Stimulating the Taste for Reading in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

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Introduction

Bibliothèque- Lecture- Développement (BLD=Reading Development Library) is a Senegalese not-for-profit organisation which was established by librarians, educators and sociologists. It is pleased to have been asked to speak about its activities in stimulating reading in disadvantaged neighbourhoods at this IFLA World Library and Information Congress.

Before turning to the subject of this session, I would first like to introduce the reader to the structure, mission and history of BLD; to give a general picture of the communities in which we work; and to describe the context which has led to the activities we now provide. The introduction will set the stage for the strategies we have developed to inculcate a taste and desire for reading in children and to increase the skills of those who teach reading.

BLD is dedicated to the development of reading and the promotion of access to information. It is a programme whose aim is to support culture, education and the development of libraries because those who can read and find information are empowered to become independent, competent and creative citizens. From this vision, flow several objectives:

- To support the development of libraries;
- To develop a taste and desire for reading;

- To increase the effectiveness of book donations; To train library staff;
- To introduce the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs);
- To contribute to the national policy on school libraries;
- And To foster local publishing and distribution.

A board of directors annually defines the actions that follow from these objectives and the Executive secretariat is responsible for implementing the action plan. CODE ensures ongoing resources, while CODE itself is funded in part by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

While CODE is the major partner, BLD has also received funds for specific activities from a number of locally –based agencies: the Embassy of France and its Programme of International Cooperation, the Embassies of Canada and Israel, the UNESCO Regional Office, local businesses and also the International Information Bank of Francophone States (BIEF) established in Canada, the Foundation of Quebec Parliamentarians, IFLA's ALP, and book donors who visit Senegal. BLD also works very closely with the Ministers of Culture and Education of Senegal.

This support demonstrates that BLD's mission - To establish libraries and provide an opportunity to read and to read in order to acquire knowledge and to explore the world and develop and grow as an individual, community and nation - has been understood both in the North and South.

Background

BLD's establishment in 1994 was the culmination of previous work done by a small group of librarians on the faculty of the School of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists in Dakar. We had been approached by some teachers of a college in Guédiewaye who wished to start a reading club for their students. The teachers suggested a club as a way of improving the poor language skills of the young people, because French is the official language of the educational system.

The first collection came from the librarians themselves with the addition of few titles, purchased with funds from the UNESCO project run by Mme. Lioba Betten of the International Young People's Library of Munich. We set up a lending system for the students to borrow books.

The popularity of this little collection with the students for the original college as well as nearby colleges resulted in a problem for the teachers and consequently for us. They were not allowed to lend books to other students – an administrative rule did not allow it. We, as librarians, working to promote books could not think of refusing to lend books to anyone who wished one. After consultation with the administrators and teachers of the colleges interested in the project, we set up small collections in each of the institutions and offered training sessions for the animateurs/staff in the libraries.

This project went on for four years and was called the Network of Libraries in the vicinity of Pikine. The network consisted of 9 college libraries, four community libraries and a container library owned by an association of renters in Hamo city.

The next group after the community libraries to show their interest was some primary schools. The demand rose so significantly that we could not respond to each request. At that point a Canadian NGO working in Pikine on primary education came to our rescue. CODE agreed to help us set up office to formalize our work.

In summary, a group of us began informally in 1989 to respond to requests of libraries in disadvantages areas of the capital, Dakar, and the NGO was established in 1994. The members of the board of directors chosen from the general assembly are the founding members. We are library professionals, teachers and sociologists and researchers who believe in the importance of the book in human development.

At the beginning two and a half staff members were employed in the secretariat: the secretary-accountant, the Executive Secretary and a half-time librarian from the Ministry of Culture. If needed the members of the Board volunteer. An accountant and clerical personnel now have joined the team to assist with the mail and the maintenance; they work part-time. The office is located in the city centre in a building with one storey and a mezzanine.

