



Developing a Collaborative Community Approach to Support Pre-schoolers' Vernacular and English Language and Literacy Development in Fijian Communities Without Access to Early Childhood Services

Policy Brief

Research Objective:

This ADRAS Project set out to investigate and develop sustainable whole community approaches to fostering preschool children's literacies in their home languages and English. This action research was located in urban, rural and remote communities that do not have access to early childhood education and care services.

This Policy brief focuses on recommendations for ensuring the sustainability of whole community approaches to fostering preschool children's literacies in their home languages and English

KEY MESSAGES

1. Establishing and maintaining strong and appropriate research partnerships is critical to ensuring sustainability of whole community approaches for fostering children's literacy.
2. Building local capacity through participatory action research fosters sustainability.
3. Developing sustainable community approaches needs to be guided by principles embedded in the context in which the work is being done.

1. Establishing and maintaining partnerships for sustainability

It is essential to establish and maintain strong and appropriate partnerships, which need as much ongoing attention as the research itself if the Project is to succeed and flourish. Chosen judiciously, Partners know how and with whom to mobilise desired actions, and provide invaluable advice germane to their contexts in which researchers work. They help researchers ensure they follow appropriate protocols and processes; and in their actions and interactions are mindful of pre-ordained social structures and relations.

These Partnerships extend to working with effective mentors in communities to support the development and sustainability of community approaches. These mentors need to be well regarded in their community and have the skills for mediating and translating interactions and relations, mobilising action, and inspiring and facilitating future measures for sustainable practice. In so doing, mentors can assist in bring a community together as they work with researchers in developing whole community approaches – such as we did in this Project with a focus on fostering children's literacy.

2. Building local capacity through participatory action research

This Project's participatory action research approach creates ideal conditions for engaging in cross-cultural research and building local capacity in communities to generate and sustain strategies for fostering their children's literacy in their home languages and English.

This research approach prioritises processes for understanding and developing practices from within traditions that shape and inform them. It allows all taking part as co-investigators to negotiate and develop a shared language and communities of practices that are grounded in the local context.

This approach frames each community's families and children as co-investigators with university researchers. It recognises and fosters children's and families' capacities for action and reflection germane to developing strategies that foster children's literacies. Ongoing, authentic dialogue amongst all involved was needed to be at the heart of this approach – seeing all co-investigators learning from one another on an ongoing basis.

Clearly this approach enables communities to move a Project's work forward now beyond the life of the Project itself – such as the communities in this Project mobilising themselves to establish a Play group, a Church group and a local library to sustain and indeed evolve the Project's work into the future.

3. Principles of sustainability

Based on the data and experiences of this Project, the following principles are important to sustainability of the community strategies collaboratively developed for fostering children's literacy:

- Strategies must be relevant to children's, families' and communities' everyday lives and purposes
- Strategies need to be culturally appropriate and significant, such as the texts we used and created with and for children
- Resources used to develop the strategies and keep them going need to likely be available into the future
- Affordability of strategies where initial and ongoing material costs are involved needs to be considered.
- Durability of materials that are used or developed as part of the strategies needs to be assured.
- Strategies and their benefits to children's literacy should be made visible and tangible to those directly involved as well as to others in the community, to profile the work and engender greater interest and involvement in sustaining the work.

METHODOLOGY

The Project's participatory action research approach framed each community's families and children as co-investigators with university researchers, recognising and fostering their capacities for action and reflection germane to developing strategies that foster children's literacies. Data were collected through observations, dialogic encounters and artefact collection in children's homes and communities; and semi-structured interviews with EC stakeholders to align development of community approaches with key policies and priorities. Authentic dialogic encounters were at the heart of this methodology; and have seen all co-investigators learn from one another on an ongoing basis and in interactive workshops at outset and close of each in-country spell of fieldwork.

- Building in the capacity for strategies to evolve and remain relevant (future-proofing)
- Strategies need to be informed by and optimise children's and their families' voices, agency and engagement.
- Strategies and their outcomes must be carefully documented and evaluated, demonstrating *inter alia* Benefits in terms of strength and reach.
- Uptake of strategies by compatible local infrastructure providers should be tracked.
- Local champions and successors to carry work forward need to be recruited

Further readings

Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. 2014. *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*. New York: Springer.

Research team: Professor Pauline Harris, Dr Anne Glover, Dr Elspeth McInnes, Dr Jenni Carter, Ms Alexandra Diamond, Professor Cynthia Brock, Dr Bec Neill

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