FOSTERING A CULTURE OF READING IN SOUTH AFRICA

The second Gauteng Community of Practice (CoP) delved into the role of After School Programmes in nurturing a reading culture in South Africa. This discussion followed the release of the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results, which alarmingly revealed that 81% of grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning in any language. These statistics have worsened since the previous PIRLS assessment. A significant factor behind this decline is attributed to the educational disparities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the National Reading Barometer survey, a collaborative effort investigating the reading landscape in South Africa, has recently been launched. The survey found that over 90% of respondents recognised the importance of reading to children, yet challenges such as time constraints and limited resources hindered this practice. It also highlighted a need for more books in households, prompting many to resort to online materials.

Presenters at the CoP were a mixture of education leaders from Loxion Mobile in the Western Cape, Fundza Literacy Trust, and the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE).

Loxion Mobile: Bringing Books to Communities

Litha Sam-Sam, Founder and Programme Manager of Loxion Mobile, shared a journey fueled by hope and passion. Loxion Mobile's origin during the Covid-19 crisis sprouted from a single book, blossoming into a mobile library housing over 3000 books.

Tips that help get reading materials together:

- Starting online donation campaigns and having Book Drives where people can drop copies of the books they wish to donate.
- Leveraging social media to showcase reading initiatives and attract donors.
- Tapping into online digital resources when physical books are inaccessible.
- Encouraging participating learners to write their own stories for reading sessions.
- Curating engaging and relatable content to ignite a passion for reading.
- Conducting book sales with donated materials that may not suit the target age group and using the funds to procure more suitable books for the program's needs.

Harnessing Digital Resources

Numerous digital resources exist for After School practitioners to cultivate a love for reading among their learners. Notable options include Fundza's Fundi Mobi site and SAIDE's African Storybook collection, both accessible in different South African languages.

Fundza Literacy Trust

Dedicated to enhancing literacy in South Africa, Fundza's efforts emphasise the transformative power of reading. Their work highlights the significance of fostering a love for reading in teenagers and young adults, contributing to improved academic outcomes, future success, enhanced problem-solving skills, and reduced stress. Fundza achieves this through its mobile platform, Fundi Mobi, offering stories, poems, courses, and interactive opportunities for young people to engage with the material. This platform also welcomes young contributors to add their content to the site.

SAIDE: Amplifying African Storybooks

SAIDE's African storybooks initiative addresses a significant hurdle in learning: the scarcity of storybooks and indigenous-language resources for African children. This platform hosts a diverse collection of over 3000 books in various African languages, designed to aid children aged 2 to 10 in their literacy journey while sparking joy. The platform is accessible online through a smartphone app, facilitating easy access for After School practitioners and learners. SAIDE collaborates with other organisations, educators, and communities to develop, translate, create, and publish these storybooks, ensuring broad access to these valuable resources.

To access the Fundi Mobi site via the Fundza Literacy Trust:
https://live.fundza.mobi/

To access the SAIDE African Storybooks collection:
https://www.africanstorybook.org/

Other resources that assist with reading materials and activities:
Mikhulu Trust: https://mikhulutrust.org/resources/
Book Dash: https://bookdash.org/books/
Biblionefsa: https://www.biblionefsa.org.za/
Nal'ibali: https://nalibali.org/stories