyame and Souleko) how I would like them to use the books. I explained that we wanted to understand which pictures the children could recognize, and ask what letter they hear often in the word with the alphabet book. With the short story starring the character “Ewasa,” I explained that they should go through the story using the pictures to guide them, read the story aloud. At the end, ask questions to see what the child retained, and help them remember the story. I gave them oral instructions and wanted to observe how the books were used without explanation on the Saber, or written instructions.

I returned the following Monday and continued to film and observe what went on in the classroom. The books were not used this day. I stayed after school and talked to Nyame and Souleko about the books. We went through each picture in the alphabet book, I asked which picture was clearly recognizable, and which picture they thought should be changed. I found this question was not answered and they would not tell me which picture they thought would work or not work. Rather, they would say “this one might have to be explained”, or “some might get this one but others will not.” This was the feedback I wanted, but I also needed to know which

pictures they thought should be changed. They did not seem to want to tell me anything critical. This was what I saw as a culture difference. I felt as though they should just give me a direct answer, which is how I would have responded. Although it is not completely black and white as it was only our second time meeting. They might have felt they did not want to criticize the work I brought. It could have also just been as misinterpretation of the question I was asking and the response I was looking for. We also went through the Ewasa book and they said some sentences that needed an additional 'a' or what did make sense, so I had edits for the Ewasa book right away which was exciting for me. I could still feel a hesitation with our relationship, and with a bit of miscommunication language wise, I think we were all nervous.

I asked if I could come back on Wednesday and stay for two nights and Nyame happily agreed. I returned the next Wednesday and again explained about the books and asked if they were going to use them. I could see they were a bit hesitant with the books, but they used them in that lesson. Nyame went through each letter of the alphabet asking what picture they saw and then explaining the pictures they did not initially understand. She would ask questions about which picture was the machete and which picture was the sugar can for example. I noticed there was more of an emphasis on the pictures than the letters, however the children seemed engaged. With the Saber sometimes the voice on the apparatus will be speaking but many children are not paying attention because they have nothing to look at.

The first day of the Ewasa reading I saw that Souleko stumbled over some of the reading even though we had gone through the book the Monday before. Initially he went around and showed all of the students the pictures, asking about what they saw, and this was also the most engaged I had seen the students. After he was done reading Souleko posed questions about the

story, I could pick up on the fact that he was asking questions, but I did not know the questions he was asking. After the lesson, he explained to me the questions he was posing and that the students responded well to the story, and answered the questions well.

The next two days looked similar, and with the Ewasa reading it was seen that the kids had remembered the story from the previous day. They were not able to explain the whole story but they remembered Ewasa which was a critical aspect in determining how much the child retains about the story. Later that day we passed out the smaller booklets to the kids and they were ecstatic. I was a little concerned about what was actually going to happen with the books when the kids got home because there was not much direction from the educators. This could have been my fault as I should have been more clear about wanting the kids to read at home with their parents if possible. If the child's parent can not read, they should still try to look at the book everyday, look at the pictures in the alphabet book, the letters, which would hopefully help with letter recognition. Even so, I have faith that just having these booklets in the students' homes would help create a learning atmosphere outside of the classroom that may not have been present before the program. I stayed the night again in Mintoum, talked to parents about the books, and discussed as well with Nyame and Souleko, which will be explained more in-depth in the research portion of my paper.

After talking to Sarah that weekend we decided that I needed to follow the testing instructions she had given me in more detail to get the data we needed for the alphabet and Ewasa books. The following week I looked over the instructions and created a testing chart, with each picture in the alphabet I would rate the child's ability to recognize the picture on a ABC scale. An "A" means the picture was immediately recognized. A "B" indicated the student was

hesitant, but came up with the word. A “C” indicated the student had difficulty coming up with the right word. I arrived in Mintoum and decided to test the Alphabet book with one student at a time, with my partner Stephan talking to the kids (since he can speak some Baka) while I took notes. The kids were a bit scared when coming and sitting with us, and nervous about what was going to happen. I knew this was going to be the case and Stephane suggested having Nyame or Souleko do the testing. I said no to this because I knew the only way to get the in depth and most accurate test results is if I were to do the testing and be there the whole time to observe. If one of the teachers did the testing they might tell them things in Baka that I don’t want which might skew the results.