Catchment Area

Pikine City, Thiaroye and Guédiawaye are the main areas where BLD works, The area is the result of populations leaving Dakar, through natural growth and migration of many from the countryside, it is the largest urban entity in Senegal. The last census in 1999 estimated the population at a million people 60% of whom are under 18.

This huge growth has created problems for managing the municipal services. The problems present themselves in the deterioration of physical and human environment, the lack of cultural facilities and the absence or obsolescence of the educational infrastructure.

The ongoing rise in the level of schooling now at 75% has not made a difference to the capacity of the schools and the demand. However, the existing services and the NGOs working in the area, of which BLD is one, cooperate to do the analysis and provide the roots necessary for a culture of development. That is the reason for BLD's priorities:

- Local groups
- Primary schools
- Public libraries
- Youth groups
- Local services for the district

Promoting a Literate Environment

As the purpose of this presentation is to explain some of the most distinctive programmes of BLD, I will provide a general plan of all our activities:

Rubric	Objectives	Implementation	Results	Future Plans
Collection development	Facilitate and professionalize the book donations received from the North Make regular additions to the library collections	BLD looks after the research, transportation, reception, processing and distribution of donated books	More than 100000books have been selected for the target libraries	Storage space is needed to accommodate the donations New bibliobus is needed to take books to the rural areas which have not been served since 2000
Establishment of new libraries	Respond to the formal request of a school taking into account the standards for quality and the availability of reasonable space	Formal agreement between the school and BLD, with the school responsible for the personnel and space and BLD with CODE's help providing the furniture, equipment and reading materials	85 libraries are either in process or in place in the outskirts of Dakar with the support of CODE and CIDA.	Building Project of the Educational/cultural Centre to be the focus of all the activities coordinated by BLD through its library network.
Reading Promotion	Highlight the importance of the book in education Make people aware of the many children's publications available to them	Organise a reading competition in all regions of Senegal; fairs in the outskirts of Dakar; celebrate cultural days and operate the bibliobus; take part in all events to promote the book	More than 100000 have been distributed to libraries or to the winners of various games and competitions	Restart the children's and Youth's Book Fair by working with all parts of the country as well as Pikine Attend book fairs outside Senegal

Local Publishing	Provide culturally sensitive children's books Participate in the local book chain	BLD regularly takes part in training sessions to increase the capacity of editors and illustrators of children's books annual sessions are organised and led by local or foreign specialists	20 published titles, children's picture books in French or in bilingual format French/ Wolof or French/ Pular 10 titles are in production	Continue training sessions Upgrade the equipment for publishing books Target pre-teens Increase the production process Try some co-publishing
Training in library management and animation/programming Training in ICTs	Equip those who manage the libraries with a good foundation equip the users (teachers and students) how to use the resources effectively, including electronic materials	Organisation of workshops and seminars in managing the library and for users in the network but also for all who ask for BLD's professional assistance	Between 1994-2002, 268 received training in managing libraries. Since 2003, 10300 students have received training and 200 teachers have learned how to teach reading	When the building complex is complete provide regular training in response to demand from all over the country and also form neighbouring countries

Participate in the national policy for school libraries	Convince central and local authorities to include the school library in their plans	Standards for building libraries have been included in the building manual for schools published by the Ministry of Education BLD organizes a seminar for all the Regional Academies to study the directions needed in a national policy for school libraries	The Ministry of Education co-opted BLD as a founding member of Round Table on Education Harmonization and created a sub-division Reading and Library under the Primary School Department Formal agreements have been signed between BLD and the Ministry and BLD and the Departmental Inspections	Campaign for a module on school librarianship in the Teacher Training colleges and campaign for the inspection of school libraries
BLD Management	Reinforce the competencies and the means of managing BLD Promote and regularize BLD's activities	Participative management based on results management Favourable response to training needs Increase the Motivation, Partnerships and Marketing	1994 1 full-time and 3 part-time professionals 2008 10 full-time of whom 6 are professionals. There are 3 departments: libraries and training, publishing and distribution and administration and public relations	Construction of a new education and cultural complex to increase and stabilize the work areas and enhance the visibility of BLD's work

Strategies for Developing a Desire to Read

Library development is the spinal column of BLD's work and there are two branches: the availability of library service and the inculcation of reading habits. To speak of BLD's to promote reading we need to discuss BLD's experiences in integrating the library into the learning process.

