CHAPTER 11

Teachers-as-writers: Writing information texts in English and vernacular

Beryl Exley, Wendy Carss & Apolonia Tamata

Queensland University of Technology, Australia

University of Waikato, New Zealand

iTaukei Trust Fund Board, Fiji

Introduction

Our contribution to this volume is not on the work of the teacher who inspires the child writer, but the teacher as the writer and illustrator of multilingual texts for classroom use that inspires the child reader. This chapter focuses on a first time teacher writer from Fiji, Bereta[1], who participated in a two day writing workshop known as the Information Text Awareness Project (hereafter ITAP). This chapter commences with an overview of the ITAP which was conducted in Nadi, Fiji, in 2012 with Bereta and 17 teachers from urban, semi-urban and rural contexts within the Nadi educational district. The politics of presenting Western ways of knowing to teachers from diverse cultural and linguistic contexts via a Western pedagogical approach is explored in the second section. We believe that this work involves a moral dimension that needs careful consideration. The third section outlines the eight stages of

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[1] Pseudonym

ITAP where teacher writers such as Bereta produced an English and a vernacular information text for use in their classrooms. The outline of the eight stages of ITAP is justified with links to the research literature. The final section recounts Bereta's interview data where she talks about using the newly created English and vernacular information texts in the classroom and the community's response to her inaugural publications. The findings may be of interest to those seeking to establish an adult writing cooperative to produce English and vernacular information texts for classroom use.

The 'Information Text Awareness Project' (ITAP)

By way of background, the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (hereafter ALEA) has been involved with ITAP for about a decade. ITAP is run by members of the International Development in Oceania Committee (IDOC), one of the regional committees of the International Literacy Association (ILA). IDOC is made up of two representatives from ALEA and NZLA (New Zealand Literacy Association) as well as key literacy educators from nation states in the Pacific. At the time of writing, these nation states included Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa and Niue. Beryl (Author 1), an Australian teacher educator, has been the volunteer ALEA representative since 2005, Wendy (Author 2), a New Zealand teacher education, has been the volunteer NZLA representative since 2004 with the last three years as IDOC Chair, and Apolonia (Author 3), an iTaukei[2] Fijian Language and Cultural expert, has been the volunteer Fijian representative since 2012.

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[2] 'iTaukei' is the preferred term for 'Indigenous Fijians'.

ITAP started out as an offshoot of the 'Non Fiction Book Flood'[3] suggested at the IDOC meeting held during the fourth South Pacific Conference on Reading in Suva, Fiji, in January 1995 (Goodwin & Carss, 2010). At this time, IDOC members were delivering workshops on how to scaffold students to read information texts donated through the 'Non Fiction Book Flood' by commercial suppliers from New Zealand. These workshops were built on Elley's (1980) historical data that drew attention to the large number of students from Fiji who struggle to read textbooks independently, as well as Morris and Stewart-Dore's (1984) observations that information texts differ substantially from the literary texts which comprise the bulk of many early reading experiences. Lumelume and Todd's (1996) Fijian based research into the 'Ready to Read Project' described an era which privileged the behaviourist-structuralist approach to language teaching and learning. They suggested that iTaukei Fijian students needed to expand the amount of time spent listening to, reading and writing a wider range of texts, including those with a local flavour. It should also be noted that many students in Fiji speak the Standard (iTaukei) Fijian language, one or more mother and father tongues, as well as English which is used to communicate across the multiple ethnic and language groups and in school. When the Pacific teachers expressed concern about the absence of information texts that reflected students' own context and language (cited in Peirce, 2007), IDOC members trialled the inaugural ITAP in Kiribati in 2000. Since then, reworked versions of ITAP have been delivered in Alofi, Niue (2002), Suva, Fiji (2006 & 2014), Nadi, Fiji (2012), Rarotonga, Cook Islands (2004, 2007, 2008 & 2010) and Apia, Samoa (2010 & 2012) by various IDOC members.

We three authors conceive of ITAP as an amalgam of two related approaches:

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[3] 'Book Floods' are outreach activities whereby one community donates a 'flood' of books to another community.

1. a **functional approach to language** which, on this occasion, focuses on the typical language patterns of five information genres[4]: recount, instructions, information report, explanation and argument (Derewianka 1990). To this end, Bereta and her colleagues explored how these information texts achieve their social purposes through specialised stages, sentence structures and vocabulary choices. Attention is also given to the way graphic features such as illustrations, tables, maps, charts, and timelines are substantially different from the illustrations in narratives (Kucan & Palincsar, 2013).

2. the **process writing approach** advanced by Graves (1983) in his text 'Writing: Teachers and Children at Work'. This approach draws on findings by Graves and his colleagues from the National Institute of Education's research study conducted in Atkinson, New Hampshire, in 1978 -1980. Graves (1983, preface) insists that the process approach to writing is not a '1-2-3-4, step-by-step teaching method' but something much more fluid. Whilst a pedagogical structure is present, so too is the opportunity for Bereta and her colleagues to move back and forth across the various stages as they see fit.

The Politics of Exporting ITAP

We recognise ITAP as a form of exported education because the functional approach to language and the process writing approach have been removed from a Western context of production and 'exported' to a non-Western context. As such, ITAP is, and should be, open to contestation. We discuss these contests briefly.

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[4] The term 'genre' has become known in different ways, so in this paper, the term genre refers to kinds of texts and their social purposes (Derewianka, 1990).

1. One position identified in the research literature speaks against exported education, labelling it as a 'means for usurping people's rights to the domains of knowledge, for dismissing people's rights to participate in the creation of knowledge, and for diminishing their rights in matters affecting their own subsistence and survival' (Good & Prakash, 2000, p. 274-275). From this position, Apple (2002) explains how exported education has the potential to irreversibly erode or displace local cultural values, and at a more subversive level, raise concerns about the reproduction of traditional colonial hierarchies of unequal power and control (see also May, 2008).

2. A second position identified in the research literature cites some positive outcomes of exported education. Rizvi (2000) suggests that exported education helps to address educational disadvantage brought about by limited access to important knowledge bases. Kachru (1986, p. 1), a proponent of this second position, argues that exported education is a 'a symbol of modernisation, a key to expanded functional roles' in new disciplines such as international commerce, new sciences, technologies and electronic communications, engineering and international diplomacy. Exley's (2005) doctoral research demonstrates that knowledge receiving nations should not be seen as passive, docile or mindlessly submissive, but rather active resistors of the literal and ideological messages transmitted by exported education. From this perspective, Western ways of knowing have become tools that can be used by Bereta and her colleagues, rather than imperialistic tools (see also May, 2008).

Taken together, these diverse positions suggest a raft of politics and power relations around implementing ITAP and programs of this ilk for Pacific teachers. The following section describes the stages of ITAP in which Bereta participated, before recounting some of her

interview data about her teaching experiences and the community's response to her first two publications. The concluding section returns to the important discussion about the politics of exporting and implementing ITAP.

The Eight ITAP Stages

In the table below, the left hand column describes the activities in which Bereta participated and our varied role as facilitators. Taken together, these eight stages mirror Graves' (1983) original intent, but also include what we have called 'new generation' adjustments. We say 'new generation' because this ITAP is (i) undertaken by first time adult writers rather than child writers, (ii) facilitated by a writing collective outside of a Western context, (iii) with information texts rather than narratives, (iv) with English and vernacular languages (v) within a compressed time frame and (vi) through the digital medium. The right hand column provides links to the literature to further explain the affordances and challenges of each stage.

Describing the ITAP stages	Justification and links to the literature
Day 1 Morning Session - Stage A Getting to know the teacher writers	
After formal introductions, each of the 18 teacher writers introduced themselves in terms of geography and language group/s, as a professional teacher and as a human being with interests and pursuits outside of teaching. Some teachers had brought along a cultural artefact (as per the invitation) and these were shared amongst the group.	As the teachers were from a range of highlands and coastal locations, this sharing session was highly informative for all in attendance. As asserted by the New London Group (1996), hybridity and diversity should not be seen as deficit, but as an important resource for writing information texts in English and vernacular. Each teacher writer was permitted the time and space to assert

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE – clip the photo as needed]	themselves as knowers, as persons with language/s, histories and culture/s and with a place to stand. ITAP pedagogy placed talk as a central tool for learning about writing (Brock, et al, 2014).
Day 1 Morning Session - Stage B Discovering the structural features of information texts	
Stage B focused on Bereta and her colleagues talking about the difference between (i) written and spoken text, and (ii) information texts and narrative texts. Beryl and Wendy set up a group work activity for the teachers to explore the structural features of five genres of information texts: purpose, text organisation and typical structural features.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE – clip the photo as needed] | Graves (1983, p. 161) clarified that whilst 'writing wears the guise of speech' since it uses the same words, information, order and organisation, 'there is a chasm between speech and print'. 'At the heart of a functional model of language is an emphasis on **meaning** and on how language is involved in the construction of meaning' (Derewianka, 1990, p. 4). Graves (1983) advocated surrounding prospective writers with real texts rather than holding 'long discussions of what writing is' (p. 19). This exploration and discussion stage is not inconsistent with a craft approach to writing. |
| **Day 1 Middle Session – Stage C Discussing writing partner, topic choice & genre** | |
| To commence Stage C, Bereta and her colleagues (i) chose writing partners or chose to write alone, (ii) chose a topic and | Graves (1983, p. 45) devoted a chapter to the reasons why facilitators should make 'explicit' what writers may not ordinarily be able to |

(iii) chose a genre. Topics selected by the teachers included "Grandma's Walaki[5]" (recount), "How to boil breadfruit" (instructions), and "Kava" (information report). Explanations or arguments were not chosen, an outcome accepted by Beryl, Wendy and Apolonia.

'see': how words go together, and 'the thoughts that go with the decisions made in the writing'. He asserted that 'writers who do not learn to choose topics wisely lose out on the strong link between voice and subject' (p. 21). Walsh (1981, p. 9) used an 'ownership' metaphor to highlight the effects of writers choosing the topics: 'when people own a place, they look after it; but when it belongs to someone else, they couldn't care less. It's that way with writing.'

Day 1 Afternoon Session - Stage D Start writing

In Stage D Bereta and her writing partner had to make a decision about the language medium of their first draft. Like most of the teacher writers, they chose to write in English then translate into vernacular. Although using their own laptops, working with Microsoft Publisher and inserting photos into a text document were new skills for Bereta and her partner. Despite this being their first use of Microsoft Publisher, Bereta and her partner worked through the

In Stage D Bereta and her colleagues changed the classroom architecture and atmosphere. Rather than the more formal Stages B and C instituted by Beryl and Wendy, the workshop space took on what one Australian teacher unceremoniously labelled as 'confusion writing', a term she coined to express her concern at the seemingly 'unstructured, uncoordinated, unmanageable chaos' of the process writing approach (Cambourne & Turbill, 1987, p. 2). In response to this

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[5] Walaki is the iTaukei word for breadfruit. Following May (2008, p. xiv) and his strong position of 'normalising' minority languages, we choose not to follow the usual Western publishing procedure of italicising non-English words.

technological predicaments with relative ease, although Beryl and Wendy were on hand to assist if asked. [INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE – clip the photo as needed]	viewpoint, we observed that the workshop space was abuzz with activity, conversations and productivity. Two teacher writers extended the workshop space beyond the walls of the classroom by visiting the afternoon markets in Nadi to photograph the production of kava. As a point of difference to Graves' observations (1983), we found that using Microsoft Publisher meant that page layouts were being designed from the outset. Scheduling Stage D in the afternoon meant web searches and photographs could be undertaken in the evening.
Day 2 – Morning and Middle Sessions Stage E Writing conferences	
In Stage E Bereta and her colleagues led writing conferences with either Beryl. Wendy or Apolonia. As facilitators we confirmed and reacted to the writing by playing the role of a naïve reader-listener, pushing the teacher writers to express their meanings as intended in English (Beryl or Wendy) or vernacular (Apolonia), yet backing off when final decisions were being made.	In a point of marked difference, Beryl, Wendy and Apolonia moved back from positions of relative control in Stages B and C so that the responsibility for writing was located with Bereta and her colleagues. The teacher writers controlled their standards of what was a clear piece of writing. Relishing the 'chaos' (Cambourne & Turbill, 1987) of writing conferences, Graves (1983) asserted they 'stimulate because they are unpredictable' (p. 119). The facilitator should expect the writer

[INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE – clip the photo as needed]	to talk first. The facilitator should not say too much although they can enter into what he calls 'the teaching zone, the zone of proximal learning' for the writer (p. 58). He advanced that skills learnt in conference last longest as they become part of the writer's practicing repertoire. The facilitator sits near the writer, 'as close to equal height as possible' so that both can engage visually with the written text (p. 98).
Day 2 – Morning and Middle Sessions Stage F Sharing the manuscript	
In Stage F Bereta and her colleague shared their writing with others and in return, listened and responded to others' writing. The teacher writers moved positions regularly, always choosing where to sit and when to cycle back to Stage D to search the internet or capture photos or Stage E to conference with one of the facilitators.	This stage is remarkable for the absence of the facilitator. Control, and the metaphoric 'pencil' (Turbill, 1987, p. 59), were left in the hands of the teacher writers. We also noticed that when fellow teacher writers shared their work, that which was going well served as a stimulus for Bereta and her colleagues.
Day 2 Afternoon Session - Stage G Rewrite & redraft the manuscript	
Stage G focused on the manipulation of words in vernacular and English and images until the intended meaning was communicated. The use of technology meant that each redraft did not need to be on	Rather than being a corrective force, the pressure of publishing proved to be a productive force for drawing attention to the standard forms of spelling, punctuation and grammar in English and vernacular without

a new sheet of paper. Varying numbers of drafts were produced, depending on the length of the text and the complexity of the genre. Beryl or Wendy mentored the teacher writers to prepare for publishing in English and Apolonia mentored the teacher writers to prepare for publishing in vernacular.	turning Stage G into a patronising or neo-colonising exercise. Turbill (1987, p. 58) prefers to call this stage 'Preparing for Publication' as a reminder not to construct revision/editing as a set of decontextualized exercises.

Day 2 Afternoon Session - Stage H Publish the manuscript

Publishing was the goal of Stage H, which included finalising the design of each page, including the covers, as well a biographical statement which served as a public account of voice, territory and a sense of personal worth. The tight timelines meant longer texts were in one language only, but many texts were produced in vernacular and English. As writing is a public act which is meant to be shared, Apolonia organised for two personnel from the Fiji National University to become the first public reactors to the new texts. A ceremony was held which included the awarding of certificates to all teacher writers. [INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE – clip	Stage H achieved an outward sign of attainment. As Graves (1983, p. 38) asserted, with the public sharing comes the group 'consciousness of special accomplishment'. Turbill (1987) also stressed the importance of 'getting the writing to real readers' (p. 61). The technology afforded a different product than was experienced by the typing team of mothers and teacher aides and the use of wallpaper sampler covers of days gone by (Turbill, 1987). The use of a digital interface meant that translated texts did not need to be redesigned, just rewritten.

the photo as needed]	

Post workshop activities and reflections from Bereta

Following the August 2012 writing workshops, Bereta and almost all of her teacher writer colleagues reconvened with Apolonia in November 2012 to further edit their texts and collaboratively decide which texts would be produced *en masse* for classroom use. Eleven texts were selected, spanning five titles in vernacular and three titles written in vernacular and English. Apolonia organised the publication and distribution to nine teacher participants for the first term in 2013 and then met with these nine teacher participants in June 2013 to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews. These interviews covered multiple questions including the context of teaching and learning, use of ITAP texts in classrooms, and community reactions to the published texts. The discussion with Bereta is the focus of our reflections in this chapter. Her accounts are typical of all nine interview participants. Bereta has been teaching for several years in a large school situated in an inland village within the Nadi education region and managed by the Indo-Fijian community. At the time of interviewing, Bereta was teaching over 40 ethnically diverse students enrolled in Years Two and Three. The one hour interview between Bereta and Apolonia was conducted in the Fijian language. The audio files were transcribed into Fijian by a research assistant with any unclear utterances shown in rounded brackets. Vernacular words were presented in italics and underlined, but as explained, in this publication, following May (2008, p. xiv) and his strong position of 'normalising' minority languages, we choose not to follow the usual Western publishing procedure of italicising non-English words. The transcribed data, including any

rounded brackets and vernacular words, were then translated into English by an accomplished Fijian/English translator.

