

## The Koravake Literacy Phonics School

Literacy schools staffed by volunteer teachers have been started in a number of villages in the Gulf Province. I report on one such school at Koravake village, which is a large village where three tribes speaking closely related dialects of the Purari language (iar) have come together, with the happy result that they can share medical, educational and religious services. When the vernacular literacy curriculum introduced in the late 1990s was dropped around 2010 in order to focus on the teaching of English and English literacy, the literacy rate in schools of the area plummeted. This decline in literacy was variously attributed to a decline in services and teacher standards, to children not attending school properly, and to too much vernacular being spoken, rather than to the change in policy or focus; there was a general belief amongst teachers and parents in the area that a focus on the teaching of English was sure to give children a head start towards higher education. The private school at Kapuna Hospital had exceptional results in English literacy to staff children (many of whom could speak English or were learning it in the hospital community), and started training volunteer teachers for English-based kindergartens in various villages around the district (where children were monolingual in their vernacular). Follow-up visits showed that these village schools had failed to help their children learn to read.

When the hospital school wanted to recruit and train more teachers for their own school, I offered to train them to use a phonics method called Uniskript (see Suzuki, 2018) to teach vernacular literacy as a precursor to English literacy. One of the trainees was a young woman, Amea, from Koravake. She was not selected to teach at Kapuna, but she was very enthusiastic, and went back to her own village, and with the help of the elders, started up a phonics school there (see Yeou, 2019). There was much enthusiasm for this project, and the children really enjoyed the school (see Calvert, 2018). I visited the school and helped with testing the children there, and found that the reading levels were good for familiar stories, but not for unfamiliar ones. I also saw that the teacher had mainly English books, and very few in the vernacular for the children to get practice in. After discussing this, we decided to hold a writers' workshop there in order to boost the amount of literature. This paper reports on the Koravake schools, both government and non-government, and shows how the writers' workshop went, and the results so far.

## References

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