

Spiral process of Collaboration Towards the Development of the Giligili Correctional Institution Detainees'

Literacy Programme
Alotau, Milne Bay Province,
Papua New Guinea

Intermediate Assessment of the Programme
30 January – 6 March 2006

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Background information

Editor's Note: Refer to previous article in Vol 41:1 April 2006

In August-September 2005 I conducted a teacher-training workshop for three officers and four former teacher detainees (Nagai, 2006). Initially, 41 detainees were identified as potential students according to their educational backgrounds which had been provided by each detainee at his arrival to the Giligili Correctional Institution. However, we soon discovered that the information was not reliable. Hence, the number of students was reduced to 26. One of them was held in detention and another one dropped off on the third day due to his poor eyesight. This decreased the number of students to 24: 15 in their 20s and 30s, five in their 40s or 50s and four were juveniles.

Among the 24 students, however, some students already had literacy skills. Thus, they began to dominate and intimidate others who did not. So we gave them a dictation test and from the test results, we divided the students into two levels. While the speed of learning in the Level 1 class was adjusted according to their slower pace, the Level 2 students began to achieve faster. Some of them began to regain confidence not only in the class but also in everyday life in the institution. Furthermore, through rewriting a story from the Level 1 students' perspective, the Level 2 students began to develop a more considerate and more caring attitude towards the Level 1 students.

As I felt it impersonal to call the students 'Level 1' and 'Level 2', I suggested each group choose a name like for a sports team. The Level 1 group decided to call themselves *Kumul* (Bird of Paradise) and Level 2 *Tarangau* (Eagle). Calling themselves by these names gave them their much needed pride and camaraderie, which was evident in their participation in the official launching of the programme on 21 September. Then, two days later, I left Giligili.

This was the first part of the first cycle of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) process through planning, trialling and documenting. When I returned to Giligili in February-March 2006, we continued the latter part of the cycle through reflection. Then, we re-planned and began the second cycle of trialling the modified ways of facilitating the adult literacy programme.

Reflecting the previous trial period

1) My accommodation

During my last visit in August-September 2005, I stayed one week in the SIL Centre in Alotau and the rest of my time in the flat in Goilanai, 4km east of Alotau. Since the SIL vehicles were shared among its members, it became increasingly difficult to arrange for a vehicle for me to commute daily to and from Giligili. Finally, it was agreed that the Correctional Institution provides my daily transport. This seemed to be reasonable since they had school runs to Alotau twice daily. However, the driver sometimes forgot to pick me up in the morning and I was always urged to go home during the planning session in the afternoon. Additionally, living in Goilanai, an unsafe area without a vehicle, meant that I was confined to the property once I returned home except for going to a little corner shop.

In order to be in Giligili on time every morning and to be able to work in the afternoon with those who are involved in the programme, I requested the provision of housing in the Correctional Institution's compound during my next visit in January-March 2006. At first, the officers were hesitant to have me stay in the compound giving various excuses such as the inconvenience of the water and power supply. However, after I explained about how I had lived with the local people in the Maiwala village, they agreed to let me stay in one of the staff housing.

When I arrived in Giligili early in the morning of Monday 30 January, I was taken to the house where I would be staying for the next few weeks. The grass in the yard was freshly cut and the paint on the walls and the

kitchen cupboard was still wet. Later, a solid bed was brought over from the Female Compound and Sulo loaned me curtains and a pandanus mat from his house. A kerosene primus, a hurricane lamp, a narrow 2-inch mattress, saucepans, plastic crockery and a few pieces of cutlery were purchased by the institution and delivered to the house. A few days later, rations of kerosene and other basic supplies were arranged, since I was living in the compound doing voluntary work for the institution. The Commander let me have his bar fridge from his office. As the power supply for the compound was restricted from 6:00pm to midnight only, it was impossible to keep food cool in the fridge during the day. Nevertheless, it gave me the comfort of some cold water in the evening.

2) The programme

On 23 September 2005, the day after I left Giligili, Sulo called a meeting to talk with the teachers. Although they were not cooperative while I was there, at this meeting they agreed to work together and confirmed their commitment to teaching thereafter. However, during the next two months while Sulo was away on recreational leave, little was achieved. Then, as the teachers wanted to have a break over the holiday season and the staff needed to concentrate on security, the class was suspended from mid December 2005.

On 19 January 2006 Sulo called a meeting with the whole class and had a dialogue with them about how to pull together for the literacy class. Some students wished to be involved in a work party, rather than attending the literacy class. If they attended the class in the morning, they usually ended up being confined within the compound all day. Others explained that it was difficult to catch up with learning. These were only excuses and no students voiced real reasons for not coming to the class. Sulo explained to them that hard labour was compulsory for them but the literacy class was voluntary¹. Then on Monday 23 January, the class resumed.

