An Exploration of the Benefits of an Indigenous Community Learning Center’s Mini-school library

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The purpose of this study was to discuss the benefits of the “lumad” (self-ascription and collective identity of the indigenous peoples of Mindanao, Philippines) school mini library. Additionally, the results of this study will aid the further research of indigenous people’s (IP) perspective at the primary school (first six grades) in achieving higher self-esteem levels and increased literacy through the community learning centers’ mini-school library. Classroom teachers and librarians determine how reading is taught and their decisions are influenced both by the policies instituted by local, regional and national agencies and the beliefs senior teachers and librarians hold. One assumption is that teacher and librarian decision making strongly influences the teaching of reading in a learning centre’s mini-school library. The processes of teaching reading have been influenced by any number of more classical learning theories over time. Within the last 10 years, no research was located in which experienced teachers’ and librarians’ decision making about reading instruction in an indigenous community’s learning centre or mini-school library was examined. A case study approach was used with an analysis of data from field based observations and semi-structured interviews of 10 classroom teachers and librarian in one community learning center at the Salugpungan Community Learning Center in Sitio Dulyan, Palma Gil Village, North Cotabato province, Southern Mindanao. Artifact analysis from teacher and librarian samples and an analysis of reading instructional practices within the mini-school library were used to expand the analysis of data.

Introduction

In some areas of the Phillipines, teachers remain the first and most personal learning contact with students as they attempt to read and make sense of print. The decisions teachers and librarians make about reading instruction at the school library, or “mini-school library,” are critical. If reading instruction is to improve among the lumad (self-ascription and collective identity of the indigenous peoples of Mindanao, Philippines) school children, teachers and librarians must feel responsible for student outcomes. Therefore, the voices of teachers and librarians, and the decisions they make daily in their classrooms and mini-school library, have merit. This study examines decisions teachers and librarians make about reading instruction methods and practices. The mini-school library can also do much to capture and preserve...
indigenous knowledge and culture since there is a critical need for this, considering that “lumad” youth and children themselves have been evolving and adapting to external realities through the years, and much of the knowledge and traditions of the past are giving way to modern notions.

At the Salugpungan Community Learning Center in in Sitio Dulyan, Palma Gil Village, North Cotabato province, Southern Mindanao, Phillippines, two important facets of teacher and librarian involvement on reading instruction were notably observed. Each participant discussed the support from the school administration (in this case, lay missionaries) concerning the reading instruction discipline at the mini library. In relation to the reading successes of lumad students, each teacher and librarian spoke extensively about the fact they were able to teach without interruption by inappropriate behavior. With the arrival of the mini-school library’s reading literacy program, teachers and librarians reported that they spent time during the day engaged with lumad school children in academic pursuit rather than behavioral problems. This aspect of the mini-school library’s program is worth mentioning because of the overwhelming response from all the participants. Most teachers and librarians were observed to teach strategies and from interviews, most teachers spoke fluently about the strategies they decided to use and the purpose behind the strategies they chose. Participants in this study focused on this concept in their instruction and in the strategies they taught among lumad school children. Vocabulary and reference materials were stated as important and these two areas were supported by the teachers in this study. Importantly, some teachers mentioned the need for more assistance from the mini school librarian in finding teaching materials. Since instructional materials were housed in the mini library and difficult to check out, teachers in interviews explored how this area of need by their students could be enhanced. Finally, the concept of helping students to become “lifelong learners” was prominent. The teachers, especially the librarians, reiterated comprehension as key to enjoyment for pleasure reading. When teachers were asked if there was an overall consensus for reading instruction in their school, most believed that all teachers were focused on reading comprehension as a goal. This was identified as a unifying facet of the reading literacy program at Salugpungan Community Learning Center’s mini-school library.

