

EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



EQ Review is a newsletter published by USAID's EQUIP1 to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate the successes, challenges, and lessons learned by USAID Missions.

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Literacy

The definition of literacy is changing; shifting from the traditional notion of basic reading and writing to context-specific communication and critical thinking skills. More specifically, literacy is increasingly defined as the set of skills, knowledge and social practices that young people and adults use to understand the world around them and to accomplish personal and social goals.

The UN Literacy Decade focuses on literacy as a plural concept that includes a “full range of purposes, contexts, languages, and modes of acquisition which communities of learners identify for themselves,” which not only recognizes the broader definition of literacy, but engages learners as an active entity (http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27158&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html). This broader definition is accompanied by a fuller understanding of how people of all ages learn and those environments in which they learn best, based in part on the considerable body of educational and cognitive science research produced during the last decades of the 20th century. Current approaches to teaching, learning and assessing are learner-centered and measure performance in real-world contexts with a broad range of assessment tools, including observations, journals, projects, and demonstrations.

Monitoring and evaluation tools are also being adjusted to corroborate literacy's expanded definition. UNESCO, which has defined literacy as “the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short simple statement related to one's daily life,” is in the process of moving away from a self-reported literate/non-literate designation, to an assessment that will document “a continuum of literacy skills and practices.” UNESCO's LAMP (Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme), which is currently in development with other agencies, will drive the content of teaching and learning by assessing the current status of literacy in developing countries and collecting data to design targeted literacy interventions

(http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?URL_ID=5243&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201).

Programmatic Examples

Putting these principles into practice is often difficult, however, especially in countries where teachers are under-educated or are trained in a rote, teacher-centered approach to learning. One approach to addressing this challenge is focused on helping teachers internalize new approaches and techniques and put them into practice by scaffolding the teaching experience. Structured teaching combines a learner-centered, participatory methodology with direct, guided instruction, especially for language learning. For example, in EQUIP3's Afghanistan Literacy for Community Empowerment Program, lesson plans guide new teachers through each two-hour session. Each session begins and ends with full group discussion and reflection; includes a variety of learning activities in pairs or small groups; and draws the content from the real-life governance and community development needs facing rural Afghan villages. As teachers gain experience and confidence, they develop their own activities and lesson plans.

ActionAid's Reflect program (www.reflect-action.org/), which creates a democratic space where learners can develop and express their views, analyze power relationships, and develop the skills needed to improve their communities, approaches literacy as a tool for social change and development. It is based on the problem-posing approach to literacy education designed by Brazilian educator Paulo Friere, which views literacy education as a political tool- it engages learners in analyzing their personal environments as a means for personal and social empowerment.

For more information, contact Brenda Bell, Nonformal/Adult Literacy Specialist, Education Development Center at bbell@edc.org.

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Family Literacy Program - Pakistan



Parenting lessons in progress in Karachi

The two year history of the Family Literacy Program in Pakistan - implemented by Children's Resources International (CRI) – can list many examples in which a meaningful change has been brought about in the lives of those who have attended classes. CRI targets children in marginalized societies. Since most parents of the children studying in the partner schools are illiterate and poor, a comprehensive program on family literacy was initiated in January 2003. The Family Literacy Program has tied the learning of parents with that of their children, which has resulted in the sustained interest of parents and siblings even after completion of literacy sessions. A two generational initiative, the Family Literacy Program aims to increase the literacy levels of parents and older siblings of children in the partner schools, so that they learn together. Teachers who taught young children were trained in adult literacy skills to carry out after-school classes for parents, especially mothers. 100 lessons developed by experts in adult literacy have been translated into Urdu to provide basic instruction to families.

As a result of the program, there have been number of successes: mothers have learned to read utility bills, read route numbers on buses, tell time, and read and write simple things. In the ethnically diverse society of Karachi, the female counselors - who did not complete primary schooling - attend the family literacy sessions and motivate mothers to attend school. Baloch, Sindhi, Punjabi and Pathan women sit together and share and learn skills despite the fact that provincial biases are strong in Karachi.