Each experience responds to a particular objective and is targeted at different audiences: pre-school, primary or middle school children. In each stage of primary education, there is an objective and activities used to achieve the objective, followed by observation of how things have worked out and finally an assessment of the skills demonstrated in the final evaluation.

Phase 1: Pre-school and the first two years of primary school

Objective: Teach the children to hold and use a book

This objective involves children in daycare, beginning classes and preparatory classes for primary school. To encourage children in the correct and careful use of the book and to stimulate interest in its contents, BLD has established a programmed in cooperation with the schools principal. It includes different activities concerning the book. BLD has developed the programme and works with the teachers to have it adopted. After teaching the principles and methods of the programme, BLD withdraws to allow the administration to implement it in the teaching process.

1.1   The Pre-requisites

- Plan a library hour each week for each class
- Prepare each library session and implement the plan
- Choose books which illustrate the points in the library session
- Prepare the space for the illustrated/interactive session to take place

1.2   The Development of the Session

Several types of books (picture books, stories, colouring books) are laid out on a tablecloth in one corner of the library, classroom or courtyard

- The facilitators/animateurs welcome the children and settle them;
- The children choose the books that arouse their interest;
- The children leaf through the book, often upside down
- The facilitators/animateurs move from one child to the next to put the book right side up and to teach them how to recognize the beginning and end of the book;
- They answer questions and ask the children to tell the story;
- They prevent the kids from fighting over the same book.

At the end of 20 minutes they begin another activity.

Story hour: reading an illustrated book with the children; the animateur reads the story by emphasizing the illustrations to engage who will in turn be able to repeat the story with reference to the illustrations.

1.3 Observations

- At the end of the session it is hard for the animateur to retrieve all the books
- The children need a lot of attention; they are stimulated when an adult listens to them retelling the story or interpreting their book
- When they like the story they recognize the book and will go to get it as soon as they arrive

- They insist on the teachers allowing them to return to the library
- Teachers find these sessions difficult to manage on their own because they tend to recreate the atmosphere of the classroom and this constrains the children. They usually work with a non-teacher, perhaps the parent of a child or a young person from the area who has been trained in this type of activity so that they create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

1.4 Results

- Children learn to handle a book, to leaf through it and to treat it with gentleness and care;
- They enjoy the story; they interpret the pictures in their own ways and according to their experience and they love to have a story told to them;

- After the first session, at the colleges in Guédiewaye, the children could not wait for the next week's session but tried to go back to the library with the teacher; the most audacious made excuses to leave their class and run 20 metres further to go to the library to find 'their' book;
- Most importantly, they associated the book with times of pleasure, games and relaxation and this gave them the desire to be with books and to go to the library often for books and sometimes they become 'hooked'
- To achieve a high sense of ownership the library sessions must take place regularly and frequently for this group.

Phase 2: The weakest students in the elementary classes (3rd and 4th years)

Objective: Campaign against failure and drop-out

2.1 The pre-requisites

- The school schedule includes the library: one session per week
- The administration works with teachers and animateurs to organize reading development
- Session preparation is done with the school librarian (person in charge of the school library, the teachers come with their students and the BLD librarian responsible for animation/reading promotion

2.2 The Development of the Session

Books are chosen in advance to match the levels of the students and they are spread onto a tablecloth in the library or in another place. Large books are suitable for this group
The children are divided into small groups of 3 or 4 and they choose a book and the animateur (teacher, librarian of other resource person) goes from one group to the other;
They ask the children to leaf through the book, to look at the pictures and to discuss the story so they prepare what they want to say before the book is read;
It is important to note that the conversations will take place in mother tongue after 3 years of schooling, even though the language of instruction is French.

