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United Nations Literacy Decade

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

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Programme name: Vanuatu Literacy Education Project (VANLEP) "The Book Flood Project"

Implemented by: Polytechnic of New Zealand Company (PINZ) through the Institute of Education, the University of the South Pacific

Basic facts

Country: Vanuatu

Starting year: 2005

Outreach: 74 schools and 146 teachers in 2007, expected to be country-wide in 2008

Target Population: Children, parents and care-givers, teachers, trainers

Language of instruction: English for teachers and trainers, and Bislama for parents, care givers, communities and youths

Operating in: primary Schools in Vanuatu

Facilitator/Beneficiary ratio: 1 per 25

Main Funding: New Zealand International Aid Development Programme (NZAid) under its Education Assistance Programme for Vanuatu (NZEAP)

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Brief Description

The Vanuatu Literacy Education Programme (VANLEP), commonly known as the "Book Flood Project", is a book-based approach to literacy and language teaching and learning that also focuses on parents as vital links in the development and promotion of parental education for partnership. The initiative is part of New Zealand's Education Assistance Programme (NZEAP) to Vanuatu which aims at enriching the current structural approach of the National English programme. It is implemented by Polytechnic International New Zealand (PINZ), in association with the Institute of Education of the University of the South Pacific (USP).

Rationale

As one of the developing Island States of the South Pacific, Vanuatu still encounters the problem of low literacy levels. VANLEP targets classes 3 and 4 students (8 and 9 year olds) in the belief that literacy needs to be promoted at the earliest level possible. The programme works closely with the parents to support home literacy as precondition for sustainable literacy learning. Parents are often regarded as 'first teachers' which they are, but the meaning of that role with parents is never clearly understood. Parenting or nurturing is often if not always, regarded and practiced as a token; to feed and clothe, to have a roof over their heads, to have books and food and other necessary items for school, to help at home and so forth. In VANLEP, the need to understand the roles of parents at every stage of the child's growth is emphasised and most importantly the need for having TIME with the child at home. TIME well-spent with children on sharing experiences at school, story-telling, sharing personal experiences, playing and having fun, sharing and understanding children's writing, reading to children all build long lasting and firm foundation.

Objective

This initiative aims at promoting literacy in rural and isolated areas of the country and at improving literacy learning outcomes for children aged 8-9 years by strongly involving parents and teachers and by providing a stimulating literate environment both in school and at home.

Conceptual Model and Methodology

VANLEP is based on a multi-pronged approach: primary schools in remote rural areas are provided with quality children's books, the teachers are trained in efficiently using the books, and an important role is attributed to the parents to help develop a stimulating literate environment also at home and encourage their participation in school literacy education.

Awareness meetings are organized for teachers, parents and the community (grandparents, youth, and "new" parents) to encourage them to spend time at home with their children and organize activities together. These activities include not only reading together, but also the importance of having fun together, sharing experiences together, undertaking household tasks and gardening tasks and a strong parental interest in the school experience of the child.

Teachers and parents' meetings are organised in 'new look' classrooms that are bright, stimulating with children's work displayed attractively across the classrooms. Parents are allowed to sit in and watch their children learn through natural, holistic pedagogy and later teachers chat with parents on the development. Such undertakings create understanding and awareness on the complementary roles of home learning and school development.

Innovative features

A key innovative feature of the programme is the close integration of school and home as measures to enhance learning – with children, parents and teachers playing mutually complementary roles in the process.

Other elements of the programme include the training and re-training of teachers, and enhancement of the literate environment in the classroom. A large variety of reading material is made available, a reading corner established as specific space in the classroom dedicated to reading and interactive teaching methods used to reinforce the children's motivation and performance.