LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION & CONSERVATION

Vol. 1, No. 1 (June 2007), pp. 77–93
http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/

Writers' Workshops: A Strategy for Developing Indigenous Writers

Diana Dahlin Weber, Diane Wroge, and Joan Bomberger Yoder
SIL International

This paper discusses how writers' workshops can be used to develop writers from indigenous language groups. It considers how such workshops fit into the greater context of a community literacy program, and describes both the practical and instructional components of workshop design. Of particular importance is the principle of teaching writing as a process. Examples from Papua New Guinea demonstrate the role writers' workshops play in developing indigenous orthographies and materials that contribute to culturally relevant educational curricula. Finally, the merits and weaknesses of such training are discussed, and questions for further research are raised.

1. INTRODUCTION. This paper describes the process of developing indigenous writers in lesser-known and marginalized languages through the use of writers' workshops. It is based on the authors' involvement in dozens of workshops from countries in South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the largest Melanesian South Pacific nation, Papua New Guinea. These workshops occurred in the context of indigenous language literacy programs with a variety of purposes: adult programs focused on personal and community needs and celebrating the local culture, programs motivated by transition to a language of wider communication, and formal bilingual and multilingual programs for children.

Following a brief overview of terminology and the origins of indigenous language writers' workshops, the relationship of such workshops to various components of literacy and language development programs is considered. Logistical and instructional issues are then discussed, with a focus on teaching writing as a process. Examples from Papua New Guinea describe how workshops have been used to develop orthographies and train writers for hundreds of indigenous languages. Finally, the merits, difficulties, and weaknesses of writers' workshops are considered, and questions and topics needing further research are identified.

1.1 TERMINOLOGY. "Indigenous," "minority," "local," "mother tongue," and "vernacular" have all been used to refer to a language spoken by a community which is not a language of power in the region where the community is located. "Heritage" is a term often used in North America in an ESL (English as a second language) setting to describe immigrants' first language. This paper uses the terms "indigenous," "minority," and "mother tongue" interchangeably.

E-ISSN 1934-5275

1.2 WRITERS' WORKSHOPS FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES: THE BEGINNINGS. Sonia Nieto (2002), when writing about multicultural education, encouraged educators to treat students' cultural and linguistic conditions not as deficits, but as talents and strengths. This approach was based on the most fundamental assumption—that we all bring important experiences and insights to the educational enterprise (2002:167). If teachers and literacy workers were to use the *words* and *worlds* (Freire 1970) of the learners, "their experiences, how they express those experiences (in whatever language they happen to use), and the social and cultural action embedded in their lives," (Nieto 2002:165) the resultant writing would be far richer and more "real" than writing more theoretical materials about the academic curriculum and social problems. Indigenous writers' workshops are one way to provide an opportunity to express these *words* and *worlds*.

Diana Weber's first experiences with writers' workshops were in the early 1970s. She and her husband David lived in central Peru and had recently begun learning a Quechua language. As with other Quechua languages, little if anything had been published for the 60–80,000 speakers. Since the Peruvian Ministry of Education was becoming involved in bilingual education in both the Amazon and the Andes, the Webers wanted to have materials ready for the day when Huallaga Quechua would be part of the national bilingual program. Since they would never be "native" speakers of the language, they needed to help develop writers within the community. Just how to do it on the scale needed was perplexing. Help came from Mexico, where Margaret Wendell (1982) had just published her book *Bootstrap literature: Preliterate societies do it themselves*, and had developed a program of "Writers' Workshops."

SIL International, an International Non-Government Organization (INGO), was one of the first to use the term, specifically to develop writers in newly literate communities. LinguaLinks (SIL 2003) defines writers' workshops as seminars to help people write material in their own language. The specific goal is to develop writers through instruction and modeling. Participants learn how to write and edit materials, and then actually produce simple books for distribution. Over time, writers' workshops were conducted for many of the Peruvian indigenous languages, resulting in hundreds of titles. Many of them were mimeographed, while others were silk-screened.