Only after this is the text read in French, usually by a group leader who has self-selected himself/herself.

The resource person takes up the hardest words with the groups and repeats difficult words and asks even the weakest and most timid to take their part and to read. After they have finished the reading, the books are closed and the children are given a piece of paper and asked to draw a character or a moment from the text which most impressed them and to annotate the picture with a short phrase.

Story hour: The animateur or a child chooses a story before the session and then tells it first in Wolof and then in French. The story is the last event of the session.

2.3 Observations

These sessions require the participation of 3 or 4 animateurs to work with each group and also spend time with each child. It is always difficult to have so many teachers working outside the classroom at the same time. To mitigate this difficulty some school employs graduates who have note been able to go to the university but who wish to get some practical training in teaching in an elementary school. They do the work voluntarily (or for almost nothing) in order to gain experience.

When the school has an agreement with BLD, the teachers are asked to identify the weakest students. But teachers are often reluctant to make those choices because they feel they will be judged by the quality of these students and so they often send the best students to the session.

- It is important to know that in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and in schools bulging with migrants from the rural areas, the class size is often from 60-90 students. The teachers can not possibly look after all the students. Normally, they ignore the weakest and work more closely with those who will achieve the standards set by the Inspector General of Education.
- The ones left behind (and they are often girls) leave school because they are not comfortable because they can not read.
- BLD has become involved in order to fight against the drop-out and to give these children a chance to acquire reading skills at this stage of their schooling.
- The drawings they complete are hung in the library to demonstrate their achievements.

Teaches are encouraged to organize similar sessions for all their students beyond these special BLD-led sessions.

2.4 Results

After the first two or three sessions, the animateurs observe a change in the children's behaviour; they are more comfortable and at ease. They choose to leaf through the books and they join another group or choose other books; they speak up spontaneously and even try to speak in French without feeling the embarrassment of making mistakes.

The teachers notice the same changes in class. They are surprised by the rapid progress that some children make with their reading.

At the end of the school year in 2001, when the final evaluation was being conducted, the teachers asked BLD animateurs what their secret was in stimulating poor readers to become good readers. The BLD personnel responded that it was the

creation of an atmosphere that was relaxed and pleasant – not constrained by fear of the teacher, or fear of making mistakes or getting a poor mark.

Phase 3. Elementary Course

Objective: To deepen and reinforce the skills learned in the first phase by using library books in the learning process

The activities to fulfill this objective take place using a game called Reading Challenge. Two groups of students each read two titles and then prepare questions which they must answer. The question concern only the books they have chosen may be formulated through a series of charades, suppositions, crosswords or anything that tests the comprehension of the content.

3.1 The Pre-requisites
- School time must be dedicated to the library: one session per week
- A level of 3rd or 4th year is chosen for the practice of the reading challenge
- Teachers are aware of the stakes and are prepared to take time to be trained in the organizing games
- The Administration is involved by identifying someone to look after the Reading Challenge
- BLD has a group of voluntary teachers ready to do the training in the schools. BLD acts as the liaison between the trainers and the organizing committee in the school.
- BLD prepared a manual on the game for distribution in the schools

3.2 The Development of the Session

- Books at the right level are selected in advance by a team of librarians and teachers who distribute them to those who are taking part in the game
- The students read the books either in class with the teacher or at home in order to grasp their contents;
- Activities are chosen by the Organising Committee following the themes of the books and the level of the children (for example, one title, a book of fiction 'The little blue boy' addresses the question of tolerance; a second, a non-fiction title ' Fati is not sad' raises the problem of poliomyelitis and infant vaccination);
- The team leader organises the activities in the teacher's presence;
- The teacher may also organise activities with students with or without the team leader;
- Children are asked to think of questions similar to those they have been given;
- The students respond with suggestions based on their understanding of the activity and the subject matter they are studying (maths, grammar or biology)
- The teacher corrects the examples and continues as appropriate;
- After a period of practice, schools meet and challenge each other with questions about the books just as the game had unfolded in classes;
- Monthly matches are planned for the whole school year;
- After each match the events are evaluated to see if improvements can be made.

