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Mobile Book Cart, School Libraries and Storytelling Promoting reading in the last corner of the world

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Abstract

The educational policies implemented by the Chilean Ministry of Education over the last ten years have brought about important advances in teaching and in libraries. For the purpose of carrying out this project we worked with 452 schools with poor academic performance. We selected a set of learning resources for their classrooms to provide support to teachers in carrying out their classroom tasks. In addition, this project focuses on the important role that storytelling plays in the classroom.

The storytelling materials introduce language resources and communication is thus achieved by using a range of resources. The books vary in terms of topics, formats, the level of difficulty and their setting, and include among others, texts that are appropriate for our diverse Chilean cultures: Mapuche, Aymaras and Rapanui.

The project funding is based on a shared investment, 85 % of the funds are provided by the Ministry of Education and the remaining 15 % come from the school and the community.

Brief description of program presentation

This is a description of the Chilean Ministry of Education's reading project aimed at helping teachers give oral texts in context to children by using specific learning resources. A professional storyteller will present several famous tales, poems, or legends from local ethnic groups in Chile. The presentation will either be in Spanish and in one of the native languages; "Aymara" from the Andean towns in the North of Chile, "Mapudugun" from the Mapuches in the South of Chile and "Rapanui", the language of Easter Island.

PROJECT

Mobile Book Cart, School libraries and Storytelling Promoting reading in the last corner of the world

I. Basis

The educational policies implemented by the Chilean Ministry of Education Chile over the last ten years have led to significant advances in the Chilean school system: the use of Information Technology in teaching, the provision of books and libraries and the implementation of the all-day school schedule, among others. However, there is still much to be done.

According to SIMCE¹, their standardized censal nation-wide test that provides objective indicators regarding the quality of education in every school in the country, has shown that when pupils finish their elementary school 4th grade, their knowledge of language and mathematics is insufficient to meet the needs of today's society. The corresponding SIMCE results for the 4th and 8th graders revealed deficiencies in critical areas of early schooling, i.e., basic reading-writing and mathematics skills, which are the basis of future development. Although these skills are further developed in later cycles, there is a need for greater consistency if pupils are to make it through secondary school 4th grade, without gaps in what are fundamental tools for their future human and professional development.

To fulfill this need, a campaign has been developed to reinforce the areas of reading, writing and mathematical analysis. Considerable time and effort have been devoted to supporting these areas, in recognition of our conviction that the quality and resilience of an individual's future development depend on their having a solid learning foundation.

¹ Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación (SIMCE) [system to measure the quality of education] operates on the basis of a yearly country-wide test that all pupils attending certain levels of schooling have to sit. This alternates between 4th and 8th grade (Elementary/Primary), and 2nd grade (Secondary). Its main objective is to generate reliable indicators that can be used to direct actions and programs that will improve the quality of teaching.

As a country, the challenge we face is to transform this situation in order to overcome this problem. Thus the Chilean Ministry of Education have started its **Campaña LEM** (Reading-Writing-Mathematics Campaign).

II.Objective

The main purpose of the LEM Campaign is to improve pupils' elementary learning in the first school cycle (kindergarten through primary 4th grade), with special emphasis on basic reading, writing, and arithmetic abilities, thereby enabling them to properly face later school tasks. For this purpose, a goal has been set for 2005, the aim of which is a 50% reduction in the number of children with learning deficiencies in language and mathematics. This is to be achieved by means of systematic support to teachers in their class work, with active participation by both the school and family.

This campaign is a national crusade and calls on children, parents, teachers, headmasters, universities, supporters, the media and private business sector throughout Chile.

III.Project Description

At the heart of the LEM Campaign is the need to **support teachers in their classroom tasks**, by providing teaching resources and tools, more effective training strategies and better working conditions. This means that schools must have **classroom resources** for their youngest pupils, and that teaching standards must be continuously and systematically improved. This in turn requires the provision of a complete collection of books and teaching materials that will form part of the school environment and be readily available for use on a daily basis.

In keeping with the nature of the LEM Campaign, a **set of resources** were selected (453 learning resources) to provide considerable support to teachers in their classroom tasks. On reflection, this led to the search for a series of means that could serve as working tools in the fields of reading, writing and mathematics, offering a vast and varied repertory in terms of format and content, thus broadening the concept of the library to one with a greater scope that implies learning resources.