We started with the alphabet book. Although timid, I think the child said the word if they knew it and it seemed like the results I came up with were pretty accurate. I rated each picture on a the ABC scale but also added the word the child said if it was not the word we were looking for in the picture. Having the word the child said will also help us when we are making edits to the book to understand the child’s thinking and how we can improve the picture. There were a couple pictures where the child did not say the word we were looking for but they said a different word. For example with a stick, the child would often say tree, not being able to identify the difference between a tree and a stick. Our job now is to decide whether we want the teacher to explain the difference between a tree and a stick to help the child understand the differentiation, or if we want a picture where the child will come up with the word right away. I tested the alphabet book with 12 different children, two of them were too nervous to speak and only identified about three pictures. So when looking at data we will most likely use the first 10

children who has an answer for a majority of the pictures. When they did not answer it was because they did not know, not because they were nervous.

When testing the Ewasa book I did a similar process with the pictures, asking the child what they see in the pictures and rating the pictures on a scale of ABC. This was a little more difficult to do simply ABC because there are so many pictures within one page that I mostly wrote down what the child saw and how quickly he/she recognized the picture. The Ewasa story had already been read to the kids about three times so I was hoping they would be able to tell what was happening in each picture with some ease. This was the case for the most part and the children took lines straight out of the book about what Ewasa was doing. Also, about half of the students said the name Ewasa when pointing to the man in the drawing.

After this testing to understand better the children's comprehension of the Ewasa book, I talked to Souleko. I asked him about when he reads the story if the children understand and when he asks questions after, how much they are relaying back to him. He expressed a great liking for the story and said when he reads the children are absorbing a good amount of the story. Explaining the pictures really helps when trying to tell the story and having the visual aspect keeps the children more engaged. He also said that because the story is in Baka they understand it much more quickly and it is easier to explain.

The other aspect of my internship was to film the children in the classroom setting, and some outside classroom aspects for donors. Sarah and Matt gave me some idea about what I should be filming and how the videos should come together. I was a little nervous about this project since I am not very artistic or good at creating videos. I have never done anything like it before. I was not sure how to approach everything at first so I just tried to follow the outline they

gave me and take videos of what I might want to see as a donor. The first video I created was just an overview of Two Rabbits. Videos of the kids dancing and the teachers using the MP3 device in the classroom. I also filmed interviews with Nyame and Souleko about their opinions on Two Rabbits and what they would like to see in the future. My second video I titled 'We're all the same really'. This video captures the similarities between the Two Rabbits preschool and other preschools all over the world. I thought this was important because it is often that people think of indigenous education and can not even imagine what it is like, or have false impressions. This video captures day to day aspects of the kids lives in Mintoum. Basically all the things kids do on a daily basis. Creating the videos was a bit difficult and the camera that I used was not the best quality. It was frustrating for me to make the videos because I did not like the resolution quality of the video. I came to the conclusion that there was nothing I could do about the camera and so I should make the best videos I possibly can and that will be enough. I was proud of the 'We're all the same really' video because I came up with the idea on my own and I really liked the result. It was easier to start creating the video when I decided what I wanted and put that into effect. I learned how to use iMovie during this time, and I kind of discovered a like for making videos so I may continue using this application and expand my new video making skills. In the future though I will definitely use a camera that takes higher quality videos.

Internship Outcomes

By the end of my internship I was able to accomplish multiple things. I created two promotional videos for Two Rabbits, along with taking many more videos and pictures which are hard to come get Sarah and Matt are so far away. I was also able to test the alphabet book and the Ewasa

story to decide how Two Rabbits should move forward in implementing these books into the curriculum. This is an important factor to take into consideration since Two Rabbits is beginning to create their second year of educational content for the MP3 player. With the knowledge of how well these books work, we can decide what books to include into the new year, and how they can best be used in the classroom setting. Along with this, the research that I did about the books can be used as an informative report on how to implement mother tongue literature.

