



Literacy Research: People and Context

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List of Abbreviations

CROP HRD WG – Council of Regional Organisation of the Pacific, Human Resource and Development Working Group

DBR – Design Based Research

FEdMM – Forum Education Ministers Meeting

FFM – Fellowship of Faithful Mentors

FO – Field Officers

IA Fono – Implementing Agencies Fono

IoE-USP – Institute of Education, The University of the South Pacific

LALI – Literacy and Leadership Initiative

LEAP – Leadership and Education Authorities Project

MEHRD – Ministry of Education Human Resources and Development, Solomon Islands

MFAT – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand

PacREF – Pacific Regional Education Framework

PEA – Provincial Education Authorities, Solomon Islands

PEARL – Pacific Early Age Readiness and Learning program

PLD – Professional Learning and Development

PLSLP – Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme

SINU – Solomon Islands National University

SSU – Strategic Services Unit, MEHRD, Solomon Islands

TESA – Tonga Education Support Activity

UoA – University of Auckland

USP – The University of the South Pacific



Executive Summary

This study focused on three recent New Zealand aid-funded school literacy and leadership projects in Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and Tonga. The projects were the Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme (PLSLP), the Leadership and Education Authorities Programme (LEAP), and the Tonga Education Support Activity (TESA). The projects were implemented in partnership with the respective Ministries of Education, by a consortium comprised of the Institute of Education at The University of the South Pacific (IoE-USP) and the University of Auckland (UoA), and, in the case of Solomon Islands, the Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM). The projects shared the common features of using a contextualised Design Based Research (DBR) approach to iteratively co-design and implement strategies to strengthen school leadership, teaching and resourcing for literacy and language learning (and also numeracy in Tonga). Previous evaluative reporting from each of the projects demonstrated notable successes in advancing learning outcomes. Therefore, this research project is designed to determine the particular mix of conditions and components that contributed to the projects' success and to identify learnings for future activities. It is important to note, however, that this study is not a re-evaluation of the projects, or an evaluation of the performance of the consortium members (UoA, IoE-USP, FFM).

The PacREF Research Framework provided the methodological and ethical guidance for the research. A Pacific-based qualitative methodology was adopted, which centered on relationality and the co-construction of knowledge-in-context. Data were generated and analysed through:

- i) Document analysis of project documentation and reporting
- ii) TalaTalanoa with 70 people identified as the most directly involved in the projects, drawing on indigenous methods such as Talanoa and Tok Stori
- iii) Collaborative analysis of the data through 'sense-making' sessions with the research team, again using methods such as Talanoa and Tok Stori
- iv) Finally, the research team collaboratively reflected on the findings overall to draw out key learnings from the research.

Analysis focussed on what was learned from the projects to inform three levels of implementation:

- i) development in Pacific educational contexts
- ii) the processes of using Design Based Research methodologies, and
- iii) classroom-based interventions.

Analysed data were drawn together into three Case Study descriptions for the countries involved: Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, and Kingdom of Tonga.

Overall, the research found that the relative success of the projects could be explained by the way in which the following five themes were enacted: engaging in the Motutapu; incorporating Indigenous expertise; utilising Pacific methodologies; planning for Sustainability; and acknowledging the unresolved.

The first theme illustrated the unique Pacific concept of 'Motutapu', the harbour, as a space to begin power-sharing and collaboration. The mana brought to a team by Pacific leaders was acknowledged, along with the knowledge, relationships and expertise to navigate complexity and collaboration across multiple partners. The Motutapu space valued the depth of understanding of relationalities, reciprocity and language in the process of co-design and implementation of a Design Based Research project.



The second theme illustrated the indigenous expertise in Leadership, Literacy and Language. A powerful lesson from this project is the importance of assembling a fit-for-purpose team. The indigenous expertise in Leadership flowed over to adopting indigenous approaches to mentoring and leadership development at multiple levels of each education system.

The third theme of the study was the value of incorporating Pacific methodologies. The use of Tok Stori in the Solomon Islands project was particularly strong. For Tonga, the use of Talanoa during implementation of the projects brought specific strengths to data collection analysis and meaning-making. Collectively, these Pacific methodologies prioritised the values of the Pacific. Through these methodologies the value of reciprocity was upheld via the ethos of ‘let’s make good together – you have something, I have something, let’s do this together’. The value of respect was also clearly illustrated in this theme, with on-going processes for seeking permission, for on-going sense making and openness to learning, and employing mindfulness of how people engage and relate to one another. These commitments meant that, in the face of implementation pressures, relationships were still prioritised. In fact, participants believed that it was through their relationships that the projects achieved success.

The fourth theme drawn from the research project focused on sustainability beyond project completion. Findings suggested that sustainability needed to be part of the design and was a collective responsibility. A range of interpretations and understandings of ‘sustainability’ were revealed at different levels. For individuals, the changed approaches that people took into new roles were highlighted. For schools, the development of relevant and context-specific learning resources remained in use and the crucial role of communities and parents in supporting a school to keep improving was found to be key to school level sustainability. Furthermore, the co-analysis of classroom data followed by opportunities to co-design responses proved powerful for informing teaching at the classroom level in an ongoing way. At a systems level, the study highlighted that design for sustainability was a collective organisational responsibility of national ministries with development partners and implementing agencies. The study also showed the place of national teacher training institutions alongside professional learning for trained teachers.

In the process of the study, additional unanswered questions and issues were revealed which have remained unsolved. These unsolved challenges presented the final theme of this study. Most pertinent amongst the unresolved challenges were the questions posed about: the effectiveness of the ‘training of trainers’ model; the ongoing cost of DBR; and the level of ongoing involvement of partners in supporting the national ministries of education and education systems. The study also revealed some important unanswered questions in relation to indigenous languages and the language of instruction, as well as the on-going issue of capacity building on the ground. The unsolved challenges also included further thoughts on the use of a multi-country programme to test an approach before committing to future investment. The multi-country approach remains an unsolved challenge and the report provides some key considerations for understanding ‘regional spaces’ and ‘national contexts’. Questions about relationships between national ministries of education and other educational providers as well as with implementing agencies and donors also require further consideration.

The findings from this study may be of interest to national ministries of education in the Pacific which are also engaged in improving literacy, teacher professional development, and using data to improve student learning. Furthermore, the study may also be of interest to national ministries of education who are working with multiple development partners and implementing agencies in the Pacific region. Similarly, this study may be of interest to other development partners and implementing agencies who



are working within the PacREF and in more general support for education development in the Pacific. Additionally, the findings from the study may also be of interest to other researchers and implementing agencies who conduct research in the Pacific region and are involved in the design of development programmes and activities for Pacific communities.



A. Introduction

Background

The SDG4 continues to be the key driver of development in the education sector for the region. As a regional policy, the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018-2030 expresses the aspirations of the member countries for improving education in the region. One of the key policy areas of the PacREF is a focus on Student Outcomes and Wellbeing, with one of its expected outcomes being the improvement of literacy and numeracy levels by the end of the primary education cycle.

Prior to the Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEEdMM) approval of the PacREF in 2018, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ MFAT) had been working on a number of regional interventions in response to concern about low literacy levels in the Pacific. These have included the Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme (PLSLP) which was implemented in Kingdom of Tonga, Cook Islands and Solomon Islands between 2014-2018. Around the same time, the World Bank was also working in the area of literacy development through their Pacific Early Age Readiness & Learning (PEARL) project that was offered in several Pacific countries including Tonga. Since 2017, the MFAT has introduced two additional literacy interventions: The Leadership and Education Authorities Project (LEAP) in the Solomon Islands; and the Tonga Education Support Activity (TESA) from 2019 (which has an additional component in numeracy).

The PacREF Implementation Plan 2020-2022 indicates that 11 (out of 15) regional countries have a high level of interest in the experiences of the LEAP and the PLSLP. This MFAT Literacy research is timely in providing an opportunity for in-depth investigation and gaining a deeper understanding of the various components and forces that have enabled encouraging results from the PLSLP, LEAP and TESA projects. Findings from the research study are likely to be of interest not only to the 11 member countries but also to other Implementing Agencies of the PacREF and additionally of interest to development partners who are supporting the PacREF.

The implementation of the PLSLP, LEAP and the TESA project was carried out through a partnership between the University of Auckland UniServices Ltd. and The University of the South Pacific's Institute of Education. In the course of the partnership, other agencies joined the consortium, including The Victoria University of Wellington and the Solomon Islands NGO known as the Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM).

Research Title

The MFAT has invited the Institute of Education (IoE) at The University of the South Pacific to provide research and diagnostic services relating to the MFAT's recent investment in literacy and leadership activities in Tonga, Solomon Islands and Cook Islands.

This research project is entitled *Literacy Research: People and the Context*, highlighting the purpose of the study which is to 'explore the critical components that [have] led to effective literacy outcomes in [the participating] Pacific contexts'.¹

¹ Literacy Research Terms of Reference, MFAT, New Zealand, pg. 5



Research Subject

The research focused on the three countries that participated in the PLSLP, LEAP and TESA – Cook Islands, Kingdom of Tonga and Solomon Islands. The study explored the reasons for the strong results demonstrated across these three projects in shifting student literacy outcomes. Further to this, the study also explored the approaches and components that were used in all three activities and identified the key lessons drawn from each project. The intention of the research project was to provide guidance for future literacy initiatives. It was not the intention of this study to conduct an evaluation of the three projects nor to evaluate the performance of the implementing agencies.

Objectives of the research

The MFAT Terms of Reference for the Literacy Research project identified the following objectives:

1. Analyse the conditions that could explain the significant literacy results achieved in the three literacy and leadership activities.
2. Examine the role and contribution of key components of the literacy and leadership activities implemented in their reported success (e.g. design-based method; resources and toolkits; culturally appropriate communication methods for PLD; access to mentors) and the appropriate mix that appears to contribute to success.
3. Assess the value of investment in the Design Based Research approach as an intervention for education.
4. Assess the role of a multi-country programme supporting countries to test an approach before committing to further investment.
5. Examine the sustainability of the approaches.

Research Questions

Drawn from the MFAT ToR and further discussions within the team, the following key questions were used as topic guides for the study.

Design and implementation of the Intervention

1. What conditions and components contributed to the significant literacy results? (e.g. design-based method; resources and toolkits; PLD; culturally appropriate communication methods; access to mentors)
2. What mix of these components and under what conditions did they influence the results?

Design Based Research approach

3. How are education outcomes measured using a Design Based Research (DBR) methodology and for whom, and how can the principles be implemented in cost-effective ways?
4. What learnings from PLSLP were used in the design and implementation of LEAP/TESA?
5. What has worked better/worse in LEAP/TESA compared to the PLSLP?
6. What timeframes are realistic for DBR methodology to show change?



Sustainability

7. How well have the approaches been embedded in education systems during/after the Activities are completed?
8. What components have contributed to integration and sustainability for the Ministries and what components have been constraints to sustainability?
9. What can we learn from these initiatives about sustainability?





B. Methodology and Ethics

The PacREF Research Framework is the overall methodological guide for the study, which has adopted relevant Pacific based research methodologies and research ethics. It should be noted that the IoE and the UoA were researching their own projects that they implemented, and that this project is not an evaluation exercise. To address issues of bias, we took a relational approach, focusing on the learning, widening the team of researchers, and holding re-iterative Talanoa sessions which provided opportunities for co-analysis and sense making with a range of stakeholders throughout the process.

Approach

Guiding principles and frameworks

As this research aimed also to support the PacREF 2018-2030 it was important that, from the outset, we created opportunities for dialogue and sharing with regional agencies and partners. The proposal for the study was endorsed by the PacREF Steering Committee (SC PacREF) prior to the commencement of the field work. In an effort to improve our understanding of the national and sub-regional context of the three interventions, we used relevant Pacific-based research methodologies and ethics. Further to this, we have worked with each Ministry of Education to meet their research requirements and ethical protocols.

The PacREF Research Framework also speaks to the protection of Pacific data and the ownership of data remaining with countries. Accordingly, the Cook Islands USP Campus stored the Cook Islands data following USP's ethical requirements, and the Solomon Islands and Tonga data was securely stored by the respective IoE-USP offices in both countries.

To carry out this research, we focused on the relational ontology of our Pacific people and their world views. We took a relational approach so that we could more authentically capture the organizational, professional and individual learnings that took place in the process of the three interventions. Through a relational approach, it is possible to highlight the people and the relationships that were created. These relationships, although sometimes strained, were maintained throughout the respective projects and ensured that the objectives of the three interventions were achieved. In this research those same relationships built on trust and demonstrated mutual commitment informed all aspects of the work, particularly the selection of our Research Associates as well as our engagement with the various stakeholders who were part of the PLSLP, LEAP and TESA.

In total, six emerging Pacific researchers joined the three senior researchers, making up a research team of nine, drawn from the Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Tonga, and New Zealand. The research team assembled for this study reflects the relationships that have been forged and strengthened over the course of 6 years, three interventions, and in working across 3 jurisdictions. The team included:

- Associate Professor Kabini Sanga (The Victoria University of Wellington)
- Associate Professor Rebecca Jessen (University of Auckland)
- Dr Seu'ula Johansson Fua (Director of the Institute of Education, USP).

As part of our commitment to building Pacific research capability, we used the opportunity of the research project to widen the research team to include emerging researchers from Tonga, Solomon Islands and Cook Islands. Thus, in the process of the study, the following Pacific researchers joined the team:

- Ellen Waiuru (Solomon Islands)



- Ambrose Malefoasi (Solomon Islands)
- Dr Christina Newport (Cook Islands)
- Peseti Vea (Tonga)
- Selena Meiklejohn-Whiu (New Zealand)
- Dr Martyn Reynolds (New Zealand).

Senior team members invited emerging Pacific researchers to co-analyse the data with them as well as to ensure that the reporting process met the needs of relevant stakeholders. Each emerging researcher joined the team at a different level and, through an adaptive mentoring approach, was assigned to a team with senior team members working alongside them to complete the study. Each senior researcher took responsibility for coaching their own team either through Tok Stori, Talanoa and Korero or through hands-on demonstration of coding and co-analysis. Some teams utilised Talanoa sessions and joined the co-analysis, while some team members joined the whole processes and contributed more to the writing of the report. Key to our Pacific approach, each Pacific researcher contributed to the research process according to their own expertise, interest, and availability.

In addition to being based on relationality, this research project was designed to support the vision of the Wansolwara platform for regional cooperation, within which the PacREF Research Framework is embedded. A key feature of this cooperation involves the wide dissemination of findings within the Pacific region, making insights and learning available to inform all. Accordingly, the project has created opportunities for dialogue, reflection and sharing of learnings with the three national Ministries of Education and the Implementing Agencies Fono, including the Educational Quality & Assessment Programme at the Pacific Community (EQAP-SPC). Moreover, although it is beyond the timeframe of the research project, through collaboration with MFAT, IoE, and the endorsement of the SC PacREF, the findings of this study will be shared at the IA Fono and at the working group for Human Resource Development (HRD) under the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific (CROP) later this year. Further to this, we will be looking for opportunities to share learnings at regional conferences including the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference, the EQAP Research Network and also OCIES (the Oceania Comparative International Education Society). Additionally, as part of our commitment to sharing the findings from the study, we will continue to work closely with MFAT, the Steering Committee of PacREF, and the PFU to develop relevant communication products that are most suitable for each context. A part of this communication strategy will be a Talanoa reflection on the use of the PacREF framework to guide this research and its implementation. Likely participants in this particular Talanoa reflection will include IoE, MFAT, the IA Fono and the SC PacREF.

Methodology

The PacREF Research Framework has provided the overall methodological guide for the study. The research utilised a qualitative approach which is primarily concerned with understanding a particular phenomenon within a defined context. In this case, this involved building an understanding of the components that led to the positive results of three specific literacy and leadership interventions in the Pacific region. To conduct this qualitative research project, we adopted a blend of contextualised Pacific-based research methodologies and research ethics with traditional Western tools where appropriate. Specifically, for Tonga, the Kakala Research framework guided the overall research approach, supported by the Talanoa as the key tool for data collection. The Talanoa sessions were conducted in the Tongan language following Tongan ethical protocols. For Solomon Islands, the Tok Stori was used as the guide for the research approach and the key tool for data collection. As with the Tonga case, Solomon Islands research ethics and principles were used to guide the study in that country. Local languages were used and translations to English were carried out where necessary. For the Cook Islands context,



the Tivaevae Research Framework was adopted to guide the research approach, and the key tool for data collection was Kōrero. Like the Kakala Research Framework, the Tivaevae research framework outlined the associated behaviour and ethics to guide the research work there. Additionally, to complement the Talanoa, Tok Stori and Kōrero, we used document analysis to review existing reports and communications relevant to the interventions within the three projects.

Sampling

The sampling procedure for the research project was purposeful and focused on the most knowledgeable participants with specific experiences in relation to the three interventions. The sampling included participants from Tonga, Solomon Islands and the Cook Islands as well as from participating implementing agencies such as the University of Auckland, USP, FFM and from MFAT. The sample was drawn from the list of key stakeholders identified from the Stakeholder engagement plan (attached as Appendix 2). A total of 116 individuals were identified to be included in the sample. A total of 70 individuals agreed to participate in the study.

Data gathering techniques

To collect the data, we used the following blend of data collection processes.

During Document Analysis, the following documents were reviewed:

- Design documents for PLSLP, LEAP and TESA
- Final Report for PLSLP
- Evaluation reports where relevant to intervention
- Progress reports for LEAP and TESA
- Key communications between each project governance committee and key relevant stakeholders
- Communications and references to PLSLP, LEAP and TESA in other regional platforms including PacREF, and
- Other documents that were identified during the study.

In line with the project objectives and to guide and focus the document analysis, researchers paid particular attention to: the design of each intervention and its inclusion of key components for literacy, numeracy, leadership, assessment, research, professional development, and learning; the project management approach through single country intervention and multiple country interventions; insights into the value of investment in the DBR approach as an intervention for education; and other matters pertaining to sustainability.

During the Talanoa/ Tok Stori / Kōrero, additional insights were drawn out as to what conditions could explain the positive literacy results achieved in the interventions, by exploring the following topics: Relationships within the team and across key stakeholders; Approaches to project management; Sustainability; and other topics that were revealed during the study.

Analysis and sense making

Consistent with the Design Based Research (DBR) approach, the research process included collective data analysis and sense-making sessions with key stakeholder in the research. The process explicitly sought to identify varied perspectives and interpretations of the data and, therefore, to understand what they ‘mean’ to those involved. Whereas traditional research designs might ‘share’ findings with participants, in the current study it is acknowledged that ‘meaning’ is interpretable within specific contexts, and that the ‘meaning’ might



alter depending on the particular stakeholder or place. For this reason, analysis and sense-making are inherently and explicitly contestable. Talanoa, Tok Stori and Kōrero for the contestation and interpretation of meanings are therefore an explicit stage of the research process. Voices and interpretations from these sessions then contributed to the final research outcomes.

Although the research questions seemed initially to have a wide focus, through this methodology we expected the questions to be refined in the process, and they were. Similarly, we expected that the data collected would also reveal the points of data saturation and, at these points of data saturation, we would have most of our questions that are answerable having been answered. At the point of data saturation, we also expected to see some clear patterns in the themes emerging from the data and we exhausted any variance from the key themes. Our experience of using Talanoa as a tool has shown that with fairly homogenous populations (as in Tonga and in the Cook Islands) we expect the data saturation to have occurred within a reasonable time frame and sample coverage. Finally, in accordance with our commitment to stakeholder participation in the sense-making, we completed the sense making exercises with the national Ministries of Education before the submission of the final report in July, 2021.

Research Ethics

In addition to the cultural ethics of relationality and regional capability building and knowledge dissemination, the study adhered to formalised research ethics in its processes. As the research involved multiple countries and organisations, ethical clearance had to be sought from each. This process is necessarily accompanied by implications concerning the time required to process multiple requests for ethical clearance within each participating country's jurisdictions and at the various levels of permission.

Country Permits

Although there was some delay in receiving the research permits, all three countries approved the research applications and research permits were issued prior to data collection.

University Ethical Clearance

The University of the South Pacific's Research Ethics Committee reviewed the study proposal and granted ethical clearance in December, 2020.

Individual consents

Each person in the study was approached with regard to their willingness to participate in the study (refer to Appendices) and letters of consent were obtained. However, in some of our Pacific contexts, these letters of consent were secondary to an individual's verbal approval. Our Research Associates who were based in the Cook Islands and in Solomon Islands were key actors in negotiating consent from our participants. Once again, this highlights the core role of relationality in the study's approach and is particularly recognized in that some of the participants in our study are people who have worked with us during the implementation of at least one of the MFAT funded interventions.



Key ethical considerations for conducting research with Pacific communities

In line with the key Pacific values-based principles, the following is a summary of key ethical considerations adhered to in this project when conducting research across three Pacific countries:

- A core value for Pacific people is that of reciprocity. This is evident in relationships, and in the effort to seek consensus and work towards mutual benefits.
- Pacific people and their cultures centre around relationships and being in a community. Their world view, beliefs and behaviour are based on being in a relational state.
- There are other core values that are also important to Pacific cultures and that define their relationships. These include: respect, loyalty and humility.
- When conducting research with Pacific people, it is important to ensure that there is opportunity for capacity building for emerging Pacific researchers.
- It is also important to ensure that data collected from Pacific contexts are protected and, in agreement with national research councils and or Ministries of Education, that data remain in the country.
- The use of Pacific-based research methodologies is not only important for honouring the world view of Pacific people but also for ensuring the validity and reliability of the research.
- Any publications of studies conducted in the Pacific should fully recognize the ownership of the data and sources of knowledge.
- Research conducted in the Pacific must have a tangible benefit for Pacific people and their communities.





C. Findings: Review of the literature

Background literature

The present study supports the regional aspirations for improving education in the Pacific. One of the critical policy areas of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) *Moving Towards Education 2030* focuses on Student Outcomes and Wellbeing, with one of its expected outcomes focusing on improving literacy and numeracy levels at the end of the primary education cycle.

Education in the Pacific has often involved projects that include external decision-making only. Terminology change is evident in education aid internationally with a shift from “charity” to “partnership” (Samoff et al., n.d.). Increasingly acknowledged is the constitutive role of context for the design and implementation of an intervention. Scholars have begun to recognise that interventions developed under one set of conditions have limited generalisability across contexts. While interventions developed under experimental conditions in one setting might be measured to have average effects under that particular set of conditions, when this same intervention is implemented under different conditions, the ability to predict outcomes becomes less likely (Winne, 2017). International research shows the need to change the way external support is implemented in countries supported by international development agencies, suggesting a shift from an approach centred around ‘external actors’, to one which focuses instead “on connecting with domestic actors who are already working to bring about reform and change” (Wild et al., 2015, p.12).

The implementation and design of each of the programmes considered here demonstrated an attempt to positively disrupt ‘how’ educational intervention is done in the Pacific. As Wild et al. (2015) state, “What is clear is that ‘more of the same’ will not be enough to close persistent gaps in outcomes between and within countries” (p.11). Disruption was therefore needed to interrupt the way that interventions are typically pre-designed, with local people measured on the fidelity with which they implement externally mandated change. Coxon (2020, p.10) reiterates this concern, critiquing: “the role of the global education agenda upheld by international aid agencies in influencing the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of education interventions (Coxon, 2009), an area of significant concern to Pacific Islands...in Oceania”. The disruption in each of the activities drew primarily from the ability of local team members to make contextually appropriate decisions, at all levels.

Development interventions and the layers within them depend heavily on context specific conditions. Therefore, variability across countries, Ministries, schools and classrooms impacts on activities, relationships and outcomes (Lietz, 2009; McCaffrey et al., 2009). Collaboration across institutions, departments and contributing groups supports sustainability, but is a complex undertaking. The wealth of experience and knowledge that in-country people have within their own contexts must not be neglected, since no person or context is without a complex history. Solving educational problems or challenges in development requires distributed expertise (McNaughton, 2011). Ensuring that in-country partners and their indigenous expertise are at the heart of the development design and implementation and utilising their context knowledge, methods and expertise is vital for collaborative responsibility and, ultimately, the success of project activities.