The need to broaden the nature of said collection implied a challenge that had to be dealt with if we wanted to really support the entire curriculum. However, this task clearly involved a greater financial expense, a difficult matter given the current economic situation. This gave rise to the idea of supplementing the collections (1st and 2nd grade of primary education) by means of a **Mobile Resource Container or Book Cart** (see below) that would allow the transfer of resources from one classroom to another, thus increasing its use and effectiveness. In doing this we can offer a series of top quality resources, and at the same time reduce the implementation costs as it will no longer be restricted to a classroom, but instead be mobile and accessible. Its effectiveness could increase enormously, for example serving not only one class of 40 students, but 6 classes with say, a total of 240 students.



In order to generate the maximum possible use of the resources, it was decided that that several classrooms should have access to each collection. This in turn gave rise to the idea of incorporating a Mobile Cart to share the quality materials and associated costs between several classrooms and students.

To implement this project, 452 schools considered critical in terms of their low performance in the SIMCE test, were chosen and offered the set of NB1 materials and resources in exchange for the construction of the Mobile Cart. This joint work implied a common effort to improve the quality of education, with the school making a commitment and real contribution that will generate synergy beneficial to their students.

In turn, the families play a key role in bringing children closer to language and mathematics. For this reason, the LEM Campaign has also supported parents so they help and encourage their children's learning. It has also encouraged collaborative "alliances" between families and schools.

The 452 schools chosen have obtained:

- The opportunity to **support the learning goals promoted by the campaign**, with a wide, varied and excellent selection of resources that will not only make the teacher's task easier, but also encourage students in relation to their day to day learning.
- A **Mini LRC (Learning Resource Center)**: containing a collection of 453 resources with printed material (tales, poems, rhymes, myths, legends, fables, drama, recipes, riddles, tongue twisters, etc.), videos, cassettes, illustrations, abacus, magnetic letters and numbers, magnetic boards, geometrical figures, polygonal blocks, scales, etc. These will allow it to effectively support the 1st and 2nd grade curriculum with the emphasis on the reading, writing and mathematics identified in the campaign.
- 2 proper designs of the **Cart** provided by the Ministry of Education.
- A Learning Resources Collection **User's Guide**.

The Importance of Storytelling in the Classroom

To reinforce and support the LEM Campaign in its desire to improve the competencies of our students, two collections were formed, one for 1st Grade and the other for 2nd Grade.

These resources are contained in a small mobile cart in order to move them from one classroom to another and increase the possibilities for using the material. All this must take into account that it takes a considerable amount of time for a first cycle teacher to take a class to and from the library and organize them when they get there - something difficult to accomplish on a daily basis. On the other hand, in their early years children need a recognizable and proper environment in which they can develop their activities and, in this sense, their classroom would seem to be the best place.

The NB1 language and communication subsector consists of a selection of resources that range from books on different topics, in varying formats and levels of difficulty, classic films in video format, magnetic white boards, among others. These directly support the four sector units, which are: Oral Communication, Reading, Writing and Language Management along with their basic elements.

The mathematics subsector contains a number and variety of resources that intend to support each of the contents, namely: Numbers, Arithmetical Operations, Shape and Space and Problem-Solving. This is why abacuses, geometrical figures, polygonal blocks, illustrations and others were included.

On the other hand, the reading, writing and mathematics campaign seeks to considerably improve both competencies, but it must necessarily include the other learning sectors, such as social sciences, physical education, religious education, arts, among others.

The storytelling aspect is at the heart of this project; teachers have to develop oral skills and know strategies to increase pedagogical conversations on literary texts. The workshop has two levels and after the training has been done, the teachers and librarians can have pedagogical practices with a daily storytelling hour using a variety of materials and innovative proposals to bring the joy of reading to their students.

