Hello Michelle and colleagues

It’s a delight to be taking part in an open review process, especially when the paper to be reviewed is commendable in so many ways. On the evidence you provide, the workshop itself appears to have been very effectively designed and conducted.

Three aspects of it in particular stand out for me: the university-community collaboration; the attention to post-workshop activities to increase the likelihood of research, and the thoughtful monitoring in evaluation. I deal with these in turn in a little more detail.

Building good collaboration between university researchers and the community is often difficult to do well. And the literature agrees. Participatory action research and a decolonising methodology are therefore good choices for the overall approach to workshop design and facilitation.

In many studies the intention to be participative and decolonising are often not achieved in practice. On this occasion it appears that your actions accorded with your intentions.

In my experience, preliminary work and follow-up are at least as important as the workshop itself. It’s therefore pleasing to read about a study where these are given the attention I believe they deserve. Your use of multiple post-workshop activities is to be commended: research mentors, local research committee, and improved ethics review procedures. These will substantially increase the likelihood that research will be done and done well enough.

It’s common for the monitoring and evaluation to be given much less attention than design and facilitation. Yet they are the source both of ongoing improvement and of learning what to do better next time. It’s therefore pleasing that you’ve put effort into evaluation, using multiple approaches. I especially like the way you built evaluation into the fabric of the workshop with your “one minute reflections” -- I may use these myself in the future.

Then in addition you used focus groups at the end of the workshop (facilitated by locals) and a seven-week follow-up. This is the level of attention that I believe
monitoring and evaluation deserve, and are seldom given.

Looking more closely at your actual questions, these appear to be appropriately designed to be usable by participants with differing levels of education.

At first I was a little puzzled why you framed your follow-up evaluation as appreciative inquiry. Because AI creates optimism and energy it’s more often used at the start of an activity. On reflection, I have decided that perhaps it was intended to create more energy for subsequent research for the participants. If so, that’s a neat touch. In any event, to judge from the elicited comments it worked well as an evaluation tool.

Most of your evaluation questions appear well designed, with perhaps one exception. I thought that “do you feel more confident to undertake research?” is loaded, and likely to elicit mostly positive responses. Again, looking at the responses in the final figure it seems not to have been a problem.

Overall, participant responses suggest strongly that the workshop functioned well for the participants too. Being told that a workshop was too short is a strong recommendation. Being asked for a further and longer workshop is as good a reaction as you could wish for.

In short, in design, facilitation, evaluation, and follow-up it appears to have been a first-class piece of participatory action research. It seems to have been well targeted at the intended participants, the cultural context, and the desired outcomes.

It would be a pity, then, if your report did it less than justice. In that regard I think you effectively communicate the key features of the workshop and its likely outcomes. What is less clear is how the university-community relationships were negotiated and managed.

From the (lengthy and informative) abstract I was expecting more detail about this. It is where many studies fall down. I believe readers who do similar work would appreciate any suggestions you have to offer. In my judgment the report would be improved if you added a paragraph on this issue. Alternatively you could make it clearer in the abstract that the emphasis of the report is on the evaluation.

Speaking for myself, I would also have liked a little more information about how you achieved the “active learning” you mention in the abstract. But this is less important to your report.

Commenting specifically on the criteria identified by the journal ...

1. Does it address an important or timely issue?

Yes. The growth of community-based participatory research shows the amount of current interest in university-community partnerships. That literature also evidences the difficulties in creating effective partnerships. This paper offers some valuable insights on how to do so, and in a cultural context not well
addressed in current literature.

2. Is it well reasoned?

It is an effective description of a well-conducted intervention. With exceptions mentioned in my review, it succinctly covers the important aspects of the intervention.

3. Is it relatively balanced, or does it make plain where the author's opinions might not represent the field as a whole?

It’s balanced. On the evidence provided, the intervention achieved what the authors claim.

4. Is the standard of writing acceptable?

I found it readable, clear and interesting throughout.

In summary ...

Major compulsory revisions
None

Minor essential revisions
1 Either say more about the negotiation of the university-community relationship, or reword the abstract to make it clear that this isn’t covered.

Discretionary revisions
2 Consider providing more detail about how the “active learning” was achieved.

3 Add a sentence on why you used an appreciative inquiry frame for the evaluation at the 7-week follow-up.

In participatory action research the action and research are both important. I’m impressed by how well you’ve achieved good outcomes on both these fronts. I hope you do a further study at Atoifi Adventist Hospital in a year or two. You are clearly a skilled team of practitioners and I congratulate you on a study well done.

—— Bob Dick, 20100719

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.