The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA)

Initiatives to reach early childhood and education

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IBBY Copenhagen,
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Who are we and what do we do?


Language planning and policy implementation in SA and in Africa (research, teacher education and materials development).

Early Literacy Unit of PRAESA: language and literacy in early childhood, concentrating on making literacy learning easy and enjoyable.
Putting stories at the heart of the language/literacy curriculum
Stories central to learning to read and write

Much time and energy convincing publishers and education departments to invest in reading for enjoyment as a central (if not sufficient) aspect of learning to read...

RATHER THAN “supplementary readers are desirable but funds are not available” - all for textbooks.
Our strengths are that we...

understand theory, and conditions on the ground, and apply ourselves to solving practical problems.

are independent - raise all funds and can perform catalytic role, hopefully inspiring others through creating models to show what is possible.
A HOLISTIC VIEW OF LITERACY LEARNING

- Reading materials in relevant languages
- Early learning
  Emergent reading and writing
- Nurturing and motivating pedagogy
- Environments for literacy:
  Synergy between home and school
- Language/s of learning and teaching...
  Using multilingualism
- ‘Culture of reading and writing’...
  Interactive role models
Some limitations are that...

We are small - cannot take our work to scale alone.

Constantly raising funds.

Because we deal with difficult language issues - have to be careful not to alienate people.
Lessons to share

1) Know what you want to do and work on ideas of how to carry it out.

2) Know who beneficiaries are.

3) Check your capacity to deliver.

4) Approach funding partners who are sympathetic to your work.
5) Mentor staff, and be clear about roles.

6) Collaborate and form partnerships!

7) Make clear agreements as to what money is for at the outset.
8) Correspond appropriately with people you are trying to work with - consider culture and language and try to make meeting times suit everyone.

9) Consider sustainability.
10) Having something to show helps get support.

11) Don’t reinvent the wheel - learn from others, adapt and be flexible.

12) Don’t give up.
PRAESA contribute at various levels

policy and curriculum (mother tongue based bilingual education and early literacy)

practical projects - classroom (teaching methods and reading for enjoyment), community and families reading and reading materials development

research - writing up and sharing findings,

advocacy (meetings, workshops, interviews, articles in media etc.)
Examples of projects

1) Intergenerational community literacy: Vulindlela Reading Club

2) Networking for a Pan African ‘reading culture’ initiative: Stories Across Africa

3) Sustaining interest and support: The Little Hands Trust
1) Early childhood orientation to using books

PRAESA, with Biblioneuf SA and
How did this start?

Woman’s magazine approached us - wanted to support ‘something’ to further love of reading.

We suggested focus on caregivers and preschoolers, drew up a suggested plan, which they liked.
Components of programme

- Helping to create a conducive environment.
- Providing information for mothers/caregivers.
- Providing reading materials with accompanying guidance and demonstrations.
Partnerships needed to implement all aspects of programme

• To extend the love of reading.

• Finding various partners, to set up, implement and document process:

1) Fair Lady: financial, moral, media and other support

2) PRAESA: early/family literacy input, books, support, monitoring.
3) Biblionef: mother tongue and additional reading materials as required.

4) SAMLA (South African Mobile Library Association) a grassroots initiative based in Gugulethu - the site for the sessions.
...and then...
Limitations

Difficult to train adults to do appropriate activities at all levels in short time...

Funding issues - inadequate delivery - too many ‘wants’ from relatively small funding

Not any baby books in Xhosa, few appropriate ones in English... what does one do?

Fairlady’s representative got promoted... nobody else interested...

... the project ended after 6 months and didn’t get extended to other areas as planned.
Successes

Raised awareness about the value of stories, and books for little ones and their caregivers (e.g. Fair Lady reported on progress in magazine for a while).

Highlighted the lack of appropriate books for young children in mother tongue.

PRAESA learned from this and could carry forward to other initiatives.
1) Intergenerational community literacy: Vulindlela Reading Club, Langa, Cape Town 2007 2008 ...

A collaboration between PRAESA and

1. Zisukhanyo Youth Empowerment (ZYE), a community organisation
2. Families in the community
3. School who hosts reading club
4. High school students
5. Local authors
6. Overseas academic and other visitors etc.
What is it about?

- Getting adults and children involved in sharing books and stories regularly - every Saturday morning from 10 - 12 am (rain or shine).
- Helping develop interest and skill in reading among adults and children.
- Creating interactive role models.
- Creating a demand for appropriate reading materials.
- Helping the education department by doing some of their work...
...provides practical demonstration for

a) national level - ‘drop everything and read!’ proclamation.

b) the Western Cape Education Department - “learning communities within learning streets and within learning homes...a learning turnaround in our communities...”
Why community literacy?