In the interview excerpts, Bereta explains that the information texts produced as an outcome of ITAP 'help me to research, for me to know some facts about something like this, for example, the frangipani'. She also declared that she is planning to write more information texts; the next one will be 'about salt (making)'. When Bereta took the texts to school she explained that 'a head teacher came from another school nearby….and he asked to take these books. I said that these were my copies to teach my kids. He saw them and he liked them. I said that when there are some more, I will share with them to teach their kids'. In terms of the students' response, Bereta explained that after reading the 'Coconut Tree' book, 'many kids did not know the sorts of things that can be made from the parts of the coconut tree. Many other words can be learnt from the story like drokai and madu; many of the kids know bu but not drokai'. She continued, 'When I brought these books, the kids were wanting some more of this type of book…because they contain some real information, there is also lots of pictures, and the photos support what's written'. When asked to recount the students' reactions to her status as a writer, Bereta said, 'It is not only the students. Firstly, the teachers, it was written on our notice board – 'Congratulations to Mrs B for the first publication of a book.' It was a joyful thing for me; it's true it is only a first step, the writing of this book, but I am really happy about my joining this association for writing information texts. The children as well, they were very happy. They said, 'Madam, your name is on the book there!' I was really happy and I am thankful to Apolonia for helping me write one book. Thank you'. When asked to comment on what could be done to support ITAP outcomes, Bereta requested: 'Can there be more teachers writing books, if monthly, or if we could be monitored, keep on monitoring, to continue the writing of real information or the true facts about things?'

Conclusion

By Turbill's account (1987, p. 8), Graves warned 'against brief research episodes – development in writing takes time'. We certainly acknowledge the potential for more benefits to unfold with more time on task, however, we also want to acknowledge what can be achieved within a limited timeframe with first time adult writers publishing information texts for the child reader. According to Bereta's interview talk, four significant outcomes included: (i) the pedagogical approach adopted by ITAP seemed to enable teacher writers to discover their own writing process, including wrestling like a writer, (ii) a highly-sought after artefact for teaching reading in the primary school, (iii) a resource for reviving students' heritage languages, and (iv) a new public identity for Bereta – she is a writer.

Whilst exported education reflects relationships of power, ITAP, as a form of exported education, can also be used to transform the struggle over language rights in the nation-state of Fiji. This snapshot of data suggests that this version of ITAP has produced some powerful outcomes for teacher writers and the communities they serve. The data suggest one outcome of the focus on information texts written in vernacular is an expansion of the functional use of the iTaukei language. This outcome contributes to the legitimation and institutionalisation (see May, 2008) of the iTaukei language, an important marker of individual and collective identity in the nation-state of Fiji.

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Bios:

Beryl Exley is an experienced classroom teacher who is now an Associate Professor within the Faculty of Education at the Queensland University of Technology. She lectures and researches in English Curriculum and Literacy Teaching and Learning. Beryl has served as the ALEA representative on IDOC since 2005. She is a past-President of Meanjin (Brisbane) Local Council of ALEA and from 2006-2013 was the ALEA Queensland State Director. Since 2013 she has been appointed as the ALEA Publications Director.

Wendy Carss lectures in both undergraduate and postgraduate Literacy Education papers within the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. In addition to involvement in the ITAP research project, current research interests include beginning teachers and their teaching of literacy, and digital literacies within the classroom. She is a past president of the New Zealand Literacy Association and at the time of writing was the chair of IDOC.

Dr Apolonia Tamata, a linguist by profession, is employed as the Senior Culture and Heritage Specialist at the iTaukei Trust Fund Board, a statutory organization mandated to advocate for, support and fund projects in the language, culture and heritage of the Indigenous people of Fiji and Rotuma. Apolonia has been actively involved in training, publications, performances, productions, and research. Apolonia has been the Fijian representative on IDOC since 2012.

Figure 1: One teacher writer discussing her woven fan.

Figure 2: Teacher writers discussing the structural features of five genres of information text.

Figure 3: Visiting the afternoon markets in Nadi to photograph the production of kava.

Figure 4: Wendy sitting with a teacher writer so both can engage visually with the written text.

Figure 5: One teacher writer proudly displaying the finished information texts, one in English and one in vernacular.