

The Nal'ibali reading for enjoyment campaign

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the implementation of the Nal'ibali reading for enjoyment campaign, rolled out and piloted at a rural public library situated in Westonaria, Gauteng on the West Rand.

The paper gives an overview of Nalibali within the Westonaria how progress was made the results, as well as recommendations on the basis of what took place.

Introduction

The nonexistence of a reading culture was a concern for Library and Information Services in Westonaria as hosting of story hours are part of the key performance areas that libraries should aim to address. Library Information Services, Westonaria, therefore accepted the invitation from *Nal'ibali* to launch their programme within the broader municipal borders.

A concern was the immediate environment as Westonaria serves a moderately disseminated and diverse community. Council therefore had to select one of the local libraries to do this from. After a review and consultation process the choice fell on the Simunye Community Library.

Once the location was certain the next step was to roll the programme out with identified reading volunteers to assist and ensure sustainability of the programme. By involving reading volunteers Library Information Services for Westonaria intended to be inclusive of all 11 official languages. The central idea was for children to take ownership of the reading programme to bring about the anticipated change towards books and reading.

It is the hope that this paper will highlight the success enjoyed, the progress made but also the responsibility librarians have towards its customers within this setting.

I read an article recently on sustainable storytelling in which the claimant made the following observation:

The problem with NGO organisations is that they often come off as “wonky, piling on facts and figures to convince the public that they should care about pressing issues such as [literacy].” – Annie Leonard, Greenpeace USA.

According to the latest studies on literacy for example only 5% of South Africans read. Even amongst my own colleagues, some of them brilliant at generating above mentioned facts and figures,” there are those openly confessing to NOT reading: yet they work within the field of promoting literacy. Maybe that is why the message is not getting out?

It is from a public librarian’s take that I will be talking about implementing Nal’ibali within the public library sphere and specifically that of Westonaria Local Municipality.

Nalibali

For those here unacquainted with Nal’ibali it is a national campaign sparking children’s potential through storytelling and reading. Nal’ibali is the isiXhosa word for “here is the story” and it is our belief that children who are immersed in great and well-told stories, will become inspired and are motivated to learn to read themselves. Such personally rewarding learning is a recipe for successful literacy development.

In the past year Nal’ibali has won both the IBBY ASHI as well as the Astrid Lindgren award in 2015 for their contribution of promoting children’s literacy in South Africa.

As stated at the beginning, this paper is the result of a programme rolled out and conducted between March 2012 – June 2013.

Westonaria

Westonaria is a small town situated in the rural west region of Gauteng the smallest province of South Africa. The town falls within the boundaries of Westonaria Local Municipality and as such forms part of the West Rand District Municipality. Residents stay in Westonaria and surrounding settlements: Bekkersdal, Glenharvie, Hillshaven, Simunye, Thusanang, Venterspost, Waterworks and Zuurbekom. (Westonaria Local Municipality, 2014)

The Main Library is situated in Westonaria with branch libraries is Bekkersdal, Simunye, Glenharvie and Venterspost, dual school-public libraries in Hillshaven and Zuurbekom as well as a Modular Library in the informal settlement of Thusanang. These seven libraries aim to serve the information needs of the ± 111 000. Westonaria has an unemployment rate of 47% and residents live on ± \$1 - \$2 per month.

Language distinction is made up as follows:

- Afrikaans 28.8%
- Xhosa 16,6%
- Sotho 14.0%
- Tswana 13,4%
- Other 27.1% (Westonaria Local Municipality, 2014).

The identified libraries falls under the department of Social Development and specifically the Community Development Department with the dual aims “to promote local economic and social development” (Westonaria Local Municipality, 2014) and “to provide a safe and healthy environment” (Westonaria Local Municipality, 2014). Falling under the Department of Community Development “Libraries in Westonaria aims to strengthen the provision of library and information services to the community of greater Westonaria” (Westonaria Local Municipality, 2014).

Challenges the library faces

Equally addressing the reading and information needs of the residents’, proof to be a challenge, as the publishing and reading culture of South Africa still focusses very strongly on English. Publishers in South Africa publish books primarily for the common trade market in South Africa and literature and grammar textbooks for schools. Although publishers do their best to publish across all genres, this takes place mostly in Afrikaans and English and to a lesser extent, they publish books in some of the local African languages (NB Publishers, 2014) and this impact to a certain extend on library usage.

Further to this Library Information Services receives little budget from the municipality itself as the service is a Provincial Mandate.

Other challenges ?

Nali’bali at Westonaria

The *Nal’ibali* reading for enjoyment campaign was rolled out in Westonaria on a request from *Nal’ibali*. To date it marks the biggest reading campaign within Westonaria Local Municipality incorporating learners from Grade 3 – Grade 12 as active participants, children attending the programme were between the ages of 8 to 18 years old. The programme was facilitated by the Programme Librarian from Westonaria Public Library and volunteers from GEM/BEM (Girls Education Movement / Boys Education Movement). Initially the volunteers learned by observing as the Programme Librarian facilitated the reading programme and then a request was put forward to *Nal’ibali* to conduct a formal training session on reading-for-enjoyment. The profincial co-ordinator for Gauteng availed himself for this and volunteers received two days of full on training.

The reading campaign was matched with language / arts and ethical issues identified by the learner participants themselves like leadership, conflict handling, and how to lead lives adding value to their respective communities.

The paper will aim to present the results of this one year reading intervention initially launched with 17 learners, at the Simunye Community Library, which grew to ± 600 registered readers on a weekly basis within the bigger community.

