

TUTORIAL

8.18

Teaching literacy and getting community involvement.

This tutorial will give an overview of the principles involved in teaching and managing a literacy project in a community, with some practical ideas for encouraging community involvement in the ongoing program.

Introduction

How you teach literacy for the first time is going to be the model for the future. It will set the stage for local people to embrace the program as their own. Seeing a well-run and successful class, with good materials, a clear schedule, a confident teacher and motivated students will give them the confidence to take on the role of teaching the program for themselves and later expanding and administrating it for the long term...but how can all of that come together? In this tutorial we will look at some ways you can prepare and implement your literacy program to encourage that kind involvement from your local friends and coworkers.

Get local people involved at every stage

We mentioned in the last tutorial, that because it is your eventual goal to hand over the program to local people, you should try to get them excited and involved as soon, and as much as possible. Be creative and involve them at every stage, being positive about their contribution and about their ability to have a real part in the future of the program. If they see it as “your program” and not “their program” then you still have more work to do in motivating them to be involved!

Pre-literacy: motivating and preparing people for literacy

We talked in the last tutorial about stimulating community involvement by setting up a community notice board or newspaper with the help of local people. There are a lot of other creative ideas that have been successful in motivating people for literacy, here are just a few:

- Using dramas to depict the importance and benefits that literacy will have for them personally and for their community, and to bring a focus on literacy before the upcoming program.

- Using your own skills personally to demonstrate the benefits of reading and writing:
 - Reading a letter from a family member a long way away.
 - Reading labels on canned goods, medicine, instructions for vehicle maintenance, recipes or health information.
 - Reading maps of the local area or broader region.
 - Reading fluently in the local language, to the pre-literates for their enjoyment. (Choose text material or appropriate, interesting stories you have recorded from them and transcribed).
 - Reading Bible portions or passages in the local language - telling them that one day they will be able to read God's Word for themselves in their own language.
- Making reading materials with pictures available, so people become familiar with holding a book, turning pages, reading from top to bottom and left to right.
- Using jigsaw puzzles, dominoes, colour matching games.
- Involving local leadership (Government, church or local political leaders) in making decisions for their community program - they can help to discuss with you:
 - Who to choose as possible people to train as teachers, or involve as helpers.
 - How to find space to set up a classroom and do any necessary work.
 - How to decide who the first students will be and how to choose or recruit students for following classes.
 - The best way to connect with the community to get them involved and excited about the literacy program.
 - When the classes should begin, what hours and what days should they be held, when to have breaks.

Teaching Literacy: encouraging local involvement

One of the most important elements in getting others involved in teaching literacy is having clear, easy to follow lesson plans in the local language, with a clear lesson process that new teachers can understand and use. The lesson process itself should be repetitive and become familiar to both teachers and students - they will not get bored because the new sounds and symbols they are learning within a familiar lesson framework will keep them interested and motivated. Teacher lesson plans that are easy to follow for newly literate people make it possible for them to imagine teaching it themselves - they can feel empowered by being able to read and follow the instructions in the lesson plans, while remembering the experience they have had in going through the literacy class as students themselves.

Try to avoid setting up a literacy program that requires a higher level of training or education for teachers than they will gain in the literacy class itself - that is a potential road-block to your grass-roots program spreading and growing on its own. Students who graduate from your program should be able to help in teaching the program straight away.

Lesson plans that follow the same basic pattern each day of exercises and activities - blackboard drills, introduction of new sounds using flashcards, reading practice, writing dictation, flashcard review time, homework time - allow people who are faster students to begin to help during the class to actually teach parts of the program. They can quickly be involved in helping other students by:

- reviewing the flashcards,
- writing the exercises on the blackboard,
- listening to others read,
- helping during dictation exercises,
- preparing the classroom before the class begins,
- storing materials and keeping class records.

This is a natural way for local teachers to develop at their own pace and in the context of the literacy class itself rather than in separate training classes, which makes teacher training accessible to many more potential teachers.

Remember that you are not only teaching reading and writing skills, but encouraging and equipping future teachers, and ensuring the longevity of the program.

Post-literacy: linking literacy to life

It can be difficult for some students to make the “jump” at the end of formal literacy teaching to actually using reading and writing every day. Continued practice and use of literacy skills is very important for new literates, especially during their first literate year, or until it becomes a comfortable and integral part of their lives. They can be greatly helped in this process if they are actively guided into practical uses for reading and writing during the actual literacy program. The more they are given the opportunity to actually use what they are learning, the more it will help them to see a link between the theoretical classroom work and real life and see the practical purpose reading and writing now has for them in their life and within their community, society and culture.

Some of these ideas will help:

- Having a graded post-literacy reading program that begins with simple material culture and stories and moves into more unfamiliar and complex material and finally ends with Bible lessons and Scripture.
- Making sure that translated Scripture, printed Bible lessons and other reading materials are available and accessible.
- Including comprehension questions for post-literacy books to which the students write answers that are checked and corrected personally by the teacher.

- Providing culturally interesting and relevant material that people want to read (e.g., local culture and history, an introduction to Jewish culture).
- Giving personal attention, encouragement and ideas to new literates to continue to use and practice their skills.

Here are some ideas to encourage new literates to use their skills and keep in practice.

- Using real-world text material to practice skills - reading newspapers to learn about the news, reading recipes in order to actually cook something. Other real-world text material would include work manuals, job applications, contracts, coupons, and of course Bible lesson and Scripture materials.
- Writing and sending real letters; to the children's school, to a government representative, to a friend or relative.
- Training to be a literacy teacher, meeting with other teachers and studying the teacher's manual and materials.
- Writing out Scripture verses. Doing regular Scripture memorization and daily Scripture reading.
- Using the Bible lessons and questions as reading and writing exercises.
- Writing books to be used as literacy reading material. Possible subjects include an important cultural event such as a wedding, school opening, community building project, natural disaster, etc. (Providing a series of photographs can help.) Students could also publish a collection of stories written by their class.

Administration of the program: handing it over

A literacy program that supports the work of the local church will have a solid foundation to continue on. Local church leaders will be motivated to see that the program continues if they can see the value it has in the life of the church. From the beginning you should be providing opportunities for members of the local church to assist and be a part of the literacy program in any way they are able and for leaders to gradually take on the decision-making responsibility for it in such areas as:

- providing administration for the entire program,
- organising the ordering and supply of printed materials,
- planning for the future of the program; new schools, continuing needs, longevity, etc.,
- training and assigning teachers,
- providing communication between schools and church leadership.
- developing a church outreach strategy that includes literacy teaching.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Teaching literacy and encouraging community involvement

1. Think of all the different ways that a literacy project in a community might supplement or enhance a church planting work in that same community.