

A Report on Mawokota Children's Reading Tent

CONTEXT

The Children's Reading Tent (CRT) was held from the 28th July to the 30th July 2008. The host school was St. Theresa P. School, Mitala Maria, Mawokota County, Mpigi District. It is located at about 50 km on the Kampala/ Masaka highway. The school is easily accessible by public means. It is located on a hill close to the Kampala-Masaka highway.

From the records pinned on the notice board in the H/M's office, there is a high student drop-out. Whereas it could be seen that lower classed register as many as two hundred students, by P7, they were as low as forty.

We were informed that the schools in that area have gone down in the number of students that pass in grade one for their Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). Part of the reasons for this deplorable situation is related to lack reading skills and lack of interest in reading as well as ignorance about the importance of reading in the overall development of people.

The theme of the Children's Reading Tent was '**A Good Leader Is a Good Reader**. This was carefully chosen so as to attract students early enough to understand the value of reading widely.

OVERALL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE READING TENT

The Reading Tent had many objectives.

a) To bring it to the understanding of students and teachers that a **good leader is** (indeed) **a good reader**.

(If they were to be the agents of change, to bring their country from the current status of being perpetually classified among the poorest countries, they had to be good readers. We endeavoured to make them understand that knowledge is indeed, power. Other objectives were:

- b) To sensitise students and their teachers about the importance and benefits of reading.
- c) To provide the much needed reading materials to the ten schools in Mawokota sub county, that formed the Reading Tent.
- d) To promote purposeful reading, by training the teachers on good delivery and showing them how to make reading enjoyable.
- e) To sensitise teachers about the need to inculcate good reading habits among children at an early age.
- f) To empower teachers so as to be able to teach good reading habits and to be committed to the purpose of empowering the students through gaining of knowledge.

THE PROJECT PURPOSE'S RELATION TO THE PERSPECTIVES OF INTEREST FOR NABOTU

Some of the objectives of NABOTU are: to promote a reading culture in Uganda through books and to support and encourage literacy activities especially in rural areas. The purpose of the Reading tent was to promote reading among the primary school children and to provide reading materials so that they can have the books to use during the reading activities, and also to assist the teachers by enabling them to experience better ways of carrying out reading activities.

Through the various activities of the reading tent, the students drawn from the 10 schools were able to improve their quality of reading and their appreciation of various activities that were carried on during the two days.

The teachers' workshop helped the teachers to change their perspective in the way that reading can be done. This in turn will contribute to the way they deliver their educational instruction to the pupils thereby improving their education.

The donation of the reading materials will contribute to better access to education and learning. There were also other activities such as debate, picture reading and story telling, and all these if continued by the teachers will improve the quality of education of the students.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON NABOTU AND LOGICAL PLANNING METHODS

Project Purpose:

The purpose of the tent was to promote reading among primary school children and to show them that the earlier they learn better reading habits, the better for their future prospects as leaders.

There was a teachers' workshop to sensitize them about the importance, for the students, to be able to learn to read as early as possible.

Through the various activities, they were also able to see that reading goes hand in hand with listening, speaking and writing.

Last but not least the purpose was to donate books to the participating schools so that the teachers could practically have something to use as they teach and also the pupils to have access to good reading materials.

a) Achievement of the Project Purpose:

a) Ten Primary Schools in Mawokota Sub County received over a hundred books each and from the excitement and happiness it was indeed a new beginning for the schools and other reading. The schools that took part in the reading tent and received materials were:

Buyika P. S., Magya P.S., Buyijja Kabira P.S., Sango P.S., St. Teresa Mitala Maria P.S., Equator P.S., Buwere COU P.S., Kabira COU P.S., and Buwanda P.S. and Ssango P. School.

- b) Children read both silently and aloud and they were able to answer most of the questions that they were asked. This was aimed at promoting purposeful reading.
- c) Pupils from different schools were able to interact freely and to make friends in a reading environment.
- d) Pupils were able to enjoy reading together in groups.
- e) Some pupils were involved in drawing and some of the drawings were really good. This enabled them to showcase their talent in art.
- f) Others were involved in handwork and they were able to make very good creative designs.
- g) On the whole, it was a learning experience that not only gave the students knowledge, but also stimulated their creativity.
- h) Children competed for the best in various categories and this helped to foster in them the competitive spirit in a friendly environment.
- i) Lastly, the good reading habits that the children, together with their teachers formed will be of great benefit to them in the future.

Through reading, they will be able to attain knowledge and skills to find solutions causes of the seemingly endemic underdevelopment in this nation and other nations especially in Africa.

The more the children read, the more they learn problem solving skills to be able to face the numerous development challenges that are threatening to cripple society.

b) Impact of the Reading Tent.

After the teachers' workshop held on the first day, the teachers understood their roles.

In the parish Hall where the reading tent was taking place, it was a very rewarding thing to walk through the various groups. The students were very keen, they absorbed each activity with such enthusiasm and seriousness, and you could tell that there was a lot of yearning for whatever the facilitators had to offer.

From the evaluation of the teachers workshop held on the first day, they said that they found the new knowledge very beneficial. They said that they had acquired skills of

handling learners and providing new activities for them. They also appreciated the way the facilitators handled the topics and their readiness to assist in every way.

From the evaluation of day two and day three, the teachers said that the whole event was very encouraging and hoped that they would be able to receive more of these in the future.

The students interacted well and were able to form friendships. They said that their studies had been impacted positively and had learnt a lot to help in their compositions and speaking, and to tell stories through picture interpretation.

c) **Lessons Learnt**

- The most important lesson learnt was that both students and teachers were thirsty for knowledge.

For instance, two of the schools that had been selected to participate were located further away than the others. During the teachers workshop they had requested for transport, which we could not provide due to the tight budget. The problem was discussed with Centre Coordinating tutor and they accepted to walk the distance.

