

Learn to read-read to learn @your library: developing creative and literate learners

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Abstract

Against a background of low literacy among many Jamaican children and young adults, the Learn-to-Read-Read-to-Learn@ Your Library was launched by the Jamaica Library Service and the Library and Information Association of Jamaica. The year-long program seeks to develop creative and literate learners through reading, writing and artistic expression. It is hoped that by the end of the year participants would have improved their literacy and creative skills and be better able to cope with the communication demands of everyday living.

Introduction

Newman, et al., quoted by Asselin (2005), posited that, “much literacy research confirms that when students have access to a wide and rich range of literature and information resources, their literacy development is significantly enhanced”. According to The International Adult Literacy Survey, “literacy is the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community- to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Kirsch, 2001). Various studies have shown that there is a close connection between literacy and libraries. The latter play a key role in creating literate environments and promoting literacy by offering relevant and attractive reading material for all ages and all literacy levels.

It is desirable, however, that a learner develops not only literary competencies but also realises his creative potential. This will manifest itself in his ability to generate ideas, to question, and to make connections. He will also be willing to take risks, to experiment, to express his own creative ideas using a range of artistic elements as well as other attributes.

The role of libraries in literacy education and creative learning

According to Quigley (2006), “low literacy affects us all, and libraries are part of the solution to achieve a fully literate society”. McClland (2003) confirmed this view when she stated that “reading must be promoted for its own intrinsic benefit and the library is essential in this promotion. It is against this background, that school, public, and in recent times on-line libraries, have as one of their core functions the creation of literate and creative learners”.

School libraries

According to UNESCO (2000), “it has been demonstrated that, when teachers and librarians work together, students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem solving and information and communication technology skills”. Asselin identified three important ways in which school libraries/school librarians can assist students to become creative literate learners. These are to:

- connect books with readers
- instruct students in identifying and locating relevant information for research assignments.
- provide students with strategies for learning from sources (Asselin, 2005, p.10).

Asselin further stated that, achieving literacy requires the school library programs to be designed to enable students to choose from a rich collection of text, to be exposed to new titles and genres and to spend time reading

on a school-wide reading basis. In addition to this, the school librarian should model and celebrate the power of reading with students and connect them with meaningful books (Asselin, 2005, p.11).

School libraries have become important places within school communities. Teacher-librarians know how to connect books with readers with regards to their personal and social background. Doiron and Arsenault mentioned that since these teacher-librarians are “knowledgeable in all areas of the curriculum, the integration of various resources in the curriculum, the promotion of reading, and the development of information literacy, they can be valuable partners in developing students learning” (Asselin, 2005, p.19).

Teacher-librarians are aware that there needs to be specific activities to make the reader become more proficient and creative. Doiron stated that ‘today’s literacy programs are built on the principles of direct instruction in skills and strategies needed to read successfully, plus numerous activities to motivate students to read’ (Doiron, 2005, p.33).

The public library

The role and purpose of the public library has been well documented. The International Federation of Library Association (IFLA, 2001) mentioned that public libraries should actively support literacy campaigns, as literacy is the key to education and knowledge and to the use of libraries and information services. The association is also of the view that the public library should support other institutions that are combating illiteracy. This includes organising events to promote an interest in reading and literature and cooperating with teachers, parents, and other contact persons to help individuals to acquire the necessary educational skills that will help them to manage their lives (IFLA, 2001, p.34).

Online libraries

An electronic library is one in which the holdings have been digitised and made available to users via terminals installed on-site (Handbook of Terminology). Several electronic libraries exist today. Prominent among these is the International Children’s Digital Library (ICDL) which provides free access to high-quality digital books. According to the website the ICDL goal is to build a collection of books that represents outstanding historical and contemporary books from throughout the world. Ultimately, the foundation aspires to have every culture and language represented so that every child can know and appreciate the riches of children's literature from the world community. Another online library is the *Project Gutenberg* founded by Michael Hart in 1971. Its philosophy is to make information, books and other materials available to the general public in forms a vast majority of the computers, programs and people can easily read, use, quote, and search. However, a great deal of literacy competence is required for the learner to realise the maximum benefit from online resources

Rationale for the Learn to Read-Read to Learn @Your Library project in Jamaica

Background information

Some English speaking Caribbean Islands, including Jamaica, have a low level of literacy. There have been initiatives both at the regional and local levels to improve in this area. One such is the Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training Programme of which Jamaica is a part. Launched in July 2005, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), it involves equipping teachers in the first three grades of primary schools to improve the teaching of reading.

Jamaica is grappling with a serious problem of illiteracy in both primary (ages 6-12) and secondary (ages 12- 18) schools since as many as 40% of these students are not reading at the required level. The Grade 4 Literacy Test, introduced in 2008 by the Ministry of Education, is viewed as the benchmark for literacy among primary-level students and throughout the years the students have performed below par. In 2009 about 46,000 students sat the exam and 67% of those in government schools achieved mastery in literacy compared the 93% in private schools. The unsatisfactory performance in language and literacy at all levels of the Jamaican educational system

and its impact on the potential for human development in the Jamaican society is a matter of grave concern especially since there is a strong link between illiteracy and violence in schools.