In the mid-nineties Weber returned to the United States and began to hear of writers' workshops as a crucial element in classrooms using the whole-language approach. The writers' workshop in formal education in the States was described as a way to organize writing instruction that included a mini-lesson, time for students to write, individual and group conferences, and whole-class sharing. The structure of the early SIL writers' workshops was surprisingly similar to that of its stateside cousin. However, the indigenous writers were given much more direct instruction, and their work was edited by linguists or language specialists. Whether the two types of writers' workshops were independent developments or cross-fertilized is not as interesting as the fact that two very distinct cultural settings employed a similar format. As those who work with indigenous communities continue to develop a learner-centered model of writers' workshops, many more eager writers may emerge. This model is centered on respect for the participant and his or her experience. By writing, recording, and sharing their worlds of knowledge, indigenous communities have the potential to join the wise educators on the endangered planet.

2. WRITERS' WORKSHOPS: THEIR CONTEXT AND IMPLEMENTATION.

2.1 THE CONTEXT: LITERACY AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS. The topic of indigenous writers' workshops presumes a motivation for reading and writing the mother tongue. Many indigenous language groups, however, are more desirous of acquiring literacy skills in a wider language of education and power to help them function and get ahead in their daily life. Furthermore, they are not used to seeing their language in print and therefore may even doubt that it can be written. An inadequate orthography can reinforce this doubt. Speakers may conclude that their language is too difficult to write, especially if previous efforts by expatriate linguists and others (such as missionaries) to devise an orthography and produce materials resulted in unreadable products. If published materials in their language are available and readable, they are often few and limited to topics such as health or religion.

Susan Malone (n.d.) stated that community mobilization activities are the first step for developing a successful community literacy program for a minority language group. Following sufficient preliminary linguistic and sociolinguistic research, community meetings can be held to discern the speakers' attitudes towards having their language developed and written, and how this might fit with their needs, desires, and strengths. Types of programs and materials, who should participate, and many other questions can be discussed at this stage. The community should also identify what human and material resources it can contribute to the program, and what resources it needs to seek from outside the community.

Key leaders and stakeholders within and without the community should be given the opportunity to voice their opinions and provide input into program design. Those facilitating the interviews, discussions, surveys, and assessments need to provide sufficient information so that the community and its leaders can control the program's decision-making from its inception. The resulting program design could center on literacy for economic growth, functional literacy, critical literacy, health-based literacy, agro-based literacy, or literacy for writing.

Teaching people to read without having a sufficient supply of materials has been compared to teaching people to swim and then giving them a bathtub. Sustainable mother-tongue literacy requires not only a large supply of reading materials, but a steady stream of new items as well. Writers' workshops, if effective, can develop a corps of writers who will produce this ongoing supply of materials. Repeatedly the story is heard of people who have been through basic literacy instruction and have read all that is available in their language. Some of these readers progress to a language of wider communication, thus continuing to use their skills in a second or third language. But others fall back into semiliteracy or functional nonliteracy.

2.2 IMPLEMENTING WRITERS' WORKSHOPS: LOGISTICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS. Planning the logistical and practical aspects of writers' workshops involves a number of facets common to workshop planning generally. These include the selection of participants, venue, transportation needs, scheduling, physical needs such as food and other services, supplies, and many other details. In one postworkshop debriefing session, local facilitators spent much time discussing the merits and deficiencies of the food service, including

a lengthy discussion of problems related to the firewood supply. While it may seem important to keep a workshop's goals in focus, these practical matters demand their share of attention.

If the venue is in the participants' home area, costs are reduced, as they can live at home and do not need much money for traveling. The workshop can provide a tea break, and possibly a meal, but the potential also exists for no meal service. This is not guaranteed, however, as workshops held in regions suffering from a food shortage may provide a meal to encourage and enable participants to function more comfortably and effectively. A local venue may also lack the infrastructure and amenities that are available at a more centralized location, whether in a more urban, developed area or at a regional office or center. Such facilities can be advantageous due to convenient access to food, supplies, water, electricity, production equipment, and furnished classrooms with blackboards.

When a region or country is involved in armed conflict or is suffering from other types of insecurity such as a bandits, both the choice of venue and travel routes are affected. This requires important information gathering, risk assessment, and contingency planning should changes need to be made at the last minute. Particularly in these stressed situations, logistical challenges raise questions of viability. An imbalance in program ownership can also be created if a program goal cannot be implemented without significant input and resources from outside agencies and facilitators.

