

ownership and control of education to the community naturally leads to a re-examination of content and process, and its relevance to employment, health, environment and other life skills, or for personal development. It also means that education systems are likely to support rather than undermine family responsibility for children.

By both conventional and unconventional methods, the commitment towards "Education for All" is being renewed. For, despite many competing priorities, awareness is growing that education is essential to combat the intertwined crises of poverty, unemployment and social disintegration. Only by investing in people can true social development come about.

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**AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO  
ENCOURAGING CREATIVE WRITING  
AND LITERACY APPRECIATION IN A  
SECOND LANGUAGE: THE FIJI WOMEN  
WRITERS GROUP.**

*Heather Lotherington-Woloszyn*

The Fiji Writers' Association (FWA) is an arts club which caters to writers living or working in Fiji. It was first established in the 1970s by a group of writers working at the University of the South Pacific in conjunction with other writers in Fiji with the aims of promoting creative writing and providing opportunities for local writers to publish their work. We write in English: an important second language in Fiji; the language of education beyond early primary school.

FWA readings have traditionally been held as pub readings, sprinkled sporadically throughout the year. The FWA readings are enjoyable evenings in which authors and readers read their own literature written in English in a relaxed environment where appreciation rather than criticism is invited. FWA pub readings have been popular and successful: closet writers have been inspired to read their works and people who would not normally have access to literary English have been introduced to literature in an anonymous, undemanding and nonacademic setting.

However, for many, a pub is an inaccessible or unattractive milieu. Further, the boisterous environment of a pub, which is excellent for encouraging the performance of humorous and entertaining pieces, is far less conducive to the reading of serious and sensitive literature. In response to this shortcoming in literacy reading opportunities, a group of women writers in Fiji has come up with an alternative meeting designed to attract and provide a forum for women writers in particular. The Fiji Women Writers have met for the past couple of years for casual evening get-together in private homes, where we have attempted to create an inviting and non-threatening environment in which women from all walks of life can participate, whether as readers or as listeners, in

the reading of personally written or selected literature.

We hold our FWW evenings several times a year, advertised in the local newspaper, the University of the South Pacific Bulletin and by word of mouth. We gather early in the evening and read in an unstructured order after we have had time to relax and chat. Our evenings are no-hassle: no one is required to do anything. New writers may feel the need to attend several readings before they have the confidence to share their own work. Listeners are welcomed. We do not attempt to systematically critique the literature read or accuracy of the language used; rather our intention is to promote women's writing, sharing their work, and appreciating the work of others, whether that author be internationally known or the person next door.

We have encouraged women of different ages, cultural backgrounds, professions and educational levels, including women with very little formal education as well as professionals and academics. Our contributions are shared on an equal footing, occupational hats being left elsewhere. In our social endeavor, we have inspired and encouraged many women, including those who have had little opportunity to formally study English language or literature, to write and to appreciate literature written in English. We have talked, laughed and cried together over works read.

In addition to succeeding in the birth of our innovative splinter group, we have experienced unforeseen benefits. Members are writing more, and more experimentally, and in so doing improving expression in English and self-critiquing skills. Regularly attending members have been inspired to write in previously unattempted genres and efforts have been solicited and published in the wider community.

Members have begun to read more widely, which is very helpful in language acquisition, and to read more sympathetically, contributing works compatible or comparable in theme or tone with those read previously. Past members who have moved have kept in touch, sending stories to be read at our gatherings. This has inspired a great deal of reading and writing and listening in English.

The Fiji Writers' Association published selected FWW works, along with those of the larger public reading nights, with a generous grant from the South Pacific Creative Arts Fund of the Australian Embassy in December 1992. *Trapped*, edited by Seona Smiles and Sudesh Mishra, is available from the Information Office at The University of the South Pacific or at the USP Book Centre.

The FWW group is planning a second publication. Meanwhile the work of several members of the group is being published elsewhere.

Our FWW nights have never brought in a stampede. However, there is growing awareness of and interest in our FWW accomplishments. One day at the bank, when I was asked to provide a signature on a document, a copy of *Trapped* was whipped out at the same time with a shy request for an autograph. We feel that the FWW has been very successful in the community level promotion of local writing, literary appreciation, and the use of the English language for artistic expression. This we would like to share with readers of *The Pacific Curriculum Network* who might be interested in joining us, if you are in Suva, or in organizing a similar forum for ESL writers in your own community.

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