



COGNITIVE INTERVIEWING *with* YOUNG CHILDREN

Adapting a social and emotional
learning assessment in Haiti



Summary

About us

The Fostering Resilience Initiative:

Our interdisciplinary team works to ensure positive outcomes for children and youth facing adversity.

By measuring and addressing risks and assets at the child-level, as well as within homes, schools, and communities, we promote a holistic approach to child and youth development. Our goal is to create environments that not only fulfill children's and youth's basic needs, but also promote nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills, and civic engagement.

We work with non-governmental organizations, policy makers, communities and other stakeholders in seven countries: Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, India, Kenya, Tanzania, and Peru. Our initiative focuses on three key areas:

1. Learning and Development

Improving learning and development of children and youth, both at school and outside of school.

2. Risk Measurement

Developing, validating and piloting measurement tools to assess risks, assets, and outcomes across several countries.

3. Global Network for Resilience

Building a global network of actors who foster systemic resilience.



Neil Boothby
Director, Fostering Resilience Initiative

“

There are several steps that need to take place *when adapting assessment tools to the local context*. Cognitive interviewing is one such critical step.

”

Introduction

A whole-child approach to measuring progress in primary school must include more than reading and writing skills. It must include the multiple layers of a child's life, such as health, family resources and community in order to gain a more complete picture. The tools used to measure progress must also be placed in context and be culturally sensitive, so that the language is understood, and concepts reflect ideas that are meaningful to the local community.

Photo: Maxence Bradley



Imagine a setting... where a devastating earthquake killed and injured hundreds of thousands, displaced millions, and shattered the public education infrastructure. Where a generation of youth lacks the basic skills needed to succeed and a non-Haitian curricula does not include social and emotional learning.

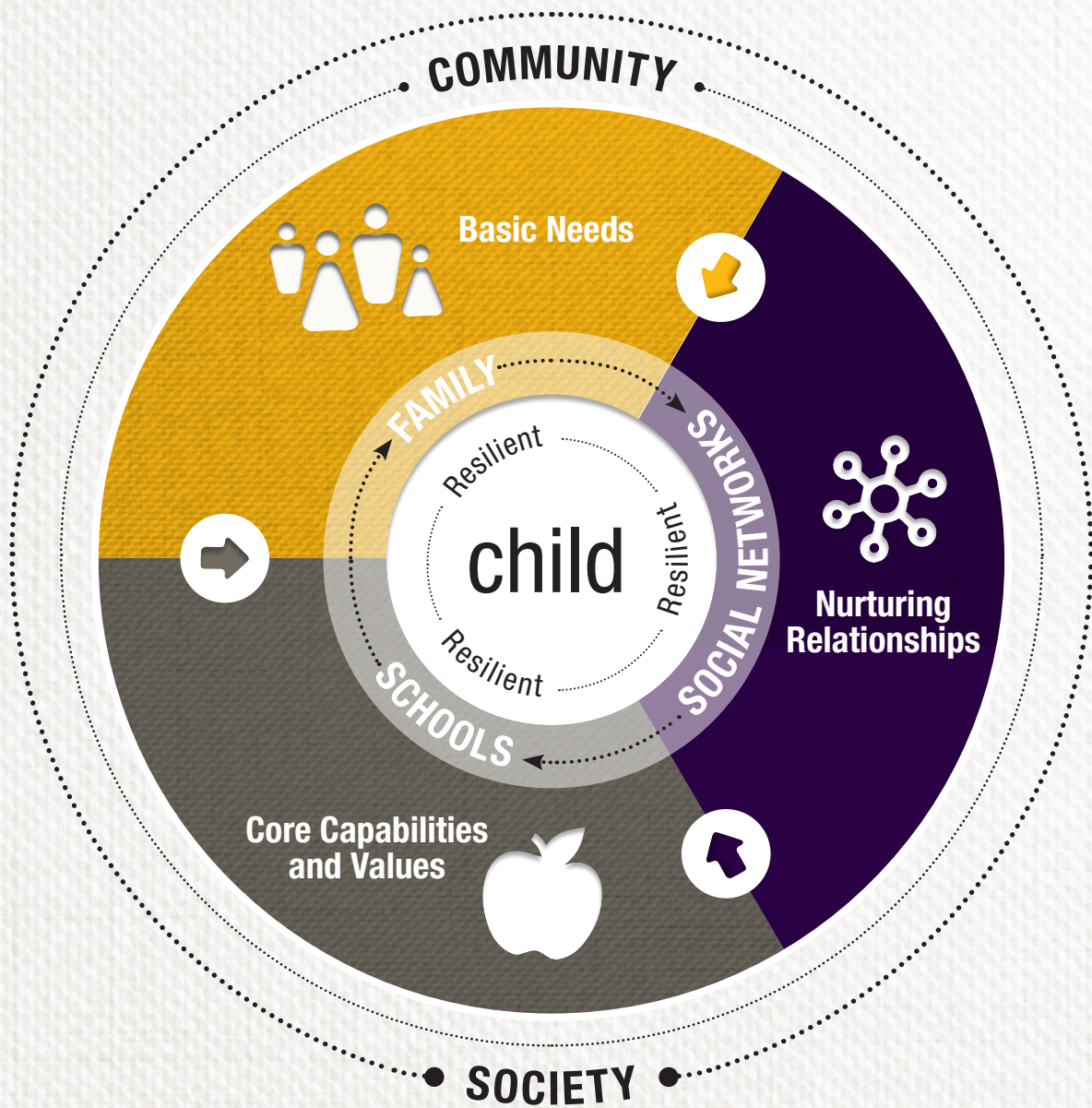
Recognizing the value of a more holistic approach to primary school education, the Alliance for Catholic Education, University of Notre Dame in Haiti (ACE Haiti) recently developed an innovative mother-tongue reading program that emphasizes social and emotional learning (SEL) alongside reading and writing.

