Literacy Training for Children and Young Adults in Public Libraries

Strategic Plan

2008.10.15

Introduction.

Since the International Literacy Year in 1990 (1) various educational groups have devoted their minds to literacy training for children.

In 1994 the "IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto" (2) was published and "literacy training" was placed as one of the key missions among the public library services.

The Social Responsibilities Discussion Group produced a policy paper on IFLANET on December 03, 2001 and expressed its opinion. "The first priority has been to address the growing gap between the information rich and the information poor both between countries and within countries. All countries have information gap problems to a greater or lesser degree."

In the same year 2001,December" the UN General Assembly launched the Literacy Decade from 2003 to 2012 to mobilise the resources and political will to meet the learning needs of illiterate people living around the world."(3) The Literacy Decade is an initiative of the United Nations General Assembly adopted unanimously.

"The United Nations Literacy Decade aims to extend the use of literacy to those who do not currently have access to it. Over 113 million children are not in school and therefore not gaining access to literacy either. The Decade will particularly address the poorest and most marginalised groups under the banner of Literacy for all: Voice for all, learning for all."(4)

Then, what should public libraries do now?　Librarians at public libraries have to take a step forward to promote literacy training in libraries.

What is literacy?

Almost all the people in the world have no doubt about the importance of literacy. Then, what does the word "literacy" mean?

There are some languages that have no one word for "literacy".
According to the definition of IFLA Reading Section (Guidelines for Library-based Literacy Programs (5), Some practical suggestions, Latest Revision April 25 2003);
"Our definition of literacy is broad. It includes the development and practice of reading, writing, and numeracy skills (skills related to numbers)."

Furthermore the ability to comprehend and communicate must be added. It might also be appropriate to contain "the use of oral languages, the senses, thinking and presenting."

Process of acquiring literacy:

Stage 1.　Before school age

Stage 2.　At school

Stage 3.　After leaving school

Literacy training is necessary for all three stages and the role of public libraries is indispensable.

Stage 1. Before school age.

Before reading and writing children are exposed to stimuli from the outside world and they begin to interpret. Early literacy services such as story times for small children and outreach to parents and caregivers lay the foundation for later literacy training at school. Public libraries are the best place for these purposes because they offer a range of services and expertise in one place at no cost to the public.

Stage 2. At school.

It might be said that all curricula at school advance literacy training and that school libraries help in this process. Then what is the role for literacy training in public libraries during this period?

When children want to know something beyond what they have learned at school they can go to a public library and get further information suitable for their purposes. Public libraries offer a place for everyone to get appropriate information of their own.

Stage 3. After leaving school.

The period of compulsory education differs from each country and the average might be 5 to 17 years old. Some children leave school before 17 because of poverty or some other reasons. Public librarie is an essential spot for lifelong learning. It is free and open for everybody who wants to use the materials and facilities.

Topics for discussion:

1. Literacy in Libraries.

Literacy training for children is mostly given in school. But, if they want to become independent, lifelong learners, public libraries are the best place to pursue their purpose. Therefore librarians should promote literacy training for children as a basic library service as advocated in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto.

2. Electronic Information Gap.

Librarians should work with appropriate national and international bodies to promote policies and develop programs that equalize access to the Internet.

Vigorous investment in information literacy and lifelong learning strategies will create public value and therefore be essential in the development of the Information Society.

3. The Profession, Library Association.

It is necessary to monitor and report on how various library associations are addressing information gap issues.

Librarians should put the concerns of Third World librarianship at the centre of its programmes and activities because literacy development is the most important and urgent subject in these areas.

4. Rural Library Development.

It is necessary to develop a research program on rural library development in co-ordination with national library agencies. We should focus on empowerment of local authorities to process the information required by the community in comprehensible formats for diverse rural populations in order to make partnership with people concerned.

5. Human Resource Development.

It is indispensable to encourage library and information science schools to adopt a socially responsible orientation, including the promotion of a strong service ethic towards all the population groups.

6. Fees for Library Services.

Librarians should take a strong position against fees for basic library services as advocated in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto.

7. Library Cooperation around the world.

Libraries ought to promote greater resource sharing for the research of education and training needs.

Librarians should urge appropriate government agencies to develop policies conducive to the development of information infrastructures for equitable, adequate and reliable communication for all so that cooperation between related organizations would make greater results in the end.

Action Plan.

1. Establish liaison with other IFLA bodies and other outside groups working on similar themes.

Resources.

(1) International Literacy Year 1990;

　　http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/42/a42r104.htm

(2) IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto

　　http://www.ifla.org/Ⅶ/s8/unesco/eng.htm

(3) UNESCO | Education –International frameworks

　　http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=40348

　　&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

(4) About the Decade: UNESCO Education

　　http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27158

　　&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

(5) Guidelines for Library-based Literacy Programs;

　　 http://www.ifla.org/Ⅶ/s33/project/literacy.htm

References.

* Reading Section – Library-based Literacy Programs

　Guidelines for Library-based Literacy Programs / Some practical suggestions

　http://www.ifla.org/Ⅶ/s33/project/literacy.htm

IFLA Children and Young Adult Section – www.ifla.org/VII/s10/index.htm