Some of the students were weak in the English language but they told stories in the mother tongue quite well. The provision of readers to help improve their English was timely. This observation was made by many of them too in their evaluation.

The teachers Workshop, which was being done for the first time was an excellent addition to the way the reading tents have been carried out in the past.

It enabled the teachers to internalize the whole concept so clearly. Since they were the one that were going to continue with the project it was a timely change. It is believed that the knowledge they received will ensure the survival of the project.

As the facilitators shared with the teachers about the future of the projects, it appeared that they were very committed to its longevity.

They expressed a desire and a commitment to the continuation of the reading activities. The new reading materials were definitely going to be a great asset in the development of a reading culture. They recommended that they should have a follow up.

The facilitators talked with the Center Coordinating tutor who promised to do the follow up.

But he would need assistance in many ways in order for him to do the follow up.

The teachers also felt that private schools should not be left out of future reading tent activities.

On comparing the foreign books and the local books, it was found that the foreign books were good for opening up the pupils to the outside world but that it would be wrong and to make them the majority readers.

The students need to start by reading something they can identify with, something familiar. Otherwise, reconciling their environment with the content of the book might cause the child to lose interest.

Description of the Reading Tent Activities

(Day one) - Workshop for Teachers

The first activity held on Monday 28th July 08, was a workshop for teachers. The objective of this workshop was to sensitize the teachers about the importance of reading and the purpose for which the reading tent was organized.

A Manual entitled: A manual for Teachers for Promoting and Teaching Reading in Primary School, which had been received from NABOTU, was used to train the teachers on what they were supposed to do with the students, not only during the reading tent but most importantly, at their respective schools.

The group presentations were done very well which indicated that the teachers had understood what had been imparted to them.

When asked to select from the lists in the manual which activity would suit their classes best, they again had very interesting and varied choices and they acted the role plays of the selected activities without any problems.

And in their evaluation they appreciated the fact that they had received good skills. They also said that the facilitators were friendly and ready to help and they hoped that even more teachers would be able to receive this invaluable training in future.

The teachers' workshop was seen as great idea because it empowered them, so that, in turn, they too would ensure the continuity of the promotion of reading.

DAY 2 AND DAY 3 – READING TENT WITH THE STUDENTS

From the second day, the teachers took over most of the activities with the facilitators engaged in the supervision.

The students were divided into four groups of twenty-five each group. Each group had at least two teachers two had three teachers. Different teachers engaged different activities at different times, just like they do in school.

Below are the activities that the students got engaged in:

a) Story Reading

The students were free to pick a book from the ones that were going to be distributed. They were free to read it quietly from some minutes. That way the students were able to sample a good number of the books.

The students also had a time for reading aloud before their group. They were marked for this activity and the best ones received prizes.

b) Story Telling

The students were also taken through story telling, guided by the teachers. It was apparent that the students had the talent, although the problem was that some of them could not express themselves in English. This is not a crime, but English being the medium of instruction, it is essential. The story levels were good. The best story tellers got prizes.

c) Story Writing

Like the story telling the levels of story telling were good and the students, under the guidance of the teachers and the facilitators, wrote quite good stories.

The problem again was on the language. The medium of instruction was English but stories written in mother tongue were also accepted. The students were free to write on any subject of their choice. So we got all kinds of narratives, like My story About A Wedding’, ‘Omuyizzi’, ‘A Hen and A King’ and ‘Omukazi n’omusajja’.

Like in the other activities, the best story writers got the major presents. The best story teller in each group received a present and the overall story teller was also selected and rewarded.

d) Quiz

Some of the groups participated in the quiz. The teachers had prepared questions ranging from politics to history and geography.

Some of the students answered fairly well but others lacked knowledge of the current issues. Some of it showed that there was a great need to use newspapers in education more widespread, and to get the students to read them.

e) Debate

Most of the groups had very interesting debate topics. The discussions were quite animated. The best debater received a prize.

For some reason, girls did better overall than boys

f) Picture Reading

There were four pictures and the students had to look at each and describe what they saw. Those that did not have confidence in the language gave weak descriptions of the pictures, but the activity was fairly well done. It proved that the students were quite observant to note the expressions of sadness or happiness. The best received prizes.

g) Drawing

Students drew with coloured pencils or plain pencils if they so wished. The best student in drawing drew a perfect picture of an army man, with all the pips and buttons in the right places. There were apprehensions as teachers and facilitators thought that he could be a victim of torture by soldiers. But all was put to rest as it was found out that his father was indeed a soldier.

h)Handwork

The teachers had been requested to inform the pupils to come with some handiwork materials like dry banana leaves. The facilitators had also come with other materials such as is used to make mats. The best at handwork was a boy who made a cap out of banana fibres. He received a prize.

j) Donations of books from NABOTU

Each participating school received books as follows:

- 1) Equator P. School.....124 books
- 2) Buwere P. School 121 books
- 3) Buwanda P. School 121 books
- 4) Kabira C/U P. School 121 books
- 5) St Balikuddembe Buyika P.S..... 119 books
- 6) Maggya P. S.....120 books
- 7) Ssango P. S.122 books
- 8) Buyijja Kabira P. S.124 books
- 9) Buwungu P.S. 122 books
- 10)St. Theresa Mitala Maria 123 books

The schools were very grateful for the books they had received. The occasion was presided over by the Centre Coordinating Tutor, who represented the DEO Mpigi.

The total number of books given out was 1,221 in total. The Centre Coordinating Tutor thanked Femrite for providing the resource persons and also thanked NABOTU & EABDA for all their efforts to improve literacy in the country.

Target Groups.

The target group were the 200 students from the 10 schools. All of them attended and participated in all the activities.