They continued to have two one-hour classes as before: the Kumuls first, followed by the Tarangaus. Previously, the teachers requested a clock, but a stopwatch was provided. To my surprise, the teachers kept the class

¹*Sulo had been trying to make the literacy class as one of the labour obligations. To the students' delight, it was finally approved in mid-February. In this way, the students can attend the class in the morning and can also be involved in a work party in the afternoon.*

sharply on time, waiting for one more minute to begin the class while the students were sitting quietly. The tables had been rearranged to face the teacher like in a formal classroom and the teacher was instructing the students to repeat after him the names of alphabet letters and their sounds, like parrots. There were no more chart stories but old class stories had been made into small booklets and the students were instructed to read them over and over again in unison. They also were instructed to write single words only. The excitement of the class had diminished and the atmosphere was rather painful. The teachers had completely reverted from the student-centred approach to a traditional teacher-centred approach, in which the authoritative teachers were controlling students as mere “subordinates” (Shor, 1996).

As the class was ending, I praised the students for their good work and asked them to dictate a simple phrase in Tok Pisin. As I anticipated, they all could, with appropriate word breaks, except a couple of students who could not spell consonant clusters. It was obvious that they had not mastered phonics skills, as the teachers did not continue to teach phonics but reverted to syllables in which they were trained for teaching vernacular. Syllables may work well for local vernaculars in Milne Bay, but phonics is more helpful for learning to spell Tok Pisin that has many consonant clusters.

3) The students

The number of the students dropped significantly while Sulo was on leave because of the following reasons:

- Five students were discharged
- One student escaped during a work party for harvesting oil palm
- One student, TS, was confined, suspected of smuggling marihuana, but he wanted to attend the class very much².
- Several students dropped out, but most of them returned to the class

² On Monday 30 after the class while Sulo and I were waiting for the guard to release us from the locked compound, TS, the student who had been confined, called out from his high security cell that he had been missing the class. A couple of days later, he sent a note with one of the students pleading for me to intervene so that Sulo would allow him to attend the class. Both Sulo and I read his note together and smiled as we thought about it. Then in mid-February, Sulo arranged for TS to come out of his confinement, but only during the literacy class.

when Sulo called a meeting in mid-January. However, three others refused to rejoin the class. S was quite old and could hardly speak Tok Pisin but only Motu which nobody in the compound spoke. F and K did not explain why they quit attending the class³.

4) The teachers

Sulo was informed that the teachers had never worked together while he was away and the morale of the class declined sharply. He also heard the teachers' complaints as well as the students' excuses for dropping out. So after the class on Monday 30 January, Sulo and I met with the teachers to hear their complaints.

G, a former elementary school teacher, hardly spoke as usual. He said that students were doing OK but that he was frustrated. However, he did not explain the reasons for his frustration. His frustration might have been caused by his classification⁴. During the past few months, many students had been moved to Minimum Security Unit (MSU) because of their good behaviour, although two teachers (T and G) remained in the Main Compound.

T, a former high school teacher, gave a lengthy explanation of how he had omitted the parts of the teaching programme that focused on meaningful and fluent reading but concentrated on teaching the alphabet and spelling words only. He further explained how he had shortened each lesson in order to speed up the learning process. Thus, the class had not composed any stories together. He also asked Sulo and me, if he would receive a certificate of teaching detainees. It was obvious that his main interest was not the students but himself.

B, a former primary and elementary school teacher, explained that there was no supply of large paper for making chart stories, so he organised other teachers to silkscreen some of the previously written stories in A5 sized booklets, instead of preparing English Big Books for the Tok Pisin – English Bridging programme. That was his excuse for not writing chart

³ *F seemed to have been suffering from some kind of personality disorder. K who was in his mid fifties seemed to have had enough of the teachers' disrespectful treatment.*

⁴ *One day when some of the students from MSU wanted to write a story about their experience of going out unsupervised to cut sago fronds for roofing, G said that he was not happy about writing the story.*

stories, because Sulo had supplied plenty of butcher's paper while I was still there with them last September. Taking advantage of his freedom in the MSU, B somehow managed to get a key to a locked room and took out various kinds of stationery, including a ream of cover stock, a ream of A4 paper, a ream of thin pink paper (which was good for rolling smokes). Thus, he used up all the cover stock, by wasting half of it, which we had kept for the making of albums and students' individual storybooks.