In May 2017, the Fostering Resilience Initiative (FRI) evaluated ACE Haiti's innovative program, using cognitive interviews to better capture SEL and the local context. FRI conducted 40 cognitive interviews with grade 1-3 students on the north coast of Haiti in three parish school communities—urban, peri-urban, and rural.

FRI's study led to 58 changes to the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA). This summary describes the changes made and what was learned through the process, focusing on recommendations for researchers and practitioners who want to conduct similar measure adaptation with children in low-resource and fragile contexts.

Building blocks **for** children's resilience

A holistic approach—one that not only addresses children's basic needs, but also promotes nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills and civic engagement—is the foundation to fostering resilience in children facing adversity.





FRI's **long-term vision** is a whole-child, whole-community approach to education in Haiti so that children and their communities can thrive.

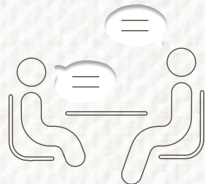


Cognitive interviewing **with** young children

at-a-glance



Photo: Maxence Bradley



40 cognitive interviews

conducted in Haitian Creole with **1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders**

50% of changes related to **wording** of question stems, response options, or interviewer instructions.



58 changes

to international **SEL assessment tool**



ACE Haiti's

"Read Haiti Project"

in **350 primary schools** across 5 regions



Photo: Maxence Bradley



What **is** cognitive interviewing and why use it?

Cognitive interviewing...

... is a survey adaptation methodology in which participants are asked questions about how they understand survey questions”

– (Beatty, 2003).

The cognitive interview aims to make explicit a participant’s typically implicit cognitive process. Information from this process is used to determine whether participants interpret questions the way the researcher expects. Issues in understanding questions can help the researcher modify the survey so that it is more valid and reliable.

Cognitive interviewing is based on the theory that before responding to a survey question, participants must: **1)** comprehend the question, **2)** retrieve information from memory, **3)** make a judgment about how (and if) to use this information to respond, and **4)** select a response option (Tourangeau, 1984)

Two approaches to cognitive interviewing

- 1. Thinking-aloud:** respondents speak aloud about their thinking and decision-making processes as they answer survey questions, with minimal to no direction from interviewers. This approach is better suited for open-ended explorations of a respondent’s understanding of the underlying reasons behind a question.
- 2. Verbal probing:** the interviewer plays a more active role by following up survey questions with specific probes that target information related to the cognitive process. This approach is better suited for determining a respondent’s understanding of specific terms in a question.



Photos: Maxence Bradley

4 major challenges

01

Cognitive interviewing is a qualitative research method and so sampling of participants is rarely representative; this can limit the generalizability of findings.

03

The act of asking **participants to verbalize** implicit cognitive processes may change their understanding of responses to specific questions.

02

The particularities of the **interview process** may fail to uncover issues that stem from the research protocol as a whole.

04

The method relies on **respondents to articulate their thought process**, which itself can be a difficult task and a source of bias, especially if respondents are young or have limited expressive vocabulary.

Photo: Maxence Bradley



Cognitive Interviewing with Children in Haiti

Lessons from the field...

Save the Children's International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA) tool, which helps understand the SEL skills of children (6-12 years), was adapted for use in Haiti. Using the verbal probing method, trained Haitian assessors conducted 40 interviews one-to-one with children in grades 1 to 3. After analyzing the data from the interviews with students, the research team was able to identify four interrelated trends that resulted in substantive modifications as follows:



Photo: Maxence Bradley

Unclear About Vocabulary

Confusion with specific words resulted in 29 (50%) changes to wording of question stems, response options, or interviewer instructions. There were several words used to describe emotions that children did not understand, including calm down, angry, or sad. Other challenging words/phrases included: cell phone, electricity, nice, adult, own, share, offer to help, yell, accuse, resolve, disputes, help calm down, disobedient, bullied, threaten, future and education level. Most often, confusing words were replaced or response options with descriptions were provided.

