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The reading promoter librarians' bag: an experience in librarians' training

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Abstract

This presentation introduces a training program to turn librarians into readers in several Latin American countries. "The reading promoter librarians' bag " is filled with texts and videos, and is ready for use in a workshop. The second element of the presentation is a teaching strategy, that seeks, via reading, to prepare the librarian to share the act of reading with the communities he (she) is working for.

THE READING PROMOTER LIBRARIANS' BAG: AN EXPERIENCE IN LIBRARIANS' TRAINING

- What is the librarian's attitude towards reading?
- What does the librarian think about reading?
- Does the public librarian develop reading promotion activities in the library?
- Does he (she) talk about his(her) experience as a reader and as a reading promoter?

These and many more questions can be asked when we talk about reading and when we talk about the public library. In order to approach the subject we need to be able to share our reading memories that we have possibly not talked about before. " The Reading promoter librarians' bag " is a training strategy that seeks, via reading, to prepare the librarian to share his/her reading with the communities he (she) is working for.

Its aim is to offer each librarian in each region, so that they can carry out major work in the field of reading promotion in the communities served by their public libraries.

The project began with the recognition that during the last twenty years, many efforts have been made by networks, systems and national and international organisations to train librarians who are working at all levels of public library posts. Nevertheless, with continuous changes of personnel, as well as the daily appearance of new challenges, we can sometimes have the impression that public library projects are always in their early stages.

It has also been noted that reading and its practice are not regarded as important subjects in librarians' training programmes. Because of this, librarians are not recognized as readers and do not therefore devise readers' training programmes in the public library, as this subject is left to the responsibility of others.

The materials of the Reading Promoter Librarians' Bag have been designed to train those librarians who are working in public libraries, whatever their geographical location. It is especially intended for those who are in isolated regions where it is necessary to meet the needs of those members of the population who have not joined actively in reading and related cultural activities.

The training strategy has five separate thematic units and a guide for the librarian as reading promoter. Every unit has a video and a text designed to help librarians in their preparation of courses or workshops with the idea that reading is a key element of the work done in a public library. The materials collection form part of the Reading Promoter Librarians' Bag. The librarian may be able to add other elements to the bag, such as books or audio-visual materials, so that he/she can prepare different training activities such as courses, workshops and lectures.

The librarians' training project

This project regards training as a permanent process, as an interactive act from the beginning to the end of each activity. The use of written and audio-visual languages encourages the librarian to feel more involved, to want to know more and, through the experience of other people, to recognise the value of his/her work.

The project asks the librarian to identify him/her self as a manager and agent of change in his/her community, to recognise in reading a social activity that fosters individual and collective growth. The project also proposes that the librarian could express across the word, the essence of the public library as a fundamental social institution, and one which gives all people access to knowledge and culture, via the many different information media.

The idea that the librarian needs to develop his/her role is widely accepted, as is the idea that he can use the many languages available to him to develop his/her vision of the world in which he/she lives and works. In this training process, the acts of reading and writing are seen as basic activities of every course or workshop, as is the exchange of valuable experiences with other participants.

Each thematic unit provides information on different subjects in order to:

- Motivate the librarian so that he/she can answer questions about him/her self and about his/her library.
- Provide a theoretical foundation that will help him/her to believe in his/her own ideas.
- Show in a practical way how it is possible to achieve these goals in his/her daily work.

In each unit readings are suggested that are intended to stimulate an interest in discovering other authors and texts. These can be used by the librarians to develop training activities, or for individual and/or shared reading in order to continue the search and discovery of new topics to use when developing his(her) own project. As each country can have different editions of a book, only the author's name and title are provided.

The suggested texts offer information about different topics and present tasks and tools to guide the librarian in his(her) creative development of skills, values, attitudes and ways of working.

The collection *Hands to the books*

"Hands to the books" is the publishing component of this project. It includes some materials developed by the Colombian National Network of Public Libraries and others which have been co-edited by the Regional Centre for the promotion of the book in Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLALC).

Each unit was designed to include as many means of communication as possible. In this way, each training activity becomes an opportunity to reflect and realign working practices in the light of the work in progress.

The thematic units that shape the collection are:

❖ ***Public library space***

This topic proposes to increase the librarian's awareness so that he(she) can be regarded as a manager for projects relating to design, construction, re-modelling, or rebuilding of public library service spaces. In a straightforward manner the text and the video present elements related to architectural design and to designing the different zones of the public library according to the functions and services that each one has.

❖ ***Reading... Before reading... Readers***

This part seeks to raise awareness, to provide a theoretical foundation and to show in practical ways how to carry out reading promotion activities in the public library. It considers a range of concepts behind the act of reading, giving brief descriptions on some fiction genres and non-fiction books with which the reading promoter librarian must be acquainted in order to carry out his(her) work. It also shows some elements to bear in mind in the planning and development of promotional strategies.

❖ ***Reading and daily life***

This part is intended to help the librarian to recognize the value of reading in daily life and to understand the responsibility that the public library has in telling readers about the many options and different formats that shape the library collections. Only a 'reader librarian' can let other readers know of the value of reading.

The video includes a number of testimonies from adults and children, and demonstrates the importance that reading has in their lives.

❖ *Children, young people and the public library*

This section proposes to raise awareness and to give theoretical and practical elements to the librarian who works with our younger populations in public libraries. It includes a profile of the librarian who works with children and young and some activities to develop in reading rooms for young people.

❖ *The rural sector and the public library service*

The method of delivering a ‘travelling library box’ to a rural community is given in story form. This format has been chosen because of the low literacy levels of our rural populations. It is also aimed at those who work with rural populations to help them to promote reading and writing as strategies to overcome the difficulties in their daily life. The video presents local people’s testimonies about their daily life and the value that they see in reading. It also shows the way in which they themselves have managed to develop the program of rural collections and the work that is carried out with the local population.

Strategy

In this strategy each of the thematic units is developed in the text and the video. There is no predetermined order for the training activities to take place: the librarian can choose one or more units to work on at a time according to the needs and objectives of each organisation. Topics in the guide are presented according to the idea of the physical space of the library, with the eventual intention of developing an imaginary space as a result of reading the collected materials.

The librarian can design one or more training activities for each topic, in the form of a workshop or a course. They can also support these using several texts and videos. The questions that he/she will find in this guide, will help him/her to begin the discussion process. A list of suggested reading and audio-visual materials will also help him/her to arouse the interest of the readers.

The evaluation of the librarians' training program

The librarians' training program is understood to be a process that follows a certain plan which is then developed by those librarians responsible for the training programs in every area. There is then the need to constantly evaluate activities in order to establish to what extent the aims have been met and to analyse each of the activities undertaken.

The evaluation and analysis of the training will include elements in order to determine to what extent both the materials and the activities could be sustained, and to know to what extent the programme has reached a regional level.

The training strategy “Reading promoter librarians’ bag” introduces evaluation as an invaluable process of analysing those elements that shaped the programme and the impact it had on all participants. It allows us to determine the relevance of both materials and activities, and of the methods used and the efficiency and effectiveness of all training.

This follow-up activity allows us to obtain information such as:

- The efficiency of the proposed strategy, and a comparison of the results and the methods used.
- The impact achieved in the public libraries by librarians training according to the above-mentioned methods.

So, we propose to evaluate every activity and finally the program in its entirety in such a way that valuable judgments can be made. In this way it will be possible to know if the programme was fulfilled, if its application has had some impact and in what measure it the recommended changes were made.

To carry out the evaluation, it is necessary to define the following:

- Librarians' training policies - which are the guidelines or general criteria that frame the training programmes? Policies are a useful guide by which to carry out the analysis.
- Strategy for the librarians' training – the way in which they will use the training resources.
- What are the training aims of the planned activities? The definition of these is the basis for the evaluation. The general aims are a qualitative expression of what is going to be obtained at a global and generally long-term level. The specific purposes contain particular elements that allow the general goal to be carried out.
- Goals: These are the quantitative expressions of the aim, and indicate the quantity and the time necessary in order to achieve the aims. In the list of goals it is necessary to indicate the period during which they will be achieved.
- Activities: These indicate the necessary steps to be made in order to achieve the purposes and actively carry them out. Listing elements of the activities in this way will allow us to know the different steps required to deliver them effectively.

Every librarian can create the forms of evaluation that he/she wishes -provided that he/she bears the above principles in mind - in order to analyse the impact according to the circumstances in which the training program is developed. All reports must include both critiques and recommendations for the wider (global) evaluation of the strategy

In the evaluation of the initial part, it is necessary to obtain information about:

- Number of librarians in service trained.
- Number of libraries in every area or region where his/her librarians were trained.
- Number of librarians who have continued their training as readers.
- Number of programs of reading promotion initiated from the librarians' training in the subject of reading.

Both quantitative and qualitative elements of the training strategy should be considered in the evaluation.

In this way, it will be possible to investigate with major depth and in a subjective or intuitive way, data concerning the attitudes, beliefs, motives and behaviours of the people involved.

The semi-structured interview can also be used to collect more in-depth data.

The evaluation of the collection materials

Some elements are suggested in order to develop a questionnaire that helps to evaluate the quality and usefulness of the texts, the videos and the guide included in the collection. In a systematic way when every training activity is complete, the librarian must deliver all evaluation to each participant for their own benefit. Later he/she will analyse the data collected.

The forms of the evaluation must include a questionnaire that explores aspects such as:

- The relevance of the contents of both the texts and the videos.
- The clarity of the development of the topics.
- The form of presentation of the contents in terms of diagrams, illustrations, print quality.
- The use of images in the videos.