3.3 Observations

Everyone is the class is involved from the weakest to the strongest students; they are divided in to groups of 20-30.

- Children are at first hesitant to take the book home and to read it without the teacher;
- The competitive nature of the challenge bothers certain teachers;
- The older teachers take a wait-and-see attitude until they observe whether these learning experiences are viewed in a positive way;
- Fear of extra work prevents some teachers from becoming involved;
- Fear of being judged can also be apparent;
- Everyone must be trained and have practice in order to involve the whole educational team in the challenge; this in turn leads to better methods of the game.

- The diversity of types of challenges (charades, quizzes, crosswords, puzzles etc) and their learning component allows the teacher to get out of the routine and introduce the child to research;

- The involvement of all the children whatever their level (weak, medium or strong) is very much appreciated although the teachers at first were reluctant because they must do extra work to prepare their students;

- Even with the vigilance of the organising Committee which reviews and accepts the questions put forward for the competition, some of the questions do not seem to have come from the students;

- In order to reinforce the knowledge gained from the Reading Challenge students continue to take part together in this course at the second level elementary course 2 and a new group begins the first level.

2.4 Results

Evaluations take place with all the players and the organising Committee after each competition. At the end of the tournament, the evaluation is done at BLD with the addition of the principals and student representatives. At the start, they fill in a questionnaire.

- The students read at lest all the titles included in the game;
- They tell the stories that they read to their friends and family;
- They go more often to the school library;
- They demonstrate a new behaviour related to the book;
- They are more confident in expressing themselves in class;
- They look at their classroom teaching and learning in a different way;
- When the teachers realize the improvements they recognize that they need to work differently not necessarily more;
- Teachers want the game to be extended to all phases of the school.

The administrators have the following views:

Many of the administrators and municipal authorities have taken part in the semi-finals in each zone and also the finals (mayors, school inspectors, representatives of

the Ministry of Primary Education and the Book and Reading Direction, parents associations and teachers' unions).

They are given the opportunity to give their views:

The Reading Challenge supports the goals of the Primary School Direction; BLD's initiative is reinforcing the effectiveness of Senegal's schools.

The participation has grown in the following way:

1st in 2003– 520 students
2nd in 2004 – 1200
3rd in 2005 – 2200
4th in 2006 – 2800
5th in 2007 – 3200

Everyone (teachers and students) receives a little gift after the final so there are no winners and losers because the game is on a means to getting everyone to read.

Phase 4: The Medium Course

Objective: To prepare the young person in middle school (5th and 6th years) to be able to use all the information in the library.

4.1 The pre-requisites

The school has to have an established library either within it or near it with adequate collections, of various types of resources: fiction of young people, picture books, comics, stories, non-fiction, and reference books: different types of dictionary, atlases, encyclopaedias, one or two periodicals for children and adults and local textbooks;

The classification of the books on the shelves has to be organised in a rational way; library sessions have to be part of the curriculum - one session per week. Each session has to be prepared in advance using the tools developed by BLD; the lessons are designed on learning cards.

4.2 Development of the Session

First Session – spatial design of the library

- The animateur discusses what lessons the children are learning and what difficulties they are having;
- The animateur presents the design of the library in the form of a game. The explanation are followed by recommendations that are noted on cardboard that everyone can see;
- The study of the space leads to the organisation of the library;
- Good signage allows the children to move around the space easily;
- This allows the animateur to introduce the classification of books and the difference between fiction and non-fiction;
- Books are distribute to the students so they can examine them for similarities and differences and these points are reinforced;

- They then look at the different genres in fiction and show the variety of non-fiction;
- The class ends with questions in the form of a game to test and reinforce what was learned.