Initial Research and Background

When I received the internship, I had to decide what it was I wanted to do my research on. Since I knew I was going to be piloting these books, I wanted to do more research on learning how to read and write in your mother tongue first. My research would start with observing and talking to the teacher, and understanding their application of the books. Then I would go on to understand the significance of having the visual (pictures in the book) in the classroom. Lastly the parents perception of the books, and how they view their children learning to read and write in Baka, specifically with the smaller books that each child in Two Rabbits received. This was my first thought and when I started researching I realized there are more parties involved beyond just the parents and I wanted to learn their opinions as well. I initially hypothesized:

Having the booklets will increase the children's want to learn, and their understanding of the Baka alphabet, and be extremely valuable to the school curriculum.

When looking at teacher application of the booklets, I hypothesized that the educator would try to follow the application model given, however changes would be made by the teacher based off of their cultural influences, and their opinion how their students will react best to the materials.

Being able to visually learn is an important part of education for young children and showing them a picture will give them better letter recognition.

The picture will help the children with letter recognition because they can think about the recognizable picture when a letter is seen to remember how that letter sounds.

Baka parents will have much interest in the booklets, and it will increase their want to learn along with their want for their child to learn.

Methodology

Site selection

Site selection was easy since I would already be working with the Mintoum village I would base my study in Mintoum with the parents and educators there. The Mintoum village has about thirty-thirty five families with 27 students enrolled in the Two Rabbits program. Mintoum is located 9 kilometers west of of Lomie. To get there I would have to take a moto for about 30 minutes. It is in all dirt road and depending on if it has rained or not the time to get there may shorten or increase. Being one of the closer Baka villages to Lomie, Mintoum is pretty calm and inviting, and most parents speak or at least understand French. This was an important aspect of the site selection since I did not speak Baka and it was not guaranteed that I would have someone with me who spoke fluent French and Baka all the time. I also did not want a translator because it may skew the results I wanted people to be as open and honest with me as possible, and I thought this would be best when it was just one-on-one conversations.

Mintoum is also one of the safer Baka villages, where Sarah had spend much of her time, so we knew this would be a safe place for me to stay. Also since it is close to Lomié if something

happened, Lomie was just a short trip away. There was also cell service so I was able to keep in contact with Stephane, and my advisors. The target population of the parents in Mintoum would be perfect because Sarah has already created a strong relationship with them. Also, the educators know Sarah well, which is with whom I spent most of my time, and the family that I stayed with while spending the night in Mintoum.

When in Lomie, I would be staying the Les Freres de l'Eglise Catholique, also known as the Christian Brothers. We chose for me to stay there because there was running water and almost always electricity along with a nice room and an area to work. I could also eat almost every meal with them with no problem. I did not know when initially choosing to stay there but staying there would be crucial to the research aspects of my project.

The Brothers have been in Lomie for almost 3 years, and two of the brothers (one is from France and the other from the Netherlands) have been in Cameroon for over 35 years working with La Salle. They run 13 different Baka schools in the Lomie district and serve almost 700 students, with about 600 Baka. They work with primary education, serving children ages 5-12. These are all private Baka education schools that can be very expensive depending on the families form of income, and where the school is located. There are three brothers where I stayed. Frere Gislhain is the one who runs all of the schools and does weekly visits and travels to the different schools (he is the only Cameroonian and the youngest.) Frere Jean Marie does the office business and works with the kids who live on the compound. There are 40 boys ages 9-18 (25 Baka) who live in the adjoining building, and go to private schools. These boys are from all over Cameroon and even other countries such as Senegal and The Democratic Republic of Congo. Although expensive the boys are given three meals a day, medical attention and can work

in the field for compensation. Lastly, Frere Martin the 86 year old Dutch man who has lived in Cameroon for over 40 years mostly just works in the garden everyday. This is where a lot of the fruits and vegetables come from that Les Freres, and the boys eat everyday.

Ethical concerns

Since this is a topic about education there were not any big ethical concerns with anonymity and I did not interview children so there were no issues with underage interviews. Each of these interviews were semi-informal and in more of a conversational manner. This being said, with each person I talked to I asked if it was ok if I used the information they gave me in my report. I explained what I was writing about and said if they wanted me to keep their name anonymous I would. Everyone said that it was not a problem, and some people just asked if they could see a written copy of the report, or the parts they were in, and I said that was not a problem. I did not name specifically the parents of the children I interviewed or the name of the teacher because I did not see this necessary to the research. Since this was for educational purposes no one seemed as though they wanted anything from me in exchange for using them in my research. As a form of gratitude I have a 50 kilo bag of rice to the village along with salt and Maggi cubes. I also gave separate gifts to Nyame and Souleko since they were so helpful to me, and graciously opened their home to me. I also give a small gift to Les Freres for their hospitality. None of these gifts were in any way compensation for the time they gave me or a gift in exchange for information.

Expanded Data Collection

Initially I was planning to talk to mostly parents and the educators of the school in Mintoum. I realized that for sufficient results I would need to change that and talk to a larger variety of people to find out their opinions on the books. So, this changed a bit what I was researching and the results that came out of my research. I decided it was more important to understand everyone perspective of bringing in mother tongue literature, and how that would change the class curriculum and if this would be beneficial to the Baka community in terms of education.

There was no point in doing surveys for this study because in my mind I wanted to make a personal connection with each person I talked to, and I also took in consideration the fact that some of my participants would not be able to read, or if they were able to read it still might be hard for them to understand my survey. I carried out ten different interviews with a variety of people. I started my data collection interviewing Matt (who is the operations director of Two Rabbits) to understand his view of the distribution of the books, and his hopes on how these books would be used. I also spoke with Christine Leonard the woman who helped create these books, who also spent 20 years in Cameroon as a linguist working with the Baka for some of that time. I then carried out four different interviews in the village, with both of the educators Nyame and Souleko, and two different parents, who have children in the Two Rabbits program. After understanding their opinions, I realized I needed more from other parties. I then interviewed Frere Gislhain, asking him about the books and if he thinks they would be beneficial in their schooling program. After talking to him, I wanted to get the opinions of the teachers in his schools. I spent the day with him and interviewed and asked questions to two different teachers

in those schools. I ended my research interviewing Stephane, who I worked with for most of my time in Lomie to come up with a solid conclusion on how to move forward.

Data Presentation and Findings

The first interview I carried out with Matt was very enlightening because he informed me about some educational aspects that I did not understand. Since I have not studied education, and the only experience I have with preschool education is trying to remember how I was in preschool, talking to someone with a masters in education was incredibly helpful.. He also explained to me how difficult it is to get books into these child's hands "one of the things that really excited us is the opportunity to get age appropriate literature in the hands of the Baka children." I was able to get some books into the hands of the kids that may not otherwise have the opportunity to see books in their mother tongue language ¹⁸. He also talked about how most educational programs try to reach the greatest amount of kids at once, i.e. teaching in the national language rather than trying to cater to local languages. This peaked my interest in understanding how likely it would be to make sure these kids learn in their mother tongue by using these books as a stepping stone to get to where we need the kids to be before they switch to the national language.

This was the reason it was important to interview Christine as she did so much research in mother tongue literacy. She would have the answers to some of these important questions. Christine explained to me how important it is for these kids to have books in their own language, how much quicker they can comprehend the material when it is in a language that they have

¹⁸ Personal Interview with Matt Owens

heard since they were born. She is willing to give as much material as she has to the Two Rabbits program and to anyone willing to use it to improve the the education of these children.

When studying the application of the booklets it was interesting to watch how the educators worked with each book. I gave verbal instruction on the first day they received the books and observed from there how they went about using the books. I also gave them the smaller books and told them I wanted each student to have one and use those booklets at home. Both Souleko and Nyame seemed a bit cautious about using the books which I saw as interesting since they are just supposed to be used as a positive tool. This tentativeness could have come from me being there and wanting to give me what I wanted. Starting with the Ewasa book Souleko first went around and showed all of the pictures to all of the kids. This was wonderful to see because I did not really explain that that was how the application should start but that is what he did. He then went through the story page at a time stumbling a bit through some of the words, but also acting out what was going on throughout the story. The kids were very engaged, and I could tell that having the visual aspect helped keep their attention along with Souleko's awesome acting skills. After the story was over he asked the children questions about what happened throughout the book which was also an aspect that I explained to carry out to gage the students understanding of the book. The following times when Souleko used the Ewasa book he did a good job keeping the kids involved and making sure they retold the story, after a couple readings when he got out the book he asked what happens in the book and the children were timid but had some responses. This was almost exactly how the directions stated to test out the book, besides some slight changes, and some small issues reading the story Souleko did an amazing job. This

showed me that the application of these books can be followed pretty precisely by the animator with little issues.

The alphabet book was a bit of a different story when it came to the application. I explained how we wanted the kids to look at the picture and understand their recognition of the picture, and then talk about the letter, ask the kids what is the common letter they hear in the word, or what letter does the word start with. When Nyame was going over the alphabet book with the child she focused on the pictures and explaining the pictures rather than focusing on the letters and the sounds within the word. She went through the alphabet book a couple times while I was there and the application seemed to be mostly about the picture, rather than about sounds and letter recognition.

This could have been an issue with my explanation about how to use the alphabet book, I may have put too much emphasis on the picture rather than really learning the letter and the sound the letter makes. I noticed that application of the alphabet book was a bit difficult when it comes to making the student learn what we want them to learn when it comes to the book. Rather than just looking at a picture and memorizing the word for that picture we need to focus on making them understand the different sounds in the word which will lead to the ability read a word.

I then interviewed both Nyame and Souleko to understand their views on the books and what they want for Two Rabbits. When talking to Souleko he expressed a want for even more, when I gave him the smaller books he talked about how it's so small and there needs to be more. I then asked how he felt about having these books in Baka and what that meant for their teaching curriculum. He talked about how important it is to have this Baka material because right now

they do not really have any of it, it is all on the SABER(the MP3 device) and there is no visual. They also now have a word for every letter that they can use when they are teaching the children how to write each letter. This helped answer my question about letter recognition and that having the book was going help the students with that if used in the right way. Nyame had similar thoughts when talking about the books, and how useful the books would be when they are teaching the alphabet. She expressed her want for the children to learn Baka and how these books will help with that. She also explained how sometimes it is hard to keep the kids involved which is what I noticed as well¹⁹. The classroom setting is not exactly what they want it to be and they are waiting till the rainy season is over before they begin to reconstruct a classroom that is more suitable and that has less distractions. With these books however, the visual is crucial and with the pictures the children are excited to talk about and look at the books.

When interviewing the parents I wanted to understand how they felt about their children having these small books and if it was important for them for their children to read and write Baka. The answer that I seemed to get was yes, they wanted their child to learn Baka. I talked to a woman who had three children and she did not speak much French, but understood me very well. I talked to her and asked if it was important for her child to have these books. She talked about how she thinks having books in general is good and she wants her children to get an education that she was not able to receive. That she wants them to be able to speak French and Baka because there are many important conversations that happen in French, and that is the national language that she can barely speak²⁰. Another father expressed how learning Baka is

¹⁹ Personal interview with Nyame

²⁰ Personal interview with Two Rabbits parent

important to keep the culture and to make sure that the language does not die²¹. He also made it clear that the child should also learn French because that is what is mainly used to communicate.

The two parents I talked to lived close to where I was staying in Mintoum. I chose to talk to them because the one parent has been working with ASTAHDE and Sarah, and is familiar with the work. I chose to talk to the other mother because she seemed intrigued in what I was doing, and I wanted to explain further what was happening and get her opinion. Some parents on the contrary did not seem interested in the books. It seemed as though most parents were on board with their child learning Baka and French but there were other parents who did not see the purpose of their child learning to read and write in Baka.

To understand this further I spoke with Nyame and Souleko, after about a week of the books being in the homes. I asked them what their opinions were about having the books in the homes. I thought this was important because it is often that the Baka will just give you the answers that you want (as Sarah mentioned to me). So it may have been that these parents saw what I wanted and gave it to me. Talking to Nyame and Souleko was important because I had a good relationship with them and they would tell me the truth about how the books are being used. Souleko explained that some of the parents know how to read some do not, some are more attentive than others. In some homes the child might be looking at the book with the parent but in others the books are not being used as all.

I then asked if it was important for the children to have these books if some of them are not even being used. I realized a question like this may come off as a bit strong but it was important to understand if having the booklets at home is useful to the child or if it is just useful

²¹ Personal interview with Two Rabbits parent 2

to have them in the classroom since that is where they are efficiently used. Souleko explained how he still thought it was important for each of the kids to have the book there just needed to be some explanation. I asked about having a meeting with the parents to explain to them what the books were and how they should be used if that would help. “Yes” he said, then went on to explain that every parent should have some instruction and that would make it more likely that the parent would be using the book²².

With some parents being on board and others not, it is important to explain to them why their child should have these books in Baka, and what an education will bring to them. Most of the families understand that their world is changing, and their children will not have the same life they did, but they still want their culture to be intact, they know how different they are from the Bantu and they embrace that. All of their children can speak Baka but most do not know how to read and write in it, and only learn how to read and write in French. Seeing books in Baka helps them to understand that learning how to read and write Baka is a possibility and in the end will have a positive impact on their child’s education.

These interviews and observations helped me understand that yes, the books are important but the application of the books is crucial to their usefulness. When it comes to the Ewasa book, reading in class and asking questions is important for the child’s understanding. Having a picture book, gives them visuals, but having a picture book in a language they understand gives them what they need to succeed. Souleko said “The book is in Baka so they understand”²³. This quote made me realize that when lessons are in French, the child is not

²² Personal Interview with Souleko Camille

²³ Personal Interview with Souleko Camille

picking up on them, but when the instruction is in Baka they understand. With the alphabet book the application is something that I could not fully explain or teach in the three weeks and little Baka that I knew. Just the use of the book, and having the full alphabet in Baka will be important but I think there needs to be more training in the future. The book needs to be put into the curriculum that they are teaching and there needs to be better instruction than what I was giving for the book to be used efficiently. I also noticed that the children are currently learning the French alphabet so bringing in the Baka alphabet is tough, they should not be learning two alphabets at once. The program has to decide whether it should be teaching the French alphabet or the Baka alphabet. After learning all of this I wanted to know if how others felt about the books, and how application might be different in other Baka classrooms.

I decided to talk to Frere Gislhain (a Cameroonian brother who runs the 13 schools within the district, his job is to make sure all the schools are running in a successful manner) and try to understand the schooling that Les Freres provide and the curriculum they use in the Baka schools. He explained to me how they use the ORA method “Obeserver, Reflechir, Agir.” He talked about how the younger classes that they have have are taught in both Baka and French so I wanted to see this myself since I know there are few schools like this²⁴. The classroom I visited was very proper with lots of writing on the board in both Baka and French. The first thing I noticed was the attendance on the board that had how many children were present that day in class, and there were separate columns for the Baka and the Bantu. I thought it was interesting that even in a Baka majority school there is still a need to distinguish between the two. I observed the lesson and it was mostly just oral teaching of the alphabet and the teacher would

²⁴ Personal Interview with Frere Gislhain

ask something like “what is a Baka word that starts with the sound ‘p’” Then the children would respond and then she would ask “what is that word in French” and the children would respond or not respond since they did not know most words in French. After she was done teaching I talked to her asking questions about her class and how she feels about this Baka school program. She explained that she had been with Les Freres program since 2013. She went on to say how important it was that these schools were majority Baka and how that completely changes the dynamic of the classroom. She also expressed how most of these children are not at the level she wants them to be because they do not understand French.

I then explained to her what I was studying and that I had these books in Baka and asked if she thinks they would be useful in her classroom. She seemed surprised and talked about how useful they would be because even she is not fully literate in Baka so there are times when she wants to write up a word but she may not know how and has to guess. I asked about the children learning to read and write in Baka and what she thinks about that. She said how she thought this was a good idea since so many of the Baka do not speak and French that she thinks it would be easier for them to learn in Baka and then switch over to French²⁵. An exact replica of what many different people have researched and the conclusion they have reached. In her classroom she had some books, but not many that were in Baka and the ones that were in Baka were almost 20 years old.

It came to my attention that there were multiple parties working on the Baka education but that none of them were really talking to each other. After visiting this classroom I had a long conversation with Frere Gislhain about Baka education and the importance of mother tongue

²⁵ Personal Interview with Prime school Baka teacher

education. We talked about the Baka and how the Baka need the most help within education because they are a minority group that is looked down upon. Although the government may be building schools that are more easily accessible to them, they do not meet the needs of that group. We also talked about how important it was that the community be included in discussions before anything was done²⁶.

It is so often that these large international organizations come in and do what they think is right for the community when in reality the community did not see what this group did as a positive change. I realized that the reason for hesitation of communication between people working with Baka communities was that people were nervous about others agendas. International organizations often have a certain agenda and quotas that need to be met, Frere Gislhain said how he was hesitant to work with them because of previous relationships. I expressed how working with Two Rabbits could be a positive two way street relationship because they do not have an agenda. When beginning the program, Sarah spent over a year living with and understanding the Baka needs, which is why she came up with the program in the first place. After seeing and talking to all of these different people I came to a conclusion about my research and about the future for Baka education.

Conclusion (Micro level)

Two Rabbits is a program put in place to better meet the educational needs of the Baka , and to empower the community by letting them have a say in their education. Bringing in books allows more of the community to be involved since parents can try to read to their children, or

²⁶ Personal Interview with Frere Gislhain

just look over the books with their child before going to bed. Having a visual aid allows a child to see , hear, and understand which helps keep their attention. In addition, having the books in a language that the child has heard since they were born has proven to be beneficial worldwide. With the right execution, these books can increase literacy in not only the child but also the parent.

However, this execution process may not be as simple as one may like. Mother tongue literacy has to reach a certain point before it truly benefits the child one year learning the Baka language is not enough to benefit from learning the mother tongue and then transitioning to French. I believe that by starting in the Two Rabbits education program and becoming as literate as possible before the age of five, the child can then attend one of the private Baka school, which will hopefully have more of an emphasis on teaching and learning Baka and then the switch is made it could be a really wonderful relationship.

Regardless of the child attending the Baka school, going to preschool with Two Rabbits is beneficial to the child, and they will exceed tremendously further than a child who does not attend the preschool. Ideally the child can continue in mother tongue literacy and then switch to French, this child will become literate in both languages, and succeed without doubt. With the sharing of information.

Conclusion (Higher Level)

Les Freres may be able to change some of their early curriculum and use some of the Two Rabbits program, along with materials that Christine is willing to share. This is just a suggestion to the Two Rabbits organization, and Les Freres at La Salle, to work in together to create an

unstoppable Baka education. This may not be something that will work out as cleanly as it does on paper, but I believe that even the small sharing of information is important. The way I see it there is no need to guard information about education because that is not benefiting anyone. The two way street though does need to be made and in order for the relationship to work all parties need to share what they are doing and what they would like to see happen. If they do not meet eye to eye about certain aspects, it still might be beneficial to both parties to share materials.

Conclusion (Macro Level)

Providing a basic education in Baka could address many problems in this community, but it is a very uphill battle. Funding is scarce and the Baka are conflicted about the value of education when compared to traditional skills. Years of being marginalized have left a mark on the psyche of the Baka. With a lack of Baka who can read, write, and speak French along with understanding their rights, the community has no Baka voice to be advocates, which leaves this in the hands of well meaning outsiders. History is littered with indigenous communities that were absorbed, assimilated or otherwise lost touch with their culture heritage. The Baka could easily become one of those lost cultures. The Baka might think they have two potential rabbits to hunt, but there might not even be one. On a brighter note, the world has made progress on this issue and perhaps the Baka will be able to meld the advantages of modern society with their traditional views and beliefs, there is still much culture left to save. Maybe there is a two headed rabbit in the future of the Baka that will meet all of their needs without the divided effort.

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