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Fostering young children's literacy in home and community settings:

A dialogic approach to developing culturally relevant and sustaining practices

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Abstract

Framed by socio-cultural understandings of literacy and principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy, this chapter details a three-year critical participatory action research study in three Fijian communities wherein researchers worked collaboratively with young children and their families and communities to develop culturally responsive and sustaining strategies that fostered children's literacy in their heritage languages and English. The chapter is structured around ten principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy that focus on: community languages, community cultures, community ways, community inclusion, community modes, community relevance, community identities, community agency, ethics in communities, and assessment in community contexts. We present practices from the three focus communities associated with each of the aforementioned principles of culturally sustaining pedagogies. We end this chapter discussing the impact and evaluation of this work as well as implications of this work for the field.

Introduction

Focusing on culturally sustaining practices for fostering young children's literacy in their community settings, this chapter explores how a dialogic approach was used in Fiji communities to co-create multilingual books rendered in children's heritage languages and English – responding to communities' desires to have such books for developing children's literacy across these languages for cultural sustainability in their local and global worlds.

Whereas Fiji has three official languages – Bauan, Standard Hindi and English – dialects proliferate, reflecting that, on a *per capita* basis, the Pacific exhibits the world's highest linguistic diversity (Eberhard et al., 2019). As the language of Fiji's government, education, media and communication, English is connected to school success, later life chances, and economic and social prosperity (Glasgow, 2010). However, the prominence of English has been seen to displace vernaculars preferred by many for teaching and learning success (Herrman, 2007). Despite calls in the Pacific for multilingual literacy resources, such materials are scarce. The development of these resources – if they are to be culturally sustaining – necessitate community-based approaches that engage with community elders, leaders, families and children in ways that build on community practices, languages and cultures as they stand and as they evolve into the future. Hence our study here to engage in developing such approaches in Fiji's community settings.

Setting the scene

The study set out to address communities' desire to support their preschool-aged children's literacy and later transition to school, as confirmed with our research colleagues, partners and communities in Fiji. The study was grounded in:

- Awareness that in Fiji, preschool education was not universally available and that most children spoke languages other than English at home, yet schooling is in English
- Previous work in Fiji and the Pacific conducted by the research team's School of Education early childhood colleagues
- The imperative from Pacific Education Ministers[2] for member nations to recommit to vernacular language education with appropriate policies and practices to support this priority.

Fifty-one children and their 44 families across three communities participated in the study. The communities had no access to early childhood services and pseudonymously were:

- *Duavata,* a small *iTaukei* village in a semi-rural locality, served by major roads and abundant in agricultural produce
- *Dovubaravi*, a rural Indo-Fijian, cane-farming and fishing community
- *Wavu*, a culturally diverse urban community in Fiji's capital, with *iTaukei* Fijians and Indo-Fijians making up 52% and 48% of Wavu's population respectively.

The study was undertaken as critical participatory action research with and by people in their settings to collaboratively build knowledge for understanding and transforming practice

(Kemmis et al., 2014; Lincoln et al, 2018). Children, families, community elders, leaders and youth, and university researchers engaged as co-investigators.

Using principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy

Developing literacy strategies in communities was framed by principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) (McCarty & Lee, 2014), summarized in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

CSP builds on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) that was developed to democratize children's formal education spaces and promote learning through: conveying high expectations for all children to succeed; valuing Indigenous knowledges and practices; foregrounding different cultural ways of knowing; fostering children's cultural identity and belonging; and ensuring educational experiences are responsive, relevant and authentic by building bridges between children's home/community and school experiences.

Grounded in the seminal work of scholars like Heath (1983) and Ladson-Billings (1995), CSP scholars attend to communities' practices and knowledge in ways that overtly resist cultural stereotypes. With a focus on pluralist outcomes rather than culturally dominant norms, CSP also extends the work of *resource* pedagogies arising from the funds of knowledge work of scholars such as Luis Moll and his colleagues (e.g., González et al., 2005; Moll & González, 1994) that seek to foster and build on students' and families' diverse funds of knowledge. Fiji's teachers, for example, use and value student centered pedagogies, culturally inclusive pedagogies

and seek to include more embodied ways of learning and knowing into their classrooms (Koya, 2015).