Second Session- the different parts of a book

- The session begins with a review of the first lesson. Then the animateur distributes books to the different teams and asks each group to find the author, illustrator, publisher etc
- The youngsters talk about the assignment and prepare their answers;
- After displaying the right answers, the same method continues with other parts like the foreword, table of contents, index, glossary etc
- This is more difficult because these concepts and words are new to the children;
- The method pays off. These practical exercises lead the kids to find the names and concepts for themselves and this is the basis for research;
- At the end they re-read the definitions from the board and take notes for themselves.

3rd Session – using the dictionary and encyclopaedia

The dictionaries are distributed to each team.

- Each team is assigned a letter of the alphabet and then each person in the team is asked to take one word within that letter;
- The animateur asks for the definitions from the dictionary; it takes a long time. At the end each group chooses one definition and explains how they found it;
- The animateur shows how to do a quick search using the words at the head of the page.
- By the end the exercise can be done by each group much more efficiently.

- The same thing happens with encyclopaedias using their guides and main sections to assist to children ;
- The exercise is repeated with different encyclopaedias and the each group chooses a subject of interest and makes a presentation based on their findings.

4th Session: interpreting graphic information

This session involves maps, atlases and different forms of graphic or visual information.
- They use the resources and come to know the key or legend by which to find a particular place – the school
- Then the animateur choose a place everyone knows and asks the group to outline the route from it to the school.

5th Session: catalogue card or bibliographical record

The last session involves some research using all the resources

- Each group chooses subject of interest;
- They take different sources off the shelves and look for things, ask questions etc
- After half an hour, they complete the work and give a list of the resources they have used to address the subject they chose;
- A general evaluation and discussion follows on each of the presentations and questions are asked about the sources

4. 3. Observations

- The students respond enthusiastically to the variety of materials;
- They tend to work in mother tongue rather than French;
- The session on graphic materials is probably the most difficult for them; because it is not taught in every school.

4.4. Results

It is impossible to generalise about the results; they differ from school to school and class to class.

To integrate the research method into the educational process the BLD method should become part of the teaching/learning process.

However the experience BLD has had in starting this programme in 2000 at the Seydou Nourou Tall School in Pikine and now repeated in all the schools gives us the following figures:

- 40% of the young people do not have difficulty in writing a book review of something read independently;
- 60% do not have trouble using dictionaries or encyclopaedias;
- 100% know the difference between fiction and non-fiction, can find a book on the shelf, can identify keywords in a phrase and make a list of the books used to make a presentation.

They thus generally seem to be able to use the research method.

Conclusion

We have described in detail two types of activity carried out by BLD to inculcate a taste for reading in a poor and disadvantaged area of Dakar. They involve our activities to assist children in becoming comfortable and confident in a library and the activities we use to increase the skills in reading. Overall, we are trying to increase the general skills of the students, where ability to read plays a large part.

The kids move around the area in these activities. For young people who have never left their own neighbourhoods, it is a challenge - a real voyage to discover new places and new children with whom to engage in the Reading Challenge and other games.

As for BLD personnel, we are working in education which is not our profession and with teachers and we are trying to encourage and push them to use new methods to involve more children in reading.

We are involving more and more teachers and students in the Reading Challenge and this brings with it a heavy load for us, because it was outside our main objectives. We are now trying to deepen rather than broaden our sphere of activity in order to ensure that the impact of our activities on the children is real and lasting.

As the major goal is the integration of libraries and information in daily life, we also have a series of activities related to the ICTs and electronic information. We introduce the software BCDI which is used to automate certain library functions and the public library section of BLD introduces all the children from day-care to senior years in the use of CD-ROMs.

We evaluate our activities on an annual basis and try to be critical about our results in order to prepare the plan for the following year. The libraries in our network also go through an evaluation done by their administrators and these are compared with defined performance measures.

Our management practices are modern thanks to CODE which has provided training in these areas. Thus through the library we are able to offer education and culture to the largest number of young people.

The larger the number of educated people at the base of the pyramid, the more solid is the society, the more active and effective the productivity and the greater the well-being of the citizens. (L'hungéria, Rome, 1980)

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