2.3 THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS.

2.3.1 LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION. The language of instruction involves the language that workshop facilitators and instructors use orally, and the language used for printed instructional materials such as presentation notes and handouts. Most writers' workshop instructional materials are designed to be used by more than one language group. They are often first written in a major language such as French or English, and then possibly translated into a regional language of wider communication, such as Swahili. Sometimes the materials are printed in diglot or even triglot to maximize their potential use.

Whether a workshop is held for a single language or for several languages affects the language of instruction. Obviously the latter requires the use of a language of wider communication. The participants' languages can still be used for tutoring and discussion as they break into small groups arranged according to language.

A single language workshop theoretically provides an opportunity for course content and instruction to be in that language. Course instructors from the same language group as the participants and outside instructors fluent in that language can lead sessions using the mother tongue. However, as translating an entire course for one language group is often an unreachable goal, an alternative is to translate the materials' main headings. The instructor can study the content written in the language of wider communication, and then make some notes and do his or her presentation in the mother tongue.

2.3.2 CURRICULUM AND TOPICS. Preliminary surveys, questionnaires, and assessments in the language community and among potential workshop participants sensitize the language speakers to the idea of writing their language, and provide information about what types of materials they would like to write and see written. Once a workshop begins,

the initial sessions also give an opportunity for participants to reflect on what they would like to learn and accomplish during the workshop.

The writers' workshop curriculum (*Writers' workshop manual*, 2000) that Joan Yoder used with various groups in eastern Africa evolved over several decades of SIL involvement with language groups throughout the African continent. Yoder and others revised this material into two levels, introductory and intermediate. Although it was gradually informed and shaped by local communities and workshop participants, in the early years its content was heavily controlled by expatriate staff. However, as members of language communities became trained in linguistics and literacy, and became workshop instructors and directors, they further adapted the material to their own cultural needs and preferences.

The first workshop, considered an introductory writers' workshop, usually produced a book of folk stories. These stories included subgenres such as origin and "why" stories (FIGURE 1), and series of stories about favorite human and animal heroes and characters. Topics covered in the workshop included what makes a good story, good writing, descriptive writing, punctuation, revising and editing, working with an artist, and ideas for further materials. Since folk stories are familiar material, the workshop emphasized the development and practice of technical skills.

FIGURE 1: A Ma'di woman from Uganda writing the folk story "Why the Hippo Has No Hair"

The second workshop involved five different types of writing: personal experience, procedural, persuasive, informative items such as news, and entertainment in the form of cartoons and various types of word puzzles. Technical skills such as punctuation, revision, editing, and proofreading were also reviewed. The finished pieces were compiled into a news bulletin, an attractive item which was usually well received and very popular with the participants and their communities.

None of the workshop topics proved to be culturally or linguistically neutral. For example, instruction about good writing in English often focuses on conciseness, concrete language, and the use of active verbs. In African languages, ideophones are a central

part of descriptive language, although in English they are often associated with cartoons and children's stories. What makes good writing in previously unwritten or little written languages is something the writers and their communities need to determine. The transition from oral communication to the development of a written style is a process that takes time. Participants would sometimes grapple with whether something they said orally should be written the same way. This question arose in discussing matters such as sensibilities, appropriateness, and casual expressions such as slang.

The first efforts at facilitating different types of writing lacked the cultural relevance of a learner-centered focus. For example, the presentation explaining procedural writing originally emphasized a main thesis with supporting points and a conclusion. This was revised to include discussions on how they persuade people in their language and culture, what issues might typically be topics of persuasion, and how different forms such as stories and songs are used.

The processes of drafting, writing, revising, editing, and proofreading also need to be taught and implemented in culturally appropriate ways, and these will be considered in the next section.

2.3.3 TEACHING WRITING AS A PROCESS. Traditionally in the field of literacy much effort has focused on the reading process, but little time and attention has been given to the writing process. Even less effort has been given to developing a culture of writing in newly literate indigenous language groups. Although many researchers and educators see considerable shared knowledge between reading and writing (Fitzgerald and Shanahan 2000**,** Nelson and Calfee 1998, Reuter 1993, Tierney and Shanahan 1991) it is important to note that while the correlations between reading and writing are positive, they are also cognitively quite separate (Fitzgerald and Shanahan: 2000:2). In many newly literate communities, reading and writing have been taught as if everything, or nearly everything, that was needed for writing achievement could be learned through reading alone. However, more studies in the area reveal that reading and writing skills are only partially correlated (Ehri 1997; Langer 1986; Niemi, Poskiparta, Vaurus, and Mäk 1998); therefore separate instruction and experience in each discipline are necessary.