Without doubt, this project's challenge is to give primary school teachers and students an opportunity to promote the use of learning materials by:

- Implementing the curriculum in diverse contexts
- Integrating information skills within the educational process
- Finding activities to use the resources available at LRC's and in the classroom
- Encouraging young people towards thorough and enthusiastic reading
- Confronting the students with different points of view on a theme
- Allowing students to learn how to work with varied data resources
- Viewing the school library as a real LRC, at the service of the curriculum

Operation of the Learning Resources in the Classroom

For the proper operation and management of the learning resources and the mobile cart, it is necessary to have the following:

- a) **A Work Team**, to coordinate the use of the resources by the different classes and teachers, in order to plan the use of these resources together.
- b) **Usage Dynamics**. The cart containing the resources has to be moved from one classroom to another in a dynamic manner, and there must also be a safe place to keep it.
- c) **Teaching and Administrative Management**, to determine their *regular movement* as the resources must be available at all times; the *time schedules* for using the material; records of usage, which implies scheduling ahead of time the use of the material in the classroom and keeping records of all home loans; *loans/returns*, establishing the terms for moving the resources, the common rules, to comply with the general provisions for each of the actions requiring this; *classification*, the resources must be classified according to the relevant categories for teachers and students; *material register*, keep a record card for each of the materials, assign it a number, and write down its main data; *order of material in the cart*, indicating by means of icons the place where the material is kept according to the classification system used.

Collection Development, contribute with said resources that are already in the classroom, renewing very worn material and replacing and them, or repairing the materials, whenever possible with the help of the children.

IV. Project Funding (shared)

The project funding will be based on a shared investment, 85 % of the funds are provided by the Ministry of Education and the remaining 15 % came from the school and the community.

Total Cost of (Mobile Book-Cart) Project Ministry: Learning Resource Center
U\$ 800.000

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION CONTRIBUTION	SCHOOL / FAMILIES CONTRIBUTION
U\$ 680.000	U\$ 120.000
85%	15%



v. Project Follow-up and Evaluation

The project will be evaluated administratively and pedagogically, by means of testing each school's ability to organize and administer the library collection as well as the pedagogic use that's made of it. Subsequently, schools can share experiences, improve weak areas and have user guides or didactic records for each of the learning resources in order to get the maximum benefit from these.

For this purpose, it has been stipulated that professionals from the Education Ministry - (LRC) Learning Resources Center (CRA Mineduc) visit 40 schools over a period of four weeks. From this contact, the following will be observed:

- The administrative management of the Mobile Book-Cart
- The Pedagogic use of the Collection
- The strengths and weaknesses of the project

The person in charge of the book carts as well as the teachers and the school directors must complete evaluation forms where the previously noted points are expanded. In addition, observations of the environment, conversations with 1st and 2nd year primary students and dialogue with the teachers will allow us to carry out an approximation of the impact of the mobile book trolley, the book collection and the storytelling.

vi. Final considerations

We would like to point out that this project has a subsequent development stage planned for 2004. The objective is to give the 452 schools that will have the mobile cart the challenging opportunity to create their own Learning Resource Center.

The existence of a mini LRC (Learning Resource Center) in the classrooms, and the experience in the use of learning resources has shown us that, especially in the case of children of 1st and 2nd year primary school, it is better to have the resources in the classrooms, accessible on a daily basis and incorporated into the school routine. The idea is that the children's use of the materials gradually becomes something habitual and systematic.

Normally by their 3rd and 4th year in primary school and definitely by the time they reach their second cycle 5th to 8th year, the children have acquired a more autonomous behavior that allows them to develop pedagogic actions with a varied range of resources; therefore, it is possible that these be applied to the physical use of the Resource Center.

The LRC must function in such a way that these classroom collections can be managed, and developed to facilitate the diligent pedagogic workings of the curricular units. It is necessary to empower the use of the classroom collections, that is to say, to instigate constant coordination work and planning from the LRC; to have collections that circulate and that are changed and renewed 3 or 4 times a year according to the planned contents.

This way, the same resources aren't left for the whole year in the same classroom. The classroom collections are an indication that a LRC not only works in its own area, but rather that it is able to create links and actions in different places within the educational community, as well as to provide mechanisms to access of local and global information networks.

We know from this experience that on projects where the work is shared, it's possible to instigate an effective use of the learning resources. The funding requirements for the year 2004 have stipulated a 50% contribution from the school (furniture, space and human resources) and a 50% contribution (collection and training) from the Ministry of Education.

School libraries fulfill a function in the educational process and our objective is that this role be valued for what it's worth, so that the will exists to support their development. This includes the systematic nature of the librarian, the teacher's pedagogic vision, the management of its maintenance and the irreplaceable support of the family network. The LRC can provide each one of these a very real service, so that the students can develop a growing interest in books, reading and research. We believe that a country that seeks to move confidently toward development must be able to count on quality libraries in each of its primary and secondary schools, and have a place of information, training and recreation for all the members of the educational community.

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