**Description of the Study**

Teacher and librarian observation during reading instruction, teacher and librarian interviews about reading instruction, and an examination of instructional artefacts provided insights that may contribute to understanding research-based practices in an indigenous community’s reading instruction. The main research question that framed this study was: What decisions are primary school (grades 1-6) teachers and librarians making for reading instruction at the mini-school library? The research problem is a lack of understanding about decisions made by today’s teachers and librarians concerning how to best teach children to read, specifically in an indigenous community. Little current research focuses on what teachers and librarians are doing in existing community learning centre environments that are highly influenced by the indicated need for more positive role models in promoting and preserving indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and traditions at the primary level.
Scope and Limitations of the Study
Every research study can be defined by its limitations. This study created balance through the use of observations, collecting artefacts, and an examination of interview transcripts. In qualitative research, case studies are contextual and limited by the samples chosen. It was important to recognize the design constraints of the small sample within one community learning center, 1 mini-school library, 1 librarian, 4 teachers, and 15 students.

A possible limitation of the observations was possible atypical behaviour by the participants because of the observation. The research design was to observe three times in the mini-school library in order to generate useful information about reading instruction. Therefore, the research design of observing only 3 times may also have been a limitation. Observations and interviews may also supply a cross check for each other. Also, trustworthiness was an important concept in this qualitative inquiry and there was a need to strive for objectivity in observations and interviews. Lastly, the study was bounded by the purpose in that it was to provide knowledge about teachers’ and librarians’ decision making with regard to reading instruction for lumad residents near Sitio Dulyan, Palma Gil Village.

Conceptual Basis
The processes of teaching reading have been influenced a number of more classical learning theories over time. Most recently, three major frameworks: behaviourist, developmental and constructivist learning theories have been identified as having significant influence. Understandings about teacher decisions and librarian beliefs about teaching reading in this case, in a library setting, have moved from the shift of behaviourism to cognitive psychology. As this shift occurred, researchers moved from examining the sequential behaviours of teachers toward studying thought processes used in their teaching. In addition, the mini-school library, as well as the community learning centre itself is the immediate culture teachers and librarians rely upon in making decisions about their teaching. Teacher and librarian knowledge and expertise grow through the interactions within the context of their classrooms and libraries. Likewise, establishing literacy skills at the reading level provides the necessary skill needed by the lumad community in working for self-determination. The indigenous people’s struggle is essentially involving their right to make decisions that affect their lives, wellbeing and development. In other words, society needs to help foster the development of indigenous people who have reading literacies because they have the potential to be life affirming, constructive, responsible, and trustworthy. Instead of empowering the lumad community, a culture of dependency is being instilled in the relationship between the learning resource center, mini-school library and the indigenous community children.

Methodology
Qualitative research offers a complex, yet insightful, framework for studying any issue in detail and depth. Examining the reading instruction in the natural setting of an indigenous community learning center in a mini-school library with minimal intrusiveness was important for providing depth of understanding about what was actually occurring within this setting. In this study, qualitative inquiry was used for the examination of the decisions about reading
methods and practices of four primary school teachers in grades 1 to 6, one librarian, and fifteen students in grades 1 to 6 as they taught and prepared students for reading literacy.

**Observations.** Three observations were conducted at each teacher’s and librarian’s convenience. They were asked to identify times convenient for observation during their scheduled mini-school library reading time. These observations were scheduled thrice a week during one to two different weeks within a month block of time. Field notes were recorded for each observation and a journal of additional information pertinent to the observation was kept. Field notes were recorded during each observation to capture the natural setting of daily routines in the mini-school library as a direct source of data. The insights of the researcher also became part of the fieldwork and were important pieces of data, such as selected interactions that related to reading instruction only. Each grade level’s particular setting was of interest because it was in a context that activities can be best understood in the actual settings in which they occur - the mini-school library environment.

**Interviews.** Following each of the observations, an interview was also scheduled to occur within a few hours after the observation. The researcher asked each observation participant questions to help broaden understanding of the the procedures and methods chosen for reading instruction during the observation. Each interview was arranged at the convenience of the teacher and librarian and took place where they were most comfortable, the mini-school library. Most interviews were completed during their free time which is approximately 30 minutes. Some teachers chose to be interviewed after school, rather than during the school day.

**Questioning Format.** A semi-structured approach to interviews was utilized. At the first interview, teachers and librarians were asked to discuss their teaching experience among the lumad community. This initial question allowed the participant to settle in and become comfortable with the purpose of study and the researcher as well as with the interview format. Following this general question, additional questions were used as a standard base of questioning for all teachers and librarians interviewed. These questions asked participants to discuss their personal approaches to reading instruction among the lumad community and how those approaches have evolved. In addition, student participants were also given the opportunity to discuss their interactions with the teachers and the librarian during reading instruction sessions.

**Artifacts.** These artefacts that exemplified their reading instruction included materials such as worksheets and teacher/librarian-made resources. The teachers and librarian volunteered these artefacts as a way to illustrate their reading instruction.

**Data Analysis**

Transcription and analysis of the observations and interviews allowed the researcher to identify meaning of the teachers’ and librarian’s actions that connected to their purpose. Therefore, multiple sources of data collection and analysis were imperative to the study because findings from different data sources may yield conflicting information and other inconsistencies regarding reading practices. A visual representation presented in Figure 1 presents how the data were assembled in layers that allows for cross-case patterns.
Experience Record. Creating an experience record for individual teachers, the librarian, and students pulls together and organizes the voluminous experience data into a comprehensive, primary resource package. Sticky note flags were used to identify the themes in each case, making it possible for the data to be manageable, yet assisting with subsequent analysis beyond the raw data. Each participant had a color-coded folder to hold the observations and transcripts to facilitate ease of identification. Using this organizational structure, the color-coded themes assisted with identifying the multiplicity observed in reading instruction such as various teaching practices throughout each individual reading class at the mini-school library.

Findings and Results

Each of the experienced teachers had more than two years of experience in the primary grades and majority was a resident near Sitio Dulyan, Palma Gil Village. Each teacher and the librarian had teamed up and were responsible for teaching reading in the mini-school library. From observations, interviews and artifacts, it was found that instructional focus was the most prominent theme. Strategies were identified but there were not as many examples of strategies being taught to lumad students.

Primary Teachers (Grades 1-6)

Four teachers provided strategies for decoding unknown or unfamiliar basic English and Filipino vernacular words. Those strategies were holistic and based on reading storybooks using the local language or mother tongue as a medium of instruction. From the observations, interviews, and artifacts, the most prominent theme reflected was that the instructional focus which was on teacher/librarian co-created materials, vocabulary from the storybooks, and related grouping strategies. The librarian also expressed her desire to have the lumad students become life-long readers and stated that she intended to develop an independent reading program that would allow the indigenous peoples like the lumad school children to tell, share, and even journal their stories and about their culture. One aspect of reading instruction observed at the mini-school library was a small reading group among various primary graders that read aloud where the teachers asked factual questions to check for simple comprehension. The reading instructional choices they chose offered students ways to comprehend what was
read in their mini-school library and were based on their desire to enable their students to make sense of what they read.

In addition, two teachers, being members of the lumad community, did their voluntary student teaching and began their teaching experiences at the community learning center a few years earlier. They recalled teaming up with a librarian who introduced them to the centre’s reference materials like dictionaries, additional textbooks, and some magazines in the Filipino vernacular, English, and the Visayan dialects. Children’s storybooks were seldom evident in the centre’s collection at this time. These teachers, being members of the lumad community themselves, had an easy manner with their students and, as observed, appeared to have a comfortable classroom environment. During their interviews and observations, they expressed encountering learning challenges but spoke easily with their students and the researcher in Filipino and in English. When asked collaboration with the librarian collaboration for the delivery of the reading instruction program at the mini-school library, one teacher explained:

This was something new she had decided she wanted to try. To put all the primary students in one room and which would be easier for us. Basically I’d be with one librarian, and most of my time will be spent with that librarian and we would talk something about how it will actually work out with the students’ reading as well. (Ms. Tannu, interview, April 3, 2011, p. 4)

Decisions made about how to facilitate reading instruction last year were further supported by teachers’ dedication to the lumad students’ reading literacy instruction as a vehicle for the future transmission of knowledge and culture of the lumad community. When asked about this decision, most teachers responded that they felt that they needed that a definite site for reading instruction. As one teacher stated,

The students need a structured environment (library) and to move one step at a time and kind of think out loud through the process. (Ms. Igka, interview, April 4, 2011, p. 7)

As a primary grade teacher working in a co-teaching partnership with a fellow librarian teacher, Ms. Igka remained steadfast in her responsibility to prepare these students for lifelong learning and to be resource bearers of their indigenous living traditions. As she aptly said:

If they can’t read and understand the basic English or Filipino question and answer it, then the reading instruction of the library and the community learning centre has failed. If the lumad children don’t pass then...they fail...and later on they will not be empowered to assert their rights and their children may become victims of socio-political oppression, historical marginalization, and so on. (Ms. Igka, interview, April 4, 2011, p. 7)

Librarian (Mini-School Library)
The librarian had served as a consultant and teaching assistant with teaching responsibilities at the community learning centre. In relation to working with lumad students at the primary grades, the librarian felt it was rewarding because she could see how much students gained over time. She also stated that one lumad teacher and lay missionary administrator had helped her develop as a teacher-librarian with a better understanding of the reading needs for students who had difficulty reading in the basic Filipino vernacular and English. She also explained the importance of her library reading instruction:

I did realize how important it was until… some students and teachers came back for additional reading sessions and then it was really explained to me what had happened with the students’ basic reading literacy…. So, if they had reading instruction sessions (story books) twice or thrice a week, and to supplement their thirst for reading, references like using encyclopaedias were also introduced to older students and also teachers as part of the instructional focus.

The librarian focused her instruction on having students summarize everything they read. Summarizing became the way students created comprehension and once the summaries were completed, then students would answer questions about what they read using the Filipino vernacular and then in English. Her teaching purpose was clear - to prepare her students for lifelong learning as they struggle for self-determination as they protect and promote their cultural expressions and living traditions.

**Primary Lumad Students (Grades 1-6)**

Most of the lumad primary school children believed that learning to read is a process that requires them to create meaning from a variety of printed materials; to apply the meaning found in print to specific purposes; and to articulate and also write meaningfully. They also expressed feeling that reading literacy would increase their self-esteem, especially if they could learn to read independently in other vernaculars and in English. In summarizing what they learned from the mini-school library, the library reading activities remained solidly based in having students understand what they read with comprehension as a common thread. Most students started to develop a love for reading materials written in the Filipino vernacular and in their native languages because the teachers and librarian provided opportunities for experiencing reading and checked for comprehension with varying instructional focus.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

In 2007, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education published a booklet entitled *Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded*. This publication’s promotion of the principles of language and education in minority language communities has led teachers, teacher librarians, even school administrators to design and implement standards for reading literacy instruction with related mother-tongue based education. Last June 2012, the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) conducted a training seminar on the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) to promote teaching kindergarten pupils using their mother tongue starting in the 2012-2013 school year.
Even before this governmental push, teachers at the community learning centre were aware that through the use of the mother tongue, students could easily express views and ideas during class discussions and develop of their reasoning and higher thinking skills. In effect, the MTB-MLE requirements led to a shift in the purpose of education for many of the nation’s public and private schools. At the community learning centre, this shift began to manifest itself in the ways the teachers and the librarian thought about their teaching that provided reading literacy instruction to lumad school children at the mini-school library.

The results of this study demonstrated similarities in the teachers’ and the librarian’s thinking about primary grade reading instruction at the community learning center’s mini-school library. Although data were collected for a short period of time, only one to two weeks during the second grading period of the school year, all teachers and the librarian were clearly focused on reading literacy instruction that would prepare students for life-long learning and cultural strengthening. Since many members of the minority language communities, especially in remote areas, face significant challenges to quality education, looking at reading instruction in terms of teacher and librarian collaboration can shed light on the best ways this instruction can enable learners to gain literacy without sacrificing their linguistic and cultural heritage.

References

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Author Note
Gianina Cabanilla is a faculty member at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. She is currently a doctoral student in developmental studies with emphasis in socio-political/cultural development and preservation of cultural heritage in the Philippines. Her interest in indigenous librarianship and the exploration and preservation of indigenous knowledge and practices stems from her concern on the issues impacting the cultural transmission documentation process of indigenous communities living in the margins of their ancestral domains, which the libraries have much to contribute in strengthening, supporting, and empowering the indigenous communities in their struggle to assert their rights and deserve equal consideration, understanding and respect as well.