In more developed countries, during the past twenty years new attention has been given to writing instruction, as well as to the writing process itself. No longer is the focus only on the result of writing but rather on the event of writing. "Writing is a process that takes place over time and which requires substantial blocks of uninterrupted time. The role of writing should be recognized as both functional and self-educative" (Farris 2001; Harste, Woodward, and Burke 1984).

Pamela J. Farris, in her text on language arts (2001), described both the skills and the steps in the writing process (Table 1). First, the initial skill and the initial step in the process are writer-centered: the involvement of the writer, accessing her or his experiences and topic selection. Second, the nature of the writing process provides a safe place to share ideas, to get help from others, to make mistakes. Traditional education in the empirical paradigm, and particularly traditional writing instruction, had no room for multiple truths, or for personal experience. Once pieces had been written, the expert corrected them, often leaving the writers feeling bad about themselves and their efforts. Contrary to what it might seem, writers in newly established written languages have many doubts about their

abilities and the ability of the writing system to capture truths. The interpretive paradigm encourages experimentation and personal experiences as knowledge to be shared. Those ideas, once captured, are empowering.

TABLE 1: Skills involved in the writing process (Farris 2001:279)

• Recollection of experiences–vicarious and real
• Knowledge of words sentences, paragraphs, etc.
• Familiarity with literature of varying genres/reading and discussing skills
• Questioning skills/research skills
• Dictionary skills
• Organization skills
• Spelling skills
• Handwriting skills/keyboarding skills

As an outsider to the language groups she was assisting, Yoder realized that her concept of writing was influenced by a stereotype from her own culture of lone writers sitting by themselves writing quietly. In contrast, the effective drafting of material by workshop participants having a strong oral tradition usually began with oral storytelling or discussion. Sometimes, particularly with short pieces designed for beginning readers, one person would serve as a scribe while the others would dictate their ideas and suggestions. They would reread the piece as a group, and make further suggestions and corrections communally. However, depending on the type of workshop being held, this deference to group work was tempered by a requirement that each participant do his or her own written work in order to fulfill the goal of learning how to write.

First drafts, particularly those of longer stories and articles, would often consist of a long stream of words, with no paragraph breaks and few sentence breaks. At this point, perhaps because their material was now written, some writers would consider the assignment to be completed. Thus the first step in giving instruction about revision and editing involved the concept that all writing can be improved, and that completing the first draft is only the beginning of the writer's task.

Efforts to have the writers create an outline or summary of main points before writing their first draft were generally unsuccessful. It is not clear whether this was due to an educational tradition that stressed rote memory, or from an oral tradition of recitation. The closest approximation to identifying main points occurred as the writers brainstormed about topics orally, although this was never successfully developed into the next step of creating a written outline or list of main points. Similarly, when, in the interests of time, participants were asked to share orally a summary of what they had written, they usually instead presented their work in its entirety. An exercise in which the main points of an everyday activity are identified and listed could be one way of developing outlining and summarizing skills.

Balancing the need and desire to work communally was a strong cultural sensitivity to anything that suggested public shame or embarrassment. Correspondingly, saving face

was an important cultural value. Thus, in teaching peer editing (FIGURE 2), the proper interpersonal climate and attitude were stressed. Emphasis was placed on culturally appropriate ways to offer constructive criticism, stressing respect and the inclusion of positive comments.

The editing process was presented as a positive safeguard: first the writers would have the opportunity to revise their material by themselves, based on the instruction and examples they had been given on topics such as revision, editing, punctuation, paragraph breaks, spelling, and proofreading. Then, the work would either be reviewed and edited by another individual, or by a small working group. All of these steps resulted in a higher quality product, and helped to protect the writers from receiving embarrassing public criticism when their work was finally presented to the community.

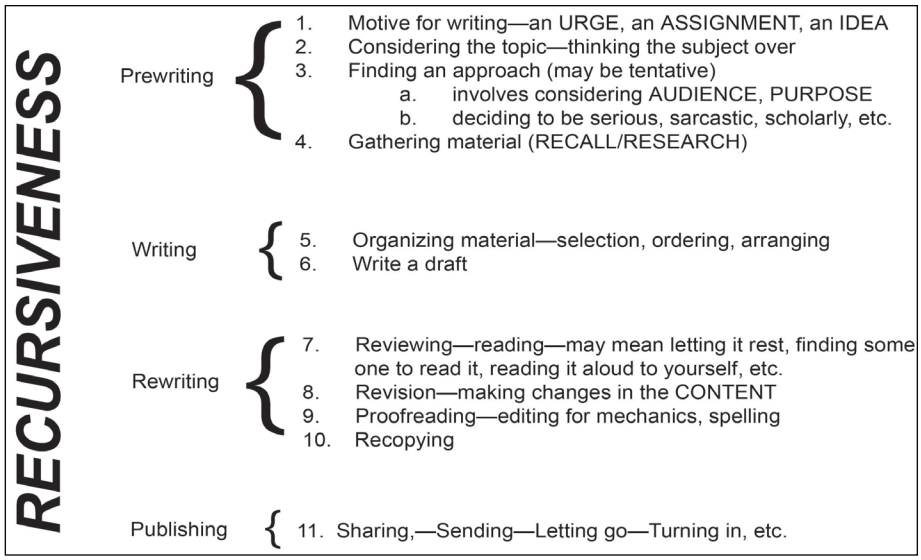
FIGURE 2: Peer editing, Intermediate Writers' Workshop, Kaka I Refugee Camp, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo)

The model followed in these workshops is very similar to the writing process model described in FIGURE 3. For new writers of indigenous languages, the use of this model in a nonformal writers' workshop or in a classroom setting has resulted in writers who have produced meaningful texts and who have felt free to share their work with others. Although it could be argued that the recursive nature of this model is weak, it still suggests a process that helps the new writer to expect and accept changes suggested by others, to discover alternative meanings in their text, or to use natural, but perhaps more complex grammatical forms. In Yoder's experience, as noted above, the organizational activities described in step five were usually not written, but part of an oral discussion, as participants brainstormed and shared ideas.

A major drawback for indigenous writers using the process model can also be considered a strong point. While the process model was designed for daily or extended implementation, most indigenous new writers have limited and sporadic periods of writing.

However, the process model, once learned, can be used without an "outside" authority figure to check and approve the product and process.

FIGURE 3: Writing process model (Daniels and Zemelman 2004: 285)



3. THE WRITERS' WORKSHOP IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: FORMING ORTHOGRAPHIES AND TRAINING WRITERS.

3.1 BACKGROUND. With 820 living languages and 10 extinct languages, Papua New Guinea is the most linguistically diverse country in the world (Gordon 2005). One unique sociolinguistic feature is that no indigenous language group is politically dominant over the others. The largest language group, Enga, has 162,000 speakers. English is the official language of the country, and there are two lingua francas, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu. Tok Pisin is the predominant of the two, and is also known as Melanesian English or New Guinea Pidgin English, although it actually is a creole language (Gordon 2005). The number of first-language speakers of Tok Pisin is increasing with each generation, and it is spreading rapidly throughout the country. It has become the language of default in nonformal literacy programs, and also in formal bilingual education programs if no indigenous orthography exists, or if little or no indigenous literature is available in a language.

The passing of the Education (Amendment) Act in 1995 meant that from that date forward indigenous languages were to be used as the initial medium of instruction, followed by bilingual instruction with English. The first three grades of elementary (preparatory-kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2) are to be taught in the indigenous languages, and the lower three grades of primary (grades 3–5) are to adopt a bilingual approach, gradually increasing the amount of English used as the medium of instruction. The upper three grades of primary, grades 6–9, include time for language maintenance. The elementary schools have been identified as the backbone of the education reform: "Elementary schools are to be the focal point of all of the education reform measures because the whole educational

enterprise relies on the successful implementation of elementary education throughout the country" (AusAID/Department of Education, Papua New Guinea 1996).

The literature on bilingual and multilingual education stresses the importance of orthography development; however, it refers mostly to linguistically based orthography development (Klaus 2003, Center for Applied Linguistics 2004, and Malone 2004). In Papua New Guinea, a number of nongovernmental organizations involved in indigenous literacy have worked with literacy teachers to produce orthographies. The community-based sociolinguistic method described below is not well known, although it has been widely used in Papua New Guinea.

3.2 COMMUNITY-BASED ORTHOGRAPHIES: THE ALPHABET DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP. The Papua New Guinea elementary education handbook states that a written orthography is one of the criteria for the establishment of indigenous language elementary schools (Department of Education, Papua New Guinea 1997:2). No country in the world uses as many languages for the media of instruction in elementary schools as does Papua New Guinea: 435 indigenous languages are used in elementary schools throughout the country (Guy 2003).

The National Department of Education's policy requires local elementary teachers to help community members develop teaching materials and curricula in the indigenous language. One avenue that has provided a way for these groups to work together is the Alphabet Design Workshops. The community-based sociolinguistic approach to orthography development that is used in these workshops involves a group consensus decision-making process that is culturally familiar to Papua New Guineans.

From 1999 to 2002, SIL-PNG held an orthography-development subcontract under the Elementary Teacher's Education Support Project of the National Department of Education. Forty-seven Alphabet Development Workshops, with a total of 825 participants, were held to fulfill this subcontract. While sixty-eight languages were officially subcontracted, SIL submitted 103 orthographies (Kale and Marimyas 2003), although that number does not necessarily represent separate or new languages. The number of workshops held during this time made it possible for this method to be evaluated and refined in a variety of contexts (Easton 2003).

Some of the orthographies assigned were from linguistically related and defined dialects. Others were part of a dialect chain and needed further analysis to determine the differences between languages and dialects, and the number of orthographies that would be needed to represent them adequately. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss what constitutes a language, a dialect, or a variety (as in the case of Quechua throughout the Andean mountains of South America).

The Alphabet Design Workshop method follows a cyclic pattern of writing and reading in the language being developed, identifying problem areas, discussing options, making decisions, providing feedback, and evaluating decisions. These activities occur concurrently, and at any point in the process, revisiting one of the elements in the pattern may be necessary. Story writing and read-alouds become the basis for discovering the sounds of the language, and of identifying which sounds writers find difficult to write.

Those listening to the second read-aloud have several tasks. They are to notice hesitations, stumblings, omissions, and repetitions. Such miscues may represent letters and

sounds that are difficult to represent and will need to be discussed. Listeners are to note whether the writer succeeded in involving the reader as the story is read. If the answer is yes, then it is considered a good story. And finally, they are to notice their own and others' responses and reactions, because those may help identify what makes a good story in that language.

At this point in the workshop SIL members offer options based upon linguistic research and orthographies of related and neighboring languages, and present rationales for each option. Through consensus decision-making, the participants choose between the options and decide how to write all sounds in their language. One of the biggest challenges of the consensus decision-making process is the presence of more than one dialect.

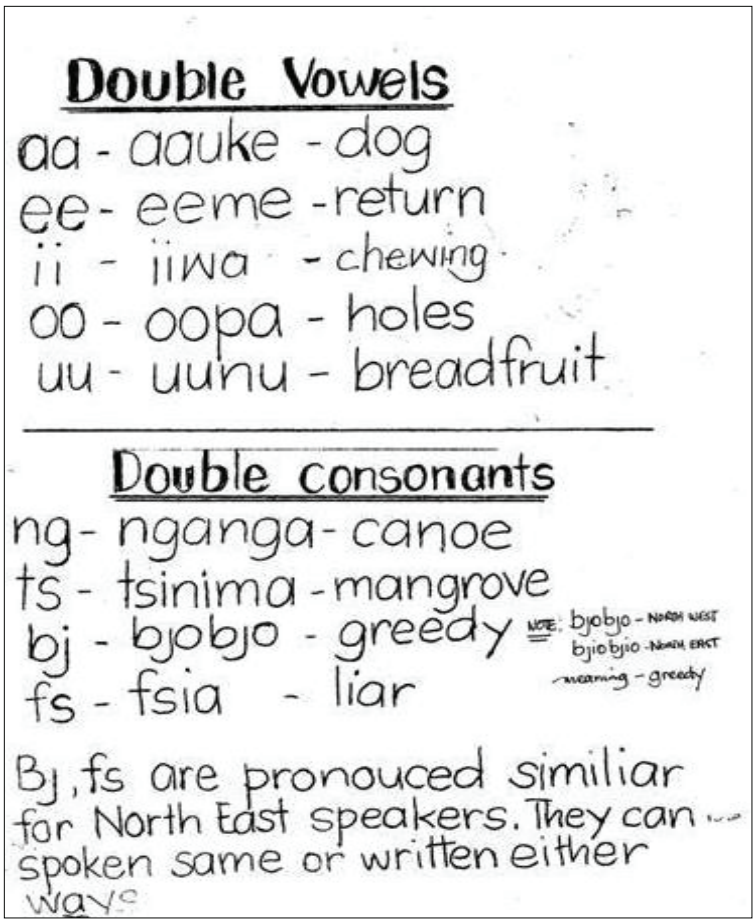
Materials production is an essential part of an Alphabet Design Workshop. Each of the language groups present decides upon a trial orthography, writes up a directed word list (FIGURE 4), and produces a spelling guide (FIGURE 5). The spelling guide is more than a simple list, for it includes the trial orthography, spelling rules, indigenous stories with translations into English or Tok Pisin, and the beginnings of a word list.

