



Learn to read-read to learn @your library: public and school library partnership

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Abstract:

The Jamaica Library Service (JLS) partnered with the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) to work with the Public Library Network and the School Library Network to provide various reading activities under the theme “Learn to Read-Read to Learn @ Your Library”. Two of the objectives of this partnership were to produce life-long voluntary readers and to promote the roles and function of libraries and librarians. The activities permeated the island of Jamaica. The partnership allowed all the entities to share the costly resources and to bridge the digital divide in order to provide access to print and electronic reading materials for every participant and to help them to develop their literacy skills. Participants were given the opportunity to read and post book reviews and comments on the LIAJA JLS Facebook. Book reviews were printed in the Daily Gleaner Youth Link and Children’s Own. Public libraries and school librarians were involved in various reading activities that involved community members and students in various types of schools.

Introduction

School and public libraries have become important places in the society. Woolls postulated that, “School and public libraries have had a long history” (15). Apart from this, she mentioned that they are natural friends because they cater to the same children. This characteristic makes it easier for meaningful collaboration to take place because in any

collaboration both entities need to have a sense of equal success. The nature of the services that both libraries offer makes their roles complementary and this sets the stage for an educational alliance that can support students who are learning to read as well as those who are reading to learn. Connecting to share reading resources and reading programmes is a means of achieving one of the main goals- that of helping these users to be literate.

The Rational for Collaboration

Woolls confirmed that, “No single library collection can or should attempt to meet all the needs of students in school. Providing library services to students is the joint responsibility of school and public libraries” (18). Therefore, collaboration between these two institutions is vital. According to Squire, one reason for school and public library partnership is to share resources that are costly. She also quoted Gail as stating that when the partnership between school and public library are born and nurtured, programmes flourish that service young people in extraordinary ways, for example summer times reading programme.

Public and School library partnership is extremely important as it is able to bridge the digital divide especially in developing countries where parents or guardians are not able to provide information technologies such as computer with Internet connection that can provide students with access to additional reading resources. Parents are also not in a position to purchase electronic devices containing educational games which their children could use to assist them with their reading. Apart from bridging the digital divide the public libraries are opened on weekends and for longer hours during the week. Students will therefore have the opportunity to visit the library to access reading materials if none is available at home.

Public and School Library Partnership in the promotion of reading

As Jeri Schneider pointed out in the article “Grant Opportunities to Support Cooperatives Project”, public libraries provide a wide range of reading resources that support the schools’ curriculum and satisfy children’s reading interest. This means that public libraries play an important role in children’s reading development and learning. In doing these, public libraries are supporting school libraries in their effort to promote literacy. Research has clearly shown that there is a connection between libraries and literacy. According to Newman, et al. quoted by Asselin in her article *Redefining the School Library’s Role in Literacy Teaching and Learning*, “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” (4). Teacher-librarians know how to connect book with readers with regards to their personal and social background. Doiron and Arsenault also supported this view as they made mention in their article that 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” (19).

Teacher librarians are aware that there needs to be specific activities to make the reader become more proficient and creative. Doiron in his article *Teacher-librarians and Classroom Teachers: Partners in promoting Reading* postulated that “Today’s literacy programmes are built on the principles of direct instruction in skills and strategies needed to read successfully, plus numerous activities to motivate students to read” (33).

On the other hand, public libraries are also aware of the necessity for students to learn to read and read to learn. This is evident as they have been providing activities and programmes such as homework centres, reading activities for various age groups to stimulate their interest in reading. They also provide reading resources that are relevant to students' curriculum needs to allow them to read and learn more about what they have been introduced to by their teachers.

Public school library Partnership in Jamaica

Public libraries and schools have many reasons to cooperate in order to benefit both entities. Both institutions are educational by nature and serve the same children, parents and teachers. Forming partnerships helps to avoid duplications of efforts and share resources that are scarce and costly. The Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) a library association with very little resources needed a partner which had reach in the community, has resources and interested in improving literacy, reading and an interest in books and libraries. The Jamaica Library Service (JLS) was the ideal partner to assist with launching a national reading campaign.. This institution provides under the Ministry of Education and Youth, a Public Library Network and a School Library Network with responsibility for one hundred and twenty-six (126) public libraries and nine hundred and twenty-eight (928) school libraries throughout the island. JLS libraries were the ideal place to hold activities because they are strategically located across the island and so became the avenue for spreading the campaign. These libraries also provide free, unlimited public access to print and electronic resources and operate four hundred and sixty-five (465) mobile library stops as well as offers access points for twenty-three (23) special categories of persons. The idea was to reach all groups in the society. (JLS website):

The phrase **@yourlibrary** was coined by the American Library Association as a public campaign that promotes the value of libraries and librarians. Jamaica joined this campaign through the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) with theme: Learn to Read-Read to Learn @Your Library. The theme was coined with the belief that "Reading is like providing the mind with nourishment. Knowledge is the food for the mind and soul and apart from giving us the basic information about the world around us, it also provides us with the food for thought. It encourages us to think. It increases our hunger for knowledge and our thirst to learn more" (Oak) LIAJA developed a partnership with the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) to promote reading in various schools and communities across the entire island of Jamaica.

A reading programme was selected because we know that as a nation we are faced with the problem of illiteracy among members in the population and some of them who can read do not have any interest in reading.

There is definitely a need to encourage reading and the use of libraries in Jamaica. The UNESCO Education For All (EFA) 2008 monitoring report states that Jamaica's adult literacy rate currently stands at **79.9 per cent**. It is clear that something needs to be done and libraries have a role to play in supporting the challenge to increase the literacy level.

The objectives of the Learn to Read-Read to Learn @ Your Library programme are:

- To develop creative and literate learners through reading, writing, books, and art;

- To encourage the increased use of public , school and other libraries as well as virtual libraries through public library community reading activities;
- To encourage students to make maximum use of their school libraries;
- To visit school libraries and engage teacher librarians and other members of staff in reading activities;
- To establish a LIAJA -JLS Facebook Page which will promote programmes and activities that will support the reading activities. This facebook page will be used to post book reviews and comments about the books being read;
- To support the Jamaica Library Service’s annual National Reading Competition 2010; and other reading programmes including the “We likkle but we tallawah” programme;
- To use the programme as an advocacy tool to promote the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) and the Jamaica Library Service (JLS);
- To sensitize the nation to the role that all types of libraries play in the promotion of good reading habits;
- To let the nation become aware of the roles and functions of libraries and information professionals.

The activities planned to carry out these objectives were integrated with the activities on the Ministry of Education Calendar of Events as well as the Jamaica Teachers’ Association so that what was done was meaningful to all participants. This plan also gave LIAJA the opportunity to form immediate and future partnerships where resources are shared to execute the programme. This is one of the benefits gained when working as a team. Integrating the activities within the calendar of the Ministry of Education and the Jamaica Teachers Association made it possible to receive their endorsement and involvement.

The first activity held was a Poster Competition which was launched to sensitize the entire nation about the “Learn to Read-Read to Learn” activities. Flyers about the competition and the rules were placed in all major public and branch libraries, schools and public spaces to invite students from primary and high schools to participate in the competition. They were asked to produce a poster to depict the theme “Learn to Read-Read to Learn” @Your library. The launch of this competition took place on March 19, 2010. Key persons from the Ministry of Education and the Jamaica Teachers’ Association, The Jamaica Reading Association, principals, teachers and students from primary and high school attended and indicated their support for the programme. The winner was announced at the Regular Meeting of the LIAJA held in June. This Poster was reproduced and sent for display in public spaces such as libraries, government offices and institutions.

The entire population of Jamaica was motivated to read various literature genres throughout the year. The two entities in this partnership wanted participants to improve their literacy skills and the way to do this was to allow these students to write after they have finished reading. This process is important because according to Kurland, “Reading is primary. One can write only as well as one reads. To write better, you must learn to read better”.