Concerns Regarding Satisficing Behavior

38% of participants exhibited satisficing behavior, that is choosing to answer a question haphazardly or quickly. More common with younger participants, this behavior may occur due to fatigue, non-interest in the question, or participants not understanding the question. Researchers added prompts to see if children could better articulate their reasoning or to collect additional information. They also offered breaks to children who seemed tired or distracted.



Photo: Maxence Bradley



Photo: Maxence Bradley

Misunderstanding or Unclear How to Respond

It's unclear what “two issues” you're referring to here. Possibly replace with: “This issue is strongly related to the issue of unclear vocabulary.” This issue is strongly related to the issue of unclear vocabulary. For example, in the self-concept section 27 children (68%) were not able to imagine themselves in the future. The research team added prompts, rephrasing the questions. When 17 students (43%) in the 1st or 2nd grade had difficulty answering the tool's increasingly complex questions with built-in stop rules, the team added screener questions to help the younger children respond.

Issues with Recall Time and Frequency

Time played an important role in the issues in a section that asked children to count out a number of beans to represent the number of times that a specific event or behavior occurred within a one-week period. The team created an alternate response option structure—Never, Occasionally, Sometimes, Often, Very Often—but only if children expressed concerns about their frequency recall or struggled to respond. Additional questions were added to help children who struggled with recalling time periods related to how long it takes to get to school or how long they have been living in their home. Additional questions like “Is the house where you currently live where you were born?” and “What age were you the last time you moved houses?” helped obtain a measure of the time period.



Photo: Maxence Bradley



The way forward

Photo by Breezy Baldwin

The cognitive interviewing process has been primarily focused on youth and adults from high-resource countries. In order to ensure a more reliable and comprehensive study in low-resource or fragile settings, cognitive interviewing must be adapted to account for the age, expressive vocabulary, and capacities of children in the local community.

FRI's cognitive interviewing process with children in Haiti led to 58 modifications to the ISELA tool, helping to ensure a more culturally sensitive tool to measure children's SEL skills.

What did we learn?

1. Develop a two-step cognitive interview process

A two-step cognitive interviewing process would include vocabulary-based interviews or focus group interviews with children from similar communities/schools. In line with the translation and back-translation process, this step would help identify a majority of vocabulary issues and change words into more child-friendly terms. The second step would be for interviewers to highlight how children understand the questions being asked and where there are misunderstandings. This two-step process is especially important in cognitive interviewing for SEL survey tools with children because of childrens' limited vocabulary to express challenges they may be having with the questions and because SEL surveys often include specific emotion and feeling jargon that needs to be clarified.

2. Use strategies to reduce fatigue and satisfying behavior

Given that interviews in this study lasted between 1 to 1.5 hours, fatigue and limited attention spans likely played a role in the children's satisfying behavior. Impromptu strategies, such as providing children with regular breaks during the interview or splitting the survey into halves and administering each child a random half, helps reduce fatigue and allows for richer, deeper data collection from each participant. While this strategy does necessitate increasing the sample size, it should increase the overall interview time only marginally.

3. Design questions that consider skill level and comprehension

A semi-structured interview protocol that is question specific is helpful in determining whether children were unable to answer verbal probes because of a comprehension issue or because the question was above their skill level. For example, in the empathy section, children are shown a picture of a child crying and asked to interpret the feelings of that child. Paired verbal probes (such as *Can you describe this picture to me?*) can help untangle whether children are misinterpreting the feelings of the crying child or whether they cannot identify an appropriate feeling.



Photo: Maxence Bradley

Photo: Maxence Bradley



fostering **RESILIENCE** initiative

Contributors:

Stephanie Augustin, Neil Boothby, Hannah Chandler,
T.J. D'Agostino, Nikhit D'sa, Leadwine Deronvil,
Fr Michel Eugene, Marie-Christelle Jean,
Anasthasie Liberiste-Osirus, Beth Rubenstein,
Kate Schuenke-Lucien, Christopher Severini,
Gamael Sonceau, Jimena Vallejos, Jessica Zhang.

Partners:

ACE Haiti Initiatives, University of Notre Dame;
Collège Notre Dame du Perpétuel Secours;
Jako Media; Le Bureau diocésain d'éducation Cap-Haïtien;
Save the Children; The Task Force on Socio-Emotional
Learning on Haiti.

INSTITUTE *for* EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

Advancing Notre Dame's Commitment to the Future of Children and Schools

Institute for Educational Initiatives
200 Visitation Hall
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN 46556
iei@nd.edu



**UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME**