Improving WASH in Pacific Island schools by embracing local epistemologies

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Photo source: ADRA Solomon Islands
“The world can only appear monochromatic to those who persist in interpreting what they experience through the lens of a single cultural paradigm, their own. For those with the eyes to see and the heart to feel, it remains a rich and complex topography of the spirit.”

Wade Davis

The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World
WASH in Solomon Islands: A Story

Photo source: ADRA Solomon Islands
Reviewing the literature

- Systematic scoping review requested by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
- Evaluated WASH systems literature relating to health and education of female school students, and students with a disability
- Conducted by researchers from CQU/JCU, in partnership with WASH specialists from Solomon Islands, Australia and the United Kingdom.

How can WASH be contextualised and operationalised in PICTs to promote the health and education of female students and students with a disability?
From findings to new questions…

• From initial identification of 471 records, 12 articles included; no intervention studies found

• Some descriptive research studies reported WASH interventions

• Growing number of studies with girls in schools about MHM (The Last Taboo)

• Grey literature included student-led WASH projects (LLEE), which should be able to integrate the needs of individual students

• These projects demonstrated the potential for targeted and locally relevant responses to the WASH needs of girls, and students with a disability

Photo source: Layton and Layton, 2010
Ep... ep... epistemologies and pedagogies

• Lots of literature on WASH in schools internationally, but impact is mediated by context (Emory)

• Review encouraged us to reflect on our own experiences, which suggests programs looking to improve WASH in schools for girls and students with a disability should draw on global lessons, but focus on local epistemological and pedagogical contexts:
  • Epistemology: the branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge. Epistemology studies the nature of knowledge, justification, and the rationality of belief. i.e. ways of knowing
  • Pedagogy: the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept. i.e. ways of learning
Partnership in PNG schools: A practitioner’s story

Photo source: Jeanette Selep, World Vision PNG
An informal settlement in Fiji: A researcher’s story

Photo source: Dani Barrington, Uni of Leeds
WASH in Solomon Islands: a useful metaphor

Photo source: Michelle Redman-MacLaren, JCU
Recommendations for practitioners

• Need to iteratively adapt WASH to local context (including needs of individual students), using local pedagogies and epistemologies
• Be informed from other countries, but don’t duplicate
• Genuine local partnerships ensure relevant, sustainable responses
• Manage donor relationships to the advantage of local people

Without localised approaches to socially and culturally situated WASH needs, there is little chance of sustainability and ongoing benefit.

Photo source: David MacLaren, JCU
Work detailed here is elaborated on in:

Redman-MacLaren, M., Barrington, D.J., Harrington, H., Cram, D., Selep, J., MacLaren, D. Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools to promote girls' health and education in Pacific Island countries: A systematic scoping review. *Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development*, (in review)

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