FIGURE 4: Kotabu women working on directed word list.

Background: Aroma language speakers

Toward the end of the workshop a group discussion is held on how to test the trial orthography. Some workshops are strategically located so that participants can travel home for the weekend to obtain comments on the trial orthography. After they return, participants share the results in a group discussion. They also determine what further follow-up and evaluation are needed when they return home after the workshop finishes. One possible action is to distribute the spelling guide and stories to community members who were not present for the workshop. The tasks of evaluation include noting the following: fluency of reading, acceptance of the story, and the letters causing difficulties.

FIGURE 5: Page from trial spelling guide for Mekeo language



Elementary teachers present during the workshop are encouraged to use the stories in their elementary classes. The teacher reads to the children even if they have not yet learned to read the stories for themselves. They are encouraged to hold other village writers' workshops and see how other community members write stories in the language. They can hold orthography meetings and discuss what the participants decided at the Alphabet Design Workshop, and receive feedback from other language speakers. It is important to stress to the Alphabet Design Workshop participants that orthography development is a process; the workshop is only the beginning of that process.

3.3 INDIGENOUS WRITERS' WORKSHOPS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA. Many indigenous writers' workshops have resulted from a centralized training course, the National Literacy Course which was held at Ukarumpa, Eastern Highlands Province, from 1983 to 1987 (Wroge 1989). Others arose from the assistance of literacy workers and linguists. When a writers' workshop is designed with and for the community, members of the community

can become involved in modifying the curriculum that is used in adult literacy classes, nonformal classes for children, or as part of the elementary classes taught in the local languages, which is part of Papua New Guinea's bilingual education system. The local stories, legends, songs, and poems produced by the writers make it possible for the local culture to be reflected in formal curriculum.

A one-week writers' course held in 1989 for thirteen speakers of the Chuave language is one example of the many indigenous writers' workshops that have been held in Papua New Guinea in recent decades (Wroge 1990). It was led by the Chuave SIL translation/linguist team and an invited SIL literacy specialist. The Chuave people number 23,107 and live in the Chuave District of Chimbu Province. The workshop had four goals: (1) to produce indigenous literature, (2) to encourage those able to write in a second language to become writers of their own language, (3) to test the proposed orthography, and (4) to provide more literature to improve fluency in their reading clubs' activities.

The participants practiced the process of story writing, which included creative writing, guided topical writing, editing, and illustrating. Their efforts resulted in a book of twenty-six indigenous stories, produced using a silkscreen printer. The book covered topics such as bush animals, traveling, trips to the bush, ancestral fighting, bride prices, and traditional stories. The highlands cultures of Papua New Guinea are patriarchal and patrilineal; therefore, some younger men sat down with elderly men and wrote down their stories. This was a culturally accepted means to record in writing the group's oral traditions. In Papua New Guinea's traditional societies, oral story telling is a Melanesian way of passing on important information. Traditionally, the only means of passing on a clan's history or a culture's mores and values has been oral. If oral traditions of the elderly are recorded, they will not be lost.

4. IMPLICATIONS.

4.1 INDIGENOUS WRITERS' WORKSHOPS: A STRATEGY FOR COUNTERING WRITING FAILURE? Written expression is a difficult skill to teach, because it is the most complex form of communication. In a globalized society the written form is important throughout every aspect of people's lives, but somewhere along the way, many learn to detest writing (Alber and Marchisan 2001). Lucy Caulkins , dedicated to developing writers in the formal system, suggested that teachers actually "stifle the natural and enduring reasons for writing" (1986:4). This is particularly true for individuals who are writing in a second language, or whose work is analyzed for grammar and structure and not for content. Alber and Marchisan proposed that "once the cycle of writing failure sets in, teachers who deal with resistant writers begin to resist teaching writing" (p. 4).

This leaves us with a rather dark picture for developing writers in any language, and darker yet for many speakers of indigenous languages, who must learn to write in a language they do not know well, or in one that has social stigmas. In contrast, learner-centered workshops within the atmosphere of a program that promotes the use and development of an indigenous language may provide a positive alternative. Drawing from their experience and knowledge, those previously resistant to writing may discover a new motivation and empowerment as their individual and collective voices use the language they know best.

4.2 UNANSWERED QUESTIONS. Workshops are often easily funded, and thus can be an attractive activity for those working with indigenous languages. On the positive side, they can foster momentum for language development and literacy programs. Much enthusiasm is often expressed for the finished product, particularly if little or nothing has previously been produced in that language. However, this congratulatory atmosphere, which is often prevalent at a workshop's closing ceremony, may cause harder questions to be overlooked or ignored.

These questions include: What happens to the workshop products? Will the materials be reviewed, and will those receiving a favorable review be revised and published for greater distribution? Are there readers who can and want to read these materials? What will the writers do with their newly acquired skills and knowledge? Will they have the desire to continue writing, and are their outlets and opportunities available, such as a community news bulletin, a demand for further books and materials, or an ongoing writers group? How will future materials be funded and produced?

Many such questions need to be answered, and many ethnographies need to be done on writing within indigenous cultures, and on the value of certain types of workshops for indigenous writers. Descriptive reports and case studies are not enough. Rather, qualitative and quantitative studies, both longitudinal and latitudinal, are needed to assess what impact writers' training has had on writers and their communities, and on issues related to language vitality and loss.

Do some cultural groups respond better than others to workshops? Where have writers' workshops actually taken place? How do the participants feel about their language and the use of writing? Have any writers' workshops taken place with no outside involvement? Where do writers' workshops fit in the literacy practices of the community (Street 1995)? Is it necessary to wait until totally indigenous publications exist (mimeographed or four colors) to know that the written language has taken hold? What concepts and meaning are brought to writers' workshops (by all participants) and what factors (prestige, money, desired communication) actually gives meaning to the workshop events (Heath 1983)?

Have writers' workshops been successful in every culture? Early efforts in Peru found new writers working hard on texts, enjoying the discussion, revision, and even the silk-screening or the inky mimeograph. When it came time to share the published work, however, they were very uncomfortable, since their highly egalitarian culture made it difficult to promote their own individual efforts. No one wanted to be seen as an author—as someone in the limelight. What we had thought would give satisfaction did not. What part of writing, in fact, can make a community feel more powerful? Have its members found new ways to use their language in the home? Are the children learning the language?

Just as there is a need to research the impact and effectiveness of writers' workshops, there is also a need to study other organized efforts. Community newspapers, writers' clubs, writers' contests, educational material fairs, and mentoring have all been happening within newly literate languages. What are their positive and negative effects on the culture, on the language? In recent times, a group of Quechua teachers in northern Peru have made an effort to use Curriculum-based Readers Fairs to develop both writers and materials. Are such efforts sustainable and independent from outside politics and ideology?

Writers' workshops provide a way for speakers of indigenous languages to craft the wealth of their indigenous thought and oral literature into a written form. However, the ongoing effectiveness and value of a workshop's resultant skills and products cannot be divorced from a purposeful, strategic, and holistic consideration of a community's literacy motivations, needs, and practices.

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Joan Bomberger Yoder
joan_yoder@sil.org