Writers’ workshops for L1 school reading texts: a step-by-step guide to an effective model used in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia

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Locally authored school reading materials make the sustainability of any local language literacy program more likely because community involvement leads to a sense of ownership. However, it can be difficult for outside experts to help minority language communities to generate sufficient numbers of texts. Moreover, locally generated texts must be appropriate for the age, grade, and curriculum of the students; varied, interesting, succinct, and descriptive; making use of the discourse structure and correct spelling of the local language; and conveying appropriate ethics. They must also be subjected to peer editing and community testing. As a result, many program facilitators resort largely to translating folktales from elsewhere.

This paper will give practical tips for planning the content of writers’ workshops. Recommendations for the writer selection process will be made. It will describe steps followed in workshops in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, which allowed local people working with two newly established orthographies to each produce two texts, edited to the above criteria, in five working days.

Local people, who have been empowered to pass on their language, culture, traditions, and folktales in writing to the next generation, are likely to be strong advocates of an educational program which includes their materials. Thus, the inclusion of locally authored materials not only reinforces a community’s strengths, but is likely to result in sustainability of a local language literacy program.