Some of the mothers and siblings have received jobs on the basis of family literacy certificates, which they receive upon completion of the family literacy sessions. These sessions have given them the confidence to pursue jobs and other economic activities. Additionally, the family literacy sessions provide a forum for mothers to share their concerns and issues and interact with each other. They share their cooking recipes and local remedies for various illnesses. They also teach skills to each other, helping to strengthen community bonds.

In support of one of the six goals of Education for All related to adult literacy, the Family Literacy Program has reached approximately 2921 parents, and is working with 80 schools in Islamabad Capital Territory, Rawalpindi District and Karachi City.

There is a famous saying “a thousand mile journey begins with a single step.” With interventions such as the Family Literacy Program, that first step has been taken towards a literate, and consequently prosperous, Pakistan.

For further information, please contact the Family Literacy Program's CTO Tom Crehan at tcrehan@usaid.gov.

Integrated Literacy Focus: Egypt's Education Reform Program



ERP Integrated literacy materials teacher training workshop

The Education Reform Program (ERP) is a five-year effort that began in 2004 to assist the Egyptian Ministry of Education's (MoE) new system-wide institutional reform program, which encompasses both the formal and non-formal education sectors.

As part of Egypt's education reform effort, ERP is working with the Adult Education Authority (AEA), Egypt's national literacy program, to raise adult literacy rates, especially among adolescent girls and women. In rural Upper Egypt approximately 70 percent of the married adult women cannot read or write, which often discourages them from participating in their children's education.

ERP is enabling local Community Development Associations (CDAs) to deliver decentralized literacy instruction services. AEA is committed to linking civil society bodies such as CDAs with government efforts because it is these organizations that best know local realities and can most effectively advocate for local needs with government resource providers.

ERP is training CDA literacy facilitators, many of whom receive their salary from AEA, on the use of community driven integrated literacy materials, which supplement

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AEA's basic curriculum. Additionally, the content used in the materials - developed in partnership with sector specialists, partner institutions, literacy facilitators and learners - integrates subject matter from other sectors such as maternal/child health, parental involvement with school governance organizations and women's income enhancement activities. ERP is also training AEA literacy supervisors and trainers to train 'lead' literacy facilitators to teach the integrated health and literacy lessons and effectively use the facilitator training guide. This guide, *The Lighthouse*, introduces senior literacy officials and teachers to learner-centered and active-learning methodologies.

In addition to current training and materials support, ERP has recently been requested to assist with the restructuring of AED from being simply a literacy provider organization to an adult education and life-long learning organization, which considers literacy a vehicle for building human capacity and community development. With this shift towards a community development approach, AEA recognizes the need for a cadre of Community Outreach Facilitators hired and trained to assist communities and local institutions.

Integral to AEA's new reform vision is the importance of addressing issues of scale and sustainability from the beginning. For instance, instead of implementing projects in just a few communities, the new reform initiative would test projects throughout an entire governorate using AEA staff, local government, NGOs, and community members to transfer and adapt the projects to other governorates.

For more information, contact ERP CTO, Hala El Serafy at helserafy@usaid.gov.

For the reading campaign to succeed, MESA realized entire communities would need to take an active role. Teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) and PTA members, chiefs and village headmen were all trained in material production and how to monitor the use of these materials. Community members were then guided by local teachers on what materials would be most appropriate for educational purposes. Subsequently, school-based workshops were held with parents and upper-level primary pupils, reinforcing that everyone in the community can make a valuable contribution to the reading campaign. Regardless of literacy skill, all members of the community are able to collect supplies used to create reading materials. They were instructed to make pens from roasted groundnuts, paper from reeds, ink from crushed flowers mixed with a sugar solution or weave baskets to store materials.

The success of this campaign, however, does not rely solely on the creation of materials. MESA included members of the community in a checks-and-balances system to ensure proper utilization of the materials. School committees ensure teachers have adequate reading materials, community members participate in follow-up workshops to create additional materials as necessary, and headteachers implement open days at which pupils can display their improved reading abilities. Teachers develop reading calendars to track pupils' reading assignments so parents can monitor what their child is reading. Having mobilized entire communities in supportive and accountable roles ensures that results from the reading campaign are substantial and sustainable.

To date, 6,300 teachers and headteachers have been trained together with key members of school committees and PTA

Malawi Education Support Activity (MESA)

In February 2004, a baseline survey conducted in Malawi by the Malawi Education Support Activity (MESA) revealed that 98% of the Standard 3 girls and boys were not able to read from their class-level books and only 40% of the Standard 6 were able to read a passage of their textbooks. Further investigation revealed several reasons including pupils lack of exposure to supplementary reading materials at home or school, and an overall lack of encouragement by parents or the community.

To counter this unfortunate reality MESA launched a reading campaign in its target districts of Kasungu, Phalombe, Mzimba and Machinga. The goal of the reading campaign was to create an environment that helps primary school pupils improve their reading skills by developing supplementary reading materials and promoting reading as a habit.



A teacher in Phalombe demonstrates how to make ink from locally available materials.

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and influential chiefs. Surveys that have been conducted to assess the achievement and impact of the reading campaign indicate that about 60% of the schools in the four target districts are involved in reading campaign activities. Reading skills are improving. For example, in Khongoloni zone in Phalombe, 25% of the pupils who could not read in Standard 1 during baseline are able to read works from supplementary materials that parents help create by the end of the school year. Perhaps one of the most important outcomes, beyond improved reading skills, is parents' recognition that they too have a crucial role in the education of their child.

For more information, please contact Ramsey Sosola, USAID Malawi at rsosola@usaid.gov.

Testing of Literacy for Comprehension

At a recent USAID Education Sector Council Technical Meeting, Luis Crouch, of the *Ed Data II* Project, and Helen Abadzi, of the Operations Evaluation Department of the World Bank, gave a presentation on early literacy acquisition. A child at the end of Grade 2 should be reading 60 words per minute on a grade-appropriate passage. The reason for the importance of fluency (speed) is that the human short-term memory has a working span of only about 12 seconds if it is trying to hold many objects. Slow readers thus forget what they read at the beginning of a sentence by the time they get to the end, and therefore, cannot comprehend what they read. Recent discoveries point out the importance of fluency for comprehension. It is also known that early reading acquisition has a few simple determinants, such as time on task, interactive teaching, timely arrival of books, etc. The presentation made the point that testing for early literacy acquisition can be made fairly simple. One very simple test to see whether children are becoming literate is to assess reading speed on an appropriate passage.

In Perú, a pilot study was done with 22 schools and 245 children to assess this method for testing the timely acquisition of literacy and its determinants. It was found that only about half of children could read even one word by the end of Grade 2. Thus, reading comprehension was essentially nil. The method also tested the fact that using an inexpensive survey of 22 schools and 245 children it is possible to develop a fairly thorough and objective snapshot of a basic education system's functioning that includes some simple results data, and some input data such as textbook arrival, time on task, teacher support, and other factors. Such a survey can be done for \$20,000 or less, and would be a good preparation for projects or sector-wide activity support. For further information contact John Hatch, CTO for *Ed Data II* at jhatch@usaid.gov.

Haitian Out-of-School Livelihood Initiative (IDEJEN)

The Haitian Out-of-School Youth Livelihood Initiative (IDEJEN) identifies and addresses the needs for education and livelihood preparation of out-of-school youth between the ages of 15 and 20. In support of this effort, it also strengthens the most effective organizations and programs already working with young people and implements a participatory strategy that directly involves Haitian youth and Haiti and US-based project advisory groups.

Developing the literacy skills of adolescents through non-formal basic education is a major task of IDEJEN. Because IDEJEN targets out-of-school youth, many of the beneficiaries have little to no schooling. Therefore, IDEJEN employs a learner-centered approach. However, the project has identified that applying this approach with youth in a hierarchal culture requires building facilitators' capacity to not only further understand and develop key teaching strategies, but also to enhance their capacity to establish meaningful relationships with the project participants. This means that facilitators need to take the risk of learning, adapting, and creating a rather new, but promising, model of expertise. Developing *building bridges* skills, as referred to in Street Kids International (www.streetkids.org) work, is instrumental to the success of those front line practitioners within an initiative such as IDEJEN.

IDEJEN is funded by USAID and implemented by EQUIP3/ Youth Trust. For more information, please contact IDEJEN CTO Grace Lang at glang@usaid.gov.

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