- Literacy environments that facilitate learning to read and write do not exist in most poor working-class homes.

- Progressive educators trying to create conditions to inspire children from community perspective.

- Establish and institutionalise a conducive space for encounters with books.
Much organising and networking...

Visits to primary schools in Langa to invite children.
All ages come.
On average, between 80 and 130 children come every Saturday.

EVERYONE IS A VOLUNTEER.
Funding

Money is needed for:
• transport
• books
• refreshments

All donations thus far are from individuals or groups who are volunteers, or who visit, become interested and committed to help.
Volunteers use their own books, PRAESA books, and seek donations from willing publishers etc.
Reading
No-one is too young.
The club develops to include other cultural activities ...
visits to places like the zoo
Spreading the (written) word...

Langa Community Library and The reading club has formed a link – in July 2008 school holidays involved a holiday programme.

Church initiatives — During June-July school holidays, New Apostolic Church and Methodist Church in Langa ran readathons.
... and community outreach programmes

Older children read to the children at Maitland Cottage Children’s Home.
Creating nurturing networks!
2) Networking for a Pan African ‘reading culture’ initiative:

STORIES ACROSS AFRICA (StAAf): working for a shared African children’s literature
STORIES ACROSS AFRICA (StAAf) 2004 - 2007

...a core project of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), the official language agency of the African Union (AU).

... enabling and supporting book reading and a love of stories among children across Africa...
HOW? Among other things...

by making and distributing common anthologies of stories for children of all ages to read in their mother tongues and other languages.

working with African publishers to support them to make storybooks in African languages.
Project coordinated centrally by the Early Literacy Unit of PRAESA.

Funding secured for 3 years for development work but not for any printing or distribution.

Aimed to get regional involvement in East, South, West, Central and North Africa, as well as making contacts in the Diaspora.
How did we network?

Used existing networks... APNET, NGO’s, publishers, University contacts, IBBY etc.

Organised and held a series of workshops/meetings - with representatives from each region attending.

At the first meeting a steering committee was elected, with regional representation.
Networks essential for all of the work...

Call for stories
Writing workshops
Planning a funding and book development strategy - which languages to use, how many books to print, where books should go, how distribution would happen...
First project: Little Hands books
Dreaming big... we planned to:

- Produce almost 4 million books!
- Divided up among: South Africa (Xhosa, English), Mozambique (Cinyanja, Portuguese), Tanzania (Kiswahili, English), Rwanda (Kinyarwanda, French, English), Ethiopia (Amharic, English), Ghana (Twi, English), Mali (Mandingo, French), Egypt (Arabic, English).
The books would be distributed by partners such as CODE International, BookAid International, Biblione International who all agreed in principle to work with us.

to libraries, preschools, classrooms, community clinics etc where good possibilities for use exist.
Donor support for African publishing

Use a client based publishing model: funds raised to guarantee buying and distributing an agreed upon print run in particular languages from a collaborating publisher.

Reduces risk for publishers. Motivates them to print further books, and also to publish in additional languages.
BIG BUT...

That scenario was dependent on required funding. If not forthcoming, or if fewer funds, we would reconsider languages and where to distribute the books.

And we have (reconsidered)...

Slower, less ambitious road...

Co-publications have been agreed on with some African publishers - small print runs but many challenges and problems with this process - communication channels poor... the bottom line is that publishers find it hard to take risks under present circumstances.
Nonetheless...

September 2008 print run sees Little Hands printed in 24 languages... and we will carry on.
LITTLE BOOKS FOR LITTLE HANDS

STORIES ACROSS AFRICA
A CELEBRATION IN THE YEAR OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES 2006–2007
3) Sustaining interest and support: The Little Hands Trust
http://littlehands.book.co.za/
Aims of The Little Hands Trust

• **Support** initiatives that promote reading for enjoyment.

• **Mentor** African literary artists, including writers, illustrators and editors, to make wonderful children’s storybooks for children of various ages with a focus on early childhood (ages 0 to 9 years).

• **Collaborate** with African publishers to increase and sustain publication of children’s books in African languages.

• **Help** to orientate and educate adults in the importance and significance of reading to and with children.

• **IE: DREAMING BIG AGAIN!**
Initial Strategies

Creating a website (blog)
Finding people to help make it interesting (early reading experiences).

Support for getting Little Hands into other languages, or to communities: individual donations, slowly but surely.
Plan is to raise support for other projects as well.
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THANKYOU!
MERCI
NKOSI KAKHULU
DANKIE
TAK