Whilst various associated terms have arisen, such as culturally appropriate and culturally responsive practices, the term and praxis known as "culturally sustaining pedagogy" is explicitly underpinned by the core goal "to maintain heritage ways and to value cultural and linguistic sharing across difference, to sustain and support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism" (Paris, 2012, p.95). CSP, therefore, explicitly and systematically supports the sustainability of linguistic and cultural dexterity and plurality by engaging with both traditional cultures, and cultures as they are lived and evolve through young people's experiences in contemporary times. As such, CSP was apt for our community project as both the project and CSP share an explicit focus on sustaining children's, families' and communities' cultural and linguistic worlds even as these worlds are evolving (Harris et al., 2020, in press).

Understanding that social, cultural, historical and linguistic contexts endow literacy practices with particular meanings, purposes and ways of being literate and doing literacy (Heath, 1983), we used a socio-cultural literacy lens that afforded insight into the many guises literacy took in the children's lives. Such a lens aligned with Fiji's early childhood curriculum guidelines, *Na Noda Mataniciva*, which states that literacy involves "understanding and using the symbol systems of a culture – not just the alphabet and number systems, but also environmental and cultural signs and symbols" (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture & Arts, 2009, p. 40).

Certainly, the children in our study were living rich, multimodal literacy lives, situated in their everyday realities. Their literacies involved engaging with: oral story-telling; religious and cultural texts and icons ; music, dance and song; print; information-, communication- and entertainment-technologies; arts, crafts and construction; making marks on paper, screen fabric, dirt, sand, cardboard, concrete and other surfaces; reading and creating images of their worlds; dramatising real or imagined stories; reading, recording and talking about the environment; reading signs in the environment; reading and creating books and other kinds of texts. The project's written texts for children were texts rendered in children's vernaculars.

We incorporated children's and their respective communities' expression modes – such as visual, spoken and written texts, texts of music, song and dance, and texts combining several modes such as speech, image and sound (Kalantzsis & Cope, 2012) – recognizing and further fostering children as literate people who were developing literacy competences related to: (1) interpreting and composing meaning; (2) purposefully producing and engaging with texts; (3) decoding and encoding texts; and (4) critically reflecting on texts (after Freebody & Luke, 2003).

In framing our study thus, we acknowledged the importance of multilingual texts for: validating and promoting multilingual literate identities that are shaped by how multilingual children understand literacy in relation to their multilingualism and multilingual literacy; affording opportunities for multilingual children's participation in literacy practices afforded by their respective linguistic communities (Barac et al., 2014; Barac et al., 2016; Hammer et al., 2014);

and redressing hegemonic effects created by privileging dominant over minoritized languages (Flores & García, 2013; Martínez Roldán, 2015).

Strategies developed with communities

A core strategy used within and across all three communities was co-creating culturally relevant, multilingual books containing words and images in and about the children's worlds and languages. While this idea is not new in and of itself, how we *collectively* went about this work with children and their families and communities is significant for its culturally sustaining attributes.

The Dovubaravi example we describe below, with reference to Table 1's CSP principles and other incidents across the study, illustrates the community-wide development and implementation of this strategy. This example describes the co-creation of a set of family and community literacy resources, which was a trilingual picture book called '*Mandir'* ('The Temple'). '*Mandir'* is structured around routines of, and preschool children's engagement in, women's fortnightly Temple washing and prayers. To this example, we add insights from Duavata and Wavu communities. Throughout the account, we argue that the strategies we describe have their place in classrooms, providing means for teachers to work with children in ways that are inclusive and sustaining of children's cultures and communities.

Embracing community languages

Across all three communities, co-created texts used children's home languages and English. In Dovubaravi, through community and family dialogic encounters in the project's phase 1, we

constructed shared meanings about words, protocols and practices of Dovubaravi's family, spiritual and linguistic lives, and appreciated the value accorded by the community to English, their vernacular (Fiji-Hindi) and heritage language (Tamil) for cultural and material sustainability in their children's local and global futures.

Literacy-support strategies responded to families' expressed linguistic aspirations for their children. Parents elicited wording from children to assemble '*Mandir*'s written text. Keshav's father, for example, showed him photos of the Temple washing day, asking: *Photo mei kaunchi hai? Battao* (What's in this photo? Tell me); *Kaunchi karte hai?* (What are you doing?); *Battao, photo mei kaunchi kare hai?* (Tell me, what's happening in this photo?). Keshav's transcribed audio-recorded answers, additionally translated into English and Tamil, became page texts. Page design of '*Mandir'* gave precedence to Fiji-Hindi and Tamil through text position and larger font size (see Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Engaging with community cultures

Across all communities, book topics engaged with each community's cultures and were chosen by the children with their families. For example, in a Fijian Indian family in Wavu, the story of Rama and Sita from the Ramayana underpins the annual Diwali festival. In an *iTaukei* family in Wavu, children enacted a *meke* (movements and rhyme) telling the story of *The Breadfruit Tree* – the book with this tale being shared by the children's grandmother, and breadfruit being a significant food source. In Duavata, Kuini lived with her parents, grandmother Meli, and her

aunt, uncle, and cousins. Grandma Meli made *roti* (flat bread) for the family daily. Kuini cose to write her book about making *roti* with Grandma Meli.

In Dovubaravi, *'Mandir'* renders a view from Fiji's culturally and religiously diverse communities. It depicts Sangam (South Indian heritage) spiritual practices and artefacts as enacted /created in contemporary Dovubaravi, rather than practices essentialized as 'Fiji-Indian'. Hitherto, participating children's access to books was largely restricted to Disney stories (e.g. Snow White), which neither reflected their life-worlds nor afforded opportunities for their reading success. '*Mandir*', alongside ten other multilingual books (Harris et al., 2020), gave Dovubaravi's children novel access to books reflecting their life-worlds and families' aspirations for their futures.

Ensuring community inclusion

Co-creating '*Mandir*' involved children, parents and elders participating in digital photography, eliciting children's narration of text wording from photos of their time at the Temple, and providing authentic translations from Fiji-Hindi to Tamil and English. Dialogic encounters occurred iteratively as together we created, translated, and edited the book's visual and written content.

Elders steered translations of children's spoken words into English, protecting the integrity of nuanced cultural meanings within children's narrations, and supporting Australian researchers' deeper understandings of these. For example, discussing meanings of '*Bhagwan hai. Jaijai log*

hai.' built understanding about integrative-pluralistic concepts of God(s) to render English translation as 'This is God. All these are gods.' (See Figure 1).

Temple elders conversed extensively with children and adults regarding their cultural histories, languages, practices and beliefs, using the languages and photos in '*Mandir*' as open-ended resources.

Engagement with elders was pivotal in Wavu, too, where children's family members and community leaders' contributions to book development included: acting as characters in book photographs; providing translations and explanations of particular artefacts and practices included in books; providing locations and props for stories; and making links between children's interests and practices and their wider community contexts. This inclusive engagement cut across age groups. For example, a unique feature of the work in Duavata was that members of the Methodist Youth Group chose to work closely with the project team.

Incorporate community modes

'*Mandir*' as a digital artefact, and its co-creation processes, engaged children, families and the wider Temple community in multiple modes of text. Illustrations include prayer rituals and religious icons. Pages within *'Mandir'* capture preschool children's engagement in learning such symbolic and gesture-based texts, as they intensely attend to their elders' performance of prayer.

Dialogic encounters between researchers, child authors and women attending Temple washing day shaped '*Mandir's* design. Early encounters included researchers' play-based interactions

with children, and preparing and sharing *prashad* (food offerings) with children and women. Such immersion in multimodal practices helped researchers see layered and multi-literate modes critical to devising culturally relevant literacy activities for children. For example, participating in Temple activities attuned us to the importance and meanings of colours, icons and numbers within Dovubaravi's Sangam practices. We digitally-rendered simple line drawings from photos of Temple icons and symbols to produce colouring-in activities, with introductory bilingual text and un-rendered images to evoke the Temple's recent repainting.

Emphasize community relevance

During dialogic encounters, parents emphasized preparing children for school success; specifically speaking, reading and writing in English, often by asking children to produce formulaic English. Our project sought pathways for families' extended, culturally relevant, knowledge of literacy-support strategies.

Researchers initially suggested parents 'read the book' to support children's literacy-learning. Parents and mentors looked doubtful, some telling us they did not know what to do. Dialogic encounters established the Fiji-Hindi word for 'read' also means 'teach'; their understanding being that parents were to 'teach' the book to children. Consequently, our colleague, Mere Krishna, an early childhood educator fluent in Fiji-Hindi, visited Dovubaravi to share and talk about books with children. Observing her, one of our Dovubravi mentors, said, "I can do that!", likening the process to adults "talking nicely" to young children. The mentor modelled this book-sharing technique with mothers and grandmothers, who employed their existing cultural

practices of talking with children in respectful, enjoyable ways as a 'teaching'/literacy-support strategy when sharing books with children.

Community relevance also was highly prized in Wavu and Duavata. As a diverse community, Wavu residents identified strongly with their communities of origin, often located many kilometres away from the capital, which they had come to for work and education opportunities. Children's stories were a reflection of their experiences, possessions, cultural perspectives and aspirations which in turn were embedded in the lives of their families and community.

Connect with community identities

In Dovubaravi, photos and text in '*Mandir*' illustrate children's identity, belonging and competence as members of Dovubaravi's Sangam Hindu community and their social peer group. Developing culturally-relevant literacy strategies with children, parents and community mentors strengthened their literate identities.

'Mandir' strengthened literate identities in Dovubaravi as adults with limited read-write literacy, as well as children, used photos to boost their literate engagement with the text. Co-participants' delight in Vivan's demonstration of competence, the mentor naming Vivan as a 'smart boy' and her evident pride in her newly discovered 'reading with children' skills (see Figure 1) reveal enhanced individual and communal literate identities.

In all three communities, children's pride in their growing literate identities that were embedded in their cultural identities was palpable. Children were excited to recognise themselves and

family members in their books and were enthusiastic in sharing their books with other families taking part in the project. In Duavata, when the family of one child, Peni, went to a different village to visit his grandparents, Peni chose to take his book to share with his grandparents.

Mobilise community agency

Revised ethics protocols not only increased children's access to books, but also built community leaders' and parents' capacity for agency on behalf of themselves and their children. Elders and families questioned initial authorship attributions, use of pseudonyms for children, and Australian individual-privacy concerns. They proposed children's and community interests were better served when children were, with family consent, authentically named as authors. The final round of ethics protocol negotiations accorded children's right to be identified as book authors.

Understand community ways

Entering, and learning to be and become within Dovubaravi, necessarily required Australian researchers to critically reflect on their personal responses to community's contexts and circumstances. By exploring connections and commonalities between their own lived experiences and Dovubaravi ways, and looking at community strengths, they avoided essentializing Dovubaravi's social and economic circumstances.

Dovubaravi children typically live in extended family compounds, frequently moving between houses and kin-carers, and sharing resources. This community strength, along with amendments to ethics protocols previously discussed, allowed for relational planning of book distribution, maximising book titles available to each child.

Enact ethics in communities

Enacting an ethics of care and commitment to communities' interests was paramount across all three communities during the three year research project. Families and children were able to choose whether to participate in the research and whether to remain connected over time. Those who participated over the period welcomed researchers into their homes and gave time to the processes of developing and sharing the books with their children and discussing how the children had engaged with the books. Researchers took care to avoid disrupting families at meal times so they felt no obligation to provide food and to ensure that the research did not disrupt family routines. Researchers also ensured that meetings of participants included refreshments for adults and children to share.

Key to ethical engagement was researchers' adherence to cultural protocols. For example, in Duavata, we carefully followed the guidelines and suggestions of the respected community mentor who ensured we were given permission to work in Duavata by the *iTaukei* Chief prior to visiting the community. As the study unfolded, the researcher and the community mentor continued to check in with the Chief to make sure that he was comfortable with the manner in which the work was progressing.

In Dovubaravi and Wavu, enacting an ethics of care and commitment to children, families and community entailed researchers listening respectfully during dialogic encounters, honouring and engaging with each community's spiritual and social practices, and attending to children's interests and their family's aspirations for them. Such actions generated community trust. This

facilitated involvement of the wider Dovubaravi populace, so that by our project's end, the eleventh and final co-created book *Gaon Mei Saal Ke Karikaram* ('A Year in Our Community') included celebrations more central to Dovubaravi's Christian and North Indian heritage families and common seasonal activities such as cane-cutting and catching *netli* (whitebait). In Wavu *iTaukei* families and Indo-Fijian families developed a shared commitment to their young children's literacy development, transcending their cultural and language differences in a plan to begin their own local pre-school.

Making research outputs such as children's books widely available within communities was not without ethical challenges, including dilemmas arising from differing Fijian and Australian protocols and cultural meanings ascribed to assent and consent, intellectual property and privacy across community. Both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian cultural protocols premised relational-embodied forms of consent (equivalent to assent but not qualifying as consent in Australian legal and ethical protocols). At times, our co-researchers and stakeholders were bemused, frustrated, and dismissive of the individualistic documentary evidence required by Australian legal and ethical defaults, which ignored families' oral assents and their understanding of original written consents. Families were patient as we renegotiated consent changes within our university's protocols to better reflect local relational permissions (Rhodes, 2014; Tagicakiverata & Nilan, 2018), and increase children's access to photographic and written portrayals of themselves and their worlds, authentic home and English language texts, and experiences of literacy success.

Embed assessment in community contexts

Na Noda Manaticiva, Fiji's curriculum document for kindergarten education, recognizes parents and families as children's first teachers (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture & Arts, 2009). As children experience their family's social and cultural practices, they learn the many ways of communicating that create diverse pathways to becoming literate adults. Sharing '*Mandir*' with young children provides many opportunities for children to demonstrate their communicative competencies, as detailed in Figure 2 and detailed below.

Impact and evaluation of this work

This study enacted principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy to work with communities to develop strategies for fostering their children's literacy in their heritage languages and English. These principles, summarized in Table 1 and detailed through the examples we have shared here, provided the means by which the participating children and their families and communities now have access to multilingual books. These books were created with children in and about their life worlds, using their heritage languages and English. This work aligned with Fiji's early childhood guidelines to ensure relevance and authenticity, and was further informed by multilingual literacy knowledge and strategies that are known to foster children's literacy.

The children's co-created multilingual books, and the processes by which they were developed with children, provided a culturally sustaining alternative to imported, monolingual literacy products that had prevailed in Fiji. The participating communities have taken steps to sustain and expand the study's work into the future for and with their families:

- Duavata established a community library for accessing culturally sustaining books written by the children; and a play group, securing culturally sustaining resources through Duavata's leader and Catholic Women's League. The play group leader applied to Australia Pacific Technical College, Suva, to become a certified early childhood educator.
- Wavu established a preschool in a building the local Methodist church offered for free, while seeking official status and government funding support.
- Dovubaravi Temple has inaugurated its own Facebook page, drawing on digital literacies developed during the project. Posts include children's *tirrakuttu* (Sangam sacred drama) performance in Tamil.

Through enacting principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy, communities now view their languages with renewed power, affirming their individual and collective cultural identities, with renewed impetus as well as means to sustain these identities. As Dovubaravi elders expressed, '*Before this Project, we were just fishermen and farmers, Now, we are somebody.'* Participants attributed these changes to valuing and documenting heritage languages in the books created with children – voicing their family and community lives through embracing their languages.

The study benchmarked 51 children's preschool literacy outcomes against Fiji's preschool literacy outcomes documented in *Na Noda Mataniciva* (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture & Arts, 2009), using observational data of children's engagement, as illustrated in Figure 2. This bench-marking revealed that, across the study, children's multilingual literacy

developed to a standard not only concomitant with, but indeed exceeding ECE curriculum guidelines.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

In consequence of the collective work with and in each community, and as illustrated in Figure 2 and evidenced in our previous Temple book example, participating children engaged and developed as readers and writers who, after Freebody and Luke (2003):

- Made and talked about meaning, supported by dialogue with children in which adults noticed, observed, prompted, scaffolded and responded to children's thinking and development of their ideas for their books, and their interpretation and discussion of their own and other children's completed books.
- Created and used texts for real-life purposes, informed by knowing what texts and genres were germane to children's lives, and the functions these texts served for children and their families.
- Critically reflected on texts, in which children made life-to-text and text-to-life connections; expressed opinions; developed and projected their perspectives and experiences; reflected on their lives; and made connections to new learning.
- Cracked the codes of texts and transferred codes into texts, supported by the development of children's personalized word banks, dictionaries, and alphabet charts, song charts and books, and labelled scrapbooks of images and artefacts in children's lives, which accompanied the co-creation of books.

The collective action of fostering children's literacy across the community through a culturally sustaining pedagogic approach built sustainable pathways to children's ongoing literacy learning and engagement, while opening doors with families and communities to ways of supporting their children's multilingual literacy. Here in our account lies key strategies for teachers to do likewise in classrooms through enacting principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy, such as we have modelled in this chapter.

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Endnotes

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Table 1. Co-constructing CSP literacy pedagogy in community settings.

PRINCIPLE:	PRACTICES:
EMBRACE COMMUNITY LANGUAGES	Use **texts in community languages** to counter privileging of dominant languages over minoritized languages (Flores & Garc´ıa, 2013; Mart´ınez-Rolda´n, 2015). - *We engaged with children, families and community members in co-creating books in children's words and languages; and used the languages communities wished to be included for cultural sustainability in their local and global worlds.*
ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY CULTURES	Focus on a community's **traditional languages and cultures in evolving ways** as lived by contemporary young people (Paris & Alim, 2012, 2014, 2017). - *The co-created books reflected traditional and contemporary aspects of children's lives, and were told through children's voices and experiences. We also engaged with children's siblings, and a youth group in one of our communities.*
UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY WAYS	Attend to **communities' practices and knowledges** in ways that do not essentialize culture and race (Paris & Alim, 2012, 2014, 2017). - *We tuned into communities' ways of knowing and doing through dialogic encounters; and used the artefacts and texts of children's, families and communities' lives, and not those imported from outside sources that essentialize Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian lives and experiences.*
ENSURE COMMUNITY INCLUSION	Include **community elders and leaders** in maintaining and promoting knowledge of cultural histories, languages and practices (Glasgow 2010). - *We engaged with community leaders, elders and mentors, as well as children's grandparents and extended families.*
INCORPORATE COMMUNITY MODES	Use **community modes of textual expression**, e.g., visual, spoken, written, music, song, dance, multi-modal texts (Kalantzsis & Cope, 2012). - *The books were co-created through spoken interactions, written words on paper and on screen, dramatic play, gesture, song, music, photos, children's drawing, and construction of props that supported story-telling and text development.*
EMPHASIZE COMMUNITY RELEVANCE	Ensure **contextual relevance and responsiveness** of pedagogic practices. - *We actively, visibly listened to community's concerns and interests, around which strategies were collectively developed, and from which co-creating multilingual books emerged as an agreed priority.*
CONNECT WITH COMMUNITY IDENTITIES	Promote **children's cultural identities, belonging and competence**. - *Children's co-created books represented their worlds and their place in their worlds, to themselves and others, showing that their lives matter.*

MOBILISE COMMUNITY AGENCY	Endow encounters with **participants' voices and ownership** that affords opportunity for participants to influence and transform their realities - *Children, families and community leaders and members all engaged to shape the encounters, collectively develop strategies, and co-create the books.*
ENACT ETHICS IN COMMUNITIES	Infuse encounters with an **ethics of care and commitment** (Freire, 1983). - *Our interactions and actions were founded on an ethics of empathetic care and commitment that included Fijian values of patience, protection, reciprocity and trust (Rhodes, 2014; Tagicakiverata & Nilan, 2018).*
EMBED ASSESSMENT IN COMMUNITY CONTEXTS	**Document** children's learning and engagement through **culturally inclusive means**. - *We used a socio-cultural framework of literacy to consider children's literacy competences in context and related to meaning, purpose, code and critical thinking; and bench-marked children's literacy learning against Fiji's early childhood curriculum's literacy outcomes.*

Figure 1. A page from the *'Mandir'* book

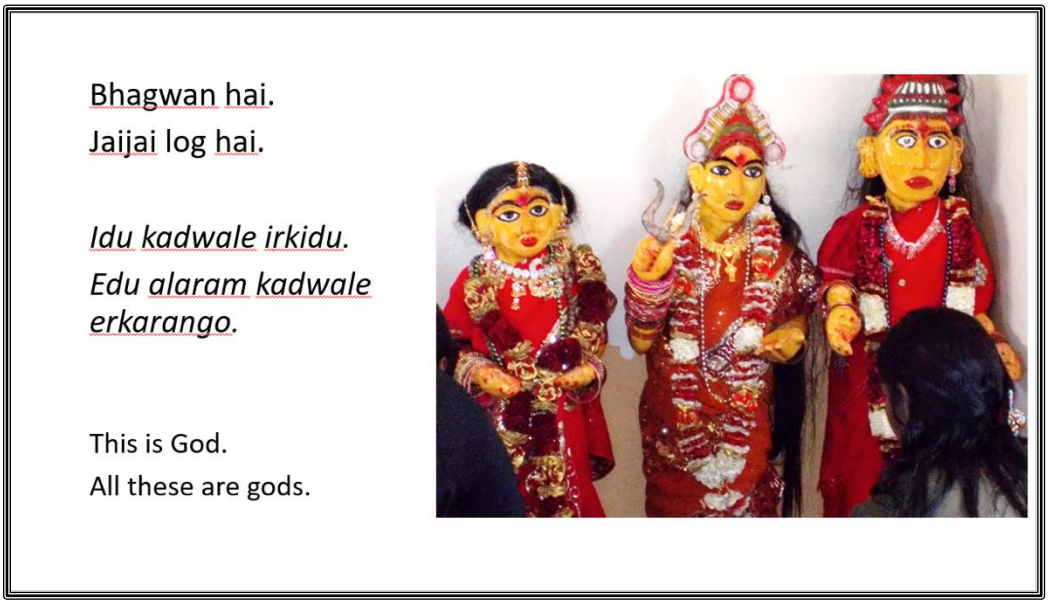


Figure 2. A literacy learning story of Neharika and Warsha from Dovubaravi

We photographed four-year-old Neharika and Warsha as they participated in the Temple washing afternoon. Later we visited them with a laptop and directly typed their narratives next to specific photos on PowerPoint slides for the 'Mandir' book. Months later we visited Neharika's and Warsha's home to deliver 'Mandir' to them. Mothers and siblings/ cousins gathered in the living room to hear the DVB mentor read it aloud. At one page, depicting a woman pounding garlic, the mentor read aloud: "Lesun koote" ('She is pounding garlic'). Vivan (aged 38 months, seated on the mentor's lap, emphatically responded: "Hanh" ('Yes'). The mentor turned to a page depicting a woman hanging up washed clothes with the text: 'Kapda jurawe' ('She is drying the clothes'). Before the mentor had time to read it, Vivan interjected: "Kapda jurawe". The mentor responded "Oh!", looking at Vivan with raised eyebrows and a smile. As captured in the video still below, everyone laughed, Neharika clapped and Vivan smiled broadly. The mentor, smiling widely, told Vivan: "Smart boy". From here-on Vivan and his older siblings/ cousins attempted to join in as the mentor read aloud.

Later still, Neharika's 22-month-old sister (Nishika), interacted with her aunt Sapna using 'Mandir'.
Nishika:(pointing to a boy in an illustration) Ee kaun hai? ('Who is this here?')
Sapna: Hum nai jaanta. ('I don't know.')
Nishika:(pointing to Neharika in the illustration) Neharika puja kare. ('Neharika is praying.').
Sapna: Ee kaunchi hai, babba? (What is that, darling?)
The next page is that of Figure 4.
Nishika:Puja hai. ('It is prayer.')
Sapna: Baghwan ke kaise puja karajai? ('How do you pray to god?')
Nishika: (puts her own joined hands up to her forehead.)

Benchmarking against *Na Noda Mataniciva's* 'Language, literacy and communication' outcomes:

- Neharika and Warsha's participation in the inscription of their own words, and their later participation in joining the DVB mentor in reading the text aloud, demonstrated their **recognition that print could convey meanings** and that they had begun to see culturally relevant **purposes for writing materials** (NNM p. 41 and 44).
- In pre-empting the DVB mentor's reading aloud from '*Mandir*', Vivan **used illustration to interpret written text** in his home language (NNM p. 44).
- Nishika's used simple vocabulary in three-word sentences in her home language (Fiji-Hindi) to describe and ask about the book's illustrations demonstrate that she meets NNM's aspirations for 36-month-olds' **listening and communicating**, including **taking turns in conversations, responding to age-appropriate stories by asking and answering questions and making comments** when the story is familiar within her life-world. Nishika responded contingently when her aunt asked her questions about what she could see and about how to pray. By bringing her joined hands to her forehead, Nishika expressed her understanding about prayer within her home culture through gesture, one of **many ways to communicate ideas**. At only 22 months-of-age, Nishika was demonstrably well on her way to becoming an **effective communicator in her first language** and was developing culturally sustaining **foundations for literacy**.