Writing book reviews was seen as a necessary part of the programme because readers need to read critically and become critical thinkers. This will also build participants comprehension skills.

Participants who were 13 years and over were encouraged to post reviews and comments about what they have read on the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA)

and the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) Facebook Page. This medium was used because it is an attractive communication tool which gave participants age 13 and over an opportunity to express themselves about what they have read. Librarians were selected to respond to the book reviews and comments posted by participants. Facebook is being used due to it being the most popular social network.

Another medium used to publish book reviews and comments and to promote the poster competition was newspaper. The Gleaner Company Limited, the oldest daily newspaper in the English speaking Caribbean was sent a proposal to participate in the campaign. Editors of the two children's magazines (Children's Own & Youth Link) were targeted as these publications were geared towards primary/preparatory and high school students. .

The second activity of the campaign took place during the month of April. Reading Week is celebrated during this month. Celebrities were invited to read to students and the general public at parish and branch libraries within the JLS network. During the month of April citizens of all ages were also asked to meet at one of the many public libraries to have librarians read to them. They were also given the opportunity to read. An author was invited to speak with them, encouraging them to be diligent readers and writers.

The third activity took place in the month of May when Education Week was celebrated. Librarians from the Jamaica Library Service visited schools to conduct reading activities. They assisted with reading instruction, reading stories, and teaching students to write book review. During the visits students were introduced to additional resources such as websites hosting full text stories for reading. Examples of the sites visited were: childrenslibrary.org, and Project Gutenberg.org. Students who were not members of the public library were encouraged to become members. Membership to the public libraries gave them access to reading resource in both print and electronic format. The Jamaica Library Service provides free Internet service for participants who wanted to access electronic story books.

During this same month the partnership of LIAJA, JLS and school libraries continued with a fourth activity, joining the Jamaica Teachers Association (JTA) will their yearly "Read Across Jamaica" activities. Partners would also join the Jamaica Foundation for Life-Long Learning (JFLL) assisting with their daily task of teaching young adults to read. On Information Literacy Day which is to be held in the month of September, both partners will continue to work with JFLL by assisting with the selection of high interest-low vocabulary readers. These are books at the readers' interest level but written at a lower reading level to encourage reading.

To end the reading activities a forum will be held during Library Week which will be celebrated in October. Students chosen from selected schools will be assigned a particular book to be read and will later discuss at the forum. Students will also be required to write a book review to be submitted before Library Week. These will be judged and a prize will be awarded to the student who writes the best review. This activity will be undertaken because "There is a close connection between reading, writing, speaking and listening are well understood to incorporate all aspects of literate behaviour. Children build on oral language knowledge as they learn to read and write (Ralenala 1).

At this forum the various types of libraries in Jamaica will each mount an exhibition to highlight their mission and work. The aim will be to promote libraries, the role of librarians

and the profession of librarianship. Hopefully, students will be motivated to become trained in the library and information science and work in libraries

The main goal of learning to read is to become enthusiastic, independent readers who will eventually use their literacy skills to learn new material in all subjects. As soon individuals can read they start read to learn as well as read for pleasure. Herrod in commenting about the importance of reading stated that “Not only did I learn to read but I became a reader. I discovered that reading opened the doors to the amazing world of books. Through reading I have explored the world, relived important historical events and many other wonderful adventures. A little secret my mom shared was that if you can read you can learn to do anything. I have learned how to cook, scrapbooking techniques, make home repairs and even program a web page by reading. In fact, most my hobbies I have learned by reading. Educationally reading is the great equalizer. It can provide a well-rounded education regardless of the availability of formal education opportunities available” (1).

It is therefore evident that providing a partnership between public and school libraries can play a positive role in helping individuals learn to read which will allow them to gain knowledge in all aspects of life. This will pave the way to academic achievement and life-long learning. We must all remember that “To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark (Hugo) and the more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go” (Dr. Seuss).

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