There have been intervention programs by the Ministry of Education to develop literate and creative learners. One example is *Little but we tallawah* - parents reading to their children. In this family literacy program, every new mother receives a bag with books to read to her child. The Rotary Club of Jamaica, a civic organisation, introduced the Race to Literacy Book Drive Project which aims to collect and distribute books to encourage literacy among young people.

Bearing in mind Eyre's (2004) suggestion to keep a weather eye open for opportunity to support basic literacy, it is fitting that the Jamaica Library Service Network (JLS)¹ and the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA)² partner to play a meaningful role in the building literate communities. This is being done through the Learn to Read-Read to learn@ your library program³.

Target audience and program objectives

The program is aimed at children and young adults. The two main objectives to be achieved by the program are:

- to develop creative and literate learners through reading, writing, books, and art, and
- to encourage students to use the resources of the public, school and other information units as well as virtual libraries to improve literacy skills so that they will be able to cope with literacy demands of everyday living.

Learn to Read-Read to Learn @ Your Library

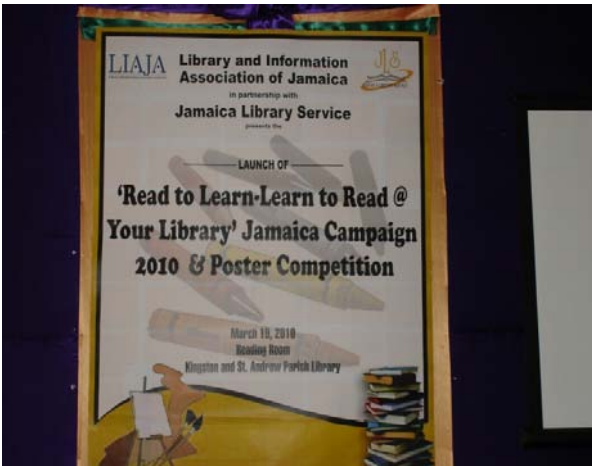
Launch - March 19, 2010

The program was launched with much fanfare on March 19, 2010. Among the people in attendance were the president and the president-elect of the Jamaica Teachers Association, the president of the Jamaica Reading Association, The head of the Literacy Unit of the Ministry of Education, the head of the Jamaica Foundation for Life-Long Learning, principals, teachers and students. Entertainment was in the form of recital of inspirational poems. The Poster Competition was highlighted. Applications were distributed and students were encouraged to enter. Students were introduced to the Facebook page where they would post their book reviews. The program was launched by Ms. Nadine Molloy, president-elect of the Jamaica Teachers Association.

¹ The Jamaica Library Service, on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Culture, administers the school library service for 530 thousand teachers and students in infant, primary, secondary, and technical schools are served. The service operates from a main headquarters in Kingston through 5 regional offices

² The Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) is the professional body for librarians and other information professionals in Jamaica.

³ The phrase **@yourlibrary** was coined by the American Library Association as a public campaign that promotes the value of libraries and librarians



Poster advertising the launch



The criteria for the Poster Competition



Audience at the launch



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br **Read to Learn -Learn to Read @ Your Library** Canadian organisation promotes reading/literacy in the Caribbean and Africa

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Learn to Read-Read to Learn Facebook page

Sample of book review on the Learn to Read-Read to Learn Facebook page

How to Write a Book Review	Sample Book Review
Title of the review: Book Title must be a part of it	“The Three Little Pigs” will Blow You Away This book “The Three Little Pigs” by John Q. Piggin is the best since “Mary had a Little Lamb.” It is about hate, laziness, and death.
Introductory paragraph: Must include the title and author, and thesis (topic).	The story begins with Mommy pig telling her piglets to go out and seek their fortune and to always do their best. The first little pig quickly builds a house of straw. Soon after, the second little pig finishes a house of sticks. Three month later, the third little pig finishes a fine home made out of bricks.
Plot summary: In a few paragraphs write a plot summary. This is basically a narrative of a plot line; including exposition, hook, conflict raising action and resolution. Summary needs to be detailed enough to support your opinion of the book and your conclusion.	The plot thickens when a big bad and hungry wolf sees the house of straw. In short order the wolf has blown it down and eaten the first little pig. A repeat performance of blowing and eating happens to the second little pig as well. The big question of this book is, “Will the wolf eat all the pigs?” I couldn’t put this book down after I had read the part about the house of straw. It intrigued me that anyone would be dumb enough to build such a flimsy house. In the last chapter of this 415 page novel, the wolf huffs and puffs but can’t blow the house down. Then the wolf gets a bright idea to climb down the chimney and invade the brick house of the last pig. The third pig anticipates the wolf and has a big pot of boiling water in the fire place. Down goes the wolf and into the pot. No more wolf. What a dramatic climax with the wolf cooked alive and made into dinner for the third pig. I enjoyed the irony of the climax. While the plot is rather simple and redundant, I enjoyed the morals that hard work pays. I recommend the “Three Little Pigs” to you as a good story.

Source:<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/10051436/Book-Review-Sample/>

Although the use of library resources to develop literate and creative learners will be encouraged throughout the designated year, there will be certain highlights.

The Year’s Highlights

April 18 – 24, 2010

Reading Week (Public Library focus)

During this week, celebrities and other outstanding citizens became involved in reading activities at all parish and selected branch libraries across the island. The target audience was the younger children. Teachers took them to public libraries for reading and storytelling sessions.

Storytelling was conducted in various conducive, well-decorated reading rooms. Stories presented covered all types of genre. Students were attentive and in some instances they laughed, screamed, and rolled in excitement on the carpet. Librarians from LIAJA attended the various reading

Examples of Reading week activities

Date	Public Libraries	Readers	Activities
April 20, 2010	Harbour View	Peter Espeut, Mystic Davis	Telling stories
April 22, 2010	Kingston and St. Andrew Parish Library	Peter Lloyd	Telling stories and engaging students in reading activities
April 24, 2010	Stony Hill Branch Library	Safia Burton	Telling stories and engaging students in reading activities
April 22, 2010	Shortwood branch Library	Mrs. Patricia Cuff Mr. Roy Black- Radio Personality	Reading and telling stories Dramatizing stories
April 23, 2010	James Hill Branch Library		Telling stories



Librarian and radio personality engaging students in literacy activities



Photographs depicting Reading week activities

May 2 – 7, 2010

Education Week - (School libraries focus)

Librarians visited schools, promoted information literacy and encouraged students to use the school library to develop their literacy skills. Target group was school children of all ages.

Education Week Activities – May 2- 8, 2010

The Learn to read-read to Learn activities continued during Education Week. Librarians visited schools across the island where they conducted reading sessions



Librarians engaging students in reading activities

June 18, 2010

Announcement of winners of the Learn to Read – Read to Learn @ your library Poster Competition

The announcement of the winner of the Poster Competition as well as other winners such as the teacher-librarian who has the most entry will be revealed at LIAJA's first general meeting for 2010. This will be held at the Cecil Charlton Hall in Mandeville. The Guest Speaker will be Mr. Vincent Guthrie, the education officer for region 6 of the Ministry of Education. He will address the audience on the topic Learn to Read-Read to learn. The schools that participated in the Poster Competition will be invited for the morning session. After the winners have received their prizes, they will be fed and the business meeting of LIAJA will begin.

September 1, 2010 Literacy Day- September 1, 2010

The Jamaica Foundation for Life-long Learning (JFLL) is an agency of the Ministry of Education which provides basic education programs for young adults 15 years and over. It has centres around the island where teacher and students meet for classes on a regular basis.

Upon completion of all four levels of the Basic Literacy & Numeracy Program the learner is awarded a Certificate of Achievement.

Levels	Description
Level 1	Non-literate
Level 2	Basic One – can identify simple words
Level 3	Basic Two – can read but poor comprehension skills
Level 4	Functionally literate - can understand and solve problems

Source: <http://jfl.gov.jm/aboutus.html>

A Literacy Day focus will be on the work of the Jamaican Foundation for Lifelong Learning (JFLL). The target will be the young adults within this group. Librarians representing LIAJA and the JLS will offer their service by assisting the teachers at the various JFLL centres to teach reading and instruct students how to write book reviews.

Both organisations will assist in the selection of high interest-low vocabulary readers (books at the readers' interest level but written at a lower reading level to encourage reading.

Oct. 31 – Nov. 6, 2010 Library Week - Reading Forum- November 3, 2010

Reading forum

Prior to Library Week students from two schools will be introduced to reading materials accessible from the virtual library childrenslibrary.org. The book for the Reading Forum will be selected from this online library in preparation for Library Week reading forum.

During Library Week, a forum will be held where students from the select schools will discuss the book that they were assigned to read. They will each do a book review which will be judged and the student who has written the best review will be given a prize. Students will also be quizzed and a prize given to the students who gives the most correct answers.

The principals, teacher-librarians and some of the students from the select schools will be invited to be a part of these activities. An author or person involved in the Jamaica Book Industry will be invited to give a presentation to motivate students to become consistent voluntary readers. Students will be encouraged to use their school libraries, the public libraries, virtual libraries such as childrenslibrary.org, starfall.com, Project Gutenberg.org, etc. and book stores to source reading materials.

Conclusion

The low literacy level among Jamaican's children and young adults is impacting negatively at both the individual and the societal levels. It is therefore imperative that all sectors join in the fight to help these groups become literate and creative citizens who will impact the society positively. The Learn- to Read-Read- to- Learn @ Your library initiative is therefore timely. At the end of the program, participants should have acquired new literacy skills and improved existing ones so that they will improve the quality of their lives and be better able to participate successfully in national development program.

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