The methodological approach of Design Based Research (DBR) is one approach that seeks to explicitly draw on a model of distributed expertise. DBR focuses on developing practical theory and tools to support local efforts to solve problems of practice (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) and it involves an iterative approach which can inform decisions about adjustments (Cobb et al., 2003). In addition, design-based implementation research



is able to work at the level of a system (Penuel et al., 2011) and is characterised by considering multiple stakeholder perspectives, and by collaboration. These various perspectives are explicitly and relationally incorporated into the approach; “At the heart of the DBR approach is a set of partnership relationships: between policy-makers, academics and schools; between theory and practice, and between 'outsider' and 'insider' researcher-practitioners. These partners contribute their various types of expertise to redesign instruction in ways that are both theoretically and practically appropriate and effective” (Jesson & McNaughton, 2020, p. 57).

In order to enhance development interventions, Indigenous methodologies need to be included in Pacific based project design. Over the last 10 years there has been a significant increase in the number of Pacific research methodologies and frameworks that have emerged from Pacific scholars. From a genealogical perspective, the Kakala research framework by a group of Tongan scholars (Johansson Fua, 2014) based on Konai Thaman’s original Kakala Framework for learning led the way for other research frameworks. These have included Tivaevae, a Cook Islands research framework (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Maua-Hodges, 2000). Associated with these Pacific research frameworks has been further work in understanding Talanoa (Vaiioleti, 2006) as a research tool (‘Otunuku, 2011; Vaiioleti, 2013; Johansson Fua, 2014) and as a teaching pedagogy (Veikune et al., 2020). Similarly, works by Sanga in exploring dimensions of Tok Stori (Sanga & Reynolds, 2018) have helped gain further insight into Pacific based methodologies. These methodologies support international educational aid research and scholarship which suggest the use of participatory approaches appropriate to unique contexts. Using, developing and building on these methods encourages in-country design, implementation and evaluation, ultimately leading to more “situationally specific” answers about “what works for whom, in what circumstances? under what conditions?” (Samoff et al., 2016, p.21).

To disrupt and (re)orient future projects, *Motutapu* is proposed as the starting place for research and development in the Pacific (Johansson-Fua, 2020). Johansson-Fua (2020) suggests that Motutapu is a key concept to allow locally contextualised negotiations to start projects appropriately. Motutapu is a space of negotiation similar in nature to when one is negotiating an entrance to a harbour. “Motutapu is posited as a relational space for the interventions which brought together researchers and practitioners from small island 'developing' countries and from New Zealand” (Johansson-Fua, 2020, p. 42). This is further unpacked in the theme relating to Motutapu in this Report.

Development interventions are known to be complex. Donor partners, institutional partners and implementing partners require transparency in foregrounding positionality, relationality and reciprocity. International research suggests collective action, flexible approaches, and equitable national development are needed in order to improve educational development (Wild et al., 2015; Gutheil, 2020; Samoff et al., 2016). By positioning the ‘incoming’ development initiative in the proposed Motutapu space, partners dedicate adequate time to spend in the metaphorical ‘harbour’ to negotiate how these complexities will come together in design. The current (but flexible) positionality of ‘actors’ is made known, dialogue is used to explore relationality, language, methods and shared priorities. Reciprocity is co-constructed and made evident in the Motutapu, and the invitation to enter is then extended or withheld by the inhabitants. Motutapu is the first and foremost space in which to negotiate and gain agreement concerning these vital elements of engagement.

Review of Programme Literature

Here, we investigate literature pertaining to the three key literacy and leadership initiatives which were conducted as DBR in partnership with key researchers and practitioners across the Pacific. The interventions



were developed in response to concerns about literacy rates in the Pacific and include the Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme (PLSLP) implemented in Tonga, Cook Islands and Solomon Islands between 2014-2018, and the two additional MFAT literacy interventions developed since 2017: The Leadership and Education Authorities project (LEAP) in the Solomon Islands; and the Tonga Education Support Activity (TESA) from 2019, which includes an additional numeracy component.

This initial review draws from the reports and publications from each of the activities to analyse the conditions that can explain the significant literacy results achieved in each of the activities. In addition, we examine the contribution and mix of key components of the literacy and leadership activities implemented that appeared to contribute to success. These components provide the basis for assessing the value of investment in a DBR approach as an intervention for education and assessing the role of a multi-country programme supporting countries to test an approach before committing to further investment and examining the sustainability of approaches.

Project Overviews

The Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme was a three-year MFAT funded project that was implemented in three Pacific nations. Included in the scope were Kingdom of Tonga, Cook Islands and one province in the Solomon Islands. MFAT partnered with external partners, the University of Auckland (UoA) and The University of South Pacific (USP). In-country partners joined from each country's Ministry of Education; the Cook Islands Ministry of Education (CI MOE), Tonga Ministry of Education and Training (MET), and Solomon Islands Ministry of Education, Human Resources and Development (MEHRD). The scope included 12 schools in the Cook Islands, 15 schools in Tonga and 16 schools in Temotu, the easternmost province of Solomon Islands. Altogether, the potential impact of PLSLP was 6000 students, 300 teachers, 60 school leaders across 5 languages and 10 islands. School leaders were positioned as 'leaders of learning' and training, and support was provided alongside literacy leaders and teachers. A Design Based Research (DBR) model was used and profiling, sense making and implementation were tailored to all three contexts. Using evidence (data collected and analysed in iterative cycles), a context informed approach was used. Context specific and appropriate literacy resources were also created and supplied to the schools involved. The final stage of the DBR included a sustainability phase to ensure that improved literacy outcomes could remain a focus in each context, over time. Table 1 provides a summary of each of the features of the three projects considered in this review.

Table 1: Project Summaries

Project	Partners & Scope	Deliverables	Models, DBR Phases & Interventions	Project Literature
<p>Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme</p> <p>PLSLP</p> <p>3 countries,</p>	<p>Funding partner: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT)</p> <p>External partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Auckland (UoA) • The University of the South Pacific (USP) <p>In-country partners:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and support for teachers, principals, and literacy leaders • School leaders as 'leaders of learning' • Improved understanding across the education system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective Impact Model (CIM) • Embedded nature of research and evaluation • Evidence informed approach with iterative cycles of 	<p>PLSLP Final Report and Impact Evaluation, July 2018</p>



<p>42 primary schools, 6000 students, 300 teachers, 60 school leaders, 10 islands, 5 languages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook Islands Ministry of Education (CI MOE), • Tonga Ministry of Education (MET), • Solomon Islands (SI) Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) <p>Human resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Coordinator embedded or based at in-country partner sites (USP-IoE, Temotu PEA, SINU, MOE) • UoA & USP Literacy, Language, Leadership and DBR facilitators • PLSLP Strategic Management Team, Program Manager, MEL Advisor <p>Scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook Islands - six islands - Years 1-3, 12 schools, 3 clusters • Temotu Literacy Support, SI (TLS) - Years 1-3, 16 schools, 3 clusters • Literacy and Leadership Initiative, Tonga (LALI) - Years 1-6, 15 schools, 3 clusters 	<p>of literacy, teaching and learning approaches, and how to bring about change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministries' capacity built to develop/oversee/drive literacy strategies and focus on results in classrooms • Improved literacy outcomes • Data collection and analysis for multiple purposes 	<p>problem-solving to build knowledge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptive expertise fostered in teachers and school leaders • Development and provision of appropriate literacy resources (Lift Publishing, Waka Publications and NZ MOE) <p>PLSLP DBR components with a focus on student learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inception phase (4 months), • Profiling/Implementation phase 1 (10 months), Included - Collaborative sensemaking, Co-design • Implementation phase 2 (16 months) - Sustainability phase (6 months) 	
<p>Leadership and Educational Authorities Project</p> <p>LEAP</p> <p>Solomon Islands based</p> <p>86 schools 6 Provincial Education Authorities (PEAs - Central, Malaita, Guadalcanal, Isabel, Rennell-Bellona and Temotu) 2-3 years</p>	<p>Discrete donor project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT) <p>External partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consortium: Auckland UniServices Ltd (AUL); Institute of Education (IoE), University of South Pacific (USP); Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM) <p>In-country partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solomon Islands (SI) Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), Strategic Services Unit (SSU) <p>Human resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EA Coach • Principal Mentor (at each Provincial Education Authority - PEA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on supporting EA and school leaders to lead improvements in learning • Focused on literacy learning, but its findings are relevant in other areas • School-based support, mentoring, Tok Stori and community engagement are core parts of LEAP's approach <p>Long-term LEAP outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved literacy learning outcomes • Improved PEA management of leadership of and support to schools • Improved school leadership 	<p>One component of MFAT's overall bilateral Education Sector Support Activity</p> <p>An iterative design approach grounded in indigenous ethics and ways of working (e.g. Tok Stori), while also drawing on principles from a design-based implementation research</p> <p>Province based problem-solving and PLD</p> <p>Peer learning (teachers, leaders)</p> <p>Relationship building for sustainability of changes (LEAP and SINU)</p> <p>Phases: Start-Up Phase (6 months), Implementation Phase,</p>	<p>LEAP Final Report Draft, 22 Jan 2021</p> <p>LEAP Communications & Key Messages</p> <p>LEAP Expansion 2021</p> <p>LEAP Integration Planning Outputs 2020</p> <p>LEAP Implementation Phase Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF)</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Manager/PEA Services Adviser (PEASA) - Honiara based Strategic Management Team (SMT) School Leader (SL) Mentor - Post-implementation phase only 	<p>Note: 2020 Covid-19 disruptions</p>	<p>Post-Implementation phase (6 months)</p>	
<p>Tonga Education Support Activity</p> <p>TESA</p> <p>71 primary schools (18-24 months) 36 schools (6-12 months)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT) <p>External partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Auckland UniServices Ltd (AUL) <p>In-country partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Education and Training (MET) Institution of Education (IoE) The University of the South Pacific, Tonga (USP) <p>Human resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 Field Officers (FO) 22 Tongan Institute of Education Lecturers (TIOE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved literacy and numeracy of Tongan primary school children Tongan primary school teachers are teaching literacy and numeracy more effectively Primary school teachers and principals are more effectively using formative assessment to promote learning for every child MET has sustainable organisational capacity to deliver effective professional development to all primary schools in literacy and numeracy instruction, formative assessment and instructional leadership <p>Note: 2020 Covid-19 disruptions</p>	<p>Approach: Three key philosophical and methodological frameworks – Faiako ma’a Tonga, Design Based Research (DBR) and Adaptive Management</p> <p>Resourcing: 22,600 copies (approximately) of 15 literacy titles to be distributed to all primary schools, and system-wide numeracy materials to be distributed</p> <p>Formative assessment tools in numeracy and literacy for classes 1-6 will be developed and professional development provided to all schools for effective use</p> <p>Phases: Implementation phase (18 months)</p>	<p>TESA Health Check</p> <p>TESA Final Implementation Plan 15052019</p> <p>Reference to: <i>Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDFII)</i></p> <p><i>Pacific Regional Education Framework, Moving Towards Education 2030 (PacRef)</i></p>

Following on from the success of PLSLP, partners noted that building on this project to strengthen leadership would be beneficial. The MFAT then funded two years of LEAP based in Solomon Islands and which covered six provinces or, more specifically, six Provincial Education Authorities (PEAs). External partners for this project included a consortium made up of Auckland UniServices Ltd. (AUL), IoE-USP and the Solomon Islands based Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM). In-country partners included the Ministry of Education Human Resources and Development (MEHRD) and Strategic Services Unit (SSU). The focus was on supporting the Education Authorities (EA) and school leaders, mentoring, and using Tok Stori for engaging the communities involved. Again, an iterative design was implemented, drawing on DBR, and grounded in indigenous ethics and ways of working. Professional learning and development and context specific problem-solving were included in LEAP alongside peer learning and mentoring. Relationship building for sustainability of changes was forged between in-country partners and Solomon Islands National University (SINU). A post-implementation phase was scheduled in 2020, however disruptions due to COVID-19 occurred.



The TESA project, based solely in Tonga, was the third MFAT funded education-focused project, building from PLSLP successes and learning. External partners included AUL, with in-country partners including MET, IoE and USP. The project's scope included 36 schools for 6-12 months, and 71 primary schools for 18-24 months. The project included goals for improving literacy and numeracy. The frameworks used included Tonga's professional development framework (Faiako ma'a Tonga), DBR and Adaptive Management. Field officers and Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE) lecturers were involved to support and promote effective use of formative assessment. TESA also focused on building sustainable organisational capacity within MET to further support professional development and learning, formative assessment and instructional leadership. Resourcing included in TESA allowed 22000+ readers to be distributed along with system-wide numeracy materials. Challenges were identified within TESA Health Checks (Coxon & Spratt, 2020), with the last one being the impact of COVID-19 on the project's sustainability. In the context of Tonga, existing frameworks from the Tonga Ministry of Education were used to guide the design of TESA and the reporting of the TESA activities.

[Table 2](#) provides a draft framework for understanding and therefore explaining intervention success. This is a challenging exercise since, by definition, a contextualised relational approach to intervention design resists prescription. However, the components described are identified as emerging themes within the review. Within each of the identified themes, the balance of interests and the negotiation of solutions have emerged as key design considerations underpinning success. Theoretically, the success of the intervention resided in the extent to which that balance met the needs of the context.

The review of the activities focused on the learnings relevant to literacy success at three levels: education development, methodology, and pedagogy respectively. The first section of the review sought to understand aspects related to development in the Pacific educational context. In this section the set-up of projects at official levels was considered. In a second wave of analysis, the methodology of the projects was considered. In this section, the successful application of a Design Based approach was considered. The third wave of analysis sought understandings related to teaching and learning. In this section the classroom-based intervention approach was considered. We introduce each focus briefly here, followed by themes arising from each.

Development in the Pacific educational context

Given the centrality of context for understanding capability building, expertise and literacy, the review considered each of the activities' embedded definitions and aims, particularly regarding 'education', 'literacy', and 'school improvement'. We acknowledge that each of the activities was grounded in particular social, historical and political contexts. Within the interventions, much of what makes up those contexts was visible as the relations between 'actors'. Acknowledgement of relationships and dynamics within each country context provides a basis for the insights into the functioning of the interventions specific to each place. Our focus is on the ways in which the relationships were able to be additive and transformational, and to unearth both the features and emergence of such outcomes. The following are key lessons emerging from the review of core literature and documentation from the three projects.

Local and context specific framing

As the external and in-country partners collaborated, local knowledge and context specific framing were essential for the best possible project outcomes. Sanga (cited in Airini et al., 2010) highlights "...the significance of context in understanding the domains of social relationships - 'the context behind the context' - within which



school communities” (Johansson-Fua, 2020, p. 42). Communities are layered and complex. In order to collaborate effectively within these complex and multi-layered contexts, flexible frameworks built on reciprocity and relationships need to be embedded into the design. For example, in the implementation of the LEAP project in Solomon Islands, the involvement of the local NGO, Fellowship of Faithful Mentors, guided the appropriate level of reciprocity, establishing and maintaining relationships at various communities, and thus providing the context-specific framing of the intervention.

Collaboration between stakeholders

Reciprocal relationships across multiple layers of government, consortium partners, local government, leaders and teachers are highlighted in the project literature in a variety of collaborative agreements. In order to build capability and truly share power, practical systems for collaborating needed to be included in the design of the project. For each of the projects there was a recognition that external stakeholders must learn alongside in-country Ministry staff, with a ‘bottom-up’ approach, where there was a focus on learners (PLSLP Final Report, July 2018). Within each of the PLSLP, LEAP and TESA project designs was the recognition that learners were at the heart of the work being done by all stakeholders, and that all decisions were shared with this key goal in mind. Through the process of data collection and sense making, there were significant opportunities for all team members and the Ministry staff to collaborate and thereby learn from each other. The learning was reciprocal, and a departure from most development aid projects was that the external team members were open and also recognised their learning from the national team members and from the school and community context.

The right people and the right allocation of resources

In order to ensure learning was at the heart of the work and outcomes from the project were maximised, the layers within the project structure all needed to invest in their people. Reports from the projects suggested that an unresolved challenge was when the right people were not in appropriate roles for their skillset or were not enabled to use their skillset in their role. This echoes the sentiments of government investment in order to support the outcomes of student-centred projects. Across the projects, a recurrent challenge was supporting Ministries to focus on establishing the necessary strategic direction and organisational structure and resourcing for sustainable, ongoing PLD for schools. This was a challenge of leadership and a challenge of ascertaining the appropriate roles and responsibilities for the different actors within the education system. While the specific dynamics differ in each country, each faces a similar question as to where the expertise for PLD delivery should sit and what the appropriate role for a Ministry is, with regard to PLD delivery, compared to teacher training institutions and private providers.

In order for teaching and learning to be positively impacted, all partners must commit the most appropriate resources and people to the projects. It was not clear from our review whether Ministries were the appropriate focus for capability building in Teacher Professional Learning. Acknowledged expertise for professional learning was, however, apparent and visible in university and higher education institutions and in the experience of mentors. In LEAP, for example, the role of FFM, SINU and USP appeared key for both expertise and consistency of personnel for the provision of teacher professional learning over time.

Adaptively and responsively building on systems and structures

Internal governance structures within project partnerships can be adaptive and responsive. Part of the noted 'Adaptive Management approach' was the emphasis on knowing the context, the work already done, and building on that work. “Adaptive Management, also known as 'learning for sustainability', takes a systematic



approach to improving management practices by learning from outcomes through a process of planning, doing, assessing and adapting” (TESA Implementation Plan, p.11). In particular, the ability and difficulties of managing operations in a flexible way were highlighted as both enablers and barriers to success. The ability of project teams to access and mobilise resources was a critical enabler for implementation. This was evident from the ability of both the implementing agencies – USP-IoE and also UoA-AUL, to adjust the provision of staff, time and also funds in order to meet the objectives of the projects. The set-up of the Trust Fund in the Solomon Islands to enable more timely and responsive funding of in-country project activities was one such example of the consortium being able to adapt to challenges in implementing the LEAP project.

Both TESA and LEAP reports mentioned how they were able to build on previous work in their regions while the final PLSLP report outlined how the work used “responsive and iterative processes, building on existing practices and previously successful projects” (PLSLP Final Report, July 2018; Literacy Research ToR, pg.7). As part of the design of projects in the Pacific, it was essential for previous successes and learning to be leveraged off. This can be done by understanding local contexts, the 'what and why' of previous experiences that had been successful (or not) and could ensure that the co-design of new work contributed to reinforcing successes, streamlining existing systems, and recording learnings to inform the future of education in Oceania.

One co-design approach to a project structure allowing local contexts to be applied was highlighted in the TESA Implementation report; “Faiako ma’a Tonga is a philosophy aimed at ensuring a relevant, high quality education for Tonga and a teaching profession rooted in Tongan epistemology ... It is based on performance measures drawing on Tongan values and behaviours which together make up the FATU model. Central to the Fatu model are the four core values that define Tongan ethical systems: faka'apa'apa (respect), feveitokai'aki (reciprocity), lototō (humility) and mamahi'i me'a (loyalty). These four values are expressed through the anga faka-Tonga (behaviour)” (TESA Implementation Plan, July 2019-June 2021, p.11). Within each of the projects, exploration of theoretical framing and underpinning values provided an opportunity for co-designers to align their actions with their values, and thereby design educational approaches that cohered with these. External educational advice seemed only to be taken up when it aligned, and such apprenticing of external 'experts' into existing local frameworks was a core design feature of all the interventions.

Capability building systems and relationships

The value of local frameworks for capability building and in-country mentors was evident in multiple reports. External partners provided support and training for the mentors throughout the projects, however the mentors themselves were considered to have had the positive impact on outcomes. In LEAP, the design of the support helped to keep the momentum of change going. “The collaborative, locally-led, adaptive mentoring approach of LEAP helped to build a sense of collective responsibility and excitement at community and school level for change, which provides a strong platform for sustaining on-going improvements” (LEAP Final Report Draft 22 Jan 2021, p.28). The length of time for this support is highlighted as something that needs to be considered in the resourcing of projects. Supporting the engagement of mentors beyond the end of a project could further support the consolidation and embedding of practices and capability building.

In line with planning contingency in the early design of the project, planning for capability building for all involved was required. This was done through support systems such as mentoring, PLD, ‘check-ins’ and DBR outcomes. In the TESA project it was noted that there was a need to “...focus on consolidating material already covered and coaching FO [field officers] in the application of what they have learnt to date” (TESA Health



Check, p.4). The consolidation of new learning through PLD sessions and mentor time was a recurring theme in the reporting across these three projects.

Investing in the time needed for developing systems, pedagogies and people

In each of the projects, culturally relevant and sustaining frameworks underpinned a shared belief structure, setting the interventions up for united efforts. Multiple reports mention the time it takes for these kinds of interventions to be co-designed, implemented and embedded. The nature of collaboration, including the use of culturally appropriate methods (i.e., Tok Stori (SI) and Faiako ma'a Tonga and Langa Fale Ako (Tonga)) and subsequent redesign or adjustment, can impact upon project timeframes. The final LEAP report strongly recommended that “future programmes need to be developed with either more realistic ambitions or longer-time frames” (LEAP Final Report Draft 22 Jan 2021, p.29). International educational research indicates that professional learning and changes in practice take time. This clearly seems to apply in the Pacific context also.

The project reports all encourage the early establishment of systems that allow communication and clarity across partners. Systems need to allow for key components, activities and people to collaborate as they weave together their strands. These systems also need to consider inevitable changes and movement within organisations of people and resources, and the time needed to adjust to each of these changes. Due to the scope and length of time of these three projects, it was important to factor in a contingency of time and funds that allowed for the training of new people should they come on board part way through a project. Recommendations from PLSLP were to look ahead and build sustainable capability. This was taken up with the design of the TESA project to include capacity building components for the Field Officers of the Ministry of Education and for the lecturers at the Tonga Institute of Education (TioE) teacher education provider. The reports emphasized that in order for the projects to withstand the impact and movements associated with change, disruption must be planned for in the early design of the project.

Design Based Research (DBR)

This section summarises the characteristics of DBR as evidenced in the three projects and which, according to reports and documentation, were felt to have contributed to the success of the projects. Firstly, it was apparent that each of the projects was essentially a local application of DBR - the DBR approach being used as an alternative to the historically predominant programmatic approaches to education improvement programmes and reform. The use of DBR in these projects provided for the adaptation and variation that were inherent qualities of schools. In each of the projects, the focus was on designing processes that support schools to do what matters most and works best; matters which are inherently contextual. Thus, the approach accommodates local needs and circumstances with activities designed to support integrity of implementation, which values on-the-ground decision-making that is mindful of context but also in line with agreed underlying principles for change.

The DBR was used for PLSLP, LEAP and TESA in line with authentic power sharing and collective decision making. DBR “seeks to disrupt more traditional approaches where an intervention framework is developed by external 'experts'. Rather, it utilises context-specific evidence to extant patterns of teaching and learning and the collective expertise of practitioners and researchers to develop strategies to improve these patterns” (PLSLP Final Report July 2018, pg. 5). Including both external and in-country collective expertise affirmed the importance of context-specific partnerships and problem solving.



In each of the projects, partners' complementary expertise rested to various degrees upon enduring and trusting relationships. There is a sense that enduring trust was built over time, rather than being a 'given' in each of the projects. Systems for building enduring trust seemed to rest on the common shared purpose for working together (for example through design workshops), humility (hosting / guest relationship), constancy (commitment to the Pacific) and mutual respect for complementary experience and expertise. Reports emphasise that the right balance of experience and expertise, and the adaptive ability to adjust these seemed critical to project success. Hence, the makeup of project teams needed to be adjusted over time and in response to context, while maintaining the core principles and direction of the intervention. The following are key features of DBR derived from the analysis of relevant project documentation.

Mutual learning and learning from the context(s)

The research component inside the three projects ensured learning from the context(s) of practice. The nature of external interventions in Oceania contexts can often position the in-country partners as the 'learners', while external partners are the 'teachers'. This negates the reality that external partners can and should learn from local contexts of practice. Including a research component in projects which is iterative and flexible ensures that there is 'space' to learn from the context.

The TESA project demonstrated how the context and relevant concepts influenced the intervention. It was noted that "...the approach taken to formative assessment was a relational approach, which cohered with Tongan concepts of Māfana and Mālie as described by Johansson-Fua (2014). When applied to an intervention these concepts focus our attention on the extent to which the intervention has engendered shared understandings and built a shared sense of empowerment among those involved to be able to solve their challenges together...these concepts recognise the mutual learning and transformation processes that occur within interventions" (TESA Implementation Plan, July 2019-June 2021, p. 127). Reciprocal, mutual learning is key for stakeholders and participants.

In order for reciprocal learning and the valuing of knowledge to take place, appropriate whole-of-project systems need to be set up within the DBR design. Although government level partners have been mentioned frequently, activities must not omit the richness and value of other parties who are heavily invested in children's education and futures. Research based systems for feedback and review from each of these parties provided powerful opportunities for the projects to consider the quality of their provision and learn from invested communities.

DBR's inbuilt cycles of evaluation

The iterative nature of DBR allows for multiple cycles of evaluation and collective problem-solving. In PLSLP the DBR evaluation supported the responsive redesign of elements of the research whilst the project was underway. "Consistent with our design-based approach, repeated classroom observations and student assessments helped us collaborate on continuously redesigning the instructional approaches for each country over three years. Changes in the frequency of teachers' use of a range of teaching techniques were observed to arise from these foci" (PLSLP Final Report July 2018, p.37). This cyclic evaluation enabled collective problem-solving where the result was responsive next steps and improved outcomes for teaching. There was also evidence of an impact on the learning in PLSLP, "...the data suggest that when teachers did redesign practice in specific ways, this was associated with changes in student outcome. Thus, the data indicate that where teachers shifted, students improved" (PLSLP Final Report July 2018, p.37).



DBR processing meant that in each project classroom data was used by teachers to respond to the strengths and needs of their students, resulting in situations wherein "...teachers confidently described a process by which they were now assessing students at the outset, using this to plan their teaching, and then reassessing progress to understand how/whether students were learning. The majority of teachers and leaders described how teaching was now more targeted on the needs of their learners and that this was a new practice arising from participation in PLSLP" (PLSLP Final Report July 2018, p.42). While there is less clarity in the project reports as to how classroom evidence incorporated the cultures and identities of contexts, the use of that evidence for design purposes within local frameworks did occur and meant that the response to that evidence could be interpreted through a local lens during the cycles of evaluation and informed practice.

Supportive relationships and mentoring for problem solving

The collective use of analysed data to problem-solve throughout projects can also identify areas where in-country mentors, school leaders and teachers may need specific technical knowledge and support. During PLSLP, it was recognised that building the capability of in-country mentors who know their context well was vital to project outcomes and expectations being met (PLSLP Final Report July 2018; Literacy Research ToR).

The TESA project also used a targeted approach to support their mentors. "Proposed is a 'training-the-trainer' strategy through which MET Schools' Division Primary Officers receive professional development in agreed improvement programmes for literacy and numeracy, which they then provide to principals and teachers through a comprehensive school-based professional development programme" (TESA Implementation Plan, July 2019-June 2021, p.9). TESA also found that disruptions to schedules, personnel or changes in circumstances need to be factored into the project design in order to maintain traction with the professional learning. For successful PLD the LEAP project report emphasises the importance of supporting mentors to connect local knowledge to new learnings. "Mentors' ability to relate to the new learnings in terms of the content and approaches was paramount to the successful integration of the PLD. This demonstrates the importance of designing PLD content that relates to, and validates, local context and concepts" (LEAP Final Report Draft 22 Jan 2021, p.28). The importance of this connection reinforces the need for partners to co-design and learn from one another.

Findings from LEAP also included the objective support of the LEAP Strategic Management Team (SMT). This objectivity was evident in the report: "...determining when and how to adapt was greatly assisted by the strategic and 'one-step-removed' advice of the LEAP Strategic Management Team. The SMT provided a valuable 'quality' and 'reality check' role, assisting the LEAP team to step back from the busy work of delivering and reflect on what they were doing, why and what changes were needed" (LEAP Final Report Draft 22 Jan 2021, p.22). Using reliable DBR data and analyses ensures that even if an external partner makes suggestions, these can be collaborated on or discussed further to ensure local knowledge and contexts are considered and changes agreed to.

Sense making

Part of the PLSLP and LEAP project design included interaction with and analysis of the findings from assessment and classroom observation. This interaction supported local knowledge, contributing to problem-solving, review, and planning next steps for teaching and learning. The sense making was co-designed and implemented by external and in-country mentors. This meant that the sense making discussions were contextualised and supported by local knowledge, language and expertise. In LEAP, this allowed for a culturally



responsive approach to the sessions, such that “...culturally relevant concepts used within LEAP such as Tok Stori, co-design and co-construction and sense making all appeal to this SI stance where people are regarded as equals in the conveying and transmitting of learning, meaning and understanding through trusted and respectful communication and connection” (LEAP Final Report Draft 22 Jan 2021, p.28). Appealing to a local 'stance' is important if groups are to engage in collective problem-solving informed by making sense of data collected and analysed in their context.

Flexible and iterative redesign of instructional approaches through a DBR approach

In each of the projects, the phased approach of DBR meant that each phase built on the previous one, which in turn had been heavily embedded in the context along the way. “The DBR approach and design principles demand that learning from the context(s) of practice must be fundamental to educational interventions, determining both content and process” (PLSLP Final Report July 2018, p. 77). Alongside the content of the intervention, partners were building understandings, language and approaches that emerged from the DBR processes. This meant that across the phases, the DBR allowed an emergence of inbuilt organisational capability for sustainability beyond the funding period (TESA Health Check).

Classroom data was also used by the project teams to respond to the strengths and needs of teachers and leaders in schools. Again, sense making processes that used local methodologies to interpret the evidence appeared crucial to allowing contextualised meanings to emerge. The evaluative and iterative use of evidence as the basis for decisions by local decision-makers meant that plans were developed and adjusted throughout the interventions. In each of the projects, the evidence was collected as 'feed-forward' evidence to contribute to further planning. Rather than solely as a review of previous work, evidence was used to contribute to the design of subsequent phases (e.g. TESA Health Check). Classroom data and contextual school-based evidence at the classroom level was used to inform planning across the intervention (Literacy Research ToR, pg. 4). Project designs stipulated how evidence from one phase would inform the next. In most cases they also described how contextualised frameworks for negotiating the evidence shaped the interpretation. This review suggests that DBR and the cycles of evaluation support these improvements in learning, which is at the heart of these projects.

Listening to the evidence from all participants

A start-up phase in each of the projects provided the opportunity for communities and partners to contribute to the vision for the interventions. The initial engagement and conversations were able to set a 'listening' tone, and adjust plans based on the expectations and aspirations of schools and communities. At the start of the project this initial work had the effect of increasing engagement and interest from school communities and boards. Robust processes and systems were then needed to make sure that this initial excitement was translated into actions. The challenge was in maintaining “this momentum to ensure continual and consistent progress across the schools engaged in LEAP” (LEAP Final Report Draft 22 Jan 2021, p.7).

The success of the start-up phases relied on the use of local context-specific methodologies for engaging with school and community partners. Culturally considered consultation around ethics, and appropriate processes for gathering ethical clearance and documentation, if appropriate, were embedded into this start-up phase. Through these processes, the commitment to local methodologies and self-determination was expressed. An example is the use of Tok Stori in the Solomon Islands, which was employed in the start-up phase and continued through each phase in the intervention. “Through Tok Stori, School Board members improved their participation and collaboration with school leadership teams. A wide cross section of school communities – school board



members, traditional and church leaders, women and youth leaders, parents (mothers and fathers), youth and the elderly were able to come together to discuss issues affecting their children's learning through Tok Stori” (LEAP Final Report Draft 22 Jan 2021, p. 7).

Classroom-based intervention

The review also sought to identify the features of the classroom-based interventions that distinguished them from traditional pre-planned and delivered models, and then understand why these features resulted in change. Three purposes have been identified for this section of the review: i) to identify key features of the classroom interventions; ii) to understand why these features might result in identified shifts in literacy outcomes; and iii) to understand the interrelatedness of the components. Thus, key features of literacy learning, of classrooms, of pedagogy, of teacher collaboration and of professional learning informed the review.

Within each of these areas of focus, four common themes emerged as instructive: the nature of the power-sharing; collaborative relationships; the nature of the expertise; the centrality of culture and identity and the durability of the change. Unsolved challenges were also identifiable in each project. Within these areas of change, these themes are detailed in the following.

Teacher as assessor and decision maker in the classroom

All three research projects positioned teachers as the decision-makers, with the expertise to design appropriate learning experiences for children. Each of the projects enabled teachers to develop skills in formative assessment, trusting teachers to be the assessors of learning. Activities such as partnering with the classroom teachers through classroom observations, PLD sessions and local context resources helped to “develop a collective culture of responsibility” (TESA Implementation Plan, July 2019-June 2021, p.12). Alongside this, they were involved in the “development and formative use of teacher administered student learning assessment tools” (Spratt & Shah, 2020, p.123). Ownership of these, as well as seeing the leadership support outcomes for those leading their schools, helped to enhance partnership relationships and co-design opportunities.

Co-design of frameworks, assessment tools and culturally relevant resources

The classroom interventions relied on the expertise of in-country academics and practitioners to develop tools and assessments that were relevant to children's cultural identities and language use. Through the co-design of formative assessment tools, local experts were able to influence the language, aims and goals that were then assessed. In PLSLP, for example, different assessment tools were developed by partnership teams that reflected the identified focus for each country. In all countries, these tools continued to be reviewed and re-designed in the context of their use. In PLSLP, the language and values underpinning the assessments required negotiation in schools and with Ministries. As such, the use and socialisation of classroom assessments took differing lengths of time to be finalised. The contextual variations in language and medium of instruction were important aspects of identity to be negotiated. Similarly, the constructs to be assessed (e.g. read and retell / comprehension/ free writing/ prompted writing) were contestable and negotiated. Again, purposeful structures for negotiation using locally appropriate methods were required, and these differed in each country and within each intervention.

Within all the interventions the materials that supported the intervention were developed as a response to evidence about what was already existing in the contexts. Similarly, learning resources were developed specific



to the particular patterns of existing strength and needs identified within the context. There is evidence of purposeful structures for gathering evidence about resourcing and materials, use of existing resources and materials, and targeted design of materials (e.g., reprinting of Māfana learning and teaching resources) (TESA Health Check, p.1). Moreover, there is recognition in the projects that decision-making within the intervention is captured within project materials, designed and owned in-country, “Attention to learning resources as an important mechanism for sustaining shifts in student performance and teacher practice” (PLSLP Final Report July 2018, p.75).

Systems for resourcing and building sustainable capability

Reports from all three projects stated that systems were fundamental to building on capability and ensuring the sustainability of the participants' learning within the systems where they work. The focus on a 'whole school approach' in Tonga LALI and TESA and the inclusion of leaders in the design of all three interventions acknowledges the need to build on and embed capability within an organisation. These systems support government, local government, mentors, school leaders and teachers to 'do things differently'. It seems vital for sustainability that the design of future projects considers how to build capability alongside different partners to ensure that sustainability and capability are factored in from the beginning and are not afterthoughts. In PLSLP, for example, systems and practices are maintained and embedded as 'business as usual' by the school leader (PLSLP Final Report July 2018). Ultimately, this is a key component when building partnerships in the Pacific.

Another key component in the partnership was the need for resourcing for sustainability from institutional and implementing partners. The project literature suggests that this should be factored into and beyond the project end date, and that it functions as an external motivator for partners to see when reviewing the investment. In PLSLP, it was noted that “Teachers need a lot of time to internalise changes in practice and need to be clear about the link between the changes in their practice and the outcomes the students achieve. It is when teachers see that changes in their practice can result in better learner outcomes, their beliefs about effective practice change. Only then are effective practices likely to be sustained” (PLSLP Final Report July 2018, p.42-43). Visible resourcing of a successful project by local stakeholders can be an investment in ensuring the embedding of new learning for teachers, and a continuation of improved outcomes for learners.

Summary of learnings from the review of literature

Table 2 provides a draft framework for understanding and explaining development intervention success. As mentioned previously, by definition, a relational approach to intervention design resists prescription. However, the components identified through this review can be identified as emerging themes and principles to inform the design of interventions in ways to promote their success in Pacific contexts. Within each of the identified themes, the relative balance of interests and the negotiation of a solution has emerged as a key design consideration underpinning relative success. Theoretically, the success of each intervention resided in the extent to which that balance worked to meet the needs of the context.



Table 2 Framework arising from Review of Programme Literature

Starting place: Motutapu - space of negotiation. Negotiating entrance to a harbour	Theme 1: Motutapu, a space to begin power sharing & collaboration - Positionality - Relationality - Reciprocity External decision making only-----> External and in country decision making-----> In country decision making	Theme 2: Indigenous expertise in Leadership, Literacy & Language - Positionality - Relationality - Reciprocity Taking a 'knowing what works' stance -----> Taking a 'not yet knowing' stance to programme design.	Theme 3: Methodologies that incorporate Culture - Positionality - Relationality - Reciprocity Texts, methods, pedagogies, communication strategies, positioning, allowing for 'particularisation', honouring people	Theme 4: Sustainability and durability - Positionality - Relationality - Reciprocity Relative balance of sustaining capability (people) and processes (people in organisations) and content (materials). Contributing to local institutional strength.	Theme 5: Unresolved Challenges
Development in the Pacific educational context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local, context specific framework(s) Collaboration between stakeholders (Ministry, local leaders, leaders, teachers) Internal governance structures in project partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enduring mentor relationships Ongoing mentor support to work within local contexts over a long period of time (past the end of a project) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in time for strategies, pedagogies and methods to be embedded Project structure flexibility to allow for local contexts and challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment of time at the start to establish systems across partners. Factor in a contingency of time/funds for induction of new staff should they change during the project Build capability of in-country mentors Systems and practices are maintained and embedded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At all levels of government, people in the right places/roles Ministry and government dept systems that allow projects to be resourced (for success) Relationships between local groups/organisations, school leaders and teachers
Design Based Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Learning from' the context(s) of practice Research component ensures learning from the context Systems for valuing knowledge across the whole project Learning from families, children, teachers as well as experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensemaking External mentors who support in-country mentors in initial phases In-country mentors who use evaluative tools to provide specific support for school leaders and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DBR phases allow for flexibility and continual redesign of instructional approaches Start-up/first phase can highlight initial changes for project design Evidence from all participants Local/context specific methodologies Ethical consideration and appropriate documentation Culturally considered/ consultation around ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DBR cycles of evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to / use of national standardised student achievement data
Classroom based intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher as assessor Teacher as decision maker in the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments, programme outcomes, and teaching frameworks conducive to local context Context specific learning resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems for incorporation of culture and identity within co-design of tools used in classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build sustainable capability Resource school leader and teacher support beyond project ("external motivator" from Ministry) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems that allow teachers and school leaders to access support needed

D. Findings: Case Studies

This section presents the findings from the country case studies, identifying key themes drawn from the data. A total of 70 participants shared their views and experiences and are reflected in this section of the report. The themes within each case study context that have emerged from the data are presented as answers to the broad topics of investigation in the research: Programme Design, Components and Implementation, Design Based Research approach and, finally, Sustainability. Although covering the same concepts, each case study's particular focus reflects the country team's contextualised approach to investigating the factors that contributed to the success of the three literacy and leadership initiatives.

Country Case Study: Cook Islands

Design, Components and Implementation

The Cook Islands case study of PLSLP investigated the success of the School Leadership and Literacy aspects of the PLSLP programme. In the Cook Islands, 12 schools from across six islands participated, grouped into three clusters. In total, 10 interviews make up the data for this case study. The four Cook Islands-based members of the team were considered key informants. These voices were supported by six interviews with New Zealand-based members of the team.

Most commentary focused on the literacy components of the PLSLP, which concentrated on the development of writing assessment and pedagogy in Years 1 – 3. Key to the success was the development of a nation-wide writing framework, developed first in English and then re-developed for Reo Māori.

The word cloud below illustrates the key themes from the Cook Islands case study, highlighting Motutapu, the use of DBR, Sustainability and Māori.





Motutapu: Being invited and welcomed

All those interviewed recalled the inception of the programme, and some initial questioning as to the intentions of partners and the role of the programme in country. Project members recalled initial suspicion of the programme, such as the hiring of personnel by outside agencies.

My colleagues around me...they kind of they questioned the structure of the project. And also, ... what was happening with me, like I was employed by UniServices, but I'm housed with them, and I'm sitting with them. So how am I contributing to the work that they're doing? ... I think before they really understood what the project was about it, there was a sense of you are one of them. (Programme Team Member)

A positionality that provided for local ownership of the programme seemed key to a shift in feeling toward the project. In particular, the ability for the local Ministry of Education to exert influence in terms of the focus and direction seemed to encourage an initial willingness to give another project a try.

I think the fact that it was co-constructed..., that was—that was the biggest one. And that was the first time we've seen that approach from a development partner..., but in reality, was the first time right from the beginning, that we had been engaged to the same—and therefore I think, that gave—that made us have a greater level of accountability as well, because we had made the des—some of the—some of the—not all, but we had made a fair number of the decisions, and so we couldn't go blaming somebody else if it didn't work. (MoE Official)

Important to the perception of appropriateness in country was the ability to fit with other strategic directions within the Ministry of Education. The relative ease with which the programme was incorporated into daily work was appreciated, therefore seamlessness was valued.

It was a project—but because we had that much choice, we were able to then align our own, you know, our own development work around it as well, so that it didn't necessarily look like PLSLP. And in fact, I'm not sure if you—if you had gone into a school at the time and said PLSLP, the school wouldn't necessarily have known what you were talking about. But have you gone to a school and talked about the writing framework and the textless books, they would have. (Programme Team Member)

Relationships between people in key roles in the project were seen as key to success. At the beginning of PLSLP some of these relationships were new, and some were new aspects to existing relationships. Relationships between project members, external advisors and schools were also seen as key. Importantly, where relationships respected the mana of the people, based on Cook Islands values, aspects of the project were considered more successful. Where relationships were seen to undermine the mana of Cook Islands people, that aspect of the programme was considered to be less successful.

So that principals had a much greater focus on what was happening in the classroom, rather than, you know, doing administrative tasks in schools, ...and I don't think that was as successful. I really do think it was approached; I just don't think it ever really clicked. And I don't know why. I suspect principals may have felt that there wasn't—they weren't respected..., X's role, you know, out there in schools and supporting the day, whereas the leadership side was much more about the Auckland people. And so I think there was more pushback, just because it didn't have that same level of local engagement and ownership and principals were like, oh who the hell are you? (MoE Official)



Shared decision making and sharing expertise cemented the quality of these relationships. Over time, this seemed to add to the perception of shared ownership and direction.

We became really close and I was able to use my experience as bilingual..., the different writing frameworks that I've seen rolled out with Aotearoa. (School Leader)

I think one thing that really stood out for me about the project was the inclusion of the people and country. And also just a real acceptance of context, and the way that we communicate with each other, and the relationships that we have with each other. And so when you asked earlier, you asked we a part of the design of the project, and the initial design of the project. No, we weren't. But as we went along, I felt like our input was greatly valued. And, and that we were also a part of the design as it went along. (Programme Team Member)

Communication, co-planning and extended engagement were seen as enablers that could lead to decision making that was in the interests of Cook Island people.

It was just lots of communication and lots of together planning that was, was valuable, I think. (Programme Team Member)

Yes, that's exactly what I think was successful. It was the fact that we were. Yeah, no, it was the fact that we were constantly communicated with and also consulted with and that whatever we brought to the table in respect of our context and what we believe was best for our people with regards to literacy and leadership, strengthening or planning. (Programme Team Member)

Indigenous expertise – present and past

Having local people lead the programme, as well as acknowledgement of local expertise was valued for what it signified about the relative mana of the people within the programme. Expertise was considered as traditional expertise, relational expertise and current capability. Notable was a change in attitude toward knowing what is best for other people.

And it was always listened to with, with just great value, you know, and so, what, what I saw was that these people from with university backgrounds in the academics, they came in, and yes, with all of the expertise, but they also valued the expertise of the on-the-ground people, so it didn't feel like it was a top down approach, and people just kind of telling us what to do and what they think is best for us. (Programme Team Member)

And because Ana was too there, in the position. And the framework has been rolled out to the schools and also year four, five and six knows about the framework and are also, you know, doing it, so ... I'm positive, it's because of that. (MoE Official)

The complexity of the components in PLSLP was acknowledged, in particular the buy-in of school principal, the use of data and the complexity of language. In particular, the understanding that language underpins literacy was a necessary condition for success, and support for Cook Islands languages remains a prominent concern, unresolved by the programme. Contextual variation meant that leaders were key to decision making to support language and literacy.

So, there were lots of different parts that needed to come together to kind of make it work. But the leadership component was definitely one. The data analysis component was the other. And



the really understanding the contextual needs of the school was the other. And then that branches out into things like strategic resourcing, like the funding component. So, if you've got no plan, how are you going to be in a utilize the money that you have to meet the goals that you are wanting to achieve? (Programme Team Member)

So, I think if I was to summarize my experience with PLSLP, I would say that, in general, it was really about leadership, that a huge component was about supporting leadership in language. This understanding the place that language has for us in regards to learning. (Programme Team Member)

Pedagogy

Key to the success of the programme was the change for teachers in their teaching and learning strategies. That allowed teachers more agency over their practice. The tailoring of the project design to the needs of the country was reported to underpin the success for the Cook Islands.

They were new—some new strategies for teachers in schools, some new resources that teachers have been involved in developing, some capacity building within the Ministry... because each country, you know, did something different, each country that was on the program as a whole was allowed to say exactly what they wanted to do with it (Programme Team).

And so we did get to look at writing, which we knew was an area of concern for us, we didn't really have any frameworks around how-how we developed kids writing or anything—we have quite a lot for, for reading, but nothing for writing. So it was good, that that was positive, that we could focus it on an area that we needed. And we also actually managed to link in, because of that, because of using that model, we could link in our own work. (Official)

But you know, we've did a lot of talking about them composing their own story using their sounds. And I remember one day, she ran down to the office with the sample in hand and said, they wrote it all by themselves, you were right, they don't need to be copying. Once they've got their skills this sounds, they can start drafting your own sentence. ... So she went from writing a sentence on the board and the children copying it all beautifully to actually being a teacher of writing. That probably was our biggest, watching that change. (School Leader)

Expertise in Cook Islands languages and knowledge was also essential to pedagogical shift. The design-based nature of the programme meant that local expertise was essential to the development of the writing framework and classroom-based resources for teachers.

The idea for the philosophy of the framework, the writing framework to be based on the MoEnga, ... We consulted with some of our teachers. Some of our lead teachers, and they shared about what the process was for weaving a mat ... from the very start to the beginning, and we also had some Mamas from Mauke who contributed quite significantly to our understanding of what those processes are and it just fit perfectly with and the different stages of the writing framework. So that's how it came about. It actually has kind of an art of its own. (Programme Team Member)

So I helped do the framework and give examples of exemplars in Cook Islands but then it had to be handed over to a team of Cook Island speakers and teachers for them because it was a tool for Māori language. (School Leader)



The development of resources by local leaders and speakers meant that these resources were able to evolve. Local resources then provided an opportunity to embed the tools more deeply and to make links between the areas of literacy and language – oral languages, reading and writing.

But at the same time, what we also identify through the development of the writing framework was total Māori. And the link between reading, writing and speaking. So yeah, and now it's extended so much that we are now working on developing something around to our Māori branching off from what we learnt through the development of the writing tool. (Programme Team Member)

Design Based Research

The use of the Design Based Research methodology meant that permissions and ethical engagement were sought from participating schools. At first, one programme team member remembers, school leaders and teachers were suspicious of being involved in research, particularly as it might be seen to have more benefit for outsiders.

And I remember that first workshop so clearly, because there were lots of really, yeah, just critical eyes. You know, what are they? What are they going to tell us? What are they looking at? Yeah, so we were really seen as an outsider, even though it was being facilitated in country. (Programme Team Member)

Using the methodology, programme team members were required to continue to seek permission to engage, which was considered to have an ongoing relational effect. In turn, the respectful ways of engaging with schools engendered reciprocity and respectful response from the Cook Islands school leaders and teachers.

And I think it was just clear, that at any time, if anyone wasn't comfortable with being interviewed or observed that they were able to opt out at any time, however, all of our teachers and all of our principals participated, and really well (Programme Team Member)

I think that the facilitation of those meetings with teachers was really well managed. And we always sought consent before going into the schools. So participation was always voluntary. (Programme Team Member)

The engagement of teachers and leaders in the sense making processes was also valued, for the respect that it showed, as well as the importance of the direction that was taken.

It's part of the whole approach of the study, or of the of the program was this design-based research approach where this joint input and determining now know how it's designed (Programme Team)

Sense making had the added benefit of valuing the use of data for school level decision-making. Through engagement in understanding what was gathered, what stories these data told, and then what leaders and teachers wanted to do about it, capability with data was noticed to grow with time.

And I think that the approach to data and understanding how data can really inform our practice, was also a significant part of the project. That was one of our biggest learnings, I think, was managing data at a school level, and all the different roles that the different people have, and how that data tells us a story about what's happening with our kids, and also with our teachers (Programme Team).



And just the respect for our people, our people, our teachers, how they would make, and also just giving time to really soak in, what it is that we're trying to understand collectively. I think that there was a really nice, respectful approach to that (Programme Team).

Sustainability

The impacts of PLSLP beyond the life of the programme were considered to be impacts on the people and organisations involved in the programme. Practice change in schools was reportedly continuing and developing. Teachers' abilities to be creative was noticed and sustained.

So I think the most powerful thing for us now is that writing is taught really well here, there's a good understanding. In fact, I think we do better now with Māori writing than we do with Māori reading. ...Our teachers are confident. (School Leader)

They kind of allowed for like freedom of individual thought, (yeah) that's what I really like about textless books, is that everybody makes their own ending, and that includes the Secretary of Education, he had a completely different ending from everybody else when we were doing that together in a workshop. (Ministry of Education Official)

Well, I mean, writing was obviously already in the curriculum, but it's certainly becoming embedded in the system as a tool for developing writing, and as a tool for teacher assessment and identification of next steps and writing. (Ministry of Education Official)

An impact of PLSLP included moderation and was considered a practice of change that each teacher learnt and continued to use.

[moderation] it's not about them, but they can also learn from that in terms of improving their teaching in the classroom practice but it's also giving them that space where there are other people that critique that that piece of writing and teaching ... what I'm also saying in terms of the moderation is that the teachers are confident in putting a piece of work out to be critiqued. (Ministry of Education Official)

These impacts on the skills of the people were able to spread due to their new roles in the system.

I really enjoyed the project. It was well needed and for us then I also became a teacher of it because then we were short staff and I had to go in and I had to teach emergent Māori, which is up to my level. And so I got to test it. I got to test the actual tool. (School Leader)

Having tools for assessment, and then using assessment data to inform planning was a generalisable practice learned through participating in the programme.

And so there was definitely a shift in regards to giving the teachers more ownership of the assessment data that they facilitate, and collect and have in front of them about the students. So that shifted, and also just consideration of the other areas of learning for students like that, ... And so there was a shift into incorporating the other areas of the curriculum. (School Leader)

However, practice change was not universally continued. Leadership was considered essential to success, but variable in the outcomes of the programme.



... the support that the leader gives within the school, determines how well it's been facilitated in the, school, or how well it's been continued supported. And what I can say is that across all of the principals across all of the different teachers of your one, two and three, there are definitely variations in regard to how well they have taken on board the framework. (Project team member)

Frameworks and resources that were taken up by teachers and schools were considered to continue to have influence. Moreover, in some cases, expertise was used to extend and improve the developed resources.

We just knew that we wanted to keep it going. But we I suppose it was just the PLSLP provided the framework. Yeah. And they provided the beginning of the wordless books. ... and I've got an amazing staff of resource makers. (School Leader)

While the programme was able to incorporate writing in Cook Island Māori to some extent as a medium of instruction, there was ongoing concern regarding the need to actively teach Cook Islands Māori to children. The extension of the expertise was considered to be teaching of language as well as literacy in Cook Island Māori. Whereas children were taught to compose in their first language, there was less expertise supporting the learning of Māori language.

One programme team member referred to the difference between 'learning the language' and 'language for learning' making the point that understanding the place of language in schools is critically important.

And I think that was probably for me personally, the biggest eye opener in regards to what was possibly restricting our improvement in literacy. (Programme Team Member)

The ability to deliver training and workshops in Reo Māori was also considered essential for the uptake by teachers that leads to sustainability.

I know a couple of teachers were saying that okay, so they doing this in English and we're going to translate what they are saying to Māori and do it in the classrooms in Māori. So how would we know what we have done is correct? so delivering need some improvement there. ... this is all about language of instruction and delivering in the language. (Ministry of Education Official)

So what I'm saying here ...is that if only there's a project that has a Cook Islands person inside that can deliver the things in Cook Islands Māori, then we will know then that all teachers are on the same page. (Ministry of Education Official)

The sustainability of funding, and the lack of extension of the programme was considered a barrier to sustainability of PLSLP. Noted was the continued support for the design-based work in the other participating countries.

I think the management of the projects in general was excellent. It was really good. And I think the only question that I had towards the end was the levels of continued funding. Because I had heard that some of the other countries kind of branched out and they continued, you know, with projects that were born from PLSLP but for us, it just kind of stopped, you know? (Project Team Member)



Country Case Study: Solomon Islands

The word cloud below illustrates key themes from the Solomon Islands case study, including; data analysis, Tok Stori, MEHRD, Sustainability, Strength-based approach and EA Level.



Both the PLSLP and LEAP projects were implemented in the Solomon Islands context. However, due to budgetary constraints, the research team was unable to travel to Temotu for a deeper investigation into the TLS-PLSLP. However, phone-based Tok Stori were held with three Temotu-based participants, two of whom were also involved in LEAP. In due course, thematic analysis of the data gained during these constraining conditions revealed that the TLS-related data was easily absorbed within the rich mix of LEAP data and, thus, this case study is focussed on LEAP.

Design, components, and implementation

The study sought to identify aspects of the design, components and implementation of the LEAP project which contributed to the success of LEAP. In doing so it also gained a deeper understanding of how ‘success’ itself was conceptualised by stakeholders. The success of LEAP was conceived of in terms of the following:

- (i) *its contributions to students’ literacy development at different levels*; specifically, in improving students’ writing skills, engagement in their learning, motivation to participate in their learning activities, levels of confidence in speaking skills.
- (ii) *its impact on improved teaching*; specifically in some changes in teachers’ pedagogy such as planning lessons with specific objectives, identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses, and tailoring their teaching activities to meet students’ needs.



- (iii) *its effect on improving parental involvement and motivation to support their child's learning, their teachers' work, and the LEAP project itself and improving community and community leaders' engagement*; specifically there was a perceived lessening of the gap between home and school, enabling and stimulating parents to be more active participants in their children's learning and reporting associated increases in their children's engagement in literacy learning.
- (iv) *its focus on and successful mentoring at multiple levels by credible local mentors*; specifically, teachers supporting teachers and school mentors developing school leaders.
- (v) *its appropriateness to the local contexts*; specifically the fit-for-purpose approach in the form of the locally recognized and accepted practice of Tok Stori.

These successes are attributed by stakeholders to the impacts of multiple factors including the following key three categories: the relationships of all key stakeholders; the resources provided; and the localised approaches used.

LEAP's relationships

The case study found that well-informed relationships between all key stakeholders were one of the most significant factors contributing to the success of LEAP. These stakeholders included MEHRD, EAs, community, parents, mentors, school leaders, teachers and students. The active and appropriate engagement of these stakeholders exerted certain positive influences on the operation of the project, creating a professional community with the shared goal of enhancing students' academic learning and performance. Within this community the stakeholders collaborated in making meaning and actioning their vision. It ensured that everyone was actively involved in the project and were sufficiently supported as needed. While team members were diverse, their collaborative alignment was important:

There were diverse and different groups of people from different institutions yet, we helped to connect a pool of people of wisdom – people of different backgrounds coming together to help solve issues. (EA mentor)

...people with strong relationships to work together for a shared objective. (FFM mentor)

Through collective involvement, the project had the involvement of different groups of people, thereby reinforcing the relationships among stakeholders and helping to enhance the process of teaching and learning. (School mentor)

Further, the relationships and interactions between consortium partners and Solomon Islands partners were also felt to be important:

The interactions between the consortium partners and the local team were very important and rewarding. It was these groups and via their healthy relationships which helped to prepare and influence Solomon Islands mentors to implement the program. (EA mentor)

Clear and timely communication among people at different levels contributed to the efficient and effective running of the project, keeping people well-informed and updated on core objectives, key requirements, and



changed practices in the project. Participants drew attention to the importance of team communication, collaboration and being informed during project implementation:

There were regular staff meetings – on weekly basis – when teachers met to reflect and gave feedback on any progress or challenges they encountered in their teaching; all teachers were able to learn from each other. The improved and constant communication between the school leaders and teachers helped improved literacy in schools. (School mentor)

Project team and each group of people communicated well and frequently, having continuous meetings – sense-making meetings – modelling and mentoring. There was trust-building between each group locally. The LEAP environment made teachers and schools leaders to collaborate better, and for them to initiate discussions and conversations about how to better support student performance and student learning. (FFM mentor)

Everyone in the team spoke the same language and shared the same experiences, goals and targets. It was very important that all education stakeholders were aware of any initiatives or changes so that they could embrace the goals and aims and worked together towards where to reach next. (School mentor)

Mentoring relationships also formed a key approach and pivotal part of the success of LEAP's implementation. At the school level it was noted that:

Teachers appreciated that the school mentors not only provided teachers with useful advice but also gave them opportunities to share and exchange experiences with other teachers. (School leader)

Throughout the implementation, peer mentorship was actioned. This allowed for actual recommendations of change or improvements coming from the players on the ground. Hence, those who visited schools, saw the issues, reported back to the group and shared with all what to do in order to help. (FFM mentor)

Mentoring is very important to provide support and guide teachers, checking their results and asking them if they have encountered any problems that needed the mentors' support. (School mentor)

It was acknowledged, however, that the value of the mentoring was dependent on the mentors themselves being competent and sound in mentoring and on careful negotiation of existing roles in assigning mentoring relationships. Additionally, it was felt that the MEHRD policies on staffing prevented there being enough teacher-mentors to continue the project, or to help sustain the changes – an issue to be addressed to support ongoing success.

Some mentors needed to be better equipped and trained, having different knowledge and skills to support teachers sufficiently. For example, mentors needed knowledge and skills related to teacher management. (MEHRD official)

Some of the LEAP mentors were either not EA officers previously or held the role of Principal Education Officers (PEO) and during LEAP, these individuals were playing the role of mentors to EA CEOs. This situation caused degrading feelings for the CEOs. Ideally, LEAP mentors should be experts who know concepts of teaching and learning, understandings of the



curriculum framework, the teacher management system, the use of teacher's scheme of services, and know the legality of employment of people and how to manage human resources. (MEHRD official)

LEAP's resources

The availability and accessibility of various resources throughout the project made these important project achievements possible. The project was successful thanks to the considerable contributions of key players including experts, mentors, teachers and parents. Particularly, Solomon Islands experts with their credibility helped create trust in the community and with local people, thereby getting their buy-in to and involvement in the project.

Solomon Islands team members included groups of people who are smart, clever, and hard-working as literacy facilitators, mentors, or as strong practitioners. (Project staff)

The mentors who came from the local contexts showed their thorough understanding of local cultures and conditions, which helped the design of the project become relevant and appropriate to the local contexts. The teachers were cooperative, hard-working, and proactive. There were, however, still instances of being short-staffed at the EA level and as mentors to support teachers.

The financial resourcing was sufficient and accessible for the participants, and managing these provided good lessons for Solomon Islanders in managing project funds. Transparency in use of funds was highlighted:

The program delivery was efficient, and the availability of funds was on time. There should be thorough communication between school leaders and community and parents regarding the amount of funds allocated for materials, teaching and learning resources. (EA mentor)

There must be the provision of funds and an efficient process of distributing funds in order not to affect the training plans and constrain the sustaining of a program. (EA mentor)

If a similar program is continued, further resourcing of EAs in terms of financing, is needed.

Additionally, appreciation for the classroom resources developed and distributed during the project was widespread.

The teachers appreciated the informative and practical materials given them and their upskilling of effective teaching approaches. (School leader)

...without appropriate and sufficient resources being provided to teachers and students, the LEAP project could not have been successful at the classroom level. (Project staff)

As toolkits, the relevant and useful teaching and learning materials and resources developed and distributed in LEAP were effective and applicable in helping students engage in learning activities. However, it was noted that there were still insufficient resources and teaching materials in some schools and classrooms, a situation which had to be rectified by local teacher efforts in resource development.



LEAP's localised approaches

The use of Tok Stori was deemed to be a significant contributor to making LEAP successful in Solomon Islands, and is discussed further in relation to the DBR approach. Its success as a contributing factor was due to it being a communication form designed for Solomon Islands contexts and by Solomon Islanders.

In the DBR, we used Tok Stori. Tok Stori is part of people's lives. Tok Stori allowed school leaders, teachers and the communities to share openly and freely. (School mentor)

Tok Stori was so effectively used in LEAP. From this experience, our inclusion of Tok Stori approach in curriculum development, in making connections with communities and preparing the communities for new policies, approaches and knowledge is necessary for sustainability.

Furthermore, flexibility and adaptability in the implementation and entry points of the LEAP were also considered key to its success. Participants spoke of the importance of flexibility in recruiting the right people and in the sequencing of waves of change:

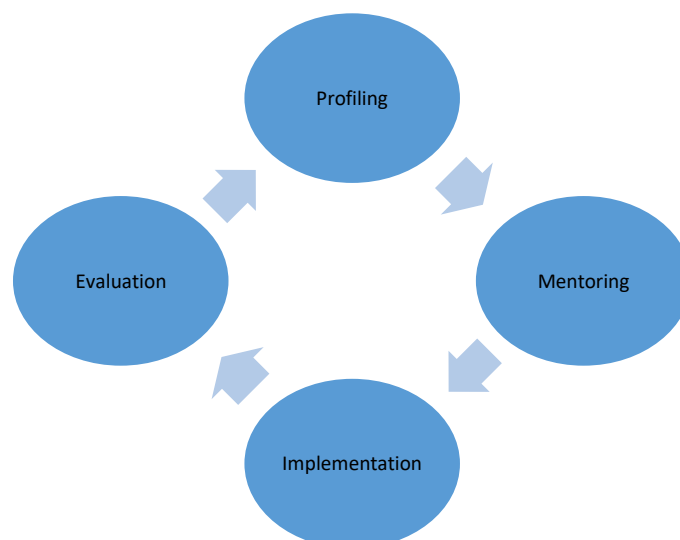
It was important to have flexibility when looking for appropriate expertise to work in the project. (Project staff)

In LEAP, the flexibility allowed for moving in ripples and in waves, simultaneously. At the community level, the FFM would connect with teachers and parents first, at the heart level, followed by mentors who would then come in and connect with the minds of people. This heart-connection happened throughout the entire program as opposed to just at the beginning. (FFM mentor)

There must be flexibility in the profiling; this is the first phase of the project and is designed to collect essential data about the background of the settings, which helps to address significant issues. (Project staff)

Project implementation was envisioned as a comprehensive and cyclical process as shown in the following Figure.

Figure 1: LEAP project implementation cycle





The comprehensive and cyclical process of implementing a contextually appropriate design has four specific components:

1) Profiling, Awareness, Planning

This is the first stage in which all relevant information related to the school-community contexts was collected and analysed. Understanding the conditions and features of the school community and other appropriate contexts was essential to officials and mentors understanding how best to support teachers and students.

How the project itself was designed in terms of making sure that the local conditions or the communities that the project was implemented in were taken into account. (Project staff)

Awareness was also necessary to raise the sensitivities of people about the significant objectives of the learning change agenda, and thereby enhance their engagement and contribution. Upon gaining better understandings of the contexts, actors were able to adaptively and co-creatively plan and design the needed activities for the project.

2) Mentoring, Training and Coaching

Provision of professional development training for teachers was a very important part of implementation. The mentors not only provided the teachers with useful advice but also gave them opportunities to share and exchange their experiences with other teachers – a necessary strategy given the inadequate numbers of mentors to support and work with teachers daily. The provision of mentoring for teachers was an essential component in continuing skills transfer skills upon project completion, however a challenge remains in relation to the time periods needed to embed this new knowledge into practice. The study noted that mentors too needed further equipping and training with different knowledge and skill sets in order to support teachers sufficiently.

The place of the FFM in the design as an effective team member, though not originally present, was highlighted as follows:

FFM brought credibility. The participation and involvement of respected Solomon Islanders and expert researchers in the project created a great credibility in the community and for the local people. (EA mentor)

The FFM Executive members made sure FFM was an effective team throughout LEAP. More so, senior FFM members treated all LEAP mentors fairly. FFM mentors were also quick to respond to any queries from all mentors. (FFM mentor)

3) Implementation & interactions

Effective interactions between actors and organizations, and at different levels, were essential in project implementation. Responding quickly to participant queries helped the smooth operation of activities. The interactions between project partners and the local teams for equipping mentors to implement the program were very important and rewarding. It must be noted though, that there have been mixed results in the nature and / or health of the connections between schools and their communities and that while schools may have conveyed messages to parents and communities, responses have varied. Thus, some school-community communication remains unclear and needs looking into further.

It was deemed important during project implementation for participants at all levels to work together collaboratively. At the school level, collaborative relationships and actions between mentors and teachers,



teachers and parents, community and schools were needed and called for and involvement of the EAs was essential.

By involving the EA officers in the LEAP program (visits, profiling and sense-making) this helped a lot so that officers could learn and implement or embed changes into their programs. (FFM mentor)

There was collaboration, cooperation and teamwork from the four groups of people including parents, teachers and school leaders, and school board members to support children's learning. (EA mentor)

The collaborations between consortium members and stakeholders together with effective communication among all stakeholders helped teachers and school leaders to achieve their goals. (MEHRD official)

The collaboration of team members were based on different strong relationships that they have built before and during the project. (Project staff)

As actors engaged with each other the critical need to enhance the engagement and involvement of all stakeholders in support of teachers' teaching and students' learning was noted. It was also agreed that, generally, support from and involvement of parents and the community was a key ingredient in effecting change activities and general project management and implementation. Gaining local community involvement using localised approaches with a common focus on student learning was vital.

In LEAP, student learning was centred. Student learning became the focus of parents, teachers and school board members' conversations. The parents and community members were engaging with teachers about the performance, learning and teaching of their children. Prior to LEAP, parental engagement in schooling was confined to building classrooms, fundraising and providing labour. Whereas in the LEAP experience, parents were emotionally connected to schooling. This was because they could understand what was going on in the classrooms. They could understand what the teachers were doing and what the students were doing and why they were doing these things. Such a parental and community engagement with schooling is new in Solomon Islands. (FFM mentor)

4) Management & Evaluation

Administratively, school leaders and teachers report to and require professional support from their EAs in Solomon Islands. The study highlighted the critical importance of ensuring EA awareness of project understandings, requirements and necessary skillsets, in order to ensure regular support for school leaders and teachers. Additionally, school boards need to be informed and upskilled so as to support leaders and teachers appropriately during project implementation. It was noted that beyond the EA, teachers also had needs to be met by management.

Teachers needed clear and regular communication and involvement from the Education Authority, regular support from the school board, and the thorough awareness by stakeholders of what teachers were doing in the LEAP project. (School leader)

Moreover, in terms of evaluation, the study noted that there were inadequate evaluations, and also that the project lacked a thorough reflection phase to allow for learnings to be provided comprehensively to all



participants and for EAs and school boards to participate more in supervising and communicating with school leaders and teachers.

Design Based Research

The research looked into what the LEAP experience revealed about DBR. Generally, teacher-leader respondents expressed support for the DBR approach and it was reported that individual teachers in the study have chosen to keep applying the approach in their teaching today. MEHRD officials also spoke positively about DBR, particularly in relation to the DBR approach being evidence-based, locally based and holistic in nature.

Evidence based

DBR was perceived as being based on research data and ongoing collection of evidence of practice, and making improvements based on these data. The DBR approach was observed to be built on actual data, obtained by real actors and providing ongoing evidence of practice and performance upon which improvements could be made. The DBR, when applied adaptively to different school settings, was believed to be nuanced and contextually relevant.

Locally based

DBR was experienced as a locally-based approach and therefore valuable for the community.

How the project itself was designed in terms of making sure that the local conditions or the communities that the project was implemented in were taken into account. (Project staff)

The use and accompaniment of Tok Stori with DBR was found to be most effective. Tok Stori provided a social and approachable space for engagement and formation of relationships with people in their settings, allowing people to express themselves freely using their own languages. As an approach, Tok Stori is familiar to and contextually relevant for Solomon Islanders as it is part of people's lives, thus allowing school leaders, teachers, and the communities to all share openly and freely.

Tok stori use was the appropriate means of communicating about the quantitative data, and the appropriate means for engaging parents qualitatively in the conversations about schooling. Without tok stori, you could not have the one-on-one parental or teacher engagement. (Project staff)

LEAP promoted interactions between people through the use of Tok Stori. In this way, the project promoted an integrated way of working and collaboration in order to improve the learning of children. LEAP encouraged regular communications and support. (MEHRD official)

Tok Stori is a familiar Solomon Islands medium of sharing ideas but its use in LEAP had shown it to be one of the best data collection tools in Solomon Islands. Tok Stori can take place anywhere. In the village or at a community level, when outsiders turn up with pen and paper, the people will feel intimidated, but Tok Stori does not have such an effect on village people. Instead, as Tok Stori can happen anywhere, people easily give information which is sincere and detailed. Sometimes the Tok Stori sessions can go on and on. It's up to you to choose which information you want. It is informal but very effective. (FFM mentor)



The use of Tok Stori method with BDR provided a friendly avenue through which people could express themselves freely. The FFM used approaches that were friendly to teachers and villagers; approaches which are place-based. (MEHRD official)

The tool of Tok Stori belongs to community people. This tool is with the people. People at a village level will continue to initiate and grow their own changes, in their own children's schooling because of their own Tok Stori. The power of Tok Stori as a medium and an approach is that it belongs to Solomon Islands people and in their contexts. Without Tok Stori use, DBR would not have worked as well in LEAP. (FFM mentor)

Project staff made two observations about DBR. First, that the iterative nature of the DBR was positive. Community and school leaders knew that project staff were coming back again repeatedly to their community and school, and confidence in this ongoing commitment kept villagers motivated and engaged. Secondly, DBR and Tok Stori were deemed as credible research methodology:

If we see that surveys and statistics are good measures of success then we should also recognize that these indigenous ways of gathering data are also be included in how we evaluate aid projects. (Project staff)

Holistic

When conducted thoroughly and responsively from the profiling to evaluation, the DBR approach is holistic. It has an iterative process and requires the involvement of a variety of stakeholders throughout the system. However, DBR can require much time and resources hence, in any continuation activities, actors will need to use only the DBR principles they wish to apply at a particular point in time. FFM member in particular appreciated the holistic nature of DBR.

LEAP started with profiling – finding the problem then creating how to address the problem. LEAP used a diagnosis approach to cure sickness. The diagnosis was not only of the children but for the school leaders, teachers, EAs, parents and the communities. Such a holistic approach was appropriate. (FFM mentor)

However, while there was general overall support for DBR, some considerations for future implementation were also raised. The respondents in this study noted that there was need for more research about the school settings (facility, teaching staff and their capacity, strengths, and weaknesses) before launching the project. As a suggestion for research, a MEHRD official proposed:

In the future, if DBR is used again, this should include undertaking research into power structures and how these influence good intentions as the gains of LEAP appeared more at the school level than at the EA level. (MEHRD official)

This needed to be coupled with more training for teachers to enable their full participation in the DBR. Similarly, it was felt that the involvement of *all* stakeholders, including parents, school leaders, community members, EAs, teachers and learners was needed in the DBR. It was noted that EAs in particular should be more involved because of their ongoing role in education in SI, visiting schools and responding to teacher enquiries. It was also noted that sufficient time was needed for DBR to be effectively implemented which, under project conditions, may not have been felt to be adequate.



The LEAP project time was too short. While effective, the DBR 2-year period of the project was not enough to see the whole process from the beginning to the final results and to really know how effective it is. (EA mentor)

Time was too short for the DBR. This was particularly so because of Tok Stori. In a Solomon Islands setting, Tok Stori does not have a time limit. Tok Stori is not a limited, confined and bounded process. Tok Stori is not limited to the project duration. In Tok Stori, changes happen and happen naturally through to stori process and in their own time durations. (FFM mentor)

Sustainability

The Solomon Islands case study emphasised that sustainability is derived from the hearts of the people. The diagram below depicts six important aspects of project sustainability, at the heart of which are people. In other words, at the core of sustainability considerations is the people – the learners, teachers, parents and Solomon Islands communities.

Figure 2: People-related drivers of sustainability in Solomon Islands



Vision

Sustainability relates to and requires a clear vision which is focused on people, touching people's hearts, and connecting people with their passions in order for people to make changes for the betterment of their own education.

Solomon Islanders have clear visions for their educational futures. The LEAP has helped to sharpen such visions, thereby assuring sustainability.

Solomon Islanders had committed to their different visions and aspirations at different levels during LEAP. Continuing to commit to these visions and processes assures sustainability.



In LEAP, all stakeholders had worked together building bridges, going out with the same issues to achieve an imprint in life and to gain experiences, skills, knowledge, and values. Working collaboratively in the future, based on successful experienced pasts, is sustainability.

The FFM leadership vision to raise a new generation of Solomon Islands leaders and to improve the leadership capacities of schools and the education system, is sustainability.

Recognition

To sustain vision, the needed human resources (people) are the ones who will contribute to desired changes, especially key players such as teachers and mentors. Thus, they need to be acknowledged and recognised and provided with mental and physical support, financial benefits, and professional development opportunities.

Improve the benefits for teachers, including financial support and recognition for their initiative-taking and innovation. (School teacher)

For sustainability to be ensured, the EA must recognise the involvement of key mentor participants as permanent and long-term staff rather than contracted or temporary. As well, in selecting appropriate staff for further project participation, the EA must identify the hard-working teachers who became school-based mentors in their schools. It is these key staff who must be supported to obtain further training. (EA mentor)

Transitioning as intentional socialization and collaboration

Throughout a project, an intentional socialization of key people is needed to embed within people the character, competencies and processes needed for leading change. Transitioning people and an embedding process must be incorporated from the beginning of a project as integral parts of the design. Transitioning involves mentoring, clear and thorough communication and collaboration, relationship building and building capacities for sustaining goodness.

MEHRD should liaise with SINU, so that when the teacher trainees are posted out for teaching, they already know what to do. There is a need to identify all teachers/school leaders involved in the LEAP program and allow them to remain in the same school for at least 3 years after the program ends. (EA mentor)

Continuing a collaborative culture and ways of working is essential for project sustainability. At the school level, peer mentoring by teachers and their school leaders are examples of continuing collaboration. At the EA level, the provision of support by EA officers to school leaders and regular communication with school leaders and MEHRD are also valuable practices. Thus, a systems wide focus on enhancing and facilitating collaboration among all stakeholders is essential for sustaining the successes of a change project like LEAP.

All stakeholders (EA, parents, teachers, school leaders) need to collaborate and at multiple levels with EA, among schools, between school leaders and teachers and among teachers etc. (School leader)

To ensure firmer sustainability, there is a need to build strong teams of local people to participate and support the project.

The team included strong people sharing the same purposes and a desire to conduct changes for positive educational outcomes. (Project staff)



LEAP participants who have gained knowledge, skills, and experience in the project are confident to continue the programmes. School leaders and teachers are committed to implementing the approaches in class and with parents. In other words, all education stakeholders who have understood and continue to desire to make things work, will support the change process. (School mentor)

In addition to EAs and school collaboration, socialisation of parents into a community to support their children was considered very important.

Having parental involvement in their children's learning was one of the contributing factors to LEAP success; and continuing this will sustain the successes experienced during the project. (School teacher)

When parents are around the classroom and they see students are learning, and they see the performance results of students are improving, they get excited as parents. So, engaging parents as people who are part of the teaching and learning of their children has everything to do with sustainability at the school level.

To support sustainability at the school level, schools must continue with their parent-teacher partnerships. Parents have the right to know and understand how and what their children learn in class. At the moment, the children's achievements are written on paper as a class or school report but not all parents can read and understand what is mentioned in the paper reports. School must therefore engage parents adaptively according to their needs and settings. (School mentor)

Leadership

The study showed an understanding of leadership which embraces both an individual leader as well as the group's leadership capacity. Understood this way, when the leadership capacities of leaders, the team, the organization and communities are cared for and improved, this ensures and sustains the leadership capacities of all, adaptively and creatively. Schools and or communities are therefore able to sustain their own enhancement of leadership.

A clear and effective Solomon Islands leadership for Solomon Islands participants to lead the programs effectively, is needed for sustainability.

An important part of this kind of leadership is its commitment to mentoring.

A commitment to and actioning a spirit of mentoring and the spirit of working together; these are expressions of sustainability.

Professional Development

Ongoing professional development which is based on the real needs of teachers, school leaders and others, is vital to sustainability. The provision of appropriate and sufficient opportunities for professional development for teachers and leaders by a school, EA or MEHRD, sustains the improved capacities developed during the project. Responses also indicated that there is an openness to the form this ongoing professional development may take:

To sustain LEAP, include the program into the teacher education programmes at the Solomon Islands National University. (School leader)



Officers know and are able, but they need to understand leadership. At the school and EA levels, acceptance of new knowledge and leadership were higher than at the MEHRD level. So at the senior MEHRD level, appropriate PD on leadership is needed to sustain the learnings from LEAP. At an EA level, there is also need for leadership PD. The openness to grow and learn is not quite there yet. Some resistances are there as in not being open to learn from other Solomon Islanders.





Country Case Study: Tonga

The Tonga case study presents findings from Talanoa with participants who were part of the PLSLP (locally renamed the Literacy and Leadership Initiative (LALI)) project and / or the TESA project. The participants also included a few project members who had been involved in all three interventions – PLSLP, LEAP and TESA.

The word cloud below highlights some of the key concepts from the case study, including: Implementation, Components, Literacy, Design-based Research, Numeracy, Sustainability and adaptive management approach.



Design, Components and Implementation

The design of the PLSLP (LALI) and the TESA followed key principles that contributed to enabling conditions for the implementation of the two activities. These key design principles became lived experiences for the project teams. The findings from the Tonga data expressed various interpretations and experiences for participants as they ‘lived’ through these two projects and observed what worked and what did not.

Strengths Based Approach

A key to the success of the design of the PLSLP and the TESA in the Tonga case study context was the strengths-based approach to the work. This was reflected in the time taken to understand the context through the environmental scan and the profiling exercise. At the inception phase, activities such as desk-based work, time for establishing relationships, visits to schools, conversations with key stakeholders, were all designed to gain a deeper understanding of the context. In the PLSLP, most of the team from the UoA were new to Tonga and to the Pacific. The time taken during the inception phase helped in introducing the external team to the context and thereby enabling them to recognize that there are existing strengths and opportunities in Tonga.



I mean you go into a country and yes there could be some problems [and] there are also local solutions to those problems...in most cases they already work, but due to lack of resources, so it fails. But it doesn't mean that there's nothing there. So, you don't start from the point of there's nothing there because there is something there. (Project staff).

A strength-based approach encouraged a deeper understanding of the context and thereby connected the project to larger in-country education plans.

We adopted the Faiako ma'a Tonga concept and made sure that it was embedded in how we implemented the project. So yes, there is design based research, but we also see the influence of Faiako ma'a Tonga and there is a synergy between those two concepts. And that is what I really like about TESA because Faiako ma'a Tonga is something that's already familiar with teachers in having that concept...and then having that concept in design based research combining it with that I think that is powerful. (Project staff)

The use of a strengths-based approach was recognized by the participants as a key step towards the success of the projects. The initial Talatalanoa (conversation) sessions that were held before the project started helped set the tone for the way teachers, school leaders and parents were going to be engaged in the project.

I believed that one of the positive aspect of this project was that the team came and talatalanoa with our teachers, the school principals and they also Talatalanoa with the PTA. The way I saw it, this Talatalanoa helped the parents also appreciate the intentions of the LALI. (School principal)

Adaptive approach and design

The Tonga data showed how both TESA and PLSLP were adapted to suit the needs and the context. In order to facilitate a project designed around DBR, it was necessary to take a more adaptive approach to the design as well as to the management of the project.

It became clear from the data that the adaptive approach to design was necessary to allow the context to inform the 'intervention'. Through an adaptive approach, Tongans from USP as well as from the Ministry were involved in the design and implementation of the projects. Further to this, the involvement of the Ministry of Education in the governance of the TESA was also important in ensuring that the project could respond quicker to the challenges faced during implementation.

I think what sort of contributed to the success, I guess is how the project itself was designed in terms of making sure that the local conditions or the communities that these projects will be implemented were taken into account...I think that is very important taking into consideration the input of people...who understands the community better. (Project staff)

With the involvement of Tongans in the design and management of the projects, there is greater support available on the ground to when it was necessary to adapt the design and the implementation. The need to have an adaptive approach to managing TESA became even more obvious when the Tongan government closed the borders in March 2020, effectively altering the role of international TAs in the on-going work of TESA. The on-going global pandemic and the travel restrictions has encouraged the Tonga based TESA team to become more self-reliant and adaptive to the changing situation. Since the closure of the borders, there has only been one NZ based TA supporting (via virtual platforms) the TESA Numeracy team.



TESA, there were also changes in government. Changes in who is sitting where and that could also impact on the project. Then the project itself needs to be resilient depending on what's happening with the country and so I think, the nature of it having inputs from local champions that is very important. Being resilient is very important especially now, with TESA for instance we had to change a number of things because of COVID. (Project staff)

Fit for purpose team

The Tonga data also showed that a key component to an adaptive approach to design and implementation was a fit for purpose team. The Tonga data highlighted that a fit for purpose team needed to have the technical expertise, the experience but also the relational skills. The data also emphasized the 'mana' (good name, character, authority and respected reputation) that was brought to the team by the team leaders. The mana that the team leaders carried in the Tongan context, added to the credibility of the projects. This mana was recognized easily in Tonga and allowed the project teams to gain 'access' to schools and to the communities.

It was led by Tongans, and it was modelled by well-respected Tongans. So, who else is best to lead a project like that, but someone who is well respected in education, and I think you know, [she] just leading that project championing that – also influenced the teachers themselves... I thought it was intentional bringing her in, because it also raised the project to another level of standard...It's modelling what professionalism should look like and it's getting the teachers to work towards the standards, where literacy should be at. (Participant)

The quality of the New Zealand team was recognized by the teachers and the Ministry and thereby reflected in how they accepted the New Zealand team to their schools and to their communities. This came about partly due to the approach taken by the Tongan teams to introduce the New Zealand team, and also with the New Zealand teams' own respect for the context and the people.

That was the second most important part of this project, was that there were experts from New Zealand who visited our schools, came into our classrooms, observed our teaching and also the resources that were available in our classrooms. From that visit they designed resources for us. (School principal)

Relationships

The Tonga data highlighted the critical role that 'relationships' held over the implementation of the two projects. It was clear from the data gathered that the implementation of the PLSLP and the TESA required a relatively large team, pulled from different organizations (UoA, USP and Ministry of Education) as well as from different socio-cultural contexts (New Zealand and Tonga). The relationships were complex yet at the same time, the people who worked together in these projects brought their values to the project and made it work, regardless of the challenges.

One of the key features of the PLSLP was the time given for team building. This proved to be a critical first step in setting up the PLSLP team.

What worked well in PLSLP is that we invested quite a bit of time upfront in building that relationship between UoA, USP and MFAT, actually it was quite a close relationship and that set up things up quite well. And the delivery was more straight forward. (Project staff)



There were pre-existing relationships with shared history and strong experience of working in the region – these again helped set the scene for the team. These relationships enabled a more organic approach to working with people, supporting a strong collaborative team that were flexible and therefore allowed deep learning for team members. There was a real sense of mutual respect and collaboration amongst the team members. Within the PLSLP team and for the LALI team in particular there was a strong sense of caring for one another on a personal level.

I think it has been vital, the relationality between all parties, both those that are coming together as a consortium, as well as those that will deliver the work. And I think that's been some of the successes as we've gone through different iterations to actually introduce new expertise and to allow that to kind of relationship to take shape and form as well. (Project staff)

Furthermore, the data spoke to the relationship between the technical team and the schools and, in particular, the relationship with the children. Under the PLSLP, there were opportunities for the technical team to visit the schools and spend time in these schools supporting the teachers. These school visits allowed the technical team to gain insight into Tongan classrooms.

I said to the teacher, I think we need to reorganize your classroom. So, we reorganized the classroom into a U-shaped desk. And when I came back, I sent some money to the principal, to buy a roll of linoleum, to put on the floor of the classroom so that the kids could sit with the teacher on the floor, and start telling stories, reading to them and sharing the books. (Project staff)

Classroom based intervention

The Tonga data showed the links between the PLSLP LALI and also the TESA. Although there was a break between projects, the approach and the resources were clearly linked.

The PLSLP LALI had a strong focus on literacy and, in particular, focusing on Read and Retell. Towards the completion of the PLSLP LALI there were requests for additional support in Writing. When TESA began the team used the same profiling data from the PLSLP LALI to design the Professional Development cycles. At present, the TESA Literacy work has expanded to include Writing and Oracy support for teachers. As part of the literacy development, assessment tools have been developed which continue to be used in the classrooms. The data revealed that these literacy tools have been taken further by teachers and adapted for their own purpose.

One of the most important aspects of the LALI was that we used the Read and Retell rubric to gain a deeper understanding of our children's literacy level. With the beginning of year and end of year assessment we were able to have a baseline and set some literacy goals. It was then up to us, as school principals, to monitor and track the students' progress. (School principal)

Further to this, the Māfana book series that was developed under the PLSLP LALI was also used in the TESA project for supporting literacy development. The Māfana series that included textless books, big books, bilingual books were developed in Tonga by Tongan writers and artists, reflecting the Tongan worldview and environment. The resources encouraged new approaches to teaching and encouraged student participation. These were relevant resources that encouraged children to speak, to write, to be creative and to be imaginative and explore new stories. The textless books have been a great success in the schools.

So I remember talking to a lot of teachers, the resources were very effective, given that it was in Tongan and in English and I've seen it in different classrooms, I've seen it in Vava'u. It was



a good example...just seeing the kids light up...it gave that opportunity for children to interpret stories for themselves. (former NZHC officer)

The TESA also continued with the support of school leaders. Through TESA, the group extended the school leadership rubric from the PLSLP LALI and added relevant concepts from the Faiako ma'a Tonga framework and indicators from the Ministry's Minimum Service Standards. The work on the school leadership component for the TESA, saw a consolidation of the learnings from PLSLP LALI and also embedding the learnings into the Ministry's PD Unit. The TESA leadership work became further embedded into the PD Unit's work, by supporting the PD Unit's Nofo program (School Visits) with the school leadership resources developed under the TESA program. In essence, the TESA Leadership component provided additional tools for the PD Unit to use during their Nofo program. Through work with the TESA Leadership, the PD Unit were also further encouraged to use Talanoa as a way to reflect and to mentor teachers during the Nofo program. Recently, the Ministry's PD Unit is using learnings from the TESA to design an induction program for new school leaders with support from EQAP.

Additional resources developed during TESA included e-resources that are available from the TESA website and other TESA social media platforms. The e-resources were created to be relevant and appropriate for the children and to ensure that they can be shared with the teachers from the most far northern islands of Tonga – the Niua islands.

A new component in TESA is the support for Numeracy. The activity-based support from the Numeracy group has been very well received by the teachers and the Field Officers.

That is what the Ministry has been working towards, to have more activity based and student centered activities. That is what is being done by TESA, and I am very pleased. I would say that, is one of the strengths of the Numeracy program. Teachers are very pleased with the classroom-based activities. (MET Education officer)

However, there has also been evident questioning of the resources being used to create classroom activities in Numeracy. This has included questions around the level of difficulty of the activities and use of imported materials for creating teaching resources.

There has been evidence of co-design between the Field Officers and the TESA team, and emerging improvements in students' achievements in Mathematics.

We co-designed the resources and even the workshops, we agreed on the content and how we are going to deliver. There is an opportunity for us to feako'aki – to learn from one another and by that we build our relationships with the Field Officers and with the teachers. We work very hard to gain the trust of the teachers. (Project Officer)

Through TESA the connection between the project and the TIOE was further strengthened with professional development sessions for the TIOE lecturers and the involvement of one TIOE senior lecturer in the Numeracy team. The TIOE had also requested for the TESA team to support them in reviewing their course for Literacy and Numeracy based on the work of TESA with the primary schools.



Design Based Research

Principles of DBR

While the PLSLP – LALI used the full DBR approach with several rounds of profiling and sense making, the TESA had a more focused approach to using DBR. The TESA used the results from the PLSLP-LALI DBR to begin the work on literacy. The TESA Numeracy component however, conducted an initial baseline profiling of schools on ‘Eua and followed by sense making. There are plans to hold further profiling later in the last year of TESA. What we learn from the data and from TESA is that a full DBR may not be affordable but that the principles of DBR can be applied. The data also showed how the PD Unit within the Ministry has taken some principles of the DBR and applied them to gathering baseline data on school leaders. The PD Unit has also used the baseline data to inform on their Nofo – school visits. The data showed evidence of different teams taking the principles of the DBR and applying them at school level.

One of the key lessons I have learned from LALI was the idea of setting a baseline at the beginning of the year, and tracking my students’ progress during the year. I have also put in place a mid- year assessment to again see the students’ progress before our final end of year assessment. I have learned as a school leader that it is my job to ensure my students are learning. (School principal)

The data showed a strong support for the use of the DBR and its application at different levels of the system.

I think that's the nice thing about design-based research, it's not as strict or structured, and it's much more about the practice of doing education than many other methodologies are. (Project staff)

While generally there was strong support for the use of the DBR, the understanding of the DBR and its purpose varied amongst the team members. Different team members were drawn to different aspects of the DBR – for example, the Field Officers were attracted to the use of a baseline instrument and using the sense making to co-design ongoing PD sessions.

The use of the *Learning Schools* model to understand what is going on in the classroom, what teachers are teaching, and what students are learning was also used to understand the relationships that occur in schools and communities and what might need to be improved. At the second level of design, it suggests how to support teachers, including appropriate resources and professional development. The overall focus of applying the principles of the DBR was on improving educational outcomes and these outcomes are connected to the context.

DBR gave us a baseline; this is where we’re at. We went back to the teachers we told them they gave us some feedback we then designed and co designed an approach that we hypothesized would move and shift and ultimately the outcomes came. (Project staff)

Cost of DBR

There is a high cost when the DBR is implemented, as there are additional people with specialized skills required to carry out a full DBR. For PLSLP, the profiling, sense making and data analysing including the use of Hierarchical Linear modelling were mostly carried out with guidance from the international TAs. This included the statistical analysis that was carried out outside of Tonga. The additional resources required to carry out full DBR make it costly. Further to this, the use of the DBR requires several years in order to track the results over 2-3 years, so that is also costly.



The data from Tonga showed that, at a classroom level, the teacher should be able to see shifts in children's learning outcomes from one term to another and that is by keeping running records. However, for sustained change in practice, as in building capacity, the data again revealed that there needs to be more time to embed the practices in the classroom and in the school. Building capacity is linked to relationships and if there are existing relationships and that they are strong, the capacity-building can take hold earlier and faster. But if there are no pre-existing relationships or only very weak connections to the schools and with the field officers, then there needs to be dedicated time given to establishing and building those relationships.

The PLSLP used the DBR approach through several data collection points and with the data collected the team was able to show change in practice, and to create projections. PLSLP was a four-year project but could have been expanded to at least 5 years or more.

Use of data to design cycles of interventions

Recognized as one of the most powerful components of the DBR, it allows teachers, school leaders, and field officers to see their own data and collectively make sense of the data collected. Through the sense making exercise, teachers are encouraged to collectively problem solve.

The cycles of intervention were really important because it meant that I didn't make it up over here outside the country but we made it here and then we were going to continuously run those cycles but they would be modified or amplified or changed to ensure that what we learned each time was actually being delivered each time. (Project staff)

But realistically a time frame for PLSLP I think it should've been extended and financed for at least five years if not more because I don't know how you could possibly do all that you want to do in such an approach in such a short amount of time. (Project Officer)

The design of the workshops followed from the data received and sense-making exercise, focusing the PLD on specific skills required at the time. Through the reiterative process, one can observe changes fairly quickly, as team members are assisting teachers as they make progress. There's an ongoing, re-iterative process of profiling, sense making and co-design of professional development sessions.

What DBR also does is it allows you to do multiple points of iteration. So we did a baseline profiling then we did an end of year profiling and then we did it all again and we kept the cycle, again that's the strength of design based research it doesn't stop at the first point or the second point of data collection and its evidence based. So it's not just us thinking we made a difference but we had real measurable student achievement, student voice, teacher voice, teacher observation data that told us either that we were doing a good or we were not doing a very good job. (Project staff)

Sustainability

Ministry of Education

At a leadership level, harnessing the support of the Ministers and CEOs of Education for the project have been inconsistent. There has been, in general, a broad involvement from the CEO and the DCEOs for the TESA project. A real challenge for the project has arisen from the frequent changes of Minister and the CEO. With frequent changes to the leadership of the Ministry there have also been changes to key policies, which have had an impact on teaching in the class – and in particular changes to the language policy for Tonga.



The culture of the Ministry of Education and the mind-set of the leadership as well as staff of the Ministry in relation to ‘projects’ have also presented challenges to embedding PLSLP approaches. However, with the recent set up of the PD Unit in the Ministry there has been a clearer unit within the Ministry that TESA can be supporting. The TESA team continues to work with the Field Officers for the Literacy and Numeracy component while the TESA Leadership team are working with the PD Unit.

The PLSLP, and increasingly more so under TESA, showed deliberate efforts to improve the involvement of Ministry staff in the co-design of activities and in the co-delivery of the workshops. Under PLSLP, there were 3 core MET officers involved in the delivery of the workshops across the 15 LALI schools. Under TESA the same 3 MET officers were again involved with additional 31 MET officers, Staff from the Teachers training college and the PD Unit. In several instances, two school principals who were part of the LALI program were co-delivering the Leadership training components of the TESA. These two school principals have continued to be leading examples of good principalship in Tonga. One of the principals is currently on a Ministry scholarship and studying towards his degree while still leading his school. After LALI, he was promoted to a middle school and has continued to demonstrate improvements in his new school, harnessing the support of his communities. The other school principal has won several recognitions as having the gold standard for a primary school.

You know there’s certainly evidence of some of the approaches being kind of embedded at a school level and just the ways of working that teachers and school leaders are using, I mean in TESA, it is all about embedding the ways of working used in the PLSLP within the system in Tonga and that is happening. (Project staff)

Under PLSLP, there was limited involvement from the senior management team of the Ministry, but under TESA, there are now two Deputy CEOs who are directly involved in the detailed planning and delivery of the TESA activities. Additional to that is that the TESA governance structure is chaired by the CEO, with members of the committee including two Deputy CEOs, the Dean of the TIOE, and the Head of the PD Unit.

The ‘capacity’ of the Ministry is often pre-judged based on many assumptions about what the Ministry is capable of doing and cannot do. One of these assumptions is the capacity of the Field Officers to learn from projects as part of their capacity building. However, when we consider the Ministry’s practice of re-allocating Field Officers around departments of the Ministry and from one island province to another on an annual basis, it is quite challenging then for a Field Officer to stay connected to a single project.

It is quite a bit of work to work with them and of course, the Ministry has some structures and processes internally, that does not always support, you know, when they keep moving field officers every year, we start working with this group, then they get moved to another unit. So we have to start working all over again with another group. (Project staff)

This perception was also shared by those who are within the Ministry:

Your side is ready with your team, but I am thinking that there should have been an agreement – that the people that come from the Ministry should be able to stay within their existing posts until the project is completed. And that these officers are able to share the knowledge learned from the project with the teachers. And that the Ministry will bring to the project, people who are not yet near retirement. The reason for sharing the learning with them is so that they help the children. (TIOE lecturer)

The Tonga data suggests that there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of capacity and capability within a Ministry, including Ministry officials’ perceptions of their own capability and how the Ministry as an



organisation perceives its own organisational capacity. The ‘issue’ of capacity building and recognition of existing capability within Ministries of education and national education systems remains an area that needs further research and critical interrogation of perceptions, assumptions and linkages to a defined educational system.

Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE)

The Tonga data also showed the efforts made under TESA to strengthen the TIOE. The support for the TIOE under TESA is part of efforts to embed the learnings from PLSLP-LALI and also TESA. The effort to embed learnings from the project has seen more offering of professional development workshops for lecturers from the TIOE. Further to this, the TESA team for Numeracy includes the Principal of the TIOE, who is also the Head of the Mathematics Department.

An added feature of the work with TIOE, has been in one of the PD cycles, we had the Field Officers together with the TIOE lecturers – it was wonderful to have them together. This has never been done before. If you are doing things differently, then maybe it is time that they are training together. (Project Officer)

The TIOE have also made several requests, through the TESA Management committee, for additional support from the TESA team to review the Literacy and Numeracy courses at the TIOE and also to develop several teaching resources for Mathematics. These additional requests could indicate a need for more support for relevant professional development and relevant teaching resources in Mathematics.

Resources produced for learning

The Māfana series developed and produced under the PLSLP continues to be used under the TESA. There have been reports of how these resources have encouraged teachers to change some of their approaches to teaching literacy.

Like the wordless books that we have used, I had observed that the children would write as many as 20 plus different stories from the same textless book. The children would write these stories based on their own understanding of the textless book. We can then see how creative the children are when given the right tools. (Teacher)

There are also Numeracy resources being planned for development later this year and those will also be available for teachers in Tonga. There are other requests from teachers and field officers for various resources to be developed during TESA – and these have included a TESA resource book, Tonga Mathematics Dictionary, Practical Mathematics resources for students and the review of the TIOE courses in Literacy and Numeracy. There are also requests for the TESA team to work in collaboration with TIOE, with teachers, radio broadcasters, curriculum writers, primary and MET PD Units to develop numeracy resources including a Tongan Dictionary for Mathematics.

Professional Development – Literacy, Numeracy, Leadership and more

The data recognized that a key part of sustainability is the transferability of the skills to the Field Officers, the teachers and the school leaders. There was further evidence to suggest that field officers and teachers are more open to using all available opportunities for PD and that they are not only fixed on one approach to teaching (depending on which project they are working with). What was also evident from the data is that teachers should be loyal to the children, rather than to any one method promoted by any one project. The data also suggest that



for teachers and Field Officers to be open to learning new skills, they need to be *loto lahi and loto'aki* – courageous and willing.

For TESA to make sure that teachers have the courage and are willing to take on the new learnings and try it out in the classrooms. And that the Field officers try to stay true to what they have learned, otherwise they will revert back to being teacher centered. (MET Education officer)

There seems to be some deep understanding about how the teachers' willingness and courage are linked to their ability and willingness to learn something new and add to their current capability.

The data also revealed that the project gave a lot of opportunities for people to grow in their roles and to use different methods to advance their role. The Tonga data also revealed future skills that can be included in ongoing professional development.

I think capability building for sustainability around data is going to be really important in the region. (Project Staff).

Role of Implementing Agency

The capacity of the two implementing agencies, USP and University of Auckland, to work within a single context and the scope and depth of the work given, and to also work across multiple countries, encourages opportunities for regional learning.

A lot of the learning from LALI has flowed into TESA including literacy resources, ...having stronger local leadership, and the design [of TESA] is much more connected into the Tongan frameworks for teacher development. TESA is almost entirely locally led really. (Project Staff, UniServices)

The in-country presence of IoE in Tonga helped TESA to continue during the pandemic and with the on-going closure of the Tongan borders. Even though TESA met some set-backs in 2020, these set-backs were due to decisions from the Ministry rather than the availability of the TESA team to continue working.

There are of course many advantages to having the project team in-country, as they get involved in the management and contribute their knowledge of the context to the design and to the iterative process of co-design. The presence of USP in Tonga for the PLSLP and the TESA provides the organizational support required for managing the projects in Tonga.

From the data, what is most clear is the perspective of the Ministry and the national teacher education institution when the project team from TESA are in the country – i.e., all the time. This means that the stakeholders have easy access to the TESA team and this helps in exploring additional requests (from USP) and continue to deepen the relationship between the Ministry and the USP.

I am happy if the PD unit is given the opportunity to continue the work of TESA. The idea that the TESA team are around and that we can call on them again in the future for support, is reassuring. (MET Officer)



Design for sustainable education development

The data revealed that ‘sustainability’ is not an afterthought, but a principle that needs to be part of the design. Part of that design for sustainable education development is connecting the project to the larger agenda of the country and the Ministry of Education – it is important that the project and those who implement the project see the connections to the bigger vision. Part of this connection also includes a whole education sector approach to connecting all projects which contribute to the same vision; to avoid duplication and to work towards improved national coordination. As is so often the case, project funds are only temporary, therefore the project is often disconnected from their real work and real lives, and the project becomes less of an opportunity and more of a perceived hindrance.

It was unfortunate that this other project did not have people on the ground that we could work with closely over a longer time frame. As they were based outside of Tonga, often when they flew into the country, we were busy with other tasks and did not always have the time to work with them. It was a missed opportunity for learning. (MET Education officer)

A key consideration in any project is the funding and nature of the contracts. Over the years, the consortium has seen shifts in how contracts are managed and, consequently, how contracts influence the nature of the partnership and how the project is delivered.

I guess one of the successes is that you see MFAT changing the way that they contract, where they're not expecting the design to be done in isolation of the implementation. And so these are a clear design phase and a period that is allowed in a contract before it's kind of expected that all the detailed budgets and milestones – achievable deliverables are set when you're submitting your response. So, I would say that is one of the outcomes. But it's also good to know that it is a challenge when you are trying to respond to a tender; often it is the budgeting and the pricing. And no one really knows how much things are going to cost without the details. So, one of the good outcomes is that you don't make false promises about how much you're going to spend and on what, before you know what it is that would best benefit from that spend. (Management staff)

The Tonga data also revealed how the methodology and approach used by the consortium, as in the DBR, can help in prioritizing areas of need and thereby support a more targeted approach to resourcing the project.

And the budget is a limitation, so it does kind of restrain the resources, and so what it means that the budget in a way it guides the prioritization, but it's not the delivery... and that I think is a big shift, to not to say, well, I'm the provider, I've got the money, I have to deliver this because it's in my contract, it's being able to have that discussion, that we've got limited resource, so we can't do everything that you say is a priority. And that's one of the things DBR did in PLSLP that helped them pick one top priority that they would put resources into. (Management staff)

However, there are challenges identified from the data, in relation to funding models and managing contracts. The key issues relate to the time frame for a project and also the reporting requirements.

In an ideal world, [if] it was possible to enter into a partnership with a country for a period of 10 years to say you're going to improve outcomes for kids, and then negotiate what it's going to take within the country to do that, would we end up in a different space to what we do with these three programs? So, lots of questions to ask about how contracts are shaped in time and form and what are the constraints and the benefits that result from that. (former MFAT officer)



'I thought this is kind of going back to perhaps influencing how funders might approach work in the Pacific. Yeah, then I think it really is just understanding how diverse the Pacific is, and often, that's one of the shortcomings, is the project timeframes are often not Pacific centric. (Management staff)

On the other hand, when the PD Unit was set up by the MET during the implementation of the TESA, it became an opportunity to connect the TESA to an organizational unit within the Ministry. Although initially, the TESA were not sure how the work of the Field Officers could be supported by the TESA, through constant Talatalanoa and invitations to the PD Unit to attend the TESA workshops, the PD Unit together with the TESA team eventually found a space for TESA work in the PD Unit's work plan.

When the PD Unit was set up, I saw it as the opportunity to make sure that TESA learnings are also taken up by the PD Unit and are promoted during the PD Unit's Nofo program. To me this is how we can ensure that professional development is offered continuously for our teachers. (MET Education Officer).

Although the design of the TESA as based on the LALI was seen as an extension of the LALI, this was not necessarily how the school teachers and principals perceived the connection between the two projects. Perhaps this was a shortfall of connecting the two projects and an area to consider in future designs.

What I saw was that LALI had done the groundwork, through Talatalanoa with the teachers, school principals and the parents. TESA came in and continued on the same track, but LALI only had 15 schools, and TESA has 107 schools. So most of the teachers and principals did not have the same understanding as the LALI teachers and school leaders. (School principal)

The data also revealed that defining literacy from a sustainable perspective also helps teachers to take on the learning gained. Part of designing for sustainable education development is trusting teachers and school leaders to do what they know is needed by their children.

So flipping that and thinking about trust as a foundational concept and just saying to bureaucrats and the policy makers 'how about we trust them?' How about we trust them to make good decisions? How about we trust them to know the child? And then build the capabilities as well but start with the position of trust. (Project staff)

The Tonga data also showed often hidden perceptions when a 'project' is named. What is seen from the Tonga data is that by naming a project, it sets in place perceptions, expectations and assumptions about the work. The Tonga data revealed perceptions of participants that projects are not part of their real job, that projects are temporary and, therefore, often perceived as an inconvenience to their work.

The response from the project staff is interesting in how they navigate these perceptions and expectations concerning a 'project'. The response, as shown from the data, is an investment in relationships that are seen to be for the long term.

What we tried to do with LEAP and TESA was to move away from thinking about them as projects and try to communicate, this is what we're doing here. The ways of working that we're introducing and working with people on, these should be or could be just business as usual. (Project staff)



These are relationships that we think actually schools needs forever...so trying to shift away from the idea that these kinds of interventions only have a need to be short term, that you know you can have a project that provides some support to a school, fixes the literacy problem, and then three years later you are done, it just does not work that way...schools are continually facing new challenges, new students come in with new problems, teachers change so you know that they will always need some kind of support. (Project staff)

The data also revealed that an important aspect of design for sustainable education development is to design for a resilient education system. The data revealed the need to ensure that the relationships survive through the challenges, of government changes, of global pandemic, of another cyclone season, and other shocks to the education system.

The way all of our projects PLSLP, LEAP and TESA one of the best things we have is that we are resilient and we can make changes quickly. So I think if we capitalize on that, making sure that we keep on being resilient then making sure that the government and ministry sees that and appreciates what we are doing then I think they can take it on and implement it long after the project is over. I think they need to see the value in it. (Project staff)

Summary

The conditions that provided the context for the delivery of the PLSLP and the TESA were a combination of many factors present in Tonga, in the Ministry of Education, the schools and the communities, as well as regional factors through USP and specifically in IoE and the influence of MFAT and the University of Auckland and UniServices. What is clear is that these are complex structures and processes that define the conditions for the work that was carried out through these two projects. What is also clear is that the relationships within these groups of people enabled the work to be carried out.

Sustainability is a complex concept that is more often harder to achieve than assumed. The data revealed that sustainability needs to be part of the design from the beginning. That there is a need for time to embed new learnings into defined and specific structures within the Ministry of Education and education system. Sustainability is also promoted through the relationships of people involved in the project and there seems to be strong connections between the capacity on the ground to how learnings from projects can be embedded into the education system.





E. Key Learnings & Implications

Theme 1: Motutapu, a space to begin power sharing and collaboration

This study has deepened our understanding of the original concept of Motutapu which was introduced by Johansson-Fua in 2016 (Johansson-Fua, 2016) and further developed in 2020 (Johansson-Fua, et al. 2020). Johansson-Fua (2016) proposed a metaphorical Motutapu (harbour) to 'reimagine' development perspectives. Motutapu is "a relational space for educational research ...[used]...to co-explore new and more authentic dialogue and conscious action for educational development in Oceania" (Johansson-Fua, 2020, p. 43). Achievable aspirations for authenticity and conscious action need to underpin all development designed in, with, and for, Pacific contexts. Each of the three project designs recognised that in-country partners were those welcoming out-of-country partners, inviting them into their home spaces. Acknowledgement from external partners of their role as guests, being hosted was central to the success of the projects. Also central to each project was a strong hosting arrangement, which was facilitated many times by the regional connections within The University of the South Pacific (USP). The following outline core concepts within the broader concept of Motutapu, and how these shaped the three literacy and leadership projects, ultimately contributing to their success.

Mana – the leadership required

The findings from this study highlighted the relational aspect of implementing a project and the subsequent efforts to embed any learnings into an education system. What is also evident from this study is having the right people for the right place – a fit-for-purpose team. The findings from all three contexts, points to the national leadership that emerged to enable access and support collaboration. In all three contexts, there were 'champions'; people who have invested in education development for decades and people who were easily recognised by communities as educational leaders. These 'champions' brought to the projects their own mana – influence, honour, respect, strength and authority. Mana is cultivated over time, spaces and gained through service, reciprocity and loyalty to one's people. When the projects recruited these educational leaders, they were initially brought in because of their technical skills and academic merit. Throughout the implementation of the projects it became obvious that it was through their mana that external team members and project teams were able to access schools and communities. This was particularly evident in Tonga and also in Solomon Islands with the role of leadership taken by national educators.

The findings from the study suggest that there is value in carefully considering the leadership and the mana required to negotiate access for a new project. The findings of the study also showed that the act of negotiating access is not a one-time task, but an on-going process of negotiation and re-drawing the lines of access. These lines of access include access to Ministry of Education resources and personnel, access to schools, to communities, classrooms and to people's hearts and minds. What this suggests is that the leadership in the project is required throughout the duration of the project, and continues to be present in the context long after the project has ended.

Seeking access to the communities at all levels

The findings from this study suggest that gaining access *and* effecting some positive outcomes is a more complex process than commonly perceived. To gain this level of access requires a long term commitment to establishing relationships and deep appreciation of the context behind the context. The LEAP project and the



PLSLP LALI project showed the gain that both projects harnessed from the community components of the projects. From the Solomon Islands and Tonga data sets, participants highlighted the additional support that the projects received when the communities were involved in the schools. The project teams were able to gain access to these communities, through several rounds of negotiations, building relationships and, while generally successful, there were communities that still remained inaccessible. The data from Solomon Islands illustrated the challenges of working with two communities in one particular province.

Similar patterns were also observed in Tonga, with one school on Tongatapu whose buy-in was difficult to get initially. Similar cases were also observed in Cook Islands. Often the slow start up to projects and uptake from schools relates to this process of gaining access. What we see from the Tonga and Cook Islands data is that it is an on-going process of negotiating access. It was not until the school on Tongatapu invited the PLSLP LALI Literacy Adviser to co-teach a lesson in one of their classrooms that the team realised that they had now gained full access to the school.

One of the challenges to sustaining learning within education systems and the Ministry of Education is often linked to the relationship with officials in the Ministry. The findings from the study suggests that the relationship with the Ministry is also linked to this process of seeking access. This is observed most clearly in Tonga, with the frequent changes in the Ministry leadership. In instances when there were deliberate efforts to provide information and consistent communication with the new leadership, there seemed to be more support for the implementation of the project. In instances when there was reduced communication and attention was diverted from involving the Ministry leadership, there seemed to be more disruptions to plans and overall implementation.

Overall, the findings from the study illustrate that gaining access to a context is not a one-off task, but rather an on-going process of negotiation and learning. The process of negotiation and learning not only requires strong in-country leadership, but also a strong team working together to learn and to negotiate new spaces. It is common to find one of the project managers negotiating with a senior education officer to timetable a professional development workshop and, at times, they have that agreed that the scheduled session be cancelled due to natural disasters, or the scheduling of other events as instructed by the Minister. Changes in the senior leadership of a ministry at time also impacted on attention given to a project and access that was given under the previous leadership therefore needed to be re-negotiated with the new leadership. In small island communities, these negotiations can also be linked to individual personalities and relationships. As such, the act of the on-going process of negotiation and learning benefits from not only a deep understanding of the context but also the mana that a team leader brings to the project. Often the team leader's role is taken up with navigating these relationships and ensuring that the team continues to have the appropriate access to schools and communities over the duration of the project.

Relationships – historical and new

This study has again affirmed the centrality of relationships to Pacific people and their world views. Throughout all three country case studies, the relational aspect of the project was evident across all key questions. In terms of Motutapu, as a space to begin power-sharing and collaboration, the data highlighted that Motutapu is a place to create and re-connect old ties. The data also revealed that while there were new relationships, there were also historical relationships and connections via people and via organisations. So, while the project maybe 'new', it did not necessarily mean that the relationships were new.

The Tonga data showed how the strength of the historical relationships was able to assemble teams quickly and to resolve challenges. The Kaumatua – elders who possessed the wisdom – were present in the PLSLP. In this case, the Kaumatua were drawn from Tonga and from New Zealand and were people who have invested in the



Pacific region for much of their careers. The PLSLP in particular included strong historical ties at an institutional level and also at a professional level between UoA and IoE-USP. The Kaumatua's relationships amongst themselves and with the wider team defined the protocol and the 'culture' of the consortium and, at the same time, allowed for new individuals and groups (as in the FFM and The Victoria University of Wellington) to join the consortium. The historical ties were strong enough to sustain the challenges of bringing together new people and new ways of working together. The Solomon Islands data also showed how the strength of old relationships was able to influence leaders on the ground to accept new relationships. This was the case with the involvement of the FFM in the LEAP. Through the IoE-USP's relationship with the FFM and the trust that the FFM had in the IoE-USP they were open to exploring a new relationship with the IoE's partner – the UoA. It is also important to note that evidence of the two-way nature of this relationship principle was also found, in that the Cook Islands data showed how a variation to old historical relationships was required due to local recall of previous experiences with particular personnel that were not felt to be fully beneficial. Team membership was adjusted accordingly, and relationships and trust further strengthened as a result.

What is clear from the study is that from the PLSLP to the LEAP and to the TESA projects there was an expansion of the circle of relationships with each iteration, whereby new people are socialised into the consortium's approach and methodology. While the process of socialising new staff into the consortium's approach was often not made explicit, there is evidence from the case studies that points towards this learning across all projects. For instance, at the implementation level, project staff recalled learning from the PLSLP-LALI project and continuing that into the TESA project. This was also evident at the project management level, where senior project managers who have been part of all three projects shared their learnings from one project to another. What is also evident from the study is that there are relationships that outlasted the projects and gained strength from one project to another.

However, it should also be pointed out that in longer projects some movement of personnel is bound to occur, and there were people who only joined certain components of the projects at different times, and others who left their organisations and thus the projects. Some of these people were part of the research study and contributed to the case studies. Nonetheless, the core group remaining and the means by which new personnel were socialised ensured the long term development and security of the relationships within the projects and across them.

Guiding protocol – legacy creation

The strength of the consortium is based on relationships that are defined by trust, reciprocity and respect. Throughout the three case studies, these values of trust, reciprocity and respect were evident in how project members related to one another and to the schools, Ministry of Education and communities. There were examples of acts of respect, of trust and reciprocity retold throughout the data gathered. There was the trust automatically given by the Tongan parents when a particular Tongan educational leader visited their school. There was the respect shown to indigenous approaches to gathering data, by the use of Tok Stori. There were many stories of exchanging hospitality, and gifts between the Tongan, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and the New Zealand teams. Similarly, there were packages of linoleum carpet and hard biscuits going to island schools as gifts from project team members.

The study has shown that through the act of co-design, it has enabled a more trusting and reciprocal relationship. By the act of co-design, 'recipients' of donor aid are asked for their expertise. By this act of co-design, it recognised that teachers, field officers and school leaders have something to contribute to solving their own problems. Through resources that were specifically designed for each context, through sense making, and co-design, all of these components of the project enabled a more trusting relationship. Through use of their own languages to describe their world and describe their solutions, people's world views were affirmed – and that



enables the restoration of their mana. Teachers, school leaders, field officers and national TAs were encouraged to behave and be who they are in their own world. Teachers, field officers and school leaders felt appreciated and valued and thereby gave their ‘hearts and minds’.

The data from Solomon Islands was particularly strong in showcasing how the projects enabled a deeper connection between schools and communities. The Solomon Islands data also revealed a strong sense of purpose and connecting the LEAP work to a long-lasting legacy for Solomon Islands children.

Adaptive management approach

When the three projects are considered together as a progression from one to the other, and that it was implemented by a single consortium, the data revealed how the power dynamics have shifted. The funding arrangement for the PLSLP saw the principal contract placed with UniServices Ltd and the USP-IoE as the sub-contractor (with the FFM group coming under the USP sub-contract). With LEAP, the contracting arrangement was again the same, with UniServices Ltd holding the principal contract. However, with LEAP, it quickly became obvious that a significant proportion of the project staff were under the USP-IoE contract. With the TESA, the contract was held by the Tonga Ministry of Education and they contracted UniServices Ltd with USP-IoE holding a sub-contract from UniServices Ltd. However, with TESA, there is but one international TA remaining in the TESA team, and the implementation is carried out by the Tonga team under the USP-IoE sub-contract. For LEAP and also for TESA, there were discussions between UniServices Ltd and USP-IoE as to who would lead each project. In both instances, USP-IoE asked for UniServices Ltd to take the lead. In each instance, the decision as to who would lead the consortium was negotiated and an agreement was reached.

The data also revealed how each partner has also adapted to each context to ensure that the project was implemented efficiently and within budget. From PLSLP to LEAP to TESA there were also learnings regarding how best to manage the funding and ensure that the project was implemented in a timely manner. The experience with the trust fund arrangement under the LEAP project informed the current arrangement for managing the fund under TESA.

Theme 2: Indigenous expertise in Leadership, Literacy and Language

The reviewed literature drew attention to leadership as contextual, nuanced, and adaptive. With the help of a weaving metaphor, this perspective allows for embracing, affirming, and supporting multiple and different individuals playing different roles and at different levels and settings. All three case studies highlighted the importance of multiple leaders and their different and diverse skillsets and manifestations of credibility. Moreover, when different credible leaders form a fit-for-purpose team, the credibility and influence of such a team is expanded and positively appreciated in context.

A collectivist mind-set

A collectivist view of leadership is supported in this study. Such a view accepts ways of being, understandings of leadership-followership, and approaches and styles of leadership which are indigenous and from diverse settings. In Tonga, a values-based and relational understanding of leadership was deemed essential. In the Cook Islands, the place and importance of Cook Islands Māori were deemed to be a foundational identity platform. In the Solomon Islands, engaging with people at the heart level is a first order entry activity, before any other mind or skills-generating activities.



Relationality

The privileging of relationality as leadership is affirming and appreciative. Hence, the leadership of Indigenous Tongans, Cook Islanders and Solomon Islanders, and not just those of the external project team members, was validated. Consequently, Solomon Islanders, in-context, can mentor other Solomon Islanders and help to champion the learning of Solomon Island children and adults.

Adaptive leadership

As a contextual ontology, leadership is adaptive. Consequently, leaders can learn to be better leaders on-the-job. Leaders can obtain needed knowledge, develop skills, improve on their roles and or practices as they travel on in their own learning journeys. Leaders can legitimately and confidently use linguistic or cultural tools and metaphors which are available to them. They can do so catalytically to advance their own and shared visions and causes and to make further improvements along the way. Moreover, leaders can intentionally contribute to their own leadership development to sustain their sense of excellence and credibility.

Authenticity

Finally, leadership is authentic. Hence, in each of the case study settings, the nature and quality of being is different for each person and each community. In Tonga, having the in-country presence of the Institute of Education was a manifestation of leadership. In the Cook Islands, using Cook Islands Māori in literacy, policy or pedagogical conversations was an affirmation of being an authentic Cook Islands person. In the Solomon Islands, having a Solomon Islands face at all levels of the LEAP was a clear manifestation of authentic Solomon Islands leadership, particularly in an aid program which has previously not featured Solomon Islanders playing key leadership roles in this way. However, to perceive leadership as authentic, others need to recognize this and support it for authentic leadership to flourish. Herein lies the new leadership opportunity for Pacific Islands international development programs in the short to medium-term future.

Theme 3: Methodologies that incorporate Culture

In the review of programme reports, Design Based Research was highlighted as an internationally recognised approach that allowed for responsiveness to context. From the perspective of the people in the case studies, culturally and contextually appropriate methodologies underpinned, even preceded, the Design Based Research approaches, and were agreed to be the starting point for any methodological approach. The reasons for this were cognitive, affective and participatory - people learned better when taking on new knowledge in culturally appropriate situations; people were more willing to engage; people were more invested in the process; and people knew the appropriate ways of engaging when the methodology was appropriate.

The invitational nature of the programmes was also affirmed by the use of shared cultural practices. Participants were uniformly mindful of how people were approached and engaged with by members of the programme teams. They were also uniformly mindful of the way institutional partners engaged in these relationships. The values underlying culturally appropriate methodologies included reciprocity, respect and responsiveness. The voluntary nature of the engagement supported the values underpinning the collective desire to ‘make good together - you have something, I have something, let’s do this together’.



The use of cultural metaphors and practices such as Tok Stori and Talanoa meant that practices were slightly different across contexts, but in all contexts the approaches provided the cultural stepping-stones that brought people together for the work of the programmes. While the importance of culturally and contextually appropriate communication was affirmed, more important was the prioritising of relationships that sit within these approaches. Such prioritising of relationships, implicit in the methodologies, allowed various perspectives to be debated, while remaining respectful of the mana of the people within the educational systems.

Sense-making processes were highlighted as a powerful aspect of the DBR approach. The use of evidence and data was agreed to have had an impact on the way teachers, schools and the Ministries work. For many, it was the first time that data collection and evidence from their own context was used to make decisions for that context.

The sense making processes of Design Based Research methodology relied upon the incorporation of shared cultural practices, which in turn laid foundations for the relationality of the actors. Sense making sessions had the nominal purpose of sharing back with key stakeholders the findings from the data and discussing the evidence arising from Tok-stori and Talanoa through the inclusion of multiple perspectives. Thus, through these practices, evidence about effectiveness and variability influenced the design and implementation. In practice they supported clear communication between partners around the various facets of the projects and allowed for two-way communication, allowing decisions to be debated, direction to be set, and agreements about programme direction to be affirmed. However, for participants, what was more salient than these content-related aspects seemed to be the use of culturally recognisable forms of communication to provide a collective purpose, permission to think differently, permission to use local ways of thinking, and a space for openness to what was not yet known.

Theme 4: Sustainability and durability

Commitment to collective and reciprocal learning

Whereas the document analysis review of reports at the programme level highlighted the need to plan for sustainability, the case study evidence illuminated aspects of lived sustainability from the perspective of the actors within each context. For the people involved across each of the case studies, an underpinning commitment to collective and reciprocal learning was highlighted as a foundation for sustainability. The ethical imperative to keep learning in order to support education improvement was expressed by numbers of participants. The heart-felt passion to build a strong future for the next generations was key to this commitment. Leadership and learning were spoken about hand in hand. Mentorship, leadership, capability building and confidence building all contributed fuel for that commitment.

The vision of learning as adding onto one's existing capabilities, rather than replacing traditional or existing practices was shared. The ongoing nature of the drive for professional learning was also attributed to teachers and attributed to their roles as decision makers within the system. Shared decision making, through whole staff participation, was seen as a necessary condition so that, collectively, leaders and teachers were open to learning and adapting and committed to continuous learning.

A threat to the notion of collective learning was the cascade model of professional learning, which inevitably led to a loss of integrity for learning and a loss of reciprocity and collectivity. In a unidirectional model where knowledge is considered to be passed along a chain through various people, questions were raised about how



the learning was additive and incorporated existing capabilities. It was noted that for future development interventions, the question of collective and reciprocal learning needed to be considered in the design.

Collective organisational responsibilities and relationships

Included in the notion of collectivity was the improvement of systems and practices in-country. Through Talanoa and Tok Stori, the negotiation around system change and improvement was planned for. These systems reflect what was already known to be working well and then a strengthening approach was taken. Through the case studies, it was noted that Ministries, professional development units and teacher education departments all benefited from sustainable changes being implemented throughout the projects.

Challenges around the very layered improvement of systems and practices were noticed, with the movement of people during the life of the project(s). Government departments moving people into new roles, as well as general and specific roles changing, were factors impacting on systems and learning. Working collaboratively with clarity around roles within the projects helped alleviate some of the challenges, as people took their knowledge into new roles and positions. For future sustainability, factoring in induction for new people would be beneficial for consistency within planning a project. Furthermore, case study findings suggest that using people who are familiar with previous projects and principles within those projects (e.g. DBR) was beneficial for sustainability.

Institutional and donor partners also emerged as challenges within the case studies. The level of involvement from these partners (both internal and external) impacted on the sustainability and durability of the project. Agreements around project coverage were impacted by variations within each context. Questions about who and why areas should be included and how including them impacted sustainable improvements for the students. For institutional partners, a shared vision, teachers being supported after the project ends, and students at the heart of future work all presented as key considerations for sustainability.

Particularly noticeable in the Cook Island case study, but not unique to the context, was the need to continue discussions about the evolution and changes in how the languages of the context are used and supported in education. These discussions would result in further clarity for providing support and professional development for teachers. Having a clearer understanding of learning and language differences (e.g. L1 vs. L2 teaching) could bring some clarity to project planning around language of delivery.

People and relationships

Like language, relationships with people and the roles that people engage in are dynamic, with many 'moving parts'. Findings from the case studies show that as in-country mentors develop relationships with school leaders and ministry officials, both capability and confidence grow as they bring their new learning, coupled with existing indigenous expertise to their role. This confidence impacts on the sustainability of project learnings, and the ability for expertise to be shared across the project. Utilising these people in further development implementation is important for future projects, as teams collectively build on previous project successes.

With an emphasis on collaboration and collective expertise across the projects, relationships reflected open to learning and adaptive approaches. Valuing Indigenous methods such as Tok Stori and Talanoa, and including sense making contributed to continuous learning for all stakeholders (internal and external). Maintaining the continuous, open-to-learning approach is vital for the success of future projects.



A threat to sustainability was noted around the translation of ideas and the implementation or teaching of these ideas. In different contexts, the case study findings show that not all ideas translate from an external perspective to in-country practice. Relationships being at the fore of the project allows for these discussions to be had, and external partners must understand that, in some cases, out-of-context ideas will not translate well into the Pacific context.

Resources

Across the three Pacific contexts, resources were developed and distributed during PLSLP. These came with teacher support materials/notes and were appreciated by school leaders and teachers. Case study findings confirmed the value of these resources, in particular the wordless books that were developed. These and other classroom resources developed influence the pedagogy and the role of the teacher in each context. This was noticed alongside the repeated call for external partners and implementation partners to keep returning to the question - What has changed for the children?

Keeping children at the heart of the resources, participating groups (e.g., Ministries and implementing agencies) also saw the development of context-specific assessment tools and frameworks to be of value in the sustainability of these practices. User-friendly teaching guides and teachers who were confident in using the tool, framework, and guides, all supported the ongoing formative use of the assessment resources and therefore the collection of quality data. Case study findings show that using the evidence (e.g. data) has impacted on the way that participating schools and Ministries are now working.

Theme 5: Unresolved Challenges

While this research has surfaced hidden and often unspoken understandings about development in these three contexts, the study has also revealed unresolved challenges.

Indigenous Languages and learning

The case studies illustrated the ongoing challenges with use of languages across the curriculum. The ongoing tensions between first language and language of instruction remains unsolved, and how best to support teachers make these transitions and translations. This became more evident with the case study from Tonga, with the challenge of finding appropriate Tongan words for Mathematical concepts. There is a perception that the language of Mathematics and its current use in Tongan classrooms is problematic, as students find it difficult to grasp the concepts when the concepts have not been contextualized. The case study from Cook Islands highlights the challenges of learning and language differences, capacity to teach CI Maori language in Cook Islands, and how this could help clarify ways to better support teachers.

Approaches to Professional development

The study highlighted a number of approaches to professional development. This has included cluster workshops (face to face and online), leadership mentoring using Tok Stori, school visits using Nofo and a cascading model for the training of trainers' approach. The study showed concerns with loss of integrity within the cascading model as field officers are relocated and without appropriate support from the project teams. The school visits and use of the Tongan concept of Nofo shows promise, but more support is required to better harness this home-grown approach.



The Nofo is taken from the Kakala Research Framework (Johansson-Fua, 2014) and it literally means to ‘stay’ or ‘live’. Under the Kakala Research Framework, Nofo is used as a complimentary research tool to the Talanoa and invites the researcher to observe, Talanoa and participate in the lived lives of the participants. The Nofo has been adopted by the Tonga Ministry of Education’s Professional Development Unit, to offer leadership support for school leaders under the TESA project. Through the Nofo, the PD officers visit a school and remain in the school for several days. While at the school, the PD officer provides mentorship, support and at times teaches while the school principal catches up on paperwork. The Nofo offers the PD officers a ‘lived experience’ in the school and this is particularly important for remote island schools where school leaders are often the sole charge teacher or one of 3 teachers in the school and receive minimal in personal support from the PD unit.

The use of cluster workshops, while they make sense for small populations, remains a logistical challenge for geographically spread small remote islands and larger populations. In going forward, there still needs to be attention given to better understanding effective professional development approaches that are affordable and can be sustained by a Ministry of Education. It is entirely possible that there are opportunities to find other home-grown approaches to professional development in other Pacific contexts.

Further to this is the unresolved challenge of induction and socialization of technical staff who are not familiar with previous projects and the principles of the DBR. There remain questions around how to tailor professional development and learning for personnel from the Ministry of Education, from the implementing agencies and also from the development partners. To what extent will the involvement of key personnel from different stakeholders be beneficial for sustaining the learning and for widening the participation?

Designing a project

A consistent message found across the study was that the timeframe given to complete the projects was often too limited. The LEAP and the TESA projects were given short extensions to complete deliverables, but there remained concerns from the participants that the timeframe was still too limited. Part of this concern with timeframe for a project is also linked to the cyclone season in the Pacific. During the implementation of all three projects, there were cyclones that affected parts of the Cook Islands and Tonga. The global pandemic has also impacted on the timeframe for TESA and LEAP and it has caused some delay in the delivery of TESA in 2020. The timeframe for a project is also believed to be linked to sustainability and the time required to embed learnings into the schools.

The study has also shown weaknesses in reporting and providing continuous communication with various key stakeholders. While reporting lines between the implementing agency, the Ministry of Education and the development partner are expressed in project contracts, what usually remains unclear are the communication channels with other key stakeholders. The sharing of communications and information about the projects (TESA, LEAP, PLSLP) with other in-country projects was limited and dependent entirely on the Ministry of Education’s approach to the sharing of information and communication. Under the PLSLP (LALI) project there was an effort to set up a Literacy Reference group as a way to coordinate three literacy projects that were all being implemented at the same time in Tonga. However, this was also limited in its reach and was not sustained beyond the project. This was partly due to different funding partners’ limited support for the initiative and limited capacity within the Ministry to coordinate and pull all three different projects together.

Further to this, while the line of reporting between the project management team and the Ministry was defined by the various project governance and management committees, the further sharing of information within the



Ministry rested with the chairs of the committees. This was often left to chance and / or was dependent on the capacity of the Ministry and its communications protocols. The Tonga case study highlighted the need to continually seek a range of approaches to sharing information and communicating with the Ministry of Education. As it is so often the case, reports are not read, but stories are told based on observations in the field. In going forward, there remain unsolved challenges relating to communicating and reporting stories from the field in a relevant and worthwhile way.

It is common practice that, when a project is introduced, it is given a name. Most often it is named by the development partner or by the implementing agency. Through PLSLP, the Tonga Ministry of Education, renamed it LALI, as the Tongan version of the primary project. With TESA, the Tonga Ministry again was given the opportunity to name it, but unfortunately the name was too long and the name 'TESA' remained. Naming a project, although often not part of the design, is an important aspect of project design in the Pacific. The findings from the study show that by naming a piece of work, it is also an act of differentiating and identifying the work as separate from the business as usual work. What is also observed from the study is that participants' perceptions of a named 'project' are most often as 'additional' work. Could the act of naming a project or piece of work be counterproductive to efforts of ownership?

From this study, there are questions that need to be further explored about the nature of projects; how time frames, reporting and communications and also naming a project influence recipients' perceptions of donor-funded projects. How can Ministries 'own' a project for which they were not part of the decision-making process, especially with regard to the most fundamental aspect of the project – timing and reporting? Further to this, how is the 'timeframe' of a project linked to capacity and capability? How are decisions being made on time frames and to what extent is the notion of time as considered by the project-designer related to the recipients' notion of time? To what extent is project time able to mirror the rhythm of the recipient island country's rhythm of time?

Ministries of Education

Ministries of Education in the Pacific are the key organization to provide access to quality education for its people. In the Pacific, the sizes of the Ministries of Education vary and are relatively small. A common unsolved challenge emerging from the study is that of understanding the structures and processes that make up a Ministry of Education in the Pacific. The case studies reveal several challenges in working with Ministries of Education. Some of these challenges are relational, others relate to communication and others relate to the thin capacity in a small Ministry.

The Solomon Islands Ministry (MEHRD) is one of the larger Ministries of Education in the region. As an organisation, the Ministry operates within a complex set of relationships that span national, regional and international levels. Each of these relationships presents its own unique challenges. Whilst the National Education Board has the responsibility of providing policy advice, it has been recorded that decisions made on policies have not always been implemented by the Ministry. At provincial level, the relationship with the Education Authorities continues to be an act of negotiating power and authority. As such, progress towards supporting the EA and schools is quite slow. Underpinning this is the translation at the MEHRD level of the vision of education into programmes and interventions that will provide leverage for EA and schools.

The Solomon Islands MEHRD does have a strong and cordial relationship with their traditional development partners, which are Australia and New Zealand. This relationship is enhanced through a funding mechanism (Sector Budget Support) that supports the implementation of the National Education Action Plan (NEAP). Whilst the relationship has been cordial and friendly, it is felt that donor-funded projects are individual activities



that have limited linkages to the holistic development of education in the country. It is evident that NGOs are slowly drifting in the education system to offer support for education. It is not yet clear how the NGOs will add value to the education system. This calls for a better understanding on how to collaborate in education work in the Solomon Islands.

The Tonga MET is, by comparison, a smaller organisation to the MEHRD, but bigger than the CI MOE. The Tonga MET shares some similarities with the MEHRD in that it oversees several other education authorities, mainly faith-based education providers. Like MEHRD and its relationship with the EA, the Tonga MET's relationship with the faith-based education authorities is a continual act of negotiated power and authority. It is interesting to note that the PLSLP(LALI) and also the TESA were both delivered to government owned primary schools. Although there were efforts from the TESA project team to encourage wider participation from the faith-based education authorities, their participation was not sustained. While in the past, when the SWAp approach was 'fashionable', there were efforts to be inclusive of all education authorities, as the SWAp out of conversation the approach to delivering projects across a whole of education systems became more focused on only government schools. The relationship between the Tonga MET and other faith-based education providers remains a matter that needs to be carefully considered for future aid funded programmes.

The Cook Islands MoE is one of the smaller education ministries in the region. As the Solomon Islands MEHRD and the Tonga MET had their unique relationships with the education authorities (EA and faith-based education authorities), the Cook Islands MoE had its unique relationships with the schools in the outer islands. The PLSLP had a special consideration for including the schools from the outer islands of Cook Islands and this was reflected in the project by more schools participating from the outer islands. During the implementation of the PLSLP, there were also special considerations by the Cook Islands MoE for provision of workshops tailored specifically for the Rarotonga schools and different workshops tailored for the schools in the outer islands.

All three of these varyingly sized Ministries of Education work across geographically spread island communities with various levels of physical access. The complexities of delivering workshops and professional development across a group of islands of varying remoteness provides significant logistical considerations for all ministries of education in the region. Project staff often travel by airplane, boat, truck, and sometimes on foot to get to a school in order to run a workshop. These are often difficult working conditions, but with rewarding experiences for project staff as they get to share stories and meals with teachers in remote island schools.

From the study, it is evident that capacity within each of the ministries is an issue that needs to be further investigated and a deeper understanding needs to be gained. This is not a new finding, but a reality that continues to be evident with limited efforts to improve understanding of small education systems. There continues to be little understanding of how an education system and Ministry of Education may be relevant, fit for size and purposely designed for a small Pacific country with a unique geographical spread. The study findings suggest that the capacity issue may be related to the current organisational structures of Ministries of Education and education systems in the participating countries. It also raises the question of whether the capacity issue could also be related to the design of projects and support programs that are placed within a Ministry of Education.

Role of implementing agencies

The case studies also bring to light the various roles of an implementing agency in delivery of a project and in supporting a Ministry of Education. Whether it was by default or by design, the relationship between the USP-IoE, the FFM and also the UoA and UniServices has enabled each agency to define their respective roles. Through a relational approach, each agency has 'learned' to know where they stand and who leads when and where. In a sense, the relationship between all three agencies reflects their understanding of their roles in relation



to the context. The LEAP project proved to be a learning project for all three agencies in defining their 'place' in the relationship.

One of the key challenges of working around the region remains that of coordination and collaboration. This is a challenge at regional level and it has greater impact at national level, with the Ministry of Education carrying the burden when agencies fail to coordinate and collaborate.

This study brings to light several unresolved challenges that implementing agencies may find useful to explore. In the implementation of the LEAP, there were challenges and delays with the recruitment of national project officers, as it became evident that the processes for recruitment under USP, the expectations of the project contract (managed by UniServices), and also the reality of human capacity on the ground were simply not in alignment.

Another of the key unresolved challenges is the role of a national implementing agency – as seen in the role of the FFM, the role of a regional implementing agency – as seen in the role of the USP, and the role of an international implementing agency – such as, in this case, the University of Auckland and UniServices. What is the role that is particular to each of these different agencies? What is the role of USP which, like SPC, is a regional agency that is owned by the member countries? How different is their role from that of UniServices or from that of an international agency? Are there responsibilities that are expected of USP and SPC that may not be the responsibility of an international agency? Is there a link between how aid is delivered and the strengthening of regional and national agencies? Could the form of aid be also an opportunity to build the capacity of national and regional institutions that support national ministries of education - such as USP and also the FFM? These are amongst a range of important questions brought to light by this study.

Development partners

The study suggests that there are lessons that development partners may want to consider in working with Pacific education systems. The centrality of relationships to Pacific people is a key consideration for working with Ministries of Education, communities and with schools. The study reveals examples of MFAT staff who take a deep interest in understanding the work of the project, including visits to schools and project workshops. This level of involvement from MFAT staff who are on the ground, helps in gaining a deeper understanding of the how the project is delivered. The question for further consideration for development partners is their strategy for strengthening relationships with Ministries of Education and also with implementing agencies. How do development partners communicate with Pacific people who are recipients of their aid? What are development partners' understandings of Pacific people, their values and their world views? How are these 'understandings', perceptions and assumptions about Pacific peoples influencing the way projects are designed and aid is delivered?

Multi-country programme approach

While the study had focused on country conditions, success contributions and sustainability, some useful observations relating to a multi-country approach (MCA) have emerged. Briefly, these include:

- (1) the need for clearer definitions of MCA.
- (2) the need for a fuller exploration of the benefits of MCA. This study has pointed to the following: multi-stakeholder engagement in-country, cross sharing of learning, capacity development for nationals, and the potential for refinements of ideas and tools, but these need to be unpacked and further researched.



(3) while MCA has been found to have these benefits, it also has challenges, and there is a need to look into the challenges that MCA offers. For instance, while it provides the potential for deep understanding of context and adaptive response to different starting points and different starting questions, these values themselves will present their own specific sets of challenges including slower pacing of activities and the need for context-specific leadership.

Further, the study has highlighted five issues requiring much deeper exploration. These are as follows:

(1) For MCA to assume a positive and appreciative approach to engagement with people in national settings and at all levels (including schools and communities) it will require engaging with the right people and grounding such engagements in the positive and experienced realities of the people. These pointers have implications for redefinitions of 'expertise', team membership compositions, team selection and budgeting.

(2) For MCA to work, relationships must be taken as essential and important; hence having the right people with established credible team-ship and context savvy social, cultural and emotional skills in teams is critical. This point has implications for recognizing and valuing relationships and requires a deeper understanding and articulation to guide implementation.

(3) Given the successful applications of Tok Stori, Talanoa and Korero, there is need to explore how to capture the nuanced impacts of interventions in different national contexts; a point which has implications for MEL frameworks, timelines, different forms of evidence, and theories of change. Investigation into this must necessarily explore how to draw them out of the context and provide opportunities for in-depth dialogue at a regional level.

(4) Like other approaches, MCA has tensions at multiple levels, and advocates need to be aware of and engage with these as necessary. At a country level, tensions exist relating to representation, sector priorities, institutional structures and operational issues. For projects teams, tensions relate to a team's capability and or pay-rates for local members across countries. There is a role for implementing agencies to play in negotiating and navigating these country level tensions within and across the member countries. Admittedly these are not easy processes and require in-depth investment in national relationships within and across the participating countries. This will require regional agencies, such as the USP, to step up to a stronger role in negotiating these relationships. It is clear that regional agencies have a role to play in MCA and this needs further exploration and clarification.

(5) The roles of donors in MCA also require further exploration. While a bridging and connections role is obvious for donors in MCA, there is a need for donors to see the value of contextual skills, local expertise, and national relationships, as well as the importance of the time needed for processes and relationships to be built and sustained. Further to this, it is important that donors and implementing agencies are given the opportunity to dialogue with the key stakeholders at national level, together and separately, on how to form a more relevant 'regional mechanism' for the sharing of ideas and resources across multiple countries. All too often the regional mechanism is defined at 'regional' level amongst donors and implementing agencies. Perhaps a starting point would be to start from each specific context and facilitate how to define the regional mechanism for MCA from the perspective of these countries.

Implications

The following are what we believe to be some of the practical implications of the research findings for considering how those engaged in Pacific education can best support meaningful, contextually appropriate and



people-affirming teaching and learning in Pacific schools. From across the wide-ranging findings of the research we have sought to draw out the overall findings that have practical implications, specifically for Pacific MoE, development partners in Pacific education, and Pacific regional agencies working in education. Some of these implications are relevant beyond the field of education and may be of interest to others involved in the design and implementation of ‘external’ interventions in the Pacific region. Therefore, while we have written these specifically for our target audience, we encourage others to consider how they may relate to their own areas of service.

Unfortunately, none of these findings are new. They echo what has been shared many times before. They echo what Pacific educators, teachers, parents know and live. The most significant implication of this research is that this report is immaterial. What matters was the engagement and learning that took place through the process of the research and through the implementation of the projects (even where this engagement was not ‘counted’ in project results). Thus, a key unresolved challenge is: how do we elevate the relational learning that is lived through projects and research, and continually widen who participates in these processes?

1. Cultivating relational leadership, expertise and engagement

The research findings show that project success is fostered by meaningful, ongoing involvement of local educational leaders with mana, working in relational ways. This was necessary from the point of first negotiating access to communities and stakeholders and contributed to the sustainability of outcomes beyond the project lifetime.

For MoEs, this finding is not new. It speaks to what Pacific MoEs know works in their worlds. The research points to opportunities for Pacific MoEs to more fully embrace this way of working. This means valuing and trusting in local capability, expertise and indigenous ways of doing things, in ways that affirm the worldviews of teachers, school leaders, Ministry staff, and communities. The research also indicates value for MoEs in giving greater attention to the ongoing relational task of negotiating and nurturing Ministry-school-community partnerships. A further implication is the strategic benefits of investing in the cultivation of the educational leaders of the future, those emerging through the teaching and university workforce, and the next generation of students. An area for further deliberation is the question of how best MoEs can cultivate the next generation of educational leaders, in collaboration with regional agencies and Development Partners?

For Development Partners, the finding indicate the need to recognise, trust and respect local educational leadership, including that which may reside outside of the MoE. Practically, this means Development Partners must learn to accept ways of doing things that may be unfamiliar and may not match development partners’ existing definitions of ‘effectiveness’ or ‘efficiency’. The research findings indicate the importance for Development Partners to recognise, and incorporate within project team specifications, the multi-faceted nature of leadership and expertise necessary for achieving education outcomes. This involves extending it to beyond purely the ‘technical’, to incorporate expertise in relational, ethical, cultural and service leadership. The research also demonstrates the need for Development Partners to consider access to schools, their communities and system-level partners as a negotiated process, not as something that can be assumed or taken for granted. Project teams must include local leaders with mana, and time must be allowed within project plans to enable both initial relationship building and ongoing maintenance of those relationships.

These are tasks that may not align to specific project deliverables, but are essential to project success and are at the heart of an ‘adaptive management’ approach in the Pacific context. An unresolved question here for further



dialogue is how Development Partners can adapt their procurement systems to allocate value to, and allow space for, these ‘intangible’ yet essential relational, adaptive processes?

2. Collective learning, leadership and legacy creation for sustainability

The research demonstrated the value of building on and maintaining long-term relationships at all levels; of being explicitly guided by a long-term vision for, and commitment to, each countries’ educational success; and investing in collective learning and leadership. The research showed how fostering collective learning, leadership and vision, within and beyond the ‘boundaries’ of the project, contributes to outcomes sustainable beyond the project lifetime.

For Ministries of Education, the research provides further encouragement for Pacific MoE to work collaboratively with those across the education sector while also taking leadership in fostering a shared vision for education across all partners.

For Development Partners, the implications of these findings are several.

- First, and in line an adaptive management orientation, there is a need to expand measures of ‘success’ to enable relational processes and contributions to collective learning to be valued, even where they do not appear to be directly related to project-specific results. This includes learning by Development Partners.
- Second, there is a need to value and maintain historical and in-depth contextual knowledge of the countries in which Development Partners are working. High turnover of staff and the ‘presentism’ encouraged by a short-term project approach, limits the ability of Development Partners to engage meaningfully in support of what are necessarily long-term, historically and contextually embedded processes of educational change. This does not exclusively mean having staff within Development Partners with this knowledge, but can also be facilitated through proactively building and maintaining relationships over time with MoE leaders and local experts (and not just for the transactional purposes of a specific project).
- Third, there is a need to move away from exclusively short-term project approaches that waste precious energy and distract MoE focus from both the demands of their core day to day operations and their longer-term strategies. Fostering a flourishing, sustainable education system that is able to adapt to changes and emerging challenges cannot be reduced to projects and results frameworks. This not to say that projects have no value, however, they must be designed on terms set by Pacific MoEs (or other appropriate in-country partners) not according to Development Partner funding cycles or reporting imperatives, and be based on very clear justifications for a why a project modality is appropriate.
- Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the research points to the need for Development Partners to more explicitly consider themselves ‘learners’ in this process; not learners *about* Pacific education but learners *from* Pacific education and educators. The research showed how the implementing consortium in the projects benefited by positioning themselves as learners, reflecting on how to adapt their own practice to contribute more effectively in Pacific contexts. Development Partners may also benefit by critically reflecting on learning from Pacific partners about how Development Partner practices and processes need to change, rather than an exclusive focus on how to influence Pacific MoEs to change.

3. Culturally, contextually and linguistically appropriate methodologies and resources

The research found that culturally and contextually appropriate, respectful and responsive methodologies were central to project success. The methodologies found to be most effective were those that were culturally familiar, respected, and which affirmed people in their own worlds, and prioritised relationships and collective learning and decision-making. The research also found the value of producing teaching and learning resources in local languages while highlighting also the tensions and challenges of doing so in some contexts.



For Ministries of Education, the research points to the value of utilising indigenous methodologies in all areas of work, whether that be in the process of consultation for policy development or curriculum reform, in the design of projects, or in the delivery of professional development. This is already happening in many instances and could be further expanded. In the case of developing classroom resources for language and literacy teaching and learning, cultural relevance and authenticity (in resource content, instructional design, format/style, artwork, and so forth) and language accuracy are central. This level of authenticity and accuracy can only be provided and ensured by indigenous and in-country expertise (resource developers, writers, translators, artists, designers) and is critical to the local acceptance and uptake of resources developed within projects. This in turn points to the value of investing in and continuing support for capability growth and the channelling of innate regional skill and potential in these areas. It will also require a sea change of opinion for both partners and Pacific nations regarding the value and quality of locally produced resources and the importance of investing in them, and in building capacity for and appetite for partnering with teachers themselves in developing fit-for-purpose local resources for teaching and learning. Careful collective considerations as to longer term financially and environmentally sustainable models of local resource development are warranted.

For Development Partners, a key implication of the research is that while co-design approaches such as DBR have potential, to be most effective they must be embedded in and preceded by a culturally and contextually appropriate methods of engagement. Therefore, any project designs would benefit from incorporating both elements and allowing space for local experts to determine what appropriate methodologies are. This extends to the naming and framing of projects. Ultimately, the means by which (and by whom) a project is named, the measures of success are identified, and the project purpose is framed, all matter. An implication of the research findings is the value of Development Partners attending more carefully to such matters.

4. Professional Development models

The research demonstrated the potential of home-grown approaches to professional development and identified the need to continue to explore the most appropriate models for sustainable professional development in each Pacific country context.

For Ministries of Education, this finding again provides encouragement for trusting in and embracing indigenous approaches to learning, socialisation and developing professionalism within the education workforce. There are exciting examples of this throughout the Pacific and the research indicates the potential for MoEs to share experiences across countries. More specifically, the research points to a need for MoEs to consider the limitations of the commonly used ‘train-the-trainers’ approach and explore further the potential of mentoring and coaching approaches.

For Development partners and also implementing agencies, the findings highlight the need to seek out opportunities to use what is already practiced or known in the national contexts. Sometimes, what is currently practiced only needs additional funding or technical support to improve it, and at other times, all that is needed to prompt strong and effective educational practice is the trust given by implementing agencies and donor partners. Further to this is the deliberate work to share learning across the countries either through the PacREF or through set up for multi-country programme approaches. Often, while the sharing of lessons across the countries is noble and agreed to by all involved, it rarely happens or happens in a manner that enables others to take up the lessons shared and contextualise them for their own context. There remains a persistent drive to always look towards New Zealand, Australia or other developed countries and their models. This, unfortunately, is often further perpetuated by international consultants who are not familiar with indigenous Pacific



methodologies and may revert to unquestioningly adopting the more ‘known’ and recommend models from developed countries.

Thus, there is an opportunity for Development Partners and implementing agencies to re-think how these communications are enacted in regional spaces – such as the IA Fono, the CROP, the meetings of heads of education systems. Further to this is the opportunity for the academic and educational practitioner communities to provide a more inclusive platform for Pacific teachers and educators to take part in conferences, such as the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference and the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES) conferences. However, the sharing of information and communication with the national education community through indigenous approaches like Talanoa and Tok Stori to encourage meaningful sharing of learnings is as, if not more, important.

5. Rethinking Roles and the ‘capacity’ challenge

The research points to several unresolved questions around the most appropriate structures for Pacific MoEs and the respective roles of regional agencies, implementing partners and Development Partners in their support of Pacific MoEs and wider education systems. These questions often focus on questions of capacity. However, the findings of this research indicate the need to rethink ‘capacity’, to consider capacity in relational and contextual-specific terms, and to move beyond concern only for institutional structures.

For Ministries of Education, this finding is an opportunity to re-consider the structures and processes of a Ministry of Education as an organisation. To think critically about a tailored, fit for purpose organisation that is sustainable and fit for a small geographically spread country with defined financial resources and access to regional agencies and development partner support. As part of this re-thinking for a more tailored fit in terms of organisational structure, the MoEs are encouraged to also consider their various relationships and roles in relation to faith-based education authorities in their respective countries, as well as to providing service to remote island communities. It is useful to consider what functions and roles are core to the work of a national education ministry? What functions are being replicated by other education authorities? How can the ministry foster a whole of education sector approach to developing the national education system, where resources are shared more efficiently and a more inclusive approach to educational development exists as an operating principle? These considerations may also provide an opportunity to consider the sharing of resources to avoid duplication of activities, and thereby encourage a more focused and strategic collective approach to capacity building within small but complex country contexts.

For Development Partners and specifically for regional implementing agencies such as USP, there is the opportunity for rethinking their supporting role for MoEs and to thus walk more closely with the national education systems. How can regional agencies supplement thin capacity and gaps in the capabilities found in small ministries of education? Regional agencies must also ask themselves, if through their approaches to development, they are also contributing to removing technical people and adding to the gap in capabilities within national ministries of education? Moreover, if they are recruiting technical expertise from the national ministries of education, how are they reciprocating and giving back to the national ministry of education in that context? Development Partners and regional agencies must also be encouraged to consider how their approach to project work adds clarity, if any, and supports national MoEs to achieve their own policy outcomes and vision. Some of the key challenges for national MoEs relate to connecting the different pieces of project work (often from multiple sponsors) to enable further progress towards achieving national policy outcomes and education vision. This raises the central questions of how regional agencies and Development Partners are structuring their project design to enable national MoEs to achieve their national education agenda?



For Development Partners and also implementing agencies, there needs to be greater effort channelled into coordinating activities at the regional level and deepening genuine collaboration amongst implementing agencies. The issue of thin capacity and capability gaps within national education systems should be considered to be a shared and collective responsibility and challenge amongst all key education stakeholders.

6. Strategic support of the PacREF

This research was designed to support the PacREF Implementation Rolling Plan. In the PacREF Implementation Rolling Plan, the following countries have requested the sharing of lessons learned from the PLSLP and the LEAP: Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. This study has presented an opportunity to further investigate the components that drove the success of the PLSLP, TESA and LEAP. Through the PacREF, the findings from this research project will be shared with the countries listed above. Further to this, the findings from the study highlight implications and opportunities for supporting various PacREF policies including the following.

At policy level for improving student outcomes and well-being:

Findings from this study have shown the critical role of language in literacy and numeracy development. The study also showed the complexities of language transition between the first language and the second language and that the work around language remains a key stepping-stone in literacy and numeracy development. The study also offers helpful insight into the use of classroom data to inform professional development in literacy and numeracy. There is also great value in the use of classroom data to design context specific learning materials in mother tongue as well as bilingual materials.

For the IA Fono and Development Partners supporting the PacREF, there is a real opportunity to strengthen the linkages between the PacREF Policy Area 1 that relates to ‘Curriculum grounded in Pacific cultures, languages and identifies aligned to country context’ and Policy Area 3 on Student Outcomes and Wellbeing that relates to ‘Learners at defined stages of education demonstrate progressive shifts in mastery of literacy and numeracy skills’. In the current PacREF Rolling Plan, there is only one activity under the PacREF Policy Area 1 that relates to Pacific languages and it is only for one country. The IA Fono is thus encouraged to explore more opportunities to work with member countries in supporting Pacific languages and linkages to literacy and numeracy development.

At policy level for improving teaching profession:

The findings from the study demonstrated various approaches to teacher professional development that included the use of Pacific home-grown methods such as Tok Stori and Nofo. The study also showed how each project worked with the national teacher education institution or national university to share the learnings from the field.

It would therefore be useful for the IA Fono and development partners to encourage an approach that involves working together with member countries to reveal more of these Pacific home-grown methods for professional development. The IA Fono also has the opportunity to work closely with participating Ministries of Education to document and support them to share these learnings with other member countries. Similarly, there is also the opportunity for the IA Fono, in particular USP, to be more deliberate in working together with national universities and teacher education institutions.



At policy level for improving coordination and collaboration:

One of the key principles of the PacREF is to improve regional coordination and collaboration. The findings from this study strongly support heading towards the national context first and letting the national context guide the ‘how’ (methodology) to facilitate regional sharing in a more meaningful way. Findings from the study also highlighted the role of regional agencies in supporting a multi-country programme approach and, in particular, in the use of existing networks and systems that are in place across regional organisations such as the USP. Wider dialogue on multi-country approaches to aid and implementation are needed, with frank conversations with regional agencies, like USP, about how their own systems can be further strengthened to better facilitate regional multi-country approaches.

At policy level for using the PacREF Research Framework:

This study was guided by the PacREF Research Framework that was endorsed by the FEDMM in 2021. By using the PacREF research framework, the study showed how research with Pacific people can be done differently. The research encouraged greater ownership of data and Pacific people leading the knowledge creation using Pacific research methodologies and research protocols. By using the research framework, the study encouraged the mentoring of emerging Pacific researchers from each of the participating countries. Further to this, by using the research framework, the study gave evidence to the depth of knowledge created when Pacific people lead research using Pacific research methodologies.

It would therefore be useful for IA Fono, development partners, and research institutions (including regional, national and international universities) who are interested in conducting research in support of the PacREF to learn to use the PacREF research framework to guide their work. This also includes seeking endorsement from the Steering Committee and sharing findings at the CROP HRD WG, the IA Fono, and also with the Steering Committee for Pacific Heads of Education Systems.





F. Conclusion

This research project, commissioned by MFAT, has explored the critical components that have led to the effective literacy outcomes in the PLSLP, LEAP and TESA projects that were delivered in Cook Islands, Kingdom of Tonga and Solomon Islands. The research project was conducted by the IoE-USP and its partners from University of Auckland and The Victoria University of Wellington, as well as emerging Pacific researchers from the Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

The study conducted a document analysis and review of project literature, and a series of Tok Stori, Talanoa and Korero throughout the three countries. A total of 70 people participated in the study, drawn from various levels of the education system in each country and from the IoE and UoA UniServices. The study followed the PacREF Research Framework and its associated protocols, including obtaining research permits from all three participating countries.

The findings from the literature review and the review of the programme literature highlighted four key themes. These themes were further explored during the data analysis and through the country case studies. At the completion of the data analysis, the study also revealed a series of questions and unsolved challenges that remain to be further explored.

The first theme illustrated the unique space of Motutapu, a space to begin negotiations as to power-sharing and collaboration. Under this theme, the study explored the mana brought to a team by strong Pacific leaders who can support the gaining of permissions and access to various levels of the local context, help establish the credibility of the project, and gain trust. The study further explored the relationships that navigate the various positionalities and the multi-faceted roles that are present in a complex project involving a range of stakeholders. A key value found under this theme is the deep understanding of relationships, reciprocity and language in the process of co-design and implementation of a DBR project.

The second theme illustrated the indigenous expertise in Leadership, Literacy and Language. A powerful lesson from this research project is the importance of assembling the right people for the right job in the right place – a truly fit-for-purpose team. Even with the closure of borders, both LEAP and the TESA were still able to be offered, thereby highlighting the advantage of having in-country presences in both Solomon Islands and Tonga. The projects, through their design, were already gearing towards greater in country leadership. Although the LEAP was about literacy development and for TESA it was both literacy and numeracy development, the findings from the data showed how leadership was a key component of the design. The indigenous expertise in Leadership flowed over to adopting indigenous approaches to mentoring and focusing on leadership development at multiple levels of an education system.

The third theme of the study showed the opportunity to explore Pacific based methodologies – as in the use of the Tok Stori in the Solomon Islands, and the Talanoa, Nofo and Faiako ma‘a Tonga in Tonga under TESA. This theme illustrated the value that Pacific people place on reciprocity and the ethos of collectivity – ‘let’s make good together – you have something, I have something, let’s do this together’. The value of respect was also clearly illustrated in this theme, demonstrated through the on-going process of seeking permission, of on-going sense making, openness to learning, and mindfulness of how people engage with and relate to one another in respectful ways. From this theme, it highlighted that in spite of pressure and problems during the implementation, the relationships were still prioritised. In fact, it was these relationships that participants believed contributed directly to the success of the projects.



The fourth theme drawn from the research project focused on sustainability and the efforts to make a good thing last. Through the project, a range of interpretations and understandings of ‘sustainability’ were revealed, at different levels of the various education systems. The learnings that teachers and school principals took on to change their methodologies were part of sustainability, as well as the development of relevant and context-specific learning resources – as in the highly praised textless books – that could be used beyond the lifetime of the project. One of the particularly powerful aspects of the DBR was the sense making exercises, where teachers were invited to co-analyse their classroom data with the project team. This simple act of co-analysis, followed with opportunities to co-design, proved to be powerful in using evidence (data) to inform teaching at the classroom level.

At a systems level, the study also highlighted that ‘sustainability’ was a collective organisational responsibility and that while we often look to the national Ministries of Education to pick up a project and make it ‘stick’, it is also the responsibility of Development Partners as well as implementing agencies to design for sustainability. The study also showed the place of national teacher training institutions in a formula for sustaining and embedded new learnings onto the education system – that it was just not about the teacher who is already out in the field, but also the teacher who is in training. Additional to this, is the role of communities and parents in supporting a school to keep improving. Findings from this study suggest that sustainability has to be part of the design, and that it is a truly collective responsibility.

In the process of the study, we also revealed additional questions that remained unanswered and issues that remain unresolved. These unsolved challenges presented the final theme drawn from this study. The theme of unresolved challenges posed questions as to the ‘training of trainers’ model and its effectiveness, the ongoing use of DBR by ministries and its cost, and the level of ongoing involvement of partners in supporting national MoEs and education systems. The study also revealed some unanswered questions in relation to indigenous language/s and language/s of instruction, as well as on the on-going issue of capacity building on the ground. The final theme posed some questions about our understanding of Ministries of Education in the Pacific as small-scale educational organisations and the impact of this on perceptions about capacity and capability. The final theme also raised questions about relationships between national MoEs and other educational providers as well as with implementing agencies and Development Partners.

Overall, the study has highlighted key findings from the field that may be of interest to national Ministries of Education, to implementing agencies and to Development Partners who are interested in learning from the context behind the context in the Pacific.





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H. Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary of key terms

Adaptive Management: An approach to learning within a development project by using evidence and allowing refinements throughout implementation.

Design Based Research: A research methodology aimed to improve educational practices. Collaboration among researchers and practitioners leads to contextually-located design principles and theories through cycles of iterative data collection, analysis, design, implementation, and review.

Co-design: A participatory approach to collective problem solving, underpinned by negotiated agreement about the nature of the issue at hand, and approaches most likely to provide solutions.

Positionality: Explicit and reflexive acknowledgement of one's role, as shaped by sociological, historical and cultural processes.

Profiling phase: An initial phase in the Design Based Research methodology that focussed on understanding complexity, the nature of the evidence about the perceived problem to solve, and the beliefs that actors have about the nature of the problem and the perceived solutions.

Relationality: A worldview that focuses on interconnectedness. Relational understandings include social interconnectedness. They also include the interconnectedness between people, places and physical objects and texts.

Reciprocity: The Pacific value of giving back.

Sensemaking: The process of collaborative data interpretation by participants and local actors together with researchers. This process explicitly seeks to identify varied perspectives and interpretations of the data, allowing for contestation of meaning, and ensuring that the 'meaning' of the data is interpreted within context.

Talanoa: A Pacific Research Methodology using culturally embedded talk as a way of coming to understand a phenomenon from multiple, context embedded perspectives

Tok Stori: A Solomon Islands participatory, conversational, dialogic approach to knowledge sharing and creation.



Appendix 2: Stakeholder engagement plan

Agency/ Organisation	Communication Needs, Channels and Tactics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience • Communication needs • Key messages • Frequency 	Communication Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key communication channels and tools 	Stakeholders Reached	Monitoring and Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools and process for monitoring and evaluation 	Report
PacREF governance	PacREF Steering Committee (SC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to participate in the research process; including sense making process; strengthen the PacREF Research framework • Key messages – application of findings to other regional and country interventions • Frequency – as in accordance with project timeline, and at strategic points in the project implementation 	PacREF SC meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual meeting, email and telecommunications • Talanoa/Tok Stori reflections on data and findings • Publication of findings 	CEOs and Directors of Education present at the PacREF SC (Niue, Kiribati, Palau, PNG, Vanuatu) Other Implementing Agencies (IA) present at the SC Meeting	Membership, attendance, frequency of meeting, inputs, decisions reached (outputs), next step planned, evaluations	As per event PacREF SC outcomes statement
MFAT	MFAT Steering Committee	MFAT Steering Com <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual meeting and email • Talanoa/Tok Stori and reflections and findings 	MFAT and posts in Honiara, Tonga and Cook Islands	Attendance, frequency and outcomes reached	As per minutes of meetings
PacREF governance	PacREF Implementing Agency Fono – including EQAP	IA Fono and in particular EQAP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • virtual meetings and emails • Talanoa on shared learnings and findings • Talanoa on connections and possible collaboration 	EQAP, UNESCO, UNICEF, APTC and USP (SOED, PTAFE) and the PFU	Attendance, frequency of meetings, outcomes of the meetings	IA Fono outcomes statements Opportunities and interest for collaboration
Ministry of Education	Ministries of Education (Cook Is., Tonga, Solomon Is.)	MOE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • virtual meetings and where possible face to face meetings • Talanoa reflections on the study, findings and analysis • Talanoa on learnings 	MOE for Cook Is, Tonga and Solomon Is.	Meeting minutes, frequency of meetings	As per record of meetings



Agency/ Organisation	Communication Needs, Channels and Tactics • Audience • Communication needs • Key messages • Frequency	Communication Strategy • Key communication channels and tools	Stakeholders Reached	Monitoring and Evaluation • Tools and process for monitoring and evaluation	Report
NZ High Commission	NZ High Com Nuku'alofa, Honiara & Rarotonga	NZ HC at post • virtual meetings and where possible face to face meetings • Talanoa and reflections on the study, findings and analysis and learnings	NZ High Com posts and relevant program officers at post	Frequency of meetings and recordings of the minutes	As per record of meetings
SINU, TIOE	National tertiary institutions (SINU, TIOE)	National tertiary institutes • virtual meetings and where possible face to face meetings • research skills learned and experience gained	Education lecturers and emerging Pacific researchers	Involvement in the research study, through data collection, sense making and reflections	As per number of meetings and recordings of events
FFM	Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM) – Solomon Is.	FFM • virtual meetings and where possible face to face meetings • research skills learned and experience gained • participation in the study and their reflections	Emerging Pacific researchers and practitioners in development education in the SI context	Involvement in the research study, through data collection, sense making and reflections	Data transcripts
USP	USP/ IoE – project staff for PLSLP, TESA, LEAP	• virtual meetings and reflections through face to face, and through virtual meetings and emails • participation in the study	Researchers and Practitioners in the education development field and specifically for the region	• Documented transcription of virtual meetings and face to face Talanoa	* Data transcripts
UniServices	UniServices – project staff for PLSLP, TESA, LEAP	• virtual meetings and reflections through face to face, and through virtual meetings and email participation in the study	Researchers and Practitioners in the education development field and specifically for the region	• Documented transcription of virtual meetings and face to face Talanoa	* Data transcripts
Schools, Communities	Beneficiaries of PLSLP, TESA, LEAP – school leaders, teachers, communities,	• virtual meetings and reflections through face to face, and through virtual meetings and emails	Educators in the field	• Documented transcription of virtual meetings	* Data transcripts



Agency/ Organisation	Communication Needs, Channels and Tactics <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audience• Communication needs• Key messages• Frequency	Communication Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key communication channels and tools	Stakeholders Reached	Monitoring and Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tools and process for monitoring and evaluation	Report
	provincial educational authorities	participation in the study		and face to face Talanoa	