A, a former elementary school teacher who had recently been released, also came to join us in the meeting. He mentioned about how boring it was for the students to read the same old stories over and over again. Special permission was granted for A to return to the locked compound to teach. However, after considering security and his immediate family needs as well as his passion for teaching elementary school children⁵, it was decided to send him home.

Re-planning and trialling (the second cycle)

I explained to the teachers and Sulo that it was very important for the students to gain confidence and be able to extend their ability. For example, they should be writing sentences instead of just words. I also explained the importance of composing a story together as a group in order to help them learn to work cooperatively. Rewriting the story from the others' perspectives was also important for them to learn to become more considerate of others. It was also important for them to enjoy reading fluently to experience achievement in their rehabilitation process.

The teaching arrangement for the Kumuls was the same as before: T and G took turns daily. For the Tarangaus, it was arranged for B to observe my teaching and assist me if necessary. It was decided to have both classes simultaneously, in response to the students' request to have a longer class time.

As for the three dropouts, we decided not to push S to come to the class but to give him time to learn to communicate in Tok Pisin first. However, both F and K finally decided to return to the class as a result of constantly encouraging them for about a week. Thus, the total number of students became 17: eight Tarangaus and nine Kumuls. Everybody was keen to continue to learn except W (juvenile) who seemed to be more interested in

⁵ Two months later, he was re-installed to his former teaching position which had been vacant during his imprisonment.

other activities and F who continued to demonstrate his problematic behaviour. After the teachers and Tarangau friends had helped F personally during the next three weeks, he finally began to pick up.

In order to prepare Big Books for the bridging class, we borrowed several examples from the Maiwala Elementary School and traced⁶ the illustrations and the texts. In order to make them more appropriate for young male adults, illustrations in some of the books were redrawn by Sulo. In addition to the three teachers, Sulo and myself, Eve (the Officer-in-Charge of the Female Wing) and two female detainees also joined in the book production. Thus, we were able to complete 14 Big Books during the next four weeks. Since we did not have any watercolour paint, I completed three more Big Books in Australia. I also designed a Tok Pisin – English Bridging lessons by using these 17 storybooks.

1) Tarangaus

Since they could write freely, I encouraged each student to write his own stories in his Tok Ples, choosing one of them to make into an A5-sized booklet. Firstly, I let them talk about their stories among themselves and then individually write a story. Since the class time was not long enough, they wanted to complete their stories as their homework. On the following day, each one took turns to read his story to the rest of the group explaining its meaning in Tok Pisin. Some of them did not write their stories, but felt encouraged to do so after seeing their friends' achievements.

Secondly, I encouraged each student to write a short letter to me in his Tok Ples. On the following day, as I read aloud each letter, I stumbled because I was not familiar with the language and some of the handwriting was not legible in the semi-dark classroom. The author of the letter and some others who knew the language helped me to continue to read. Then, I asked the author to explain the meaning of his letter in Tok Pisin. In this way, I paid special attention to each student and his work. This experience made them realise that I, too, was learning to read and needed their assistance. It certainly helped us to establish more symmetrical relationships. J, one of the students, said to me in tears: "Many people have come to teach us in the past, but now we know that you truly love us. You are genuine." From that time on, he and some other students began to call me "Sinagu" (my mother)⁷.

⁶ *The original authors and the artists were acknowledged in each book.*

The Tarangaus continued to write more stories and then each one chose one of the stories to make into a booklet for the first time ever. Although copyright law is non-existent in PNG, I taught them how to respect each other's intellectual property. I also taught them how to design the layout for their booklets. The easiest way would be to write a text on the upper part of a page then draw pictures underneath. However, some of them could, if they liked, write the text first on the bottom half and then draw pictures above. D, who has been eminent right from the beginning, designed his layout with texts and pictures crossways. Then, each one chose his favourite colour for the cover. Throughout the process of book production, I continued to encourage them to help each other.

When the first three students had completed their booklets, we had a special time for their presentation in front of the Kumuls at the end of the class time. Each Tarangau confidently read his story and explained it in Tok Pisin by showing the pictures in his book. This helped the Kumuls to know that they, too, could likewise achieve.

2) Kumuls

First of all G, a former elementary school teacher, needed to understand that these adult students were capable of composing longer stories, not like the short stories (one sentence per page) which he used to write for his preparatory class. On the other hand, T, a former grade-7 teacher, had to learn to make a story shorter by avoiding complex sentences. Since all the students could write the alphabet and wanted to copy the story onto their exercise books, it was decided not to make a chart story. Hence, each student began to read from his own exercise book. Since they were very keen to read from their exercise books, it was decided to let them continue to practise reading for the rest of the class time.

When they came to learning the parts of the language and to think of Tok Pisin words with key letters, we all felt that it was not a good idea, since the students wanted to learn to spell English properly. Thus, it was decided that each student find words with the key letter in his vernacular and write a sentence or two using some of these words in vernacular. We explained to them that they should develop these initial sentences into a short story. The number of stories should increase as each student writes a

⁷ Currently, involvement of female officers for juveniles is experimented in the Bomana Correctional Institution in Port Moresby. They also wanted to write their names in Japanese!

story per week with a key letter. Then, later, each student should choose one of his stories to make into an A5-sized booklet, as the way the Tarangaus have done.

When the students tried to find words with the key letter, those from a certain culture and those who were convicted of sexual crimes often chose words that related to women. One day, K chose a word for “breast” and drew a picture of the whole body of a naked woman. I was very surprised, as drawing such a picture was prohibited in the compound and exercise books that contained such pictures had to be confiscated. So I suggested to K to put a skirt around the woman’s body⁸, but he did not seem to understand why. I mentioned it to the teachers, but they did not make any comments. After the class, I asked Sulo and Eve how women were respected and protected from sexual harassment in PNG. It was mentioned and explained during an inservice course which Eve had attended some time before, but in reality, it had not been practised in the PNG society.

Nevertheless, because of my feeling of being harassed, Sulo explained to the students that I was from a different culture and that they needed to learn to show their respect accordingly. All the students, especially K, felt really badly that they had offended their teacher whom they respected⁹. So K and the whole class planned an apology at the end of the following class. However, as usual, B took over the whole event, showing his power of control over K. Later when I saw K, I extended my right hand to him personally, as I wanted him to know that I had already forgiven him because I knew that he did not intend to offend me¹⁰. In this way, we continued to build mutual relationships by learning to understand each other and accept each other’s differences.

3) Combined class

All the Tarangaus had finished making their booklets in three weeks.

⁸ Both men and women are topless in the traditional cultures in PNG.

⁹ Sulo had already told me that he wanted to give me a piece of carving.

¹⁰ He was very happy and shook my hand so hard saying, “Sorry, sorry.” Then, he had a younger student from his culture to bring out a little shark he had carved for me from a piece of rosewood which he had found among the firewood some time before. Since he was a professional carver, he had spent two months carving it with a razor blade which is a weekly shaving supply to each detainee

About that time, T complained to Sulo that the teachers had been used for the development of the literacy programme which seemed to be only for the benefit of Sulo for his promotion. T and B also complained about not being paid while they were qualified teachers. This outraged Mr Bann, the Function Officer who was overseeing the literacy programme, as they were convicted detainees who could not earn anything during their term in prison. These teachers seemed to have thought that the literacy class would not continue without them. So Mr Bann began to consider dismissing them and requesting the Education Department to find elementary school teachers to come to teach in their place.

I explained to Mr Bann that, for the sustainability of the programme, it would be better for the officers to facilitate teaching rather than bringing teachers from elsewhere. I also explained to him the difficulty of re-training trained schoolteachers for teaching adults and that it would give rise to various problems, such as their transportation¹¹. Instead, I said that these adult students could learn to help each other with the assistance of an officer like Sulo. So I suggested that I would mentor the Tarangaus during the next few weeks to help them become confident in their achievements and be able to help the Kumuls. He seemed to be skeptical, but agreed to let me try.

As for the current teachers, it was decided to give them the option of resigning taking time off, rather than dismissing them from teaching. Then, Sulo called a meeting with them on 20 February to meet with the teachers. To Sulo's and my relief, T decided to stand down from teaching, but B¹² and G did not.

Then, we combined the two classes together to trial alternative ways for class arrangements:

- 1) There would be no more teachers but facilitators.
- 2) Each Tarangau would choose one or two Kumul friends to look after.
- 3) Students and facilitators would work as a team to take responsibility

¹¹ They had already encountered a problem of transportation during the workshop with the elementary trainers in March.

¹² Two weeks later, B was finally caught in smoking. Thus, he was removed from MSU and dismissed from teaching. He appealed to be reinstalled, but his plea was not granted.

in devotions, roll call, writing of date and day on the blackboard and ticking off the alphabet letter they would have learned during the week.

During the first combined class, the Tarangaus began to speak up and the Kumuls were intimidated. However, as I kept on reminding the Tarangaus of their responsibility to look after their Kumul friends, they began to learn to talk with their Kumul friends and let them speak up. This experience gave the Tarangaus a completely different perspective: they were appreciated for giving opportunity to the weaker persons to speak up rather than trying to display their power of control. The Kumuls also began to feel that they were no longer insignificant peripheral people but were respected as fellow students. As the Tarangaus patiently helped their Kumul friends, their eyes were shining with the joy of satisfaction. The Kumuls were also very happy to receive individual attention and encouragement in their learning process.

After I left Giligili at the beginning of March, the students continued to learn together under the supervision of Sulo. I phoned him from time to time to see how things were going. A month later, the students were annoyed by one student, FA, who was finding it difficult to read fluently in Tok Pisin. Since he could read well in his Tok Ples, I suggested not to pressure him but rather encourage him to keep moving forward with the rest of the class. Unfortunately, F and W dropped out again. Since they were adults, it was decided to respect their final decision. Thus, 15 students remained in the final leg of the course culminating in their first ever graduation in June.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Action Research is often used for teachers to improve their own practices in their classrooms. However, nothing can be improved if the teachers strongly believe that they do not need to change their current practices. When I trained elementary school teachers a few years ago, I learned that most of them did not feel the need to try a new way. They might have felt obliged to try it during the workshop, however, most of them preferred to revert to the old way in which they had been trained previously or the way which they had observed in their own schooling as pupils.

Action Research is also used in the search for solutions to meet the problem in the research community by utilising the knowledge of the community members, rather than introducing foreign ideas right from the

beginning. Thus, it involves the lengthy process of improving “human welfare” (Whyte, 1991). In the case of Giligili Correctional Institution, the officers wanted the detainees to improve their communication skills in Tok Pisin. On the basis of my previous experience, I preferred not to involve the former schoolteachers when teaching adults, but the officers thought that it was the way to go. So instead of rejecting their ideas, I accepted their suggestion to try in order to determine what would be best suited for the programme. When the teachers got bogged down while Sulo was away and continued to express their complaints, it became obvious that the involvement of former schoolteacher detainees did not work out. Our reflection at the end of the first cycle was the appropriate time for me to introduce an alternative way of facilitating a programme.

When dealing with the detainees’ welfare, there were a few important elements that needed to be considered. Firstly, the students desperately needed encouragement. They needed to be respected as adults and accepted as they were. They all knew that they had been convicted of their crimes. So they needed to overcome the feeling of rejection from society by learning to view things in a positive way. They often sang a “kalabus song” about how Jesus loved them. However, how could they feel the love of Jesus, if they were treated by the teachers like ignorant little children? These teachers could certainly display their knowledge in the classroom, but their behaviour outside the classroom was disrespectful. Since many students left school because of negative experiences with their teachers, they needed to see teachers who were transparent at all times. They also needed teachers who could show personal interest in each individual student and his work.

Secondly, both the teachers and students needed to learn what is meant by commitment. The teachers were not committed to teaching while Sulo and I were away. While they were serving their sentences, they had little time to concentrate on helping their inmates. Instead, they were struggling to learn to overcome shame and guilt. Some of the students were not committed to attending the class, because they had been selected to come along with others on the basis of poor educational backgrounds. Those who lacked commitment were more interested in other activities (i.e., hard labour) which did not require long-term commitment.

While I was in Giligili, I endeavoured to be present at every class, as I wanted the students to know how committed I was to the class. If I had to go away for any reason during the class time, I sent my *written* apology to the students, as I wanted to assure them that I truly cared for them and how literacy skills could be used for communication with others. Observation of a person who is committed to teaching is far better than instruction by a

teacher who is not committed. The students may not need an officer to watch over them during the whole class time, but officers' daily visits would assure them that they are not forgotten. The officers' word of encouragement and their interest in the students' work would also help them to keep their morale high.

Thirdly, there was a need of understanding the detainees' cultural and personal backgrounds that might have led them into crime. I have compiled some reading material regarding the issues of sexual crime and HIV-AIDS, because of the exceptionally high rate of sexual crime in Milne Bay Province. However, only a few officers showed an interest in reading them. Understanding of the cause of the crime is essential in order to help the detainees to rehabilitate during their prison term. Educated detainees should be encouraged to read such materials and think for themselves, as the reading of these materials will enable them to understand who they are and why they have committed sexual crime. As they reflect on their lives, these materials can give them various suggestions about how they can rehabilitate. So it would be beneficial to have a counselling training workshop¹³ for the officers in order for them to deal with the detainees' emotional needs.

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¹³ Jackie Scorza, an SIL licensed counsellor, has showed interest in offering a counselling training workshop for the correctional officers.

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This website is a repository for data on Papua New Guinea Languages. You can find linguistic data, dictionaries and soon literacy material and READ Magazine. The information is organised by language and by province.

Well worth a look.