There was no actual campaign goals except to draw children into public library spaces and encourage the widest possible interaction between children and books. On a weekly basis the Programme Librarian visited each of the reading clubs. LIS Westonaria was provided with by *Nal’ibali* with weekly supplements – by making use of these learners got the opportunity to make a book every week and in this way start building their own personal library. The idea of recycling a shoe box into a *Nal’ibali* book box was introduced so that readers could keep tract of the books made.

As librarian material was also sourced from the library stock and children were introduced to library books connecting to the theme of the *Nal’ibali* booklet.

The booklets were made, cut out and stapled, children were invited to write their names on the cover page in an attempt to ensure bigger buy in, the title, the author, the illustrator were identified and discussed every week, as well as the illustration on the cover page before we would start reading the book, either as a group or as reading volunteers learners were asked to read.

It was truly amazing seeing these readers, week after week, after starting their day at around 5am and then a full day of school work, waiting for us in the afternoons at the various libraries. The reading programmes at libraries were scheduled to start at 3pm and we would sometimes only finish by 5:45pm. This illustrated these children's need for personal development but also what is possible when libraries start connecting children with relevant reading material that they want to read.

As the program grew it was formally introduced to local primary schools with "reading clubs" established in 3 libraries and 6 local primary schools.

Impact

Based on teacher / parent feedback as well as observation both in the classroom as well as the public library it was clear that the programme had positive effects on all groups of learners attending on a weekly basis.

The strongest effect was the increase of participants to the various "reading clubs", children's approach to books and reading, mainly independent reading as a direct result of the contact through the ongoing reading campaign. Wide variations were found amongst learner ability and understanding yet in cases of regular reader participation learners displayed general academic progress in all learning areas after implementation of the programme. Learners also seemed more willing to seek out books for independent reading. Although the campaign focussed on reading for enjoyment it indicated the benefit of developing learner's reading, spelling and writing skills as well as a broader general knowledge and better comprehension skills.

The campaign illustrated the need and the key role of a committed adult facilitator in the form of the Programme Librarian and the role of volunteers to ensure sustainability.

As a result of the success of the reading and other community outreach programmes in Westonaria, I was invited by the Director of Archives and Libraries – Gauteng Division – to do a presentation at one her senior management meetings with library managers for Gauteng. This provided other libraries in Gauteng with insights into perceptions and practices of implementing a reading for enjoyment campaign within public libraries or as part of ongoing outreach programmes in interested primary schools most notably here, public libraries and schools within Merafong. Merafong LIS send their programme librarian to come and observe how the reading programme was facilitated in Westonaria and then proceeded to implement the reading programme within their own community.

The review concluded that for the programme to be implemented successfully the design had to change daily into a mixed-method to adapt to the understanding, reading abilities and interests of the individual "reading groups" in order to enhance reading achievement. By conducting the reading programme in various communities within the greater Westonaria with learners hailing from different schools / teaching back grounds the reading programme had to be adapted to suit the needs and abilities of the various groups. What was of great interest was even how reader's abilities would differ within a school according to the educator's work commitment.

Conclusions

When librarians or other adult role models proactively address meagre reading skills through ongoing reading programmes they can impact on reader progress.

Authentic role models for children will be able to expound the drive for reading and be fluent readers themselves, and facilitate the reading for enjoyment programme in a lively interactive manner. Without such adult role models, learners will receive limited contact with books and vocabulary.

To increase the amount of language a child gets exposed to, librarians can make use of radio, cell phones, conduct read alouds, speed dating with books, spelling bees and a variety of other activities linked back to the book being read. Nalibali provided LIS Westonaria with enough copies of their weekly supplements to ensure all children who opted to could join in this reading programme.

Librarians need to encourage a reading culture from the earliest age involving parents introducing reading as part of everyday life.

As noted there are various gears that needs to run smoothly for learners to progress in reading and public libraries do have a role to play. There are many useful reading programmes available but for the community of Westonaria the *Nal'ibali* reading for enjoyment campaign proved successful in drawing children into public library spaces and getting children to interact with books / stories. As observed it is not just about having the books / stories available but the role of the facilitator cannot be stressed enough.

Clearly reflecting on the aforementioned this programme was a huge success story within the Westonaria Local Municipal area – however the failure was steadily spectacular. With no responsible adult left to drive the programme anymore children and educators become equally disheartened. Volunteers from the GEM/BEM movement tried keeping it together but when LIS Westonaria cancelled on receiving the Nal'ibali supplements these volunteers themselves gave up. Westonaria LIS have a compliment of ± 20 staff members, one of which is Programme Librarian, a position made available through provincial funding. After I resigned the position was advertised and filled, sadly the newly appointed Programme Librarian could not cope with the work demand and left. The position of Programme Librarian was left vacant once more and a new Programme Librarian was only appointed in March 2015. One can only speculate as to why the *Nal'ibali* subscription was cancelled – but it needs to be noted that the drive for service delivery for most library staff in South Africa is sadly lacking.

From this it became apparent that readers themselves can be used confidently as role models for reading and therefore it is the recommendation that libraries draw on this asset within their own communities. As libraries are in some cases under staffed, communities can assist their services on a voluntary basis to help drive library outreach programmes. Senior Library Management needs to realise that in isolation little gets accomplished, it is by joining forces that much gets accomplished. There are many ways in which volunteers can assist in libraries, for the purpose of this paper, the most obvious being that of a reading mentor or volunteer.

The overview recommends the closest possible collaboration between public libraries / schools and the community at large to emphasise the need of fostering a reading culture. Librarians needs to know the needs of their communities, to involve communities in planned library outreach programmes, to show case libraries as a